

Understanding the subjective art experience *through context*

and attachment



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P R E F A C E

There was a time that the academic world only existed to me as something abstract that made my sisters bunk up for days with piles of paper. It felt as something I could have done as well, but I liked the days I spend at art school so soon that was forgotten. When I graduated I began to miss certain skills and the idea started to grow on me. I am happy that I have decided to enter the Erasmus University, now also knowing the pain of bunking up with piles of paper. I think my experience with the self-centred art school did influence me in wanting to write this thesis. Although I deeply value the understanding I have gained of the social constructs underlying arts and culture, I repeatedly have wondered “is this it?”. My thesis is a product of this wondering.

My supervisor Thomas Franssen helped me to develop this wondering into something academic. I would like to thank him for his open, knowledgeable and (sometimes painfully) critical support. I would also like to thank Museum Boijmans van Beuningen for letting their exhibition be the setting of my research. I would like to thank the guards of the museum who came up to me during my fieldwork and shared their very insightful opinions. And I would like to express my appreciation to the 45 clowns who were my companions during those days. And lastly I would like to thank everyone around me for their patient ears and especially Midas for helping me to find my academic path and supporting me through it.

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1 - INTRODUCTION

The light is soft and the air conditioning is on. I am in a building, in a room, in front of a painting. There is this booklet in my hand that tells me everything I should know. People walk by, silent, and a guard is humming a song with his hands on his back. I lose my interest and walk to the next work of art. A couple is standing there, discussing the work. They are talking about meaning and symbolism. The woman points at some detail she claims is wonderful but the man has wandered off to the next work. He says that it reminds him of something he has seen before, maybe that time they went to Madrid. I look at the painting he is talking about and try to guess what he is referring to. I like listening to people's conversations in museums, to hear how someone else feels or thinks about a work. Then I learned about Bourdieu and the social structures behind the experience that felt so personal. So from then on I started guessing who those people were, the jobs they would have and the reasons for their visit.

I also learned about all the implicit statements every exhibition and museum beholds, statements on who it believes is their audience (Macdonald, 2001). Every art exhibition, whether full of texts or completely void of it, is a setting full of social and cultural codes. Different formats for exhibitions are created, some in which the audience is firmly guided through their experience, others in which the audience is expected to guide themselves. At my next museum visit, after having met my own art craving, I again started to look at the people around me. Were they guided and almost passive? Did they follow up on the rules of the curators and artists who wanted them to experience the work in a certain way (Rancière, 2015)? I wondered whether the audience within this guided activity managed to maintain a certain form of subjectivity (Wuyts, 2015). How does a person use and choose out of all the elements that he or she encounters? What is needed in order for a person to make contact with a work of art?

To be able to answer these questions I have decided to research the subjective art experience of individuals when visiting a museum. Through conversational

interviews and participative observations I try to come to a better understanding of the ways visitors relate to art objects. Theoretically this research has a specific interest in the influence of contextual elements, as well as for the process of attachment and detachment. In the sociology of art there has been limited attention for how the ordinary visitor experiences art. Therefore Heath and von Lehn (2004) have proposed that a turn should be made to the practical side of the art experience, that is a turn to the ways in which ‘people, in ordinary circumstances, discriminate, evaluate and experience objects and artefacts in museums and galleries’ (p.44). Although the museum audience knows a relative social homogeneity, their motives and preferences are of great variety (Daenekindt & Roose, 2014).

In my theoretical framework I will start discussing the sociological perspective of the art experience by discussing Pierre Bourdieu's (1980, 1983, 1984, 1985) legacy in uncovering the social structures behind these practices. Bourdieu has helped demystifying art consumption and valuation; according to him both aesthetic preferences and attitudes are socially acquired and unevenly distributed between the higher and lower classes (Schwarz, 2013). Since then a stream of sociology, called critical sociology, continued to unmask the dominant ideologies and values of the art world. However, this downgraded the cultural object in itself ‘from active ingredient or animating *force* to inanimate *product*’ while also taking away the audience's agency (de la Fuente, 2007, 416). As Bourdieu's work has increasingly become criticised for being too deterministic, abstract or just plainly out-dated, a stream of research has been activated to supplement or revise aspects of his theories (Prior, 2005).

Antoine Hennion (1999, 2007, 2010) is one of the post-critical sociologists whose aim it is to centralize the contextual elements of the art experience. Whereas critical sociology has researched who looked at what, post-critical sociology of art wants to know *how* a person engages with a work of art. Steier, Pierroux & Krangle (2015), for example, propose that a holistic approach is necessary when we aim to broaden our understanding of the valuing and meaning-making process in museums. In this holistic approach the interpretive process, the body, materiality and representations should be viewed in relation. One way of doing so is by looking at the particular moment in which the art experience takes place (Stewart, 2015). When individuals experience an art object, they not only relate to the object but also to spatial, textual, temporal and physical elements that can help, harm, influence, shape

or distort the experience (Griswold et al. 2013).

Thus I will look at the wider context of the art experience, as well as the way an individual feels a connection with this context. When we want to understand subjectivity, attention should be given to the processes of attachment and detachment (Helgesson & Muniesa, 2013), and see how one comes to those activities. In doing so I will use Hennion's theories on attachment in connection to context. Context is conceptualized on to the basis of Actor-Network-theory of Bruno Latour (2005). More concretely I will use Griswold et al. (2013) concept of materiality, Babon's (2006) threefold conceptualisation of setting and I will combine Heath and von Lehn's (2004) and Steier et al. (2015) studies for a conceptualisation of interaction. The use of these three subcategories of contextuality (materiality, setting and interaction) will enable me to take into account the context in its totality.

To gain insight in this topic I use both participant observations of, and conversational interviews with, the museum audience. Having these conversations with people on how they have experienced the art exhibition in general, and the artworks in particular, enables us to understand the subjective art experience and the way people use and are influenced by contextual elements. For the empirical research I have selected Ugo Rondinone's exhibition *Vocabulary of Solitude* in Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam. The Boijmans van Beuningen is an adequate place for collecting data: it is a relatively large institute that attracts a diverse public by having a variety of art genres on show at the same time.

The particular exhibition in this research showcases contemporary installation art, 45 life-size clowns to be precise. I have chosen this exhibition because it spatially allowed me to see almost the complete experience of a person in the exhibition room without being obtrusive. Additionally, my first orientations indicated that this exhibition triggered strong behavioural reactions. The observations have involved the bodily and interactional reaction of the audience towards the artworks and the set up of the exhibition. Primarily, these observations have been used as a contextualisation of the conversational interviews. With the conversational interviews I have taken a semi-structured approach centred around a limited number of topics. However, I aimed to leave space for the interviewees to introduce topics into the conversation (van Manen, 1990; Gray, 2003). An understanding of subjectivity is created from within the subjective experience, on its own terms, and not from an external and conceptual point of view (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992).

In the conversations I have, for example, talked with the interviewees about their thoughts on the exhibition, what they did in order to experience it and what they did during their visit. I have aimed to find out on what aspects visitors focused in their experience of the art works, how they described their experience and how they constructed their opinion. In chapter 3 I will discuss in detail the methodological implications of the theories I have used, the focus and employment of my fieldwork and how lastly I have coded and analysed my data. After that I will discuss my findings in chapter 4. I start doing so by discussing how visitors refer to, and use, contextual elements as materiality, setting and interaction. Secondly I will discuss parts of the conversations in which the interviewees express moments of attachment and detachment. And I will finish my findings chapter by looking more closely at the interrelation of attachment, context and the overall art experience.

All in all this research allows me to study and observe an experience within a specific context. This enables me to better understand the subjective experience without making too early statements or inferences on the museum visitor. In wanting to see how individuals constitute their subjective experience of art through context and attachment, room is given to the audience members to fill in this experience themselves. Ultimately the particular context makes it possible to not only say something about how people react to Rondinone's work, but to make claims about the subjective art experience on a more abstract level. To not only talk about how people reacted to clowns or installation art, but to better understand why the man in the first example refers to a painting in Madrid and the woman wanted to direct her husband's attention to some detail she found interesting. There are so many layers within the art experience, of which many that are social, but many more that are at least partly subjective as well. It are those layers that will be of focus in my thesis.

2 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Conceptualising the subjective experience

As I have explained in the introduction I would like to understand what constitutes the subjective experience of art. Within all the different ways a person can relate to a work of art, I would like to know how this constitutes an art experience (van Manen, 1990). And what does it mean for a person to have an art experience? Other people's experiences, although varying greatly, can help enlighten certain aspects of the experience of art when wanting to understand what constitutes the subjective art experience. The orientation to an individual's experience can provide us with clues when thinking about the arts experience abstractly (van Manen, 1990). Although for everyone the concept of subjective art experience will sound vaguely familiar, it is the vagueness I would like to quickly tackle in this section. Thus as the following sections of my thesis will focus on the *art* experience, this first section will briefly introduce what I mean with *subjective* and *experience*. In doing so I will try to establish a conceptual understanding of what I refer to when talking about subjectivity and experience.

When a person has a subjective experience this refers to the personal human experience one can have, this type of experience is often called a lived experience. Lived experience refers to everything within an experience that is lived and is embedded within its societal and cultural context (Olesen, 1992; Ellis & Flaherty, 1992). This can be theoretically explored in an artificial division between what is experienced externally and what is experienced internally (Olesen, 1992). So the lived experience is not only guided by cognitive frameworks and emotions, also the physical and contextual experience is part of the lived experience (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992). The goal of this thesis is to formulate a theoretical interpretation of the art experience that ultimately can accommodate the varieties within lived experiences from a subjective perspective (Flaherty, 1992). How I have attempted to research the subjectivity of the experience I will explain more in detail in the methods chapter. But first I will turn to the *art* of the art experience and look at its social, contextual and personal elements from a sociology of art perspective. While whatever the experience

looks like, it can never be divided from its wider context (Clandinin, 2006).

2.2 The sweep of time

Since the eighteenth century a dominant perspective in the art world has been classical aestheticism (Dewey, 2005[1934]). Artworks have, from this perspective, a presence that is self-sufficient and resemble something that has taken shape by itself. The representation visible in the work of art is then a disclosure of what that representation in truth *is*, it is claimed that art has a reality of its own (Heidegger, 1996[1950], emphasis in original). Through this perspective the art world has symbolically purified the existence of art, while simultaneously legitimising it by claiming that experiencing art (in public museums) can lead to emancipation and true democracy (Prior, 2005). Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu took away the aura of purity and autonomy of the art world by researching the social patterning of taste (Schwarz, 2013). Since then this has been a reoccurring topic of research in the sociology of arts and culture (for example: Bourdieu, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1985; Daenekindt & Roose, 2014; Prior, 2005, 2011; Lahire, 2002, 2003, 2008).

One of the ways Bourdieu has brought the social structures into focus is with the concept of habitus, which refers to ‘internalized dispositions that govern our thoughts and practices’ (Stewart, 2015, 150). Lahire (2002) defines habitus as ‘what the social world leaves in each and every one of us in our proneness to act and react in a certain manner, likes and dislikes, ways of perceiving, thinking and feeling’ (p.569). Bourdieu (1980) connects taste to habitus; knowledge of culture and context is required in order to experience art. The audience can use the biography of the artist, their knowledge of the stylistic or formalistic aspects or their symbolic knowledge in order to experience the artwork (Freeland, 2002). Whether a person has this knowledge is dependent of his/her social position. In order for a spectator to see and interpret what s/he sees training is needed. People experience art ‘when information coming from the artwork [codes] interacts with information already stored in the viewer's mind’ (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990, 18).

Additionally Bourdieu (1985) has defined the high art world as the field of restricted production, as opposed to the mass or popular art world that he designates as the field of large-scale production. Cultural products have, besides a commercial and economic value, also a symbolic and cultural value. In the case of commodities

produced and consumed in the field of restricted production the first value, economic profit, is secondary to the enhancement of the symbolic capital that can be accumulated. The field of restricted production has its own logic (Bourdieu, 1985). When directing the material to a designated public, the public is expected to be able to decode the material along legitimated lines (Bourdieu, 1980). Spectators should be able to recognise and know the works of art as such in order to retract the symbolic value. When considering the production of the value of the artwork, one should not only consider the direct producers (e.g. artists, writers) but also the producers of value (e.g. critics, curators, directors). Through the influence of a combination of these agents an audience is created that is capable of understanding the work of art (Bourdieu, 1983).

In the chapter *Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception* (1984) Bourdieu has written about the art world from the perspective of the audience. In this text he claims that in order for the aesthetic experience to be effective, one should be able to decipher the cultural code adequately. The competent spectator can immediately understand the coded elements of the cultural object. When the conditions under which the objects should be decoded are not met, Bourdieu furthers, the engagement will consist of an illusory comprehension based on a mistaken code. When a person is not familiar with the aesthetic and art-historical codes, one is probably to apply another set of familiar codes: those of everyday life. Bourdieu claims that out of this habit of decoding the artworks along the lines of everyday codes, the demand comes for realistic representations in art (1984, p.591). The signification that is used by uneducated people he claims is ‘a mutilated perception’ (Bourdieu, 1984, 593).

So Bourdieu (1984) claims that the work of art is only given, thus only truly experienceable, to those who are already capable of appropriating. The artistic object could not be possessed if the capital to understand is not already in possession. In order to perceive the work of art in a truly aesthetic manner one has to see it 'as a signifier which signifies nothing other than itself' (Bourdieu, 1984, 596). The need for culture increases once it has been satisfied, ‘each new appropriation tends to strengthen the mastery of the instruments of appropriation and, consequently, the satisfactions attached to a new appropriation’ (Bourdieu, 1984, 603). When the level of education rises the more a person tends to think in terms of schools, styles and concepts. A person can only form a personal opinion when s/he is so highly educated

that s/he has assimilated the educational information into a free attitude. This discourse is freed from their conscious concept of education and has become a second nature (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu (1985) claims that this is a necessity will the field of restricted production remain to exist; rarity of language and form are the characteristics on which the market is build and in which the symbolic value of the object is given.

Although Bourdieu's legacy is great, his studies have in the past years been critiqued for being too abstract and for lacking empirical ground (Lahire, 2002). In many analyses concepts such as class, education and gender have proven to be really fruitful but also functioned as 'blind spots which prevent attention to other, perhaps more locally-motivating, categories, practices and actors' (Macdonald, 2001, 10). Artworks are liked because they fulfil certain needs of the audience members, and two audience members can never have identical experiences (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990). So might it be possible for the audience, instead of wanting to retract an artwork's correct message (if there is any), to aim to do over the creation of the artwork, to participate and not to passively accept a pre-established meaning (Collingwood, 2011[1945])?

Indeed when we read the above it is clear that the art experience is strongly socially structured, but to understand the subjective experience solely from this perspective seems unsatisfactory. In order to understand the social in connection to the subjective Stewart (2015) has divided the art experience into the *sweep of time* and the *particular moment*. The earlier described Bourdieusian aspects of the art experience is the *sweep of time*. Within this concept Stewart (2015) considers 'the specific histories that bring individuals to the moment of engagement' (p.150). When experiencing a work of art a person is already informed by their past experiences, by their background in education, family life and class. So even in spontaneous and intuitive engagement a great deal of our relation to a cultural object is determined by previous experiences. Consequently this does not mean that this indicates the entirety of the experience, within the *particular moment* emotional elements of the experience and the context of the experience can be considered as well (Stewart, 2015). In my thesis I would like to direct myself towards this particular moment. Although attending to the power of the social structures is of importance, the personal and subjective elements of the experience have in consequence been under exposed. Therefore I would like to contribute to this approach of the experience and look at this

'particular moment'.

2.3 The particular moment

Through concepts of habitus, cultural capital and field Bourdieu has formed a critical paradigm in sociology. However, a new paradigm has emerged, one that is called post-critical sociology (Prior, 2011). The sociology of art has found itself in the position in which critical sociology is being critiqued. As Bourdieu has helped expose social structures behind what people do and say when in contact with cultural objects, he does not really consider *how* a person engages with them (Stewart, 2015). In the literature following Bourdieu, it has been questioned how restricted the audience truly is and whether they can maintain a certain degree of agency in the processes they are under when experiencing art. Important in this discussion is also the debated opposition of the active and the passive within the art experience. As an important critic of Bourdieu, Antoine Hennion (1999, 2007, 2010) has argued that individuals cannot be reduced to their social characteristics and material objects are not simply passive. Hennion (2007) considers the art experience and the constitution of taste to be an active and conscious process. 'Returning to Bourdieu after reading Hennion, one is struck by how flat Bourdieu's analysis of the work of art is, how synoptic, inert and mechanical the cultural encounter can seem' (Prior, 2011, 133).

Hennion's theory on the art experience is strongly influenced by John Dewey's understanding of Art as Experience (2005[1934]). In this book Dewey claims that the experience of art mixes doing and undergoing. He criticises the practice of classical aestheticism, expressed by for example Martin Heidegger (1996[1950]), in which a wall is built around an artwork in order to obtain status. By doing so the object is separated from its origins and the engagement one can have when experiencing it. Dewey aimed 'to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and everyday events, doings and sufferings that are universally recognised to constitute experience' (p.6). When a person is engaged with art she or he is experiencing a heightened vitality, instead of being with oneself and ones private feelings and sensations. The art experience signifies an interaction with the world. It is Hennion who started to empirically explore these ideas half a decade later.

There is a risk of going too much into the extremes just to make a

point, the sociology of art should rather aim to embed ‘the aesthetic dimension within the framework of critical sociology’ (Schwarz, 2013, 419; also mentioned in Stewart, 2015, Prior, 2011 and de la Fuente, 2007). One way of doing so, as Stewart (2015) suggest, is by dividing the art experience into the *sweep of time* and the *particular moment*. This approach enables to respect the social and link it in continuity, without losing the possibility to look at “the other side”. As I have stated in the previous section I would like to bring into focus the *particular moment* of the art experience, while ‘each aesthetic judgement is specific to the moment in which it is articulated’ (Stewart, 2015, p.151).

Hennion’s post-critical sociology (or sociology of attachment) will help us look at this particular moment of the art experience. Hennion has empirically researched *how* people use techniques and methods to engage with cultural objects (Stewart, 2015). It is not to debate the social dimensions of taste or the experience of art, to some extent ‘our taste is the taste of others’, but at the same time very limited agency has been given inside these probable dimensions to a variety of actors and actants that might be more diverse and creative than delineating them by social factors (Hennion, 2007, 103). Post-critical sociologists have initiated a socio-material direction within cultural sociology and the sociology of art, in which *all* actors, human and non-human, are given agency (Strandvad, 2012).

So a variety of elements are in interaction when a person experiences art. The decoded meanings from these elements can affect the visitor emotionally, socially, cognitively and behaviourally. Some codes, especially behavioural codes, can be experienced so naturally that they not appear as being constructed (Hall, 1980b). In the legacy of Bourdieu we would then say that these works of art are only accessible for those who are in possession of the skills to master the codes that are placed on them (Bourdieu, 1985). However following post-critical sociology I argue that codes are dominant but not determinant (borrowed from cultural studies: Hall, 1980b). The museum elements react in engagement with the visitor; taste is an activity and not an attribute. A visitor is required to do something (look, read) in order to appreciate (Hennion, 2007). In the next section I will look at how engagement with the elements one comes across is established.

2.4 Experiencing attachment

Within the art experience active and passive behaviour should thus not be seen as something strictly divided. Though there are some requirements of the behaviour of the audience in order for it to go from passive to active and back: in the end 'beautiful things only offer themselves to those who offer themselves to beautiful things' (Hennion, 2007, 106). In an ideal art experience an individual exposes a form of attachment to the artworks, as Gomart and Hennion (1999) suggest these are occasions in which 'activity and passivity enable each other' (p.241). Objects are responding during the actions in which they are employed, these actions can be as diverse as driving a car, climbing rocks or watching art. Taste is an activity, something has to be done in order for an object to be liked, contact must be made in order to feel (Hennion, 2007). There exists a co-formation in the art experience between the individual, the art object and other non-art related objects. So it is not for the audience to 'deny social determinisms, they rather rely on them, as they do rely on masterpieces or on the tastes of others, to "determine" their own tastes' (Hennion, 2007, 103). But, as Hennion claims, the more deterministics exist, the more preferences can be found.

To explain this Hennion (2007) refers to reflexivity; a being neither passive nor active, a state in which being has just arrived. Both the object that is "tasted" as the "taster" has to be in this state in order for more to emerge. With this concept he aims to respect both an individual's own understanding as well as the revelations of tastes within the art experience. 'In testing tastes, amateurs rely as much on the properties of objects – which, far from being given, have to be deployed in order to be perceived – as on the abilities and sensibilities one needs to train to perceive them' (p.98). The moment of concentration in which 'a tight flux of attachments' are deployed, can be opposed against deterministic characteristics (p.100). The final dispositions when experiencing art in which one engages with an object, requires an effort. In order to be able to engage one needs to offer intention and will, time, favourable conditions and training (Hennion, 2007). The gesture of tasting is installed when one, for a very short moment, stops and observes oneself tasting (Hennion, 2007). Gomart and Hennion (1999) has called this the conditioning of oneself, to attune oneself to having a possible experience.

A person's (or in Hennion's words an amateur's) taste is a collective technique, it functions as a person's indicator of how s/he feels about the just

experienced. How s/he sensitises the object in front of him/her and the context in which it is seen, as well as it helps him/her to control these feelings and shape them into something that can be expressed and discussed with others (Hennion, 2008). The active passion of attachment is a process, a continuous act that in its totality forms the art experience (Gomart & Hennion, 1999). So the attachment to the works of art differ according to what in that particular situation constitutes as information, space, used language and familiarity (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999; Thévenot, 2007).

When someone experiences something a dual act is performed, at the same time a person performs a reflexive move inwards and outwards through interaction with the external world. In order to judge and criticise (even when not expressing this), a person has to link different sets of objects, people and elements. In order to express their judgment, or maybe even come to an agreement, one has to move from the singular towards a form of generality to which other experiences and people can be related as well (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999). So as Hennion (2007) has stated:

Placing emphasis on the analysis of taste as a collective, reflexive, instrumented activity is also to point at the thousands of devices that amateurs have invented. The space opened by taste is in no way a no-man's land. It is on the contrary rather full – of objects and tools, devices, frames, confrontations and references, of all kinds of supports, collectives and material equipment that permit taste to deploy itself beyond the here and now of the interaction. (p.109)

As this statement already indicates experienced attachment is not only influenced by the cognitive tools employed by curators or used by the audience. It are also the wider external elements of an exhibition that help the audience members to experience what they experience. With the introduction of the concept of attachment, it helps to rely less on the states and characteristics of people and more on their activities, responses and 'capacity to co-produce' (Hennion, 2007, 109). The next aspect of the art experience that should be taken into account when wanting to understand the subjective art experience are those elements one can respond to. These contextual elements will be discussed in the next section.

2.5 Contextual elements of the experience

The subjective art experience that is of focus in this research is a distinctive activity, it is in a set context of a museum visit. In this distinctive activity instrumental elements are designed by professionals but also by visitors; those enable the visitor to deploy their taste (Hennion, 2007). These elements create obstacles as well as opportunities for visitors, their understanding of the art world is organised around these elements (Griswold et al. 2013). In their research Griswold et al. (2013) 'suggest that elucidating specific mechanisms through which materiality and cognition interact in particular settings is necessary to understand how people encounter cultural objects and assign meaning to them' (p.345). Through interaction between people, objects and their surroundings agency emerges. Visitors do not simply employ a relationship with art objects when visiting an exhibition but are relating with a variety of spatial and physical factors that influence the experience (Griswold et al. 2013). When wanting to include contextual elements within a research I propose a combined focus on materiality, setting and interaction.

The exhibition is a 'conjunctural event' in which relevant objects, subjects, and groupings are co-produced (Gomart & Hennion, 1999, 246). During an ideal experience of an art object intensified contact takes place in which the object approaches the spectator and vice versa (Hennion, 2007). Additionally the setting of the art experience, the museum, structures the experience by cuing responses and classifying the art (Griswold et al. 2013). Griswold et al.'s (2013) research indicated that nonhuman agents (objects and words) choreograph the art experience in interaction with the human body. The museum as an institute has a public function in which it tries to make connections between art and the audience. Art objects are strongly coded and in connection with other explanatory objects. That are objects that are strategically put in the exhibition rooms to guide the experience: these objects play a crucial role as mediators. However, the trajectory so strategically planned by museum professionals is not always the trajectory the visitor will follow (Heath & von Lehn, 2004). Visitors interact with objects and words through a process of position-taking; the value that visitors can draw from this interaction determines the experience of the visitor (Griswold et al. 2013).

In order to take the contextuality of the art experience into account I use the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) approach. ANT argues that the social domain is much more extensive and does not just consists of humans and societies formed by these

humans. Often nonhuman objects are perceived to be a fixed entity that bears symbolic projections of the wider social environment; ANT allows us to observe associations between the different actors, them being human or nonhuman (Latour, 2005). In his book *Reassembling the Social* (2005) Bruno Latour criticises critical sociologists (as Bourdieu) to designate everything as being social before actual research has been done. He argues that, when following this logic, behind every activity in society an explanation based on the same social structures can be found. In his book Latour tries to redefine the notion of social by scrutinizing 'more thoroughly the exact content of what is "assembled" under the umbrella of society. (...) The social seems to be diluted everywhere and yet nowhere in particular' (p.2). Latour believes that there is not a fixed kind of social domain, the presence of the social should be shown every time anew.

He then further claims that ANT has been able to create new ground for sociology and other social sciences by means of tracing associations. The social is normally shrunk to the realm of humans and modern societies, diminishing its extensiveness. 'According to the second approach [ANT], adherents of the first [critical sociology] have simply confused what they should explain with the explanation. They begin with society or other social aggregates, whereas one should end with them' (Latour, 2005, 8). The actors that can be observed (people, objects, spaces, interaction) should be given space to show us the variety of positions they find themselves in; the actors should define the social themselves instead of leaving it to the social scientists. The most appropriate way of taking ANT into consideration in my research is by looking at the contextual elements of an art experience, those being materiality, setting and interaction. I will now discuss the three categories of contextuality and lastly connect them back to attachment and the experience as a whole.

2.5.1 Materiality, setting and interaction

It are not only the artist or the art professional who shape the art experience, also contextual elements structure the field of art. Materiality, context and interaction shape how the art is experienced, how variations are made and how people move through exhibitions (Rubio & Silva, 2013). Rubio & Silva (2013) argue that Bourdieu has failed 'to explore the possibility of considering objects as genuine

agents within the field (..) which leads Bourdieu to miss a fundamental insight into how materials affect field dynamics, relations and boundaries, their constitution and reproduction over time' (p.163). The capacity to exercise agency is not just reserved for human actors, when nonhumans are placed between two actors they modify the relation between these actors (Sayes, 2013). This not necessarily refers to causal agency, but to an agency that is active in the realm of the many forms between absence and causality, Sayes (2013) calls this 'a complicated but nonetheless minimal conception of agency' (p.141).

The audience has to actively engage with these elements to experience the art and/or exhibition and to be touched. Though it is not only the visitor from whom active participation is required, the objects of the exhibition should be actively involved as well. The pleasure of the experience is located in the interplay between the visitor and the objects that shape the museum context (Gomart & Hennion, 1999). So not only the artwork has a structuring position in the museum context, but also the surrounding objects choreograph the art experience, in totality these elements are called the materiality of the art experience. Materiality is used to include 'the physical characteristics of objects and environments' that interact with the audience during their moment of contact with the artwork (Griswold et al., 2013, 345). This includes both the objects of art as the non-art related objects. The material objects influence the art experience through position-taking in which position is related to the 'physical relationships between objects and bodies in a particular place' (Griswold et al., 2013, 346).

So the art experience emerges not only within oneself, through materiality, but also through social interaction between and with visitors who take position. People collaborate with others (human and nonhuman) to reflexively create a sense and meaning of cultural objects. Too often the practical aspects of the actions and interactions an individual engages in are disregarded (Heath & von Lehn, 2004). Other people, whether people one is with or who happen to be in the room, can have an influence on how one experiences a work of art or navigates through an exhibition. Additionally objects are differently experienced dependent on how a person positions oneself to this object.

Through talk and bodily conduct the visitors gain resources through which the art object is experienced and signified (Heath & von Lehn, 2004). Gestures and movements are part of the social structure of a museum visit, attention for

these bodily aspects of the visit can help reveal elements in the process of experiencing that cannot be derived from verbal accounts (Steier et al., 2015). Therefore attention should be paid for how people interact together or with the material aspects of the exhibition in order to better understand their subjective experience of the art surrounding them. 'Positioning and orientation are important aspects of the embodied interpretive action (...) Through physical movement (gestures, posing and positions) perception and orientation is facilitated to others as well as to the work' (Steier, Pierroux & Kränge, 2015, 40; also Heath & vom Lehn, 2004).

The third contextual element that is of importance is the setting of the art experience, this refers to the wider setting of the exhibition, museum and art world. 'Personal experience is not detached from the setting in which it emerged' (Gomart & Hennion, 1999, 235). In another research Babon (2006) demonstrates how setting, although often overlooked, is a crucial element when trying to understand the valuing of objects of art.

Cultural objects and their own sets of meanings are not isolated from other objects, from the meanings of those objects or the meanings of the place in which the objects reside. As a result, reception becomes a multi-interpretive and interactive process where receivers reflect upon the meanings of the location of reception as well as the art in it. (Babon, 2006, 155)

When assessing the setting of the artwork(s) different contextual elements are of importance, first of all the totality of the objects, within a given composition are judged. Secondly the setting identity and coherence is looked upon. And lastly the associated activity of the setting is taken into account, which might be an important element in the symbolical and institutional context of a museum (Babon, 2006).

Ultimately Babon (2006) has argued that the setting of the experience is central when one tries to understand the process of interpreting. Past experiences create expectation for future experiences and therefore function as a standard of expectation and acceptability. 'Variances in meaning and evaluations of art can perhaps be best understood in terms of expectations framed by the physical

location of interpretation' (Babon, 2006, 165). The expectation a person has of a setting is not static but develops continuously as a person gains experience within different contexts (Babon, 2006). This is however not only the case for the setting of the art experience but also for the interaction and materiality, thus the wider contextuality of the art experience. Berghman and van Eijck (2016; work in progress) have identified this process as *symbolic contextualisation*, a process in which cultural objects gain symbolic value because of the surrounding in which they are seen. This contextualisation is not external to experience of art but an integral element.

The different aspects of the art experience (attachment, materiality, setting and interaction) can be differentiated temporarily in order to be studied, though at the same time it must be realised that all these elements are inter-related and that one always calls for the another (van Manen, 1990). The art experience can be seen as an experience in which art and non art related elements are experienced, 'and these experiences lead to attachments and detachments' (Strandvad, 2012, 174). Therefore every time the engagement within the art experience can differ in focus, feeling and reference of experience (Stewart, 2015). In every visit, even a visit of the same works of art, a person can focus on different elements and make different connections in order to be attached or detached.

To properly register the subjective experience of art, instead of reducing it to a social effect, a shift should be made from a notion of social determinism to activity and passion (Prior, 2011). Through focusing on contextual elements, attachment and their interrelations subjectivity can be approached without losing touch with the situational, cognitive and personal aspects of the experience. So in the particular moment of the art experience, in which a person comes across not only the artwork but also other objects, a setting and other people, one is able to create within ones own width of references (the sweep of time, based on socioeconomic characteristics) a subjective experience. In the next chapter I will explain how I have aimed to research the subjective art experience along the line of the here discussed categories.

3 - METHODS

Culture patterns social practices; the organisation of these patterns should be studied when one wants to research culture (Hall, 1980a). Therefore this research is not aimed at finding the meaning behind the artworks or exhibition, but at the significance of various elements of the exhibition that altogether construct the experience of the audience (Gray, 2003). As Stuart Hall (1992) claims:

If you work on culture (...) you have to recognise that you will always be working in an area of displacement. There's always something decentered about the medium of culture, about language, textuality, and signification, which always escapes and evades the attempt to link it, directly and immediately, with other structures. (p.285)

The previously discussed elements are part of the structures that Hall is talking about, the way a person position oneself towards and refers to these elements is of my interest in order to understand the subjective experience.

As Latour's (2005) favourite slogan, I have to 'to follow the actors themselves' (p.11). The actors that can be researched should be given space to show us the variety of positions they have immersed themselves in; they should be given space to define the social instead that we, as social scientists, do it for them. Listening to Latour has left me with a research in which my theoretical framework and choice of methodology are quite interwoven. In an attempt to understand the subjective art experience I have not only distilled the art experienced into different categories, but simultaneously expressed ideas where and how to look.

In this study I would like to use the reflexive approach, for its fluidity instead of fixedness allows me to interrogate my subjects, and with that the theoretical claims, on their own terms. Instead of finding one truth it aims at looking at the multiple perspectives. Hopefully this way I can discover the social reality 'by attending to many levels of practice through which meaning is generated, within particular social and cultural settings' (Gray, 2003, 22). My study focuses on the subjective

experience, which is based on lived experience and knowledge; this experience can then be related to the structures that organize the art experience (Gray, 2003).

Therefore my aim is to look at and talk to people who have just undergone an art experience. In this methods chapter the elements that are of focus in my research will be discussed, after which I will proceed to describe the setting of my research, the requirements and my process of coding and analysing the obtained data.

3.1 Elements of focus

Recently the social sciences have made an inventory of methods that can help orientate the disciplines towards the open-endedness of the social world. It is argued that this can be achieved by taking into account materiality, participation, action, context and non-representational investigations. In these attempts methods are made specific to the issue that scientists aim to research (Lury & Wakeford, 2012). In my research I use a mixture of observations and conversational interviews that are directed to flow freely into the direction of the by the visitors preferred topics (Gray, 2003). These methods permit me to research the daily and personal elements of a museum visit. I think that the surrounding of a museum will be extra interesting for this type of research, because it knows quite some elements, hidden or out in the open, that play a role in the art experience (Emmison & Smith, 2007). As is made clear in my theoretical framework I have taken into account the contextual elements of the experience. With the subject of my research, however, it is simultaneously not something that I will actively look for. Instead of decoding the museum context in itself I aim at decoding the interaction of people with this context (Emmison & Smith, 2007).

With the use of conversational interviews (also termed unstructured, in-depth or nonstandardized interviews) I attempt to access people's experiences and feelings of their reality (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). In this method both the questions as the answer categories are not determined up front, instead an open interaction takes place between the researcher and the interviewee. This way unanticipated themes can be exposed and a better understanding of the interviewee's experience can be developed (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). However, although the conversational interview is unstructured this does not mean it is non-directive and random, the study's purpose has always been kept in sight and I have encouraged the interviewees to talk about

certain topics (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The whole process of deploying a conversational interview is therefore disciplined with the fundamental question of the research, in my case trying to understand the subjective art experience.

When wanting a person to talk about a lived experience it is important to stay as concrete as possible, choosing a specific context can help to achieve this goal (van Manen, 1990). Therefore directly approaching interviewees in the exhibition room after they have had their lived experience made it possible to talk about something still somewhat close and to use the setting of the experience as an illustration of their experience. Additionally I have tried to approach this context from the perspective of the individual and on the individual's own terms (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

So I have tried to let the conversations flow freely. I have not decided beforehand the questions I wanted to ask but to keep in mind a list of topics that I could address when they would be appropriate. For example questions on the visitor's opinion of the exhibition, whether they had read something during or before the visit and how they have experienced the exhibition. In order for this approach to succeed I had to be very active and reflexive (Gray, 2003). The only a-natural and directive topic that I have addressed was *the question of art*, this question I posed at the end of the conversation. By questioning the artistic value of the exhibition I have tried to leave the specificity of the context and let the visitor express his/her thought on art in general.

In the case of my observations I started with very general observations, but have specified them after a few days. From then on I have tried to account the following elements of the art experience; contextual elements, social interaction, patterns and attitudes. While observing I have jotted down these observations in the form of field notes (Gray, 2003). It is data that can be recorded through the naked eye, as the spatial arrangement of the room and the visitor. Visual elements that were looked for were the two-dimensional, objects, setting (the exhibition room or the museum as a whole) and activities (Emmison & Smith, 2007). The material that I have collected through observations I have used to complement my conversations while I am aware of the limitedness of what it can say on its own. The observations therefore give me a descriptive context, a setting in which I can place the scene that the interviewee is talking about (Gray, 2003).

As is often typified in methodological books and articles I spend the first day mostly getting orientated and focused, as my days in the research context proceeded I

noticed my notes and talks become more directed (Schensul et al. 1999). I have tried to be as unobtrusive as possible in my presence in the exhibition room, due to the set up of the exhibition this was quite manageable (Schensul et al. 1999). If visitors made remarks in my direction this was always in relation to me as another visitor (mostly jokes about resembling a clown as I was sitting on the floor). While on location I took quick jotted, but as elaborate as possible, notes regarding my observations as well as the conversations I had (Lofland & Lofland, 1999). In the case of the conversation I had noticed that recording the talks was not appreciated and had a negative effect on the willingness of the people to participate. So I proceeded with making quick notes during the conversations that I then elaborated upon right after the conversation ended. After the day of observations and conversations I have tried to convert these notes into full field notes as soon as possible, which often was the same evening or the next day. Additionally to the conversations and the observation I also noted down my own impression, feelings, analytical ideas and reflections (Lofland & Lofland, 1999).

3.2 Setting of research: time and place

An appropriate approach for this study is the case study approach; in this approach a particular site or situation is researched from the idea that the complexity and particularity of this case can bring understanding. The clear boundaries of the case can help to examine different elements that occur in the social and cultural processes at play (Gray, 2003). My research is a case study in so far that I have focused on the particularity of Ugo Rondinone's exhibition. Studying this instance of art experience has enabled me to understand more general elements of the process. After asking the Boijmans van Beuningen for approval I settled there for fourteen days, for about four to six hours a day. I have tried to conduct the research on different weekdays as this could influence the type of people visiting (e.g. on a Saturday a different audience might be present than on a Tuesday morning). I have observed the behaviour of about 164 people, of which I have talked to 57 people in 48 conversations (in a few occasions the conversation was with a duo).

As the setting of my research I have chosen the exhibition *Vocabulary of Solitude* of artist *Ugo Rondinone* in *Museum Boijmans van Beuningen*. *Vocabulary of Solitude* is a retrospective exhibition of Rondinone's works inspired by the colour

spectrum. It consisted of 45 life-size clowns, 1 clock, 12 candles, 7 shoes, 4 window frames, 1 window and 3 rainbows. In the wall text (see appendix A) it was explicitly stated that the artist believes that art essentially holds something that is unsayable; he does not think one has to understand art but to feel it. The installation of *Rondinone* is said to do the same, it consist of recognisable images that help the visitor to free-associate. The main element of the exhibition are 45 clowns that all resemble elements of a day in the life of an individual with titles such as *yawn*, *sleep*, *breath* and *remember*. The exhibition was on show from February 13th until the 29th of May 2016 in the exhibition hall on the first floor that is reserved for temporary exhibitions.

When you enter the exhibition (see image 1, all images can be found in appendix B, p.60) one immediately sees a big photograph of a clown and the title of the exhibition (the same photograph as the one that is used in the museum's advertisements). A little on the right is a small room that is looping an introductory video that shows people from the art scene talking about Ugo and images of the exhibition in the Boijmans. As a visitor you then proceed to walk through a long corridor with children drawings of rainbows (image 2). On the right is then the next and main part of the exhibition, and the room that was the setting of my fieldwork. This space consists of three rooms that are openly connected to each other. In the first room the wall text is situated and three clowns and some smaller elements as droopy candles and shoes are exposed (image 3 and 4).

When visitors would walk further their perspective changes and they can now look into the second and main room, this room is filled with some 40 life-sized clowns sitting or laying on the floor (image 5 and 6). In this room there are also some extra elements hanging on the walls as big drawings of rainbows, window frames and clowns' shoes. A big attraction of the exhibition can now be seen as well, the window that is situated in the third room (image 7) but can be seen from the first and main room as well. The window is covered with see-through coloured plastic. In the third and last room there are also some clowns situated as well as smaller elements as the rainbows, shoes and window frames. In order for visitors to leave the exhibition they have to walk back to where they have entered, leading them again through the main and first room.

I have chosen this exhibition to be the setting of my research for a twofold of reasons. First of all Boijmans van Beuningen attracts a relative diverse public. It is one of the bigger museums in Rotterdam and exhibits a mix of design, classical,

modern and contemporary art. Even when a visitor would come especially for one of the four genres of art, it is quite possible for them to walk through the other exhibitions as well. This type of museum made it more likely that I would talk with a more diverse, and less professionalized, museum audience than the more specialised contemporary art museums or art centres. Secondly I have decided for the exhibition of Rondinone in specific because I thought it might stir up relative strong reactions. The exhibition is unorthodox, by being an installation it is not the usual exhibit of paintings, and at the same time it refers strongly to daily life and recognisable elements. Also the artist explicitly challenges the classical concept of art exhibitions that might make some of the visitors enter the exhibition with more awareness of the concept of art than in other occasions might be the case. Vocabulary of Solitude is an exhibition that gives rise to other forms of experiencing. It is more interactive, people are more likely to sit on the floor and a lot of people engage in taking pictures and posing. At the same time it is a room inside of a building with a more classical set up. In my opinion this exhibition could therefore offer me interesting reactions and interactions.

3.3 Requirements of study

My research is aimed at the free flow of the moment, therefore standardising the research setting would not be beneficial. Because I want my actors to lead me the way, I want the study to develop in the most natural way. Additionally: because of the specific character of this study generalizability can be harder to achieve. Though the study can maintain a level of representativeness as I claim that the findings can be applied to different contexts (the case study approach) and to an abstract understanding (Gray, 2003). Also my choice for research can account for a certain level of validity because of its immediacy and closeness to location and research subject, though the validation of the interpretations made of the collected data can be problematic. Important in this process is the conscious reflection on the methodological strategies chosen and the claims made.

I would like to position centrally the notion of reflexivity: an awareness of the process of my study and the influences I am under should give a certain degree of internal validity (Gray, 2003). Looking at the singular does not mean that one cannot say anything about this outcome, it enables instead to make claims about the great

number of people that find themselves in between extremes (Lahire, 2003). I am not to generalise through my data because this opposes my aim to give room to the individual experience, if I am to generalise at all it is rather on theoretical principles (Gray, 2003). In an aim not to posit any universal values or assumptions, the system of referencing and meaning making is created out of claims made by the people I have talked to (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000).

3.4 Coding and analyses

During the fieldwork I have already transcribed and coded my notes so that not only my empirical work could be shifted towards the outcomes of the previous activities but that I also could work along the lines of *grounded theory* and theoretically shift whenever needed. In my transcriptions a running log of chronological ordered observations and conversation were written, with a description of the events happening, the people seen and the things heard and overheard (Lofland & Lofland, 1999). As my notes then were worked out into field notes I started to code elements within this data. Most often I coded a single or set of sentences in a word or short phrase that started out as being descriptive, occasionally I coded element In Vivo and often a sentence or set of sentences was simultaneously coded (Saldaña, 2012).

This was the process of *first cycle coding* in which I have freely coded everything that came to my attention. The codes in this stage varied greatly; sometimes they indicated a word, a sentence or sometimes an entire paragraph. The use of preconceived categories was avoided, instead it was allowed for categories to flow from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In a second coding cycle I added more interpretational codes and deleted and merged others. I then tried to start making inferences in my data by linking and grouping the individual codes, later some of these categories were refined into subcategories (Saldaña, 2012) I have tried to focus on the characteristics of the language used as well as on the contextual meaning of what was said (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In order to avoid a powerful conceptual grid that might distract from uncategorised expressions I tried to avoid a strict coding scheme (Silverman, 2001).

After the initial coding phase I have checked my codes, edited and merged them and was left with the resulting 300. These codes I have divided into codes that came from observations and codes that came out of conversations. As earlier

mentioned during my fieldwork I have observed the behaviour of 164 visitors. In 48 cases I have walked up to those visitors around the time they were about to leave and started to talk with them about their visit. In the other cases I have just observed their behaviour and their attitude towards others and the works of art. The observations I have mainly used as a contextualization of what was talked about in the conversations; it helped me understand the visitors better and understand their references to atmosphere, other people or elements of the exhibition. My observational codes were divided into the following categories: walking, reading, photographing, looking and interacting and attitudes.

Besides observing visitors I have also held conversational interviews with visitors in the setting of the exhibition room. Through analytic induction I was able to formulate elements of the subjective art experience that encompasses it to its fullest variety (Flaherty, 1992). The codes that derived from the transcriptions of these conversations consisted of *elements*, *interpretations*, *experiences*, *motivations*, *museum behaviour*, *opinions (positive and negative)*, and *references*. Through mentioning these elements of their visit the audience members sequenced their experience. This way they attempted to translate their experience to a point that would be understandable to the external world (e.g. me). A final and a more complex group I have called *to (not) know*, as opposed to the other categories that emerged quite naturally this group is mostly existent because of my probing. Although the conversations about the specific exhibition were very enlightening I also wanted to enter the subject more generally and structurally. I attempted this by specifically asking people if they considered the work to be art and/or whether they had read or felt the need to read something in order to create an understanding or improve their experience. In this next chapter I will discuss what findings came out of the analyses of this data.

4 - FINDINGS

Using conversational interviews as a method left me with material that varied greatly in what was discussed by the participants. A way of incorporating lived experience within one's research is to weave elements of the conversation against what van Manen (1990) calls the existential of an experience. So along the lines of my theoretical framework, by looking at contextual elements and attachment, I will start discussing my data. This is done not because the art experience can be strictly divided into these aspects, but because these aspects can help me uncover a structure that is common in all the collected subjective experiences. The structure of the experience can thus be differentiated into categories, those categories refer to elements of the experience that are used to describe the experience (van Manen, 1990).

The use of categories allows me to order the data: 'So when we analyse a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience.' (van Manen, 1990, 79). Additionally it is investigated systematically what variations of categories the conversations reveal. So in the first section (4.1) the ways that the contextual elements materiality, setting and interaction take part in the art experience are discussed. In section 4.2 it is discussed how attachment can be derived from the conversations and what way the attachment refer to contextuality. And in the last section I will look at how the expressed attachment and the contextual elements are connected in order to create the overall art experience.

4.1 Finding contextuality

Post-critical sociology has claimed that contextual elements greatly influence the art experience; the subjective art experience is strongly situated in the particular moment (Hennion, 2007; Stewart, 2015). In my fieldwork it could also be seen that contextuality, and its three subcategories materiality, setting and interaction, were important elements to refer to, to be felt and to be opinionated about. In having the art experience interviewees repeatedly referred to specific elements or connected the art to contextual elements in order to structure their experience. For example materiality,

the physicality of the objects and environment (Griswold et al., 2013), were elements that the interviewees interacted with in order to experience the work. This could range from the materiality of the actual art objects:

What can I say.. Beautiful, modern, expressive. With confronting I meant that it asked for my complete attention. The postures and the play of colours.

- Conversation 7

To the materiality of the exhibition room that the artist had worked on in order to create the effect:

I love it, such beautiful work! I think it is playful but also very clever. Like that window framework, that shows that the work is more than just clowns. He also very cleverly uses the colour spectrum. Though for sure he's very lucky with such fucking big windows.

- Conversation 23

Both the above quotations show how the interviewees connect their liking of the exhibition to material elements of the exhibition. In the first quotation the interviewee expresses how he has experienced engagement with the work by connecting this to the poses of the clowns and the colours. The second quotation shows the way the interviewee connects a window, and the artist manipulation of the window (he has pasted colourful see-through plastic on the windows) to the ingeniousness of the artist. An ingeniousness with which the artist rises above the literalness of the clowns. In another instance an interviewee refers to the dominance of the ceiling, expressing that he does not think the artist has liked this aspect of the room:

I do think the artist would rather have had another ceiling. It's so dominant, that pattern. But well, he could not change something like that. But I think he would rather have had that somewhat more subtle.

- Conversation 13

Of course material references, especially those that do not refer to the materiality of the works of art, are closely related to the set up of the exhibition (the second subcategory of contextuality I have mentioned). In the next quotations, for example,

one can read how the interviewee expresses how he sequenced his own experience by looking at the grouping of individual material elements:

And then I look at the patterns of the fabric and the colours and how they all are grouped. With there three in the corner with yellow socks. And those in that corner with blue socks. And than also the clothing, some have cubes and others patterns. That is for sure something that he [the artist] has thought about. How everything is placed also with all those colours.

- Conversation 13

Contextual references to setting are linked closely to materiality, simply because in the end it are the material elements as a whole that make the setting of an exhibition. The category of setting however enables me to look at a wider contextual framework of the exhibition than materiality on its own would have. So when material elements are mentioned as well, this is done in connection to the spatiality and set up of the exhibition. It is therefore a more zoomed-out perspective in which the spectator additionally does not only direct him or herself to the elements within the exhibition but to the work and the exhibition as a whole. Look at how, for example, the next interviewee experiences the setting:

But it also gives a nice totality. The way everything is composed and also the distance between the clowns.

- Conversation 14

Repeatedly the set up of the exhibition and the division of objects and spaces was referred to within the conversations. In the following quotations an interviewee tells me how he has experienced the entering of the exhibition:

When we entered there was a group of kids standing at the entrance, so we did not really realise it all. We just saw three of those clowns. And then you walk further and you see that space and that is very surprising. So, I think that the arrangement is very well done. And then again those clowns portray silence and they are introverted.

Conversation 16

When a visitor would enter the first room she or he would only see three clowns.

When s/he would then walk further his/her perspective would change and all of the sudden the main room in its entirety is uncovered. Many interviewees claimed that it was impressive that the interaction started with only a few clowns and moved, in a few steps, up to an interaction with over 40 clowns. Likewise I saw in my observations that the space at which this change of perspective was to be seen for the first time (the space between the first and main room, see image 5), was a spot where a lot of visitors stood still for a longer period of time gazing into the main room and sometimes uttering amazement. Also when a visitor was walking back to exit of the exhibition this was the spot where a lot of visitors turned around and stood still again.

This is similar to what Griswold et al. (2013) have shown in their research: in the process of interpretation and meaning making position precedes location. In their definition position is physical (characteristics of and relationships between actants) and location is cognitive (schemas and cognitions that are triggered). Similar Steier et al. (2015) state: 'Positioning and orientation are important aspects of the embodied interpretive action (...) Through physical movement (gestures, posing and positions) perception and orientation is facilitated to others as well as to the work' (p.34; also Heath & von Lehn, 2004). The man starts with describing the sequence of his experience, from entering the first room to getting an overview of the exhibition as a whole. He then connects this impressive material and spatial experience to the introspectiveness of the clowns.

That position proceeds location can also be seen more specifically when it is connected to Babon's threefold conceptualisation of setting. The first instances of setting I have discussed just now, are referring to setting as (1) compositional. Babon, however, has approached setting in two other ways as well, namely by looking at the (2) identity and coherence of setting, and (3) the associated activity of the setting. I think the main advantage of taking setting into account can be taken from this conceptualisation of setting. For example interviewees referred repeatedly in two ways to the difference of the exhibition; to the otherness of the exhibition in contrast to other exhibition and/or the otherness of the exhibition in contrast to the outside world. For example the peace and quite of the room was often put in contrast to that of the outside world, which are statements on the identity of the setting:

I think people start feeling calm when they are walking through here. It is in such a contrast with everything outside, with the busy city.

- Conversation 27

In another instance one interviewee claims that it took her some time in order to get adjusted to the difference of atmosphere in the exhibition:

When I entered I had to walk around for a while to get some overview. And to take in the room. With its silence and space, and the lightness in here and then again all those brightly coloured clowns. It is a completely different world than outside

- Conversation 22

Another interviewee connects a cognitive and emotional framework (location) to the otherness of the exhibition by claiming that the exhibition gave him the possibility to reflect on things he could otherwise not, he then continued with expressing his interpretation as a legitimisation:

The expressions and the postures are very daily things. But because of the multiplicity of the situations you cannot pay too much attention to it. And within an exhibition like this you can. Yeah.. and a clown is of course a symbol of joy and expression, it has something youthful.

- Conversation 7

These quotations that express the otherness of the exhibition can also be connected to the third contextual element: that of interaction. As I have earlier mentioned materiality and set up influence how people act, but this acting is also a form of interacting as it is in relation to objects and other people (Steier et al., 2015). Because the exhibition was experienced so atmospherically, people expressed their dislike of busyness in the room, for example one of the interviewees expressed that she was happy that she visited the exhibition at a quiet time:

I would not want to be here when entire school classes would be running around. Then the entire effect would be gone! So I am happy there were no school groups when I was here.

- Conversation 32

Another woman spoke of the importance of emptiness for her to be satisfied:

Yes I think it is lovely but I think the room has to be completely empty. I am very different than my friend. [points at other woman] I was very irritated that you were standing there for so long! [laugh] And she then says, leave it be, that is the way it is in a museum. [both women laugh] But I want the room to be empty. I have very high standards. Look when those children come in and start posing that is all very nice. But I don't need a picture of that!

- Conversation 18

Additionally the materiality and set up of the exhibition seemed to make the visitors at ease in the exhibition room, this could be connected to (3) the associated activity of the setting (Babon, 2006). In the wall text of the exhibition it was explicitly stated that the visitors could free-float in association (see appendix A). The openness of the objects helped diversify the visitors activity as the following quotation indicates:

Before I came I have read some things about it, on the website. But now I'm here it all slips away. It is just so nice in its own, so then those texts do not matter anymore. It also really invites you to lie on the floor. Haha, I even I lied on the floor for a moment!

- Conversation 32

In my observations the classical museum behaviour was often seen: silent and contemplative walking, standing still, gazing and looking at details. Typical postures that contributed to these attitudes were the hands-on-the-back pose and the hands-in-pockets pose. What was interesting about this exhibition was that for a big part of the visitors I have observed this was not the only modus used. Visitors seemed to switch back and forth between this typical behaviour and more day-to-day behaviour. This was especially noticeable with the posing and picture taking activities of people in which people sat on the floor, laughed and talked more loudly and animatedly. The switching between these behaviours went fluently; people could enter and walk through the exhibition in a contemplative mode, until one of them directed the others attention by asking for a picture. At this point the visitors could engage for quite a long time in taking all kinds of photographs. And then at the point of leaving, they could turn around and gaze contemplative again. This was not the case, as one might

expect, with only younger visitors but it was also dominant acting for the middle-aged and elderly visitors. This kind of behaviour could indicate a moving away from the 19th century classical approach to art and the influence of ‘highly-commodified, mass-mediated, visually-intensified societies’ within the museum (Prior, 2005, 135).

Interviewees themselves consciously experienced the exhibition as unusual and most of them liked the exhibition for it. The unusualness of the experience then seemed to be based on past experiences (Babon, 2006). One man I have talked to expressed this when two other visitors entered the exhibition and started photographing right away:

That’s nice right?! You don't see that at other exhibitions!

Conversation 28

Not only the photographic appeal of the exhibition influenced the activity of the visitors, also the composition of the art objects made the exhibition differ in bodily experience.

It is nice that you can walk around it, that is something you don’t often see that. It is not that I could walk here for hours, but still it is nice that you can.

Conversation 45

This last interviewee expresses her appreciation for the fact that you can walk in between the art objects, however she directly relativizes this liking by claiming that it did not mean she would want to do it for hours. These can be seen as a reference to her attachment and detachment to the works of art. Of course all the contextual elements I have discussed in this section cannot be seen separated from attachment (and the lack of attachment). These kinds of remarks about the connection one can make with the art objects and the exhibition will be discussed in the next section.

4.2 Finding attachment

When interviewees mention contextual elements this does not occur in isolation, contextual elements are referred to within general description of interviewees’ experiences. Through these elements interviewees explain how the work and the exhibition made them feel and the way they relate to the work. The referencing of

people to contextual elements is thus part of a larger structure in the art experience. When engaging with works of art one also needs to have the time and free will (Hennion, 2007). For two interviewees the kind of art objects in this exhibition created a barrier for engaging with the works of art:

Woman 1: Normally when you visit an exhibition and there are paintings hanging you walk across all those paintings, and every time you pass a painting you stop and stand still for a long time, and look at it. There is then much more to look at, all the details and all. I can't do that here.

Woman 2: Yes, you can hardly look at every clown separately! You have those costumes and the posing and such but.. No, in some way it just doesn't have that appeal, and it is not because it are clowns.”

- Conversation 8

In another case an interviewee expresses a similar (im)possibility for attachment with certain art genres based on their characteristics, but then the other way around:

With older art, for example, 17th century, that art is pretty but.. You cannot really have a relationship with it like with contemporary art.

- Conversation 44

For others the fact that the exhibition consisted of clowns made it difficult to feel the appeal:

You know what, we don't like clowns! Even as a kid I did not like them. Then I went to the circus and saw them spraying water on people and I just did not get the fun of it..

- Conversation 31

Though the interviewee explains that it this makes it difficult for her to like the exhibition, it did not mean that she stopped trying:

But we were planning to read more about it. We still want try and understand it better. We are intrigued. Let us help you: we are intrigued, haha! [both women laugh]

- Conversation 31

Although the woman of conversation 31 might have proclaimed to be intrigued jokingly to stimulate my research, wanting to read more to understand it better was something that has been expressed more often.

Most of time work appeals to me, or not. And yeah, sometimes I do want to make an extra effort.

Conversation 2

Similarly to the above quotations this interviewee expresses a natural appeal (or the lack of it) but does claim this does not mean that this feeling always has to be followed. He tells me that even in cases he does not feel this he might try and make an extra effort. In another example the interviewee is very enthusiastic about the effect of the exhibition and also refers to external information:

I love it! It's just like a bath. I would almost go and lie between them. I think they are all individuals, I can identify with all of them. They are something on their own, but they are something together as well. They are just like a family. And I also like it that you can see the twenty-four hours.

- Conversation 42

The twenty-fours the interviewee is referring to is the titles of the clowns, who all are supposed to represent the different stages of a day. When I ask her if she had recognised the title, the twenty-four hours, in the artwork she confides to me the following:

Well, it is that I have read it.. Otherwise I would not have got that from it. Then I would have probably seen it more as human emotions. I had to make an effort in order to see that. It seems so simple, right, but that is with all art. It just says so much.

- Conversation 42

So although the interviewee very enthusiastically speaks of her experience and immediately refers to seeing the twenty-four hours of the day, she later additionally tells me she had to make an effort to see this. People thus have to make an effort in order to understand and appreciate the works of art, this effort though is not only textual, it can be bodily as well. Another interviewee expresses how he had to stand

still and let it in (a passivity that enables activity; Gomart & Hennion, 1999) when he is describing his process of experiencing:

When I entered it had to sink in for some time. I had to stand still and look around for some time. After that I started to look at the individual clowns separately. But to me the clowns as a whole are more important. I think the atmosphere is in the totality of the clowns.

Conversation 16

In all these expressed instances we can see how the interviewees make themselves available to the works of art. They make an effort in order to understand and therefore create favourable conditions. In some way individual's bettering their understanding of a title can be seen as a long way from attachment but it is this making available of themselves, the conditioning, that can ultimately lead to attachment (Hennion, 2007). It does however not mean that when an experience is not all consuming it is not an attempt for attachment. Gomart and Hennion (1999) state that to taste is to develop an activity in which one wants to achieve 'the sublime moment of *aficionado*'. In other articles Hennion (2007, 2010) states that there is no taste without the intensified relation between the individual and the object, he then conceptualizes taste 'as a meaningful accomplishment and a situated activity' (p.25). Attachment then might be an ideal way of experiencing, a situation in which 'activity and passivity enable each other' (Gomart & Hennion, 1999, 241). However most of the time people find themselves in a state of possibly reaching attachment. People express quite a practical outlook on attachment and their overall art experience, especially people who have had a lot of art experiences are quite down to earth when it comes to their experience:

You cannot get into everything, in museums you always have to make decisions. Before, when I just started at the art academy, I always thought that going to a museum was so tiring. I thought that you always had to really see everything. But I don't do that anymore.

- Conversation 38

Another interviewee has told me that she reflected for some time on the difference she experienced during several art experiences. She then concluded that the conditions of the visit (did she have enough time, how was she feeling, etcetera) influenced her

appreciation highly. Because of this knowledge of the context of her experience, she explained, she has now made an agreement with herself that she allows herself to not understand:

Now I went here this afternoon and actually I was quite late. So at first I thought should I really be doing this. And then I thought, well I will just go and look around for a while and then I don't have to think anything of it. So I went in the museum and just thought about how beautiful they [the clowns] were sitting here, how peaceful is it in here. It just did me good.

- Conversation 20

These two quotations express a learned and naturalised understanding, something that I came across more in my research. It are indicators of the sweep of time (Stewart, 2015) that brought people to this point. These interviewees are people who, as Bourdieu (1984) claimed, have learned from earlier appropriations to such an extent that it has strengthened their future appropriations. How a person experiences art is not something static but something that develops continuously as a person gains experience (Babon, 2006). But it is not always out of naturalised education that people express a practical attitude, in other occasions people also focused on doing what made them feel pleasant but did not connect this to previous experiences but to the moment of experience. One interviewee expresses that the intensity of the museum made her decide not to read but just to appreciate how it felt at that time:

I have been walking around here [in the museum] for two hours. And it is so overwhelming. It is too much. And then I came here and it is so light and so heavy at the same time. I don't think it is necessary to read something about it here. Maybe if I would have read it, it would be extra charming. But it just is not really necessary.

- Conversation 47

So although the interviewee is aware that there is a chance she would like the exhibition more if she would read something about it she decides not to and to appreciate her experience for what it is.

When visitors express not fully being able to condition themselves to the works of art, this can happen for a multitude of reasons. The experience of art should

not therefore be disregarded. Interviewees either make an extra effort or just accept this lack of attachment. It is important to signify these art experiences, even if they do not contain complete attachment. Stewart (2015) also claims that the lesser forms of attachment with works of art should be seen as significant as well. To do so he claims that the particular moment can exist out of sustained engagement or distracted engagement. Sustained engagement refers to a heightened level of attention while distracted engagement refers to multi-tasking or a multiple engagement. He then further claims that only people who have the time and the luxury of setting all the other worries aside have the opportunity to experience sustained engagement. While others cannot 'take time out of their lives' and experience engagement because for example they are performing a domestic task.

The notion of distracted aesthetic engagement enables us to see that many interactions with cultural objects take place in an absent-minded manner, producing as a series of micro-evaluations that might seem meaningless when considered in isolation but gain significance as part of wider patterns.

(Stewart, 2015, x)

Likewise I think my research indicates as well how important it is to take all instances of attachment, and consequently also detachment, into account. I do however would like to subtilize Stewart (2015), who mainly links distracted engagement to domestic duties (with an emphasis on female and lower class distractions). This research does so by linking distraction to more diverse causes and also illustrating all the in between positions one can take between being sustained and distracted. Taking on a less sustained mode can also be a tactical decision in order to have a pleasant experience. Besides the clowns were often especially valued for their lightness, and quick ability to be experienced, as opposed to paintings:

Well not bad, otherwise we would have left right away. It is quite nice, nice and a light after all those paintings. You can see that as well in the way people react to it: people smile!

- Conversation 28

And:

I have also seen the video at the beginning, but I don't think it was really necessary to see that in order to understand. It is not very complicated work. It's open for different interpretations. I also don't think that for this work it is necessarily important to know what the artist meant.

- Conversation 22

The accessibility of the work was also valued for giving room to one's own interpretation:

I thought it was a pleasant experience. I have read the text on the wall and I am taking the booklet with me. But he [the artist] does not really explain in there what he means with it all. But I quite like that. That I am not being pigeonholed or being pushed in some direction.

- Conversation 34

In these cases the direct accessibility of the works was experienced positively, it enabled the visitors to make their own connection. In another occasion a visitor expressed similarly that he did not need the explanation but he did really like that the artist tried to achieve this:

I have read at the beginning what he had to say about it. I did not really think that was necessary. But what he said in it was fucking brill [slang for brilliant]. It made me very happy. Because it does not mean that there is nothing behind the works. But that it just does not have to be over-rationalised.

- Conversation 23

Through the textual information the interviewee valued the works of art even more, although the works of art were liked for not needing textual explanation.

4.3 From context and attachment to experience

Because I did not want to limit individuals to a singular form of experience that is suited to their class (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006), I have tried to find aspects along the lines of which the subjective art experience can be researched. So far I have written about attachment and context within the particular moment. In this

third and last section I will look at the relation between attachment and context in order to try to understand the subjective art experience on a more abstract level. I will start doing so by looking at my most abstract question, the question of art.

4.3.1 The question of art

When looking at the instances in which I have asked the interviewees whether they considered the exhibition to be art, the relation between attachment and different elements of the exhibition came into sight. This is insightful because the value of art is a symbolic one, the recognition and validation through these symbols are important indicators of appreciation but also to understand how people attach or detach themselves to the works of art (Hennion, 2014). People made several references when they were talking about this topic. First of all a often recurrent way of stating that the works were art was by making a connection to the set up of the exhibition and the setup of the work:

Yes, I do think it's art and not just a room full of clowns. There is really some kind of dimension. I think it is the set up, at first when you enter there are two or three of them. And then.. So I think the way they have placed them gives something extra.

- Conversation 4

In this quotation the interviewee expresses that he thinks that the exhibition rises above just containing clowns because of its spatial dimension. To illustrate his opinion he refers back to his process of experiencing the clowns from a few to the totality. The single materiality is then compared to the totality of the setup in which one is stated to be less impressive than the other. In mentioning that it is more than just a room of clowns, the interviewee not only legitimises the exhibition as art but he also delegitimizes the clowns in their singularity.

In another instance an interviewee claims that she feels a natural appeal to the work, an appeal that she also illustrates by mentioning the totality of the exhibition. Although the interviewee of conversation 6 expresses a similar opinion and connection as in the above conversation 4, she does not connect it to the process of her experience but to the general, overall appeal. In clarifying the appeal of the totality she connects it to a her sensuous and emotional experience:

But yes, I do consider this art, it just appeals to me. I think the work as a whole is

something special. And also the experiencing of loneliness, although you're not alone. With all those clowns and all those figures, but then again that atmosphere and that peace and quiet that you can feel in the room as well.

- Conversation 6

In a third instance a woman refers again to the totality and spatiality in order to express her opinion that the works are art. Similarly as in the first and second quotation she connects this to the set up and composition of the clowns, emphasising the importance of the totality over the individual clowns. Until this point everything is quite similar as in conversation 6, she even brings in a second explanation of her opinion based on the feeling she has gotten from the work. However her emotional response is the opposite of that expressed in conversation 6:

Yes, everything together! Also because the room is so big. I just said to her that it would have been completely different would they [the clowns] have sat in a row. But now in such a big space.. Yes it is everything together. And because it does something to me. It makes me happy. That's also way I think it is art.

- Conversation 32

Relating the status of art to attachment, the feeling of appeal and connection, is something that is regularly done when I ask the question of art. The pleasantness of the experience (a pleasantness that can contain all kinds of emotions), is related to a diversity of contextual elements, but seems to ultimately create the valuation of art:

Well, what's art and what is not. We both studied the arts [she points at the man accompanying her] and we have had a gallery and we still don't know what art is! I do think it is very pleasant and nice. And mostly I think it is just important to see what I experience as pleasant and then I'll just follow that feeling.

- Conversation 3

So contextual elements within the works of art or in the wider context create an appeal (or not) to the visitor because of which he or she experiences the works as art. However not thinking something is art, not understand or not feeling the attachment (as I have also tried to show in section 3.2) is not the end of the art experience. In one instance an interviewee herself stated at the beginning of our conversation that she did

not think the works were art by making a connection to the multiplicity in order to justify this opinion:

I really like it but I don't think it is art! It's just a room full of clown in nice colourful suits. It is just one thing that is repeated over and over, and then they've put some dresses or suits on them.. I often go to modern art and I like it but sometimes I also just think hmhh. But nevertheless I can still like it.

- Conversation 46

Similarly another interviewee also declared that he did not think the works were art, he made this claim by emphasizing its unoriginality:

Well, I like it. But if you would ask me whether it is art I would say no. And that's that. And of course you now want to know why. Because I think it belongs in the V&D [Dutch department store]. I don't think this should be in a museum. I don't think it is special at all. With all those colours and those clowns, it just is something that should be in the V&D. It is just the opposite of a happy clown. That's just nothing, that's not something real.

- Conversation 19

Both these interviewees however claim that they nevertheless like the exhibition. Also in my observations I did not notice very different behaviour in the case of the naysayers as the art valuers. With the examples described in this section I have tried to illustrate the diversity of connections a person can make when valuing the works as art. So although interviewees quite strongly believe something is not art, did not make them not like the artworks. And interviewees who stated that the works made them feel very sad or happy both expressed to experience a natural attachment to the works.

4.3.2 Intensity and form

The examples I have used in the previous section exemplify how the interviewees made various connections between context, felt attachment, and the overall art experience. Additionally the interviewees expressed a valuation to both their overall experience as well as to contextual elements, those valuations however could be quite diverse and incoherent. In this last section I will look at what can explain this diversity. Post-critical theories have discussed the topic of value only quite indirectly

as a by-product or result of the experience. In Gomart and Hennion's (1999) article taste is considered to be the appreciation of the individual, so whether something is liked or not. Taste can then be seen as giving value to the experienced. This is in line with Hennion's (1999; 2007; 2010) claim that taste is an activity, the activity is then not only making one available, but also the subscribing of value to feelings.

Nevertheless my findings indicate that valuation is much more interwoven and also influences attachment instead of only being the outcome of the attachment. Similarly Griswold et al. (2013) state that value is drawn from interaction with elements, they however not mention how this can be related to the overall experience. At this point in my analyses I have decided to look at valuation studies to see if I could find a conceptualisation that could be of use. I have to expand my theory in order to be able to define value and valuation and understand its place within the art experience. It is relatively easy to point out the values that are expressed when talking about the art experience, it becomes more complicated when trying to understand how this constitutes an experience.

So what is value? Kjellberg et al. (2013) claim that the way an object or element is referred to is where valuation can be found. When a valuation is made it are the circumstantial elements that help construct value. The values that can be attributed in an experience are manifold and can shift within one activity; they can overlap, be combined or be conflicting (Helgesson & Muniesa, 2013). In the end valuation is the ordering of things in accordance to their differences, the taking into account the differences is an important aspect while an evaluation is not just a representation but a signification of certain elements or things above others (Kjellberg et al. 2013).

Even when actions and experiences are not expressed to other people, a person still has to coordinate him or herself toward different states, elements and expectations of the art experience (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). An experience has to be structured along the lines of different elements of reference (of which some are external) in order to be understandable to the individual. Also when a valuation is made this does not mean that a person cannot shift during the proceeding experience, different sets of values can be applied later on in the process. Also in the case of an already expressed value people accept the tension between what they initially experienced and what they experience later on (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006).

In a more recent article Hennion (2014) himself reacts against an author's Bourdieusian and deterministic use of valuation studies. He then further claims that it would be interesting to question 'values and judgment-making in a field where criteria are not obvious' (p.253) and that a valuation studies perspective can look at the varying requirements that compose the art activity. In the next paragraphs I modestly attempt to incorporate valuation in a post-critical approach of the art experience.

So valuation is the signification of certain elements above others (Kjellberg et al. 2013). Let us now go back to my findings with this basic knowledge. One of the last aspects that I have discussed was how different the interpretation of the work could be, although expressing a similar intensified attachment. When looking at my data expressions are made that range from happiness to sadness (and everything in between). This aspect of the art experience can be conceptualized into *form*, the way one interprets and perceives the elements around him or her. Additionally the degree of felt connection is expressed, this could then be conceptualized into *intensity*; this ranged from disinterestedness to mild engagement and extreme enthusiasm.

When I entered the exhibition I started laughing right away. It just made me very happy! I don't really know what it is supposed to mean but it just makes me happy. Normally I do want to know what someone wants to say with his work but in this case I just didn't really find it necessary.

- Conversation 32

The interviewee expresses a positive experience, the exhibition made her happy and even laugh right away. Later in the conversation she also claims that she values the works as art because of the exhibition in its totality (I have discussed her on page 43 as well), and:

And because it does something to you. It makes me happy. That's also why I think it is art.

- Conversation 32

She does value the exhibition positively and highly and it could be said that she in some way experiences attachment. She lets go of wanting to know more about the

exhibition and just experiences it. Additionally I saw her stay in the exhibition for quite some time and also return later on to walk around a second time. Another interviewee expresses her immediate intense experience, but then that of sadness:

I think it's lovely. And very, very sad. And I immediately felt that when I entered. I did not know what to expect. And it was right away such a strong image. We were lucky that there were very little people when we entered. And then we could right away take in that image and walk around quietly.

- Conversation 25

Later on in the conversation the interviewee is moved so greatly that she cannot express it and touches her stomach in order to show how it felt:

"It's just so strong, the contradiction of those colours and the sadness. I did not really think of what the artist wanted to say and what the clowns represented. I was just thinking about how people treat each other, and that you really try and do your best but that it all doesn't.. Yeah, I really think, pfoe..."

- Conversation 25

I also noticed throughout all the conversations that when people did not have a strong form related valuation, their intensity of attachment was also minimised.

I liked walking around here. For the atmosphere and that everything is so low. Because of that it felt like I was floating when walking around. Yeah I like it.. I don't think that I find it beautiful though. But I'm not sure if that matters. I don't think so. (...) I don't think something always has to be beautiful, but sometimes I can find something really repulsive. I don't have that now but I also didn't really find it beautiful right away. You know that kind of beautiful that you don't need any explanation. I do think it is the artist's intention that you should walk around for a bit. That you stay in here for some time. The atmosphere is kind of special, also because it's not something you see that often. But I also cannot really say that I really find it beautiful.

- Conversation 15

So when a person is experiencing an art object she or he is trying to engage with this object and its context by attributing value to its found form and felt intensity.

Ultimately the form of the experience, whether someone finds it beautiful or frightening, impressive or typical, is influenced by which contextual element is signified. Then through this signification, and thus valuation, of these elements an intensity of attachment is created through which the overall experience in the end is evaluated. Whether a person likes the way the different art objects are composed will influence his/her attachment and therefore the overall art experience. Whether a context is expected and therefore appreciated, or expected and therefore perceived as boring will change the subjective art experience.

So to better understand the process of subjective art experience the incorporation of form and intensity would be fruitful. When following the theory of Boltanski and Thévenot (1999) the difference of experience can then be explained by the lack of 'a common definition of the form of generality which allows to connect this situation with other ones identified as similar' (p.367). It could then be sad that the visitors who experienced happiness versus the visitors who experienced sadness (to put it bluntly) do not share similar ideas on what the works of art and their symbolic value refers to.

A division between intensity and form, based on a dual valuation can give create a more subtle understanding of the particular moment. Additionally it is again a way of subtilizing the division that Stewart (2015) makes between sustained and distracted engagement in his further so subtle article. In trying to understand the subjective art experience it is important to look at both the values connected to the context (form) and attachment (intensity). Valuation, signification of differences, is thus crucial when trying to link context to attachment in order to understand the variation within the subjective art experience.

5 - CONCLUSION

The aim of this research is to understand the subjective art experience. Although Bourdieu and other critical sociologists have fruitfully researched the sociality underlying the art world, the individual's experience has remained underexposed (Prior, 2005). In order to better understand the subjective art experience I have adopted the post-critical approach of looking *how* people engage with art. This approach claims that the art experience is an active and conscious process. A way of focussing on this process is by taking into account the particular moment of the experience (Stewart, 2015). In this moment an individual encounters contextuality and attachment. When a person experiences an art object, he or she simultaneously experiences its wider context: the setting, materiality and interaction of the experience play an important part. The art experience is dual act: both a move inwards as outwards is made. Besides the contextual encounter an individual undergoes an experiences of possible attachment in order to attune oneself to an object. This ideally leads to a co-formation between the visitor and the object (Hennion, 2007).

In order to empirically research the subjective experience I have looked at the various practices through which an individual generates meaning and value (Gray, 2003). Instead of using a fixed method I gave the individuals that were the subject of my research space to show themselves in the variety of positions they find themselves in (Latour, 2005). I have attempted to do so by conversational interviewing and observing visitors of a contemporary art exhibition. The interviews were focused on an open interaction and no predetermined categories were used. When wanting someone to talk about lived experience it is important to stay as concrete as possible. The particular exhibition in which my fieldwork was placed functioned as a clear context of my study. I have tried to approach this context and the visitors interaction with this context as much as possible on the individual's own terms (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). In doing so the complexity and particularity of this case can bring understanding to the wider, abstract phenomena of the subjective art experience (Gray, 2003). To analyse my data I started to look at the instances in which the interviewees mentioned context and after that attachment. Furthermore I have looked

at the connection between the expressed attachment and the contextual elements that ultimately create the overall art experience.

My research shows how contextuality functioned as a means to refer to, to be felt and to be opinionated about. The experience of the exhibition was often connected to materiality and the setting of the exhibition. Besides these compositional references, interviewees also referred to the identity of the setting by mentioning the otherness of the exhibition in comparison to the outside world. The exhibition then functioned as a place in which emotions could be felt, that for some reason could not as easily be experienced in the outside world. Thirdly contextual references were made when interviewees talked about how they or other people acted and behaved in the exhibition room. This could be seen in the repeatedly mentioning of the otherness of the exhibition when compared to other exhibitions. My observations indicated that the classical museum behaviour, the hands-on-the-back pose and the hands-in-pockets pose, was often performed. However, visitors also switched back and forth to another more day-to-day type of behaviour. This behaviour seemed to be stimulated by the museum texts that claimed that the visitors could free-float in association, the dailiness of the art objects (clowns) and the possibility of walking around and sit besides the artworks.

When expressing attachment my research suggests that interviewees were influenced by contextual elements, they however also used these elements in order to condition themselves. For example the genre of art or the subject matter could make an engagement with the artworks difficult. However most interviewees expressed an openness to make an effort to better understand or appreciate the artworks. Simultaneously this openness is combined with a very practical attitude that does not necessarily aim at reaching ultimate attachment. In that sense my research confirms Stewart's (2015) claim to take seriously the experiences that do not live up to the ideal-typical idea of attachment. When an experience is not all consuming, it can still be an attempt for attachment. And furthermore when one notices he or she cannot make the connection the experience does not end there.

Most of the time people find themselves in a state of wondering, a state in which one could possibly reach a state of attachment, though at the same time this might just as well not happen. People express quite a practical outlook on attachment and their overall art experience. Being not attached could even be used as a tactic to relax during the intensive museum experience as whole. So although visitors can

express an inability to fully make contact with the works of art for diverse reasons, the art experience can still be significant. Interviewees either make an extra effort or comply (or even better in Dutch: *berusten*. The English language does not seem to have a word that implies the same activeness). It is important to signify these art experiences, even when they do not contain full attachment.

In order to explain this diversity of experience the concept of value turned out to be useful. The way one makes a reference is where valuation is created, however valuing is not only classifying (by referring) but also signifying one over the other (Kjellberg et al. 2013). When people experience elements, states and expectations, they make valuations (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Within an art experience an individual has to coordinate him/herself to different states of mind (attachment/detachments) and contextual elements. In my findings I saw that value judgments were mentioned in a twofold way: when a person referred to elements of the exhibition and when as a person referred to his or her experienced attachment. These two values together create the overall art experience. The two expressed values relate to form (elements) and intensity (attachment) and can be quite diverse and even incoherent.

So individuals attribute two kinds of value when in relation with objects of art: one that is connected to contextual elements and another that is connected to attachment. This influences the experience also in a twofold way. First value is created when a person encounters the contextual elements; certain elements are focused on and interpreted. This creates the form in which the work is experienced: the way something is emotionally and cognitively approached. Secondly a person experiences a certain attachment to the elements just valued. The interpretation of the former functions as a way to make a connection to the artworks in the for that person subsequent intensity. This can lead to the overall art experience. However there is also still the possibility to go back again to the contextual elements and create another, additional or contradictory, forms that can alter the felt intensity of attachment. One can make this circular movement as often as one wants and every renewed round influences the overall art experience. I have illustrated this process schematically in figure 1:

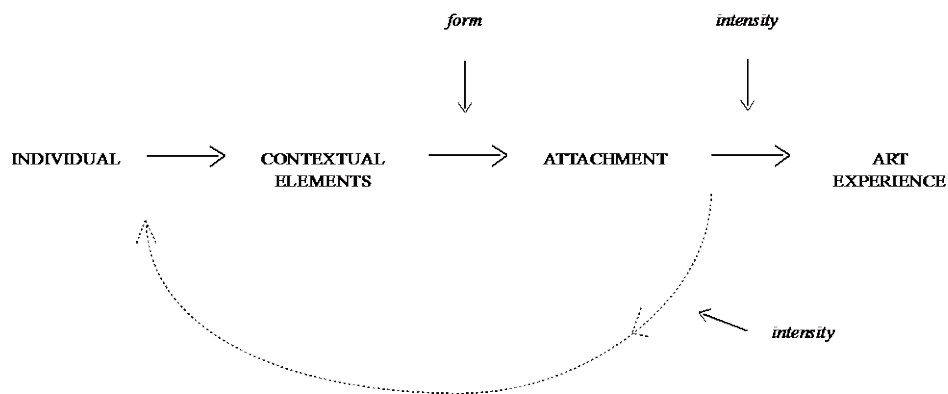


Figure 1: conceptual model

The experience that people have of the works of art is thus dependent of the experienced intensity and found form. Interviewees could for example differ in interpreting the works of art as very happy (because of the colours) or as sad (because of the facial expressions of the clowns) though both expressed to feel an extensive contact with the works of art. However people that did not value the form distinctly, also expressed a minimised experience of attachment. Ultimately the valuation in form leads to a valuation in intensity, these combined make up the overall art experience. These finding indicate that valuation is much more interwoven in the art experience, it is not only an outcome of the experience but also influences it.

Attention to intensity and form of attachment within the subjective art experience can diversify the ideal-typical attachment conceptualized by Hennion (2007; Gomart & Hennion, 1999). Additionally it can also subtilize Stewart's (2015) attempt to signify of distracted engagement as well. The subtlety and diversity found in the subjective art experience through form and intensity confirm the subjective dimensions of the art experience and help it expand it from its isolation in class and sociocultural characteristics.

Because I was limited in time this research has a smaller scope than I would ideally want to. By only researching one art exhibition, it can still be questioned how much of my findings can be attributed to this specific exhibition. Although I suspect that I have abstracted my findings in such a way that the conceptual model is also appropriate in other contexts, I cannot make these claims yet. To do so similar

research in different art exhibition contexts should be employed. Secondly, the directness of the conversational interviews were extremely useful to gain in-depth understanding of a phenomenon within a particular context. However positioning myself within the art exhibition made it impossible to have very elaborate conversations as would be the case if I would have interviewed people outside the art exhibition context. However more traditional interviewing missed the concreteness and insightfulness of the combination of observations and conversations.

A future consideration of this study would be to research the sweep of time in connection to the conceptualized particular moment. Although some possible instances of the sweep of time were seen in my research, I have no empirical grounds to make any inferences on them. A lack of a common form of generality can explain the differences in form (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999), and this lack might be explained by socioeconomic characteristics, but one cannot know until further research is employed. A really useful addition to this study, besides the earlier mentioned elaboration, would thus be the incorporation of the sweep of time without endangering the subjectivity of the experience. One could, for example, employ conversational interviews and observations in setting, and do follow up interviews with the same people that focus more on the background and wider experience of the interviewee.

It is clear that much can be found in the particular moment of the art experience. Within their own width of references and tools an individual can relate to a work of art in a multitude of ways. Through a process of position-taking the visitor interacts with several contextual elements within his/her art experience, through this interaction value is created that ultimately leads to felt attachment. In combination these values of form and intensity creates the subjective art experience. Though to understand this process in completeness a turn back to the sweep of time should be made. Not only Bourdieusian theory should be opened up to a diversity of positions, Hennion's theory can also benefit from a less idealized concept of attachment. Much can still be said and found in the realm of the individual.

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APPENDIX A: Wall text accompanying exhibition

Ugo Rondinone - Vocabulary of Solitude

‘The fundament world of the visual art is an inward world. We approach it through solitude and silence. I don’t have to understand an artwork through linguistic conventions; I have only to feel it. Any explanation will reduce the artwork to the sayable, whereas every artwork holds what is essentially unsayable. I believe in the spiritual and magical power of an artwork. It is an alchemy of transforming the viewer’s emotional and physical reality.’

Ugo Rondinone

With his installations Ugo Rondinone (Brunnen 1964, lives and works in New York) creates personal dreamscapes. This installation, entitled Vocabulary of Solitude, is a retrospective exhibition of his works inspired by the colour spectrum. Clowns, clocks, candles, shoes, windows, light bulbs and rainbows: they are recognisable images that speak to all of us, symbols that excite free-association.

The rainbow has a holistic significance for Rondinone: a symbol that is all-embracing in its form, colour and familiarity. The 45 clowns shown here have titles in the present tense, such as ‘be’, ‘breath’, ‘remember’, ‘feel’, and ‘yawn’. Together, they describe a day in the life of an individual. Just as a prism splits white light into all the colours of the rainbow, in this installation Rondinone reveals the various aspects of human existence.

Please take a copy of the accompanying booklet at the beginning of the exhibition containing the titles and background information of the individual works. Please share your images online and use the hashtag #ugoinboijmans.

APPENDIX B: Photographs of exhibition



image 1: entrance and video

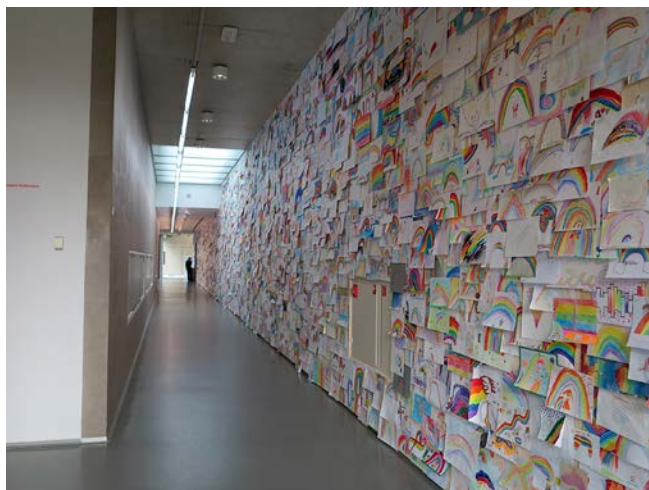


image 2: hall to main room

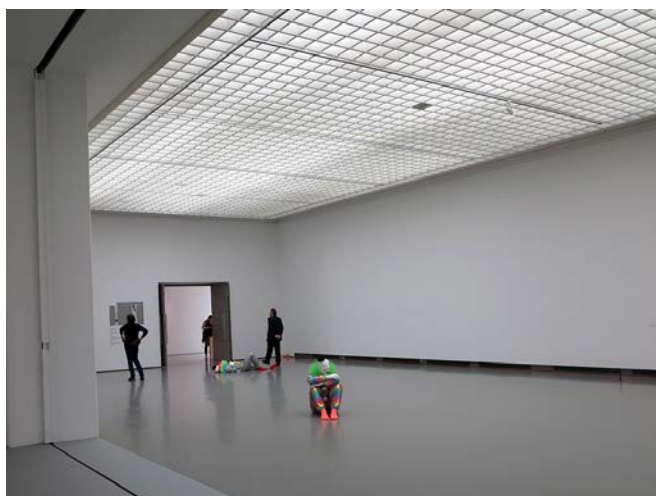


image 3: first room and wall text



image 4: first room



image 5: change of perspective



image 6: second and main room



image 7: third room and window