Hesitation Before the Impact
– The museums and their visitors

By
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Abstract

This study has had a twofold ambition; to probe into the life in the museums by studying the visitors and trying out some concepts in a cultural policy research setting. I will do this by analysing encounters between art and visiting audiences using "acontextual" analytic concepts: event instead of experience, affect rather than emotion and a broad understanding of the concept of atmosphere. Furthermore, the empirical material for the analysis consists primarily of parts and elements that are often discarded or excluded in examinations. The preliminary conclusions invite further probing into the interface between visitors and art, between the cultural imaginations that motivate cultural policy initiatives, and the actual concrete events in spaces and settings we tend to think of as cultural.

Keywords: museums, visitors, method, cultural policy, event

Introduction

The encounters between art and the public take place in different settings and locations, some of them private, as when we read books of poetry, look at paintings in art books, listen to music in our homes, or through headphones as we move through the world. Others take place where it is possible to witness them, in galleries, in concert halls, at festivals. Some of these encounters can be seen as points of contact between the products of accumulated efforts of making art and culture available and attractive to all and the actual public. To study the visitors, to do visitor studies, is a potentially productive way of probing into the effects of cultural policy initiatives: The actual encounters are among other things also the boundary surfaces between some of the abstract imaginations that motivates cultural policy – art has positive effects – and the concrete bodies and minds of the public.

Objects in museums of contemporary art are sometimes so different from each other that audiences find it difficult to recognise that they are supposed to belong to the same class of things. This does not prevent the encounters with these objects from being referred to as experiences of a specific kind, aesthetic experiences (Belfiore and Bennett 2007). There is also a strong belief that the encounters that take place in art museums have positive effects, both for the individual and for society. This belief legitimizes public engagement in the field of culture. The positive effects are imagined as profound and transformative, capable of changing our sense of ourselves, our way of dealing with the world and with one another. These assumptions are mediated by curricula, cultural policy initiatives (Bjørnsen 2009, Røyseng 2007: 231, Vuyk 2010: 173), as in more "advocacy driven" parts of the cultural policy research (Belfiore 2016, Mangset and Hylland 2017, Stavrum 2013, Oman and Taylor 2018).

A significant amount of research on the relationship between art and audiences is based on two different and often opposed theoretical perspectives: the phenomenological-hermeneutical (humanistic-aesthetic) and the social science-sociological (cultural-sociological). The phenomenologist approach accentuates the subjective meaning of the situations (encounters) (Gadamer 2004). The sociologist often concentrates on explaining the situations (encounters) as an effect of underlying social structures (Bourdieu 1984, Bourdieu et al. 1991). However, both perspectives use the encounters as starting points for answering questions about something believed to lie behind, under, over or hidden within the empirical.

In this article, I want to discuss and explore the possibilities that more open approaches can offer. I attempt to do this by avoiding managing the encounters in the museum as encounters between entities that are predetermined by the help of strong terms like art, culture, audience, aesthetic, and experience - and instead

consider them as open and ambiguous events. This approach also implicitly goes against the usual subdivision of empirical (societal) reality into different fields, as Per Mangset does when he states that what happens "within" the cultural is justified by its effects "outside the cultural field" (Mangset 2018: 6). To divide reality into ordered elements, parts or fields, prioritises similarities and identity at the expense of changes, processes, differences. My hope is that the use of other framings might contribute to "a wider understanding of the entirety of the field of cultural policy analysis" (Gray 2010: 225).

I also want to highlight an often-neglected element of any fieldwork, namely the initial, tentative contact with possible informants – the negotiations with them. Some of these negotiations ended with the respondents joining, becoming informants; others ended with them refusing to participate further. The material I use in this article is from negotiations that lead to both decisions. To use this material raises crucial ethical problems, first and foremost: is it ethical to use a material that the informers have not given explicit permission to use? My decision to do so came after series of deliberations. I reflected on the character of the material, its status, I discussed it with my colleagues, other researchers, and I consulted the *Ethical Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Humanities, Law and Theology*, drawn up by The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees. The material I use lay within a kind of a grey area; the material is not either this or that; it is in the middle: It is material that has not become proper material yet, nor has it yet become something not meant to be. This uncertain, or ambivalent, character of the material made it especially interesting for further scrutiny.

In the ethical guidelines from The Norwegian National Ethics Committee, the main principle is that research that involves contact with individuals should be based on informed consent. However, they also state that research without consent might be considered where "the data being processed is not particularly sensitive, and where the utility value of the research clearly exceeds any disadvantage for the individuals involved." (The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees 2021). The material used in this article meets both these exceptions. The initial encounters with possible informants did not include sensitive material. The material contained no personal information. It is almost impossible for anyone, including me, to identify the persons involved. The anonymity is further ensured by the way I represent them in the text: the situations are paraphrased, focusing on the changing events and affects, not the participants' individual traits. The utility value in using the material lay in the ambivalent tensions the question of participation triggered, tensions and ambivalence, sentiments and events that seemed to be brought "under control" in the "proper" cooperation with those that chose to become informants.

The empirical material for this article consists of about 20 encounters with potential informants, combined with participatory observation and production of diverse sense-data such as photographs and sound bites. The encounters took place at the Astrup Fearnley Museum, the National gallery and Kunstnernes Hus, all museums located in Oslo, Norway.

The Rules of Impact – Concepts

Cultural policy researchers have long been interested in the effects or impacts of encounters with art; by attempts to measure these effects, for instance, by using metrics "aiming to capture the intrinsic impact of that [the art] experience…" (Brown and Novak Leonard 2013: 224); by questioning the ways such attempts are conducted (Belfiore 2015, Gibson 2008, Belfiore and Bennett 2010, Vuyk 2010; Newman 2013, Newsinger and Green 2016, Oancea et al. 2018); or by discussing the "nature" of encounters with art (Ryder 2013, Kobyshcha 2018). To study impacts, effects, the nature of their existence, how they work, even to question whether they exist, is to be concerned with results, outcomes. There is something "logical" in the emphasis on impacts in cultural policy research; in recent years, the justification of public support of the arts has increasingly been linked to its "positive effects outside the cultural field" (Mangset 2018: 6). Justification of the arts has thus increasingly become equated with measuring the possible impacts of art.

Each thing that happens in the world consists of a "chaos of variables" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 202), also the incidences that we tend to label as experiences of art. The researcher "tames" the chaos of the world by slowing the actions down, by eliminating "whatever other variabilities are liable to interfere, so that the variables that are retained enter into determinable relations" (202). The taming is probably necessary; it brings on an order to the empirical field and makes the chaos manageable. Simplification is in many ways the very foundation for our kind of actions, the production of certain types of statements about the world. The procedures keep chaos at arm's length, to use a familiar culture policy phrase. However, as time passes, we have to plunge into chaos again. Especially so when the elimination of "variabilities" has gone too far, the field has become too neat; or as Deleuze and Guattari write, everything has become a matter of "… opinion, which claims to protect us from chaos itself" (203). In this case, to plunge into chaos could mean to return to the empirical field guided by other conceptual approaches than those we are accustomed to, approaches that accentuate what Verbeeten and Speklé (2015) thought of as missing in the quest for measuring results, effects and impacts; namely processes and inputs.

The use of other concepts creates other worlds or accentuates aspects of the world that are habitually left in the shadows when we keep on leaning on the

old ones. The cultural field is a concept, as is art, audience, and experience. And impact. Some of them had new and fresh beginnings; they were elements in new solutions to old problems; at other times, they were means to create interesting new problems. Still, aggregated use has made some of them into solid lumps of "opinion", or elements in what Bourdieu labels as "doxa" (Bourdieu 1984).

In this article, I will probe the situations that the informants and I, together with the material and non-material surroundings, forces and movements, produced by using concepts that differ from those we habitually use in exploring museum visitations. I will do this primarily by substituting terms such as "encounters" (with art), and "experiences" (of art) with the concept of an "event". Using the concept "event" has some advantages; the most important one is its openness. As Gilles Deleuze uses it, an event is an open, processual concept oriented towards change. The "point of change in an intensity is an event for Deleuze" (Adkins 2012: 509). An event does not, as our habitual understanding of experience does, denote the production of specific results or certain qualities: such as when we think of experiences with art as experiences of a specified kind, with particular outcomes. The point of inventing, or thinking with, new or other concepts is that it makes "us aware of new variations and unknown resonances, it carries out unforeseen cuttings-out, it brings forth an Event that surveys [*survole*] us." (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 28) Here, I use the concept event as a tool, a means, to create a crack, a rift, or an opening, into a world that often is treated as an intact and transparent whole.

It is not too difficult to extract constants from the surroundings. For example, after a conversation with one of the museum staff at the Astrup Fearnley Museum, I wrote the following in my field notes: "The temperature, 19°C, the relative humidity is between 45% and 60%, with an average of 55%. Warm in winter, cool in summer, dry: a superficial climate. A compromise between the needs of humans and artefacts." One way of "closing in" on the surroundings, without breaking them down into senseless fragments, is to concentrate on what they do, for example, their uncanny capability to engrave the unfolding situations with compelling yet strangely unspecific qualities. We often try to grasp these essential but obscure qualities in a situation, place, or event by using atmosphere. "Atmosphere" is neither an objective trait of things nor merely a feeling within a subject. It is something in between; atmospheres are "the perceived quality of a situation, made up by the constellation of people and things", a "phenomenon or a condition that transgresses boundaries, such as subject and object" (Bille et al. 2015: 32). As such, the use of the term atmosphere may be of value in attempts to close in on complex, dynamic states such as the situations in a museum.

Emotions are often thought of as "felt qualities" that produce "characteristic action tendencies" and "specific motor patterns" (Stern 2010: 27), anger, joy,

delight. To treat the shifting intensities as pure manifestations of emotions is to believe that they are holders of clear and accessible significance and decode them into clear-cut meanings through sensible, skilled interpretation. Affect is a term that differs from emotion by opening up for thinking about states that have not acquired a distinct shape. As Deleuze understand the term affect, it precedes emotion; it can evolve into emotions but is prior to them. Affects are fundamental; they move us; they are "the change or variation, that occurs when bodies collide or come into contact" (Colman 2010: 11). The term emotion connotes ownership, different kinds of stability and identity, and is often regarded as a result, like in the sentence: "This experience gave me a feeling of sadness." To sieve the situations through the concepts of event, atmosphere and affect favours the present, the acute, but is also an approach that acknowledges that present articulations, movements and affects, produce, and reproduce, the already existing, i.e., the past; powers, structures, gender, dreams, hopes and fears (Stewart 2007, Blackman 2015, Gibbs 2015: 224). It is an approach that focuses on the minor, the transient, the fragile; tones, movements, hesitations, glances: "The scale is small, but that is where we live, and it makes up the matrix of experiencing other people and feeling their vitality" (Stern 2010: 6).

Managing Impacts – Methods

This article is a part of a multi-sensory approach. This means that it has included – in addition to the production of oral data by interviews and conversations – moving, seeing, listening, sensing, taking photographs, recording sound, on-site writing, off-site writing, jotting down, writing up, recollection and numerous discussions with friends, relatives, colleagues and others. All research is dependent on and affected by the researcher's relationship to the "object of study." I am a member of the imagined community (Anderson 2006, Danielsen 2006) of those interested in art. This affiliation has, of course, affected me as I moved within and between the sites. However, as a teacher, researcher and writer, I also have a history of problematising prevailing beliefs about the impacts of encounters with art. The tension between these two positions constitutes the intellectual and affective horizon of this work.

There are many ways to try out concepts and approaches. In this case, I tried them out with the help of a series of situations that consisted of elements which, when put together, constitute what we habitually refer to as encounters with art, or at least as visits in a museum — an environment, individuals moving through this environment, living, sensing, uttering. First, I approached the possible informants within the museum who had already purchased an admission ticket. Then, I asked them to take me with them as they walked through a couple of

museum sections and share their thoughts about what they were undergoing while walking with me.

This article will concentrate on the negotiations before the actual conversations, primarily because of their surprising intensities. It seemed to me that the negotiations, in a more intense, raw and hastened way, exposed tensions that vanished, or at least "thinned out" in the later "proper" conversations. Some of the negotiations resulted in conversations; others did not. The negotiations were not taped, the examples are based on field notes that were written immediately after the incidents.

Hesitations Before the Impact – The Informers

The first time I began to approach the visitors, I became aware of a set of problems I would later come to regard as both fatal and highly productive. It was as if the potential informants perceived me as the embodiment of what they seemed to imagine to be the desired results of questions they knew all too well. When we are pupils, we are supposed to repeat the already known and add something of our own. This pedagogy leaves us with "a thin margin of freedom" (Deleuze 2011: 15): In *A thousand plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari write about a character in a film by Werner Herzog; the character in the film says to himself: "Who will answer this answer?" Then Deleuze and Guattari go on: "Actually, there is no question, answers are all one ever answers." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 110). What could be the answer here? None in particular, not a set of detailed ones, rather a frame of mind, a specific tone perhaps, a reference to a set of qualities, to depth, proofs of achievement of anticipated impacts?

Hesitant, careful, nervous, I approach a couple in their early thirties, a woman and a man. Surrounding us, dead, butchered animals, Damien Hirst's works, a cow and a calf split in two, sheep that seem to be crucified, white ceilings, a shiny epoxy enhanced concrete floor. I ask if they may be interested in participating in my project, answering a few questions. She answers first, "Yes," followed by his, "Yes, can do that." I explain a little bit more about what we are going do to, that the purpose is to report immediate responses to what is happening. He begins to hesitate: "I am not sure…" She says, like an echo: "I am not sure either", followed by short laughter. I assure them that they will remain anonymous: She mumbles something, I cannot make up what it is before she goes on: "Yes, I don't know…" "I want to say no," he says, his voice sounds strained. I ask the woman: "What do you say?" He answers, on behalf of both: "I think we say no." "That's all right," I say, (my voice, friendly, conciliatory, but also laboured). They mumble something; I cannot hear. I notice that she flushes. (From my field notes.)

Hesitation, one could arguably state, is a delay, a series of interruptions

towards an end, an objective, a conclusion. Nothing is happening, or at least not at the pace we expect. But it is not so. Hesitations are, on the contrary, often packed with events, movements, energies, but their shape is different, strange, varying. To think with them, we must use open analytic concepts that can handle their fluid, ambiguous quality.

The Unspecific – Atmospheres, Ghosts

Atmospheres are a part of the here and now but are also ghostly signs and materialisations; of the past, other places, spaces, spheres: other museums, their museums, my museums. Suppliers of commercial atmospheres know this (Roschk et al. 2017); they feed on the productive aspects of atmospheres when they try to attract shoppers by creating "pleasant and enticing atmospheres that evoke the spirit of the holiday season" (Spangenberg et al. 2005: 1583). The qualities that we try to articulate through the use of the concept atmosphere are those that seem to have the ability to suspend time, to move us effortlessly through space and time; performance of some sort, an act. These traits may well also explain the concept's diffuse ontological status. The use of the term is an attempt to close in on the ongoing effects of a whole situation, a totality; our language, especially the scientific language, is, on the contrary, oriented towards that what it is possible to isolate, particulars (Bøhme 2013: 2).

Nevertheless, the notion of the atmospheric has been used for a long time in attempts to describe certain qualities in "cultural" or "art" settings. Thus, for example, in his seminal book *Distinction* Pierre Bourdieu writes about the "quasi-scholastic atmospheres of the museum" (Bourdieu 1984: 75). In doing so, he established connections between things of different nature; the materiality of the museum, its walls, its artworks, guards and halls, and a spirit, knowledge, a praxis.

We were not alone, my prospective informants and me. We were here to watch, to see, to look. However, we were observed, too, spied upon. We were monitored by cameras, observed by guards, by other visitors, but also by entities that were not there (here), at least not in the ordinary sense of "are" and "here", things and forces that become visible, or palpable, by the effects they had on us. To be subject to surveillance, whether by video cameras or by human eyes, may have unspecified effects: "… the atmospheres which surveillance produces are then often unlikely to induce recognisably (or qualified) cognitions or even emotional states, but, rather, particular forms of affectivity" (Ellis et al. 2013: 720). The guards, cameras, and other visitors are relatively definite entities; we can (or try to) move beyond their reach and turn away from them. However, there were also others there, or something other; they affected us in forceful, obscure ways. "Places, people, are

always already haunted insofar as 'they [spectres] are everywhere where there is watching '. [..] Spectrality effects in place, and differentially in different placings, an unsettling complication of the linear sequence of past, present and future." (Wylie 2007: 172). Space is seldom empty; even the uninhabited deserts are full of something that affects us, imaginations of other deserts, the idea of the desert, deserts of the past, the future, is this my desert, can I exist in this desert? A spectre, says Derrida, "begins by coming back" (Derrida 1994: 11). That which is coming back must have been there before; we are full of the already happened, or that which did not happen, the un-happened. My visitations to the museums are haunted by prior visits, by imaginations about the museum, what I am supposed to do there, am I a worthy visitor? This is already present, but it is not visible to the eyes, audible; the hints of its presence become accessible through the effects they have on our bodies, movements, sensations, expressions; voices, eyes, unrest, reddening, tonal variations, flickering eyes.

The situations in the museum might be an example of something Berger and Luckman wrote about general social conditions, a situation "pre-empted by social order" (Berger and Luckman 1991: 69). However, this particular order is paradoxical; an order without order, or at least as one of a different kind, a stranger kind, supposedly more unrestricted. One of the primary purposes of the art museum is to facilitate the meetings between the works of art and individuals. There are "libraries full of works that describe what art does, can do, or should do" (Ryder 2013: 147). A common feature of these anticipated effects is that they at the same time are both fundamental and non-specific. For a long time, these effects were taken for granted (Vuyk 2010, Mangset 1992, Mangset and Hylland 2017), and we still hold the belief "that the artistic experience can have transformative effects on both the individual and society" (Belfiore and Bennet 2007: 226). Gadamer writes that "the power of the work of art suddenly tears the person experiencing it out of the context of his life, and yet relates him back to the whole of his existence" (Gadamer 2004: 60-61). The Norwegian core curriculum for primary, secondary and adult education almost exactly mirrored this view: "Even more, a confrontation with creative art can wrench us out of our habitual modes of thought, challenge our opinions, and provide experiences that spur us to re-examine prevailing conceptions and break with conventional wisdom and customary modes." (Norwegian Board of Education 1996: 13).

It would have been easier to treat the events in the museum via the context of these prescriptions, the cultural, the aesthetic, the deep, to compare our emotions, actions and utterances to the aims inherent in these prescriptions. However, the use of contexts, even the widest ones, would not do justice to the speeds and shifts, the ambiguous character of the events there. Moreover, to rely solely on contexts makes it tempting to be content with describing and processing what you imagine

is already there and thus to overlook or ignore the things and processes that do not fit into the pre-established notions of what naturally belongs there. (Bal 2017). As one of my recruited informants later said, possibly as a reaction to a pause in our conversation: "The silence is like the silence in a doctor's waiting room." Another said that the atmosphere reminded her "of a train station, of travelling." The indefinite is the essence; it is like a projective field, open, an anything-land, beauty, anger, boredom, indifference, inhibition, freedom.

Before the Impact – Affects

A man, not quite my age; sometimes, they all seemed older than me, even the ones that obviously were not. He wore autumn colours, woollen garments, brown leather shoes. I fell into interpretation, could not help it, kept on deciphering that which never were cyphers. I halted this by asking, "Excuse me, may I bother you with some questions? It's about how it is to be here..." He did not hesitate as so many did, went motionless for a split of a second before he answered: "I would like to keep the experience to myself." Of course, "myself" is an interior, and one of the secret pathways to this interior goes by the name experience. (Reflection based on my field notes.)

It is pretty apparent that "dance floors are affective places" (Bøhling 2015: 161), or that the stands in a football arena are saturated with affect. When looking into events in such places, we tend to assign the noticeable signs of affects to the "nature" of these events. The visibility, even palpability, of these affects may lead us to think of them as phenomena with a distinct quality; they surge in some situations and are absent or non-existent in others. This tendency is bolstered by our favouring what can be converted into words, meanings (Mazzei 2013, 2010). Art museums are also known to be affective places. In my fieldwork at the Astrup Fearnley Museum, I witnessed, both close up and from a distance, quite a few "outbursts" of an affective nature; signs of swift changes of energy, moods, speeds. The bulk of these outbursts were seemingly affiliated with either the artwork possessing certain "sensational" qualities, or with the visitors knowing the works of art from before. Time and time again, I witnessed or was affected by my informants hurrying, excitement, joy, even relief, towards artworks that, in some ways, were familiar to them, like the motives in Jeff Koons work *Michael Jackson and Bubbles.* In both cases, the spectacular and the known, the affects seemed to emanate from acutely unfolding relations between localisable entities, the informants and the artworks. The works seem to be in possession of something that comes to us, does something with us, are made up by traceable movements. The sudden surge of intensity seems to confirm the traditional conception of the relationship between art and its audiences; art does something with us. However, this kind of events

were rare, but at the same time, at least to some extent, predictable. The dynamics of these sudden outbursts of affect resembles what Daniel Stern (2010) writes about when he describes the variations in intensities in events produced by our daily encounters with the world.

However, the bulk of affects I witnessed throughout the fieldwork came forward, appeared, made themselves known in more modest ways. My attempts to contact some of the visitors seemed to release different forms of "natural" uneasiness; polite, conventional, undramatic, but still nervous, tense, expectant. What does he want? The specified, explicit request seemed to intensify some of these situations into something that it was almost painful to endure, an almost palpable uneasiness. This difference in quality was easy to ignore, primarily because of the transitoriness (they arose, unfolded, disappeared) and the fact that we tend to understand awkwardness as an integral biproduct of all encounters of this kind. These manifestations of turmoil and movements were in important respects different from the outbursts of intensities associated with the physical encounter with the artworks. They were not supposed to be shared; they were unwelcome manifestations of turmoil that seeped through the surfaces, the skin, the movements, the voices; mumbling, twisting, fumbling, flickering eyes, minuscule, rapid changes of facial expressions.

The outburst of affects when attending a soccer match, the curious fluttering around an artwork, seems to be directed against something present, something at hand, the action on the grass, the artwork. The muffled, reluctant movements in the negotiations were obscure in this respect; their objects, their directions, seemed to be related to something working in the background, a horizon. A possible perception of this might be to think of the uneasiness, the distressed and ambivalent states, as ongoing products of processes where the present, the request, the encounter, the actual environment, become entangled, mixed up with the "inner" worlds of the possible informants. If so, the uneasiness and ambivalence can be seen as palpable and rather unspecified effects of a kind of friction between actual events, the encounter and the imagined world of culture.

We tend to think of ideologies, power, and social structures as something abstract, which becomes effective by working in slow, maybe even indistinct ways. We often perceive them; think of them as something working on us from above, from below. Much of what is written about them in academic settings is airy, theoretical, and almost ghostly. Stewart (2007) proposes considering them as events in a stream we always are in the middle of. These events are affective, the affects "are a kind of contact zone where the overdetermination of circulations, events, conditions, technologies, and flows of power literally take place" (Stewart 2007: 3). At times they animate our bodies, voices and movements in ways that can be observed, felt: "obtusely, in circuits and failed relays, in jumpy moves

and the layered texture of a scene. They surge or become submerged." (Stewart 2007: 4). Me entering an already established situation made it tenser, maybe even dangerous; it was like the request "accidentally" actualised the darker undertows of this world. To experience or encounter art in a museum is not an activity without rules, regulations and expectations, not without its own dangers.

"Ideologies happen. Power snaps into place. Structures grow entrenched." (Stewart 2007: 15). During the incidents that I later would label completed conversations, the informants and I moved along the structures; we fulfilled, in different ways, the spirit of the museum by moving between the artworks, talking, with soft, tentative voices, about what we were experiencing. We were tuned, to the situation, to each other, performing well. When the structures, the power, surfaced in the interviews, or snapped into place as Stewart says, it did so in the shape of abrupt, sometimes isolated, statements, like in sudden questioning about the quality of the works, the atmosphere, the connections between artworks and money. I think the hesitations, the interludes, were a series of events where the structures, power, the pulls of the institution, made themselves visible, palpable, in a direct, raw form. The intensities leaked out, worked their way through bones and muscles, past the skin, the things at stake showed themselves as a series of signs of tension. Me disturbing them intensified something that was already there. My intervention threatened to expose their relationship with art as an illegitimate one—to expose their lack of foundation, knowledge, their lack of the right state of mind, the qualified aesthetic attitude. In this way, one could arguably say that the disturbance, the "contamination" (Svensson et al. 2008: 117), which we often try to minimise, or compensate for, was productive. It did not produce statements, "contaminated" or not, but a surge of tensions already in place. The tensions were a part of the atmosphere in the museum, an atmosphere that Bourdieu calls "quasi-scholastic" (Bourdieu 1984: 75). This atmosphere sometimes signals or exposes us for mutually exclusive requirements, most palpable as the "double-expectation" of simultaneous spontaneous expression of pure aesthetical judgement and the demonstration of natural ownership to the proper "scholastic" knowledge.

Tentative Conclusions

In this article, I have tried to explore the potential significance of events that we tend to consider as preparative and nonessential: the initial stages of contact with possible informants. The tentativeness in these early opening stages seemed to make space for the unfolding of a series of events that displayed properties of the relationship between audiences and art that otherwise tend to slide into a kind of ghostly background-existence in "proper" or "real" exchanges between researcher and informants.

In the article, I used more open, analytical concepts than traditionally used in cultural policy research. I did this by avoiding treating the events in the museum as encounters or experiences with art and instead treated them as ordinary encounters between individuals, or humans and things within an environment. Furthermore, I analysed the unfolding events, using "acontextual" concepts, affect and atmosphere. The point of using "acontextual" analytical concepts is that using them, rather than their more context-oriented siblings enhances the possibilities of closing in on the movements and processes as singular and unique events, rather than changing examples of a basic form; the aesthetic experience. Loosening situations from their conventional contextual constraints opens them up and makes it easier to "locate" the events in the interface between the imagined, "die kulturelle Vorstellungswelt" and the actual; the concrete.

This study has had a twofold ambition; firstly, and most important, to probe into the life in the museums; secondly, to try out some concepts in cultural policy research setting. The preliminary results from probing into the preparatory phases in the conversations with the informants suggest that the potential informant's imaginations about the institution art as a whole play a crucial role in how they react to requests to talk about their encounters with specific exhibitions. The imaginations of the audiences regarding this seem to have some common traits. Firstly, there seems to be some sense of danger involved, the occurrence of uneasiness was an indicator of this. Secondly, the imaginations of audiences seemed to gain strength and get some direction by the interaction with the researcher; it was as if their fantasies and expectations required a kind of disturbance, or some sort of pressure to become palpable, maybe even for the informants themselves. This suggests that the disturbances, in this case the researcher's request and presence, were a productive provocation. It generated diverse sets of uneasiness and tension, sentiments and affects that otherwise tend to go underground, and thus slip away, in more established phases of conversations with informants.

Cultural policy researchers working with arts and audiences have often tended to take the meaning and function of central concepts, such as culture, art, experience, museum, participation and so on for granted. At an applied level, much cultural policy research lean towards repeating studies that thematise issues or phenomena that reproduce stable understandings of some core concepts and known problems; (the lack of) participation, uneven recruitment, different barriers and thresholds and so on. This suggests that there is an intimate relationship between how one understands (implicitly or explicitly) basic culture-relevant concepts and one's ability to develop functional, practical and not least interesting new problems. In this article, I have tried to combine the two levels both by introducing new conceptual approaches and by experimenting with them on empirical material, the situations in the museum. The relevance or

usefulness of this lies in that it may offer new ways of "solving" old problems; for example, problems connected to lack of participation, legitimacy and so on. Or in creating new ones.

In the article, I have concentrated on the sometimes neglected, discarded even, parts of a fieldwork. The next thing to do would be to apply a similar approach to what is regarded as "proper material" in investigations of the relationship between audiences and the art; voices, actions, movements, the surroundings. However, the main objective could be - or should be - to dive into these situated and unique processes and events and relate them to the constitutive role that our conventional ways of making sense of museum visitations play in (re)producing adequate results in cultural policy relevant research.

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