

THE AFFECTIVE FUNCTIONING FORMS OF THE ADULT MUSEUM VISITOR

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Abstract

The piece of research presented here on the forms of the affective functioning observed during a museum visit identifies nine of them, while most of the authors who are part of the "affective curatorship" trend maintain that there is only one, emotion.

Keywords: *Museums, adult visitors, affective functioning, meaning making.*

1. Introduction

For the past twenty years, the museum community has been interested in emotion as a factor that would greatly contribute to the pleasant and educational character of an exhibition visit (Ahmed, 2004; Bagnal, 2003; Bodenstein, 2011*)¹. Recently, this interest has given rise to a movement, the "affective curatorship", which attempts, through various museographic means, to arouse emotion in visitors (Boyd and Hughes, 2020; Varutti, 2020*). Moreover, a careful reading of the authors who promote this movement reveals that emotion corresponds to the affective functioning in its entirety. Such an equivalence is astonishing, because the first adult who comes along will say after two hours of visiting that he feels tired, but happy all the same, because he has seen things that interested him. In the museum, the affective functioning therefore includes at least sensations in addition to emotions. This simple observation gave rise to the question that guided the research presented here: What forms does an adult's affective functioning take during a visit to a museum exhibition?

Broadly speaking, the strategy adopted to answer this question is threefold: 1) Developing a definition of affective functioning based on the work of neuroscience and the affective sciences; 2) Drawing up a list of the forms of affective functioning identified in fields that have points in common with the museum visit, namely tourism and advertising produced for the cultural milieu; 3) Confronting this list with several successive samples of adult visitors.

2. The affective functioning, its definition

The definition offered here draws on publications from the neuroscience stream (Damasio, 2003; 2012; Hellman, 2000; Thagard and Aubie, 2008*) and the affective sciences stream (Clore and Ortony, 2013; Feldman Barrett, 2017; Moors, Ellsworth, Scherer and Frijda, 2013*). It reads as follows: Affective functioning is expressed in four ways: *reactions* to the environment in which people find themselves or that they evoke, but also reactions to themselves as they are or perceive themselves; *sensations*, i.e. awareness of changes in their body or mind; *states* that are more or less prolonged, and *dispositions* to act.

3. Forms of the affective functioning identified in fields close to museology

Two fields, tourism (Escobar Rivera, Casadesus, Simon Villar, 2019*) and cultural production advertising (Wang, Close Scheinbaum, Li, Krischen, 2021*) provided the following list: emotions, sensations, feelings, sentiments, attitudes, interpersonal stances, dispositions, and passions.

¹ References marked with an (*) are only examples as the subject matter has been treated in many other publications

4. Confrontation of a list of affective functioning forms with the meaning making of successive samples of visitors

As far as meaning making is concerned, it is obtained using the Thinking Aloud Technique (Ericsson and Simon, 1993), which involves asking an adult visitor arriving at the museum to go through the visit at her/his leisure, but saying as she/he goes on what is on her/his mind; what she/he is thinking, imagining or feeling. What is said is audio recorded by a researcher accompanying the visitor. When visit is over, the recording is entered into a computer so that it can be analyzed in written form.

Regarding the successive confrontations with the previous list of affective forms, it goes as follows:

1) The list is first checked with the meaning making produced by 10 adults in three exhibitions presented respectively in three types of museums: history, fine arts and natural history. The analysis of the recordings led to the elimination of two forms of the affective functioning: sentiments and passions as irrelevant to the situation of an adult visiting alone.

2) The resulting list is checked against the meaning making of 50 adults aged 20 to 65 years of age (same number of men and women, with three different degrees of education and three visiting habits levels). The resulting list includes: emotion, sensation, mood, disposition (taste, preference), empathy, self-projection, desire, laughter and pleasure.

3) A further check with 10 people visiting different exhibitions from the previous ones confirmed the previous list.

The following is a definition of each selected form of affective functioning, as well as its main characteristics.

Notes: a) Each definition is obtained inductively from the analysis of the meaning making provided by the visitors of the successive samples; b) Each definition takes into account the definitions offered in several specialized dictionaries of psychology, philosophy, aesthetics and the French language; c) Each definition is "watertight", i.e., does not suffer from any overlap with another.

5. Definition of the nine identified forms of affective functioning

5.1. Emotion ²

Direct reaction to what holds the visitor's attention and stimulates him, reaches him, touches him
 The visitor judges, appreciates, gives his/her opinion
 Reaction is triggered quickly and is short-lived
 Its valence can be positive, negative or indeterminate ³
 Example (positive valence) : "It's beautiful"
 Example (negative valence): "It is insignificant"
 Example (indeterminate valence): "It is curious"

5.2. Feeling (feeling or felt meaning) ⁴

Awareness of what is going on within oneself in response to an external or internal stimulation
 What is felt is psychophysical. For example, fatigue has an affective connotation, while frustration is accompanied by physical or physiological feelings
 The visitor describes what he or she feels, senses, or the impression he/she has
 The valence can be positive, negative or indeterminate
 The visitor presents what he/she feels in one of the following three forms:
 Example (predominance of the physical component): "I feel tired".
 Example (predominance of the affective component): "I feel frustrated"
 Example (predominance of the cognitive component): "I feel like I've been looking at it for a long time."

5.3. Mood⁵

A transient state (disposition), like sensation, but which lasts longer, and which is not necessarily caused by a particular stimulus, as is the case with sensation

² Synthesis of the parts applicable to the museum situation of the definitions offered by Lalande (2002), Larivey (1998) and Rey (2005)

³ As we observed, Antonin Broi (2020) considers that the valence of emotions can be indeterminate as well as positive or negative

⁴ Synthesis of the parts applicable to the museum situation of the definitions offered by the American Psychological Association (2009), Gendlin (1962), Lalande (2002), Rey (2005) and Sander and Scherer (2009)

⁵ Synthesis of the parts applicable to the museum situation of the definitions offered by Frijda (1993), Sander and Scherer (2009)

Example: "I feel nervous today"

Note: Mood can influence other forms of affective functioning and some aspects of cognitive functioning.

5.4. Tastes and personal characteristics⁶

Inclination to act in a particular way because of personal preferences or inclinations

Taste and personal characteristic have more permanence than emotion or mood

Valence can be positive, negative or indeterminate

The intensity of what the visitor describes is more or less important

Example (what the visitor likes or dislikes): "I don't like baroque art; it's too complicated for me"

Example (what the visitor likes or dislikes): "Noisy groups like that are not acceptable!"

Example (what the visitor is or is not): "I'm not patient. I have to practice a lot so I don't get upset!"

5.5. Desire⁷

Reaction of attraction towards something that the visitor considers enviable

It can take the form of a wish, a vow, but also of wanting something to come true or to outline a project

In the museum, desire is usually expressed with a positive valence and has an imaginary dimension

Example (wish) "I would like to go and see the other exhibition, but I don't have time today"

Example (project): "On my way out, I'm going to buy a catalog because I found it interesting"

5.6. Empathy⁸

Identification or description of a feeling or reaction experienced by another person

The visitor evokes what someone else is feeling or doing

Valence can be positive, negative or indeterminate

What the visitor says always appeals to the imagination

Example (what the other person feels): "When the Mississippi explorers traveled great distances, their arms must have been tired from rowing all day"

Example (other's reaction): "A man who feels guilty, he must not want to go home at night and see his wife and children"

5.7. Self-projection⁹

Identification or description of affective reactions, sensations or states experienced by the visitor elsewhere than in the room where he/she is or at a time other than that of the visit

The visitor is transported in space or time and experiences something

The valence can be positive, negative or indeterminate

What the visitor says appeals to the imagination

Example (something experienced elsewhere): "I visited Easter Island with a group, I was afraid of what they said about their large stone statues"

Example (something experienced in another time period than the present one): "Like in the painting, I crossed the river in winter with my grandfather. We followed the other sleds and then we talked quietly"

5.8. Laughing¹⁰

Reaction to external or internal stimulation characterized by moments of aspiration and expiration in rapid succession

The meaning of laughter at a particular moment often eludes the researcher, for laughter can express a wide variety of reactions: depreciation, irony, embarrassment, nervousness, relief, relaxation, surprise, joy, approval, and even just good, happy vitality!

⁶ Synthesis of the parts applicable to the museum situation of the definitions offered by Rey (2005) and Souriau (2004)

⁷ Synthesis of the parts applicable to the museum situation of the definitions offered by Damasio (2003), Lalande (2002) and Rey (2005)

⁸ Synthesis of the parts applicable to the museum situation of the definitions offered by the American Psychological Association (2009), Piéron (2005) and Rey (2005)

⁹ The definitions found, except for Rey's, consider self-projection in the psychoanalytical sense of projecting one's own problems onto others, which is not relevant here. For Rey (2005), self-projection is the external localization of felt impressions or the projection of oneself into the future

¹⁰ Synthesis of the parts applicable to the museum situation of the definitions offered by Sander and Scherer (2009) and Souriau (2004)

5.9. Pleasure ¹¹

Pleasant sensation (feeling) aroused by a physical, intellectual, affective, aesthetic stimulation

If it is prolonged, the sensation is easily transformed into a state

In terms of intensity, the sensation or state can vary from the primordial sensation (Damasio, 2012), i.e. from something barely perceptible to a very strong enjoyment

Our data confirm what most psychologists and philosophers think: pleasure is an affective phenomenon that most of the time accompanies others, like a continuo accompanies a melodic line.

When pleasure surfaces, it appears in the form of exclamations such as: "This is really, really nice!" , "This is so good!", "This is so great, you can't tell!"

6. Synthesis and perspectives

In light of the above, it seems that we should not establish an equivalence between emotion and affective functioning, at least in a situation such as that an adult visiting a museum exhibition. Indeed, emotion appears as only one of the nine forms that the affective functioning can take in this context. Moreover, emotion is only a reaction that is quickly triggered and does not last long.

Does this mean that the role of emotion in the visitor's production of meaning, that is, in what he thinks, imagines or feels, is negligible? In other words, that its weight in what the visitor takes away from his visit to the museum is insignificant? Before making a judgement, one should at least examine the dynamics of emotion by asking, for example, would it by chance play a role as a *trigger*, as an incentive to observe an object at length, such as a portolan, and to grasp its beauty or importance? Or would it be the *result* of a patient deciphering of an object, like Picasso's *Guernica* or Veronese's *Wedding at Cana*?

These two questions could also be asked of the eight other forms of affective functioning identified here, so that the present research leads to the study of the dynamics of this functioning as it occurs in the context of a museum visit. In other words, in the context of one of the main offers of a museum to the society in which it is embedded.

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¹¹ Synthesis of the museum-applicable portions of the definitions offered by Bramble (2013), Clore and Orthony, 2000), Damasio (2012) and Rey (2005)

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