RELIVE THE PAST!
EXPERIENCE AND AUTHENTICITY IN DUTCH HISTORY MUSEUMS

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Experience and authenticity in Dutch history museums
Relive the Past!
Scale models, videos, computer programmes and games, puppets, live actors, mis-en-scene, projections and holographs, props, fakes, forgeries, sounds and even smells; all of these and more have been used in the past few decades by museums in order to present the visitor with an “experience” of the past. Instead of the classic “temple”, where authentic objects were the focus of the presentation and the museum a white cube, the expo model now seems to have the upper hand. The story is essential in this rediscovered model, where the object has become just another means to an end. Nowadays museums offer “interactive presentations” which will let the visitor “experience values”, ways to “explore old Amsterdam” in the local history museum. The current museum hardly resembles the traditional history museum anymore, due to developments in very diverse fields influencing the museum practice: in museum management, funding and government support as well as in changing ideas about the role of the museum in society, its history and its functioning; museum education and pedagogy; but also in history and memory studies. The museum is no longer seen as neutral and an authority, but as an active institution, contributing to the cultures it puts on display, in discussion with its surroundings and public. Many subjects, earlier not deemed worthy of a museum, are now part of the regular exhibitions, for example, women’s history, social history and minorities; but also popular culture in art museums and current cultures in ethnographical institutions. All stories have become museum worthy and stories are exactly what the new museums present.

The participants of the Dutch Museum Prize 2009 confirm this image. Last year’s category was history museums, and among the nominees were the modern day “Beeld en Geluid” experience (the centre for Image and Sound, that contains both the Dutch television archives and offers visitors a tour through their history); the new permanent exhibition of the Tropen Museum (Tropical Museum) in Amsterdam; the Dolhuys, a psychiatry museum in Haarlem and the Railway Museum in Utrecht. From these, selected by a jury of specialists, the public voted the Nederlands Openlucht Museum (Dutch Open-air Museum) in Arnhem as the best museum of 2009. This museum contains many Dutch monuments and monumental farms, deconstructed on their original standing and then rebuilt at the museum site. It also includes old crafts, practices and fashion. “Special encounters, scents, images and stories bring the past back to life”.

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2 www.hmr.rotterdam.nl [21st of April 2009, 9.30h]
3 www.ahm.nl [15th of June 2010, 10.00h]
4 This is perhaps less the case with art museums, where the artwork is still the main reason why visitors come to see it, for example the highly successful and confrontational presentation of Damien Hirst’s For the love of God (2007) in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Visitors stood in hour-long queues to catch a glimpse of the diamond-encrusted skull (“Mensen in de rij voor schedel Hirst”, Leeuwarder courant, 5th of December 2008)
5 “Museumprijs”, www.museumprijs.nl [9th of November 2009, 11.30h]
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the website states, with the focus on the daily life of the common people. An old paper mill is brought to life by actors in traditional costumes, as are many other forgotten crafts and little shops. The visitors can use the old tram, and walk over the former village square, nibbling on waffles or syrup cones. Even though most buildings are authentic and rebuilt stone by stone from their previous location, the park is far from the traditional museum, with its items on pedestals and small labels explaining their importance. None of the participants of the contest are traditional history museums; none of them even carries the word “history” in its name anymore. They are however popular museums.

The developments described above make one wonder, is there still space for the authentic historic object with its magical aura of times past in the Dutch history museums? The focus nowadays seems to be on stories and experiences and no longer on objects or authenticity. Museologist B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett states that museums should become more and more like theatres, presenting a full story with dramatic effects. According to J. Urry, these changes made the modern museum lose its “aura”, its authority. People no longer visit a museum to view authentic objects, but out of nostalgic feelings, a longing to the life of times past. The museum is not a place to collect and study objects of the past anymore, but a means of communication, to confirm or change identities. Or as R. van der Laarse describes, the expo model has slowly over come the museum as a temple. This new experience-based museum differs greatly from the old showcases and seems to hold little regard for the authentic historical object. Although an interest in authenticity seems to be resurfacing, the differences between the two approaches are thusly numerous that the chances to combine them seem slim. However, historic objects have been said to make its public experience the past too, due to their direct link with that past. Historian J. Huizinga called this the “historic sensation”, a short and sudden insight in the past, activated by direct contact with that past. So perhaps there is room for the old historic object in its own right after all.

Many theories have been formed on the presentation of objects, and many individual exhibitions have been described. However there are few surveys that include multiple exhibitions and none of them focuses on presentations in the Netherlands. This paper will make an attempt to combine both theory and practice and compare several museums to add a layer to the discussion that has often been very theoretical or uses only prime examples to prove its case.

8 J. Urry, The tourist gaze (Londen, 2003), 119
9 Van der Laarse, “Erfgoed en de constructie van vroeger”, 16
An overview of Dutch history museums would show not only exhibitions that follow the developments, but also those that might not do this completely or not at all, showing which points in the theoretical discussion are actually put into practice. In order to provide an insight in the Dutch situation, three elements shall be considered. First some historical context shall be provided. This is necessary to be able to place the Dutch situation within the general developments, but also because the hybrid history of the many types of museums is a growing inspiration for new museum presentations. The traditional differentiation between art, science, history and ethnography museums is becoming less strict and presentation techniques from throughout history and theory are used in order to bring the story to the visitors. Or the museum itself becomes part of the display; as for example is the case with the Teyler Museum in Haarlem, where the 18th and 19th century presentation of scientific samples and equipment has been preserved. The general history of museum types shall be shortly mentioned as well, but, as it is a topic one can write many books on, it shall describe only the most noticeable developments. Secondly, this paper shall sum up some theories on the presentation of historical objects. Countless articles and papers have been written, from several disciplines and interests, mostly fragmentary, but here an attempt shall be made to show the most important ideas on the presentation of historic objects in museums, and their context. The theories will be used to make a checklist to analyse the museum displays of the case studies. Aspects that will be discussed are authenticity, multimedia, story based versus object based presentations and the “museum experience”. Other topics that will prove to be relevant shall be included in this chapter as well. The last element will focus on the analysis of museum objects in actual museums.

The logical choice for the case studies would have been the new Nationaal Historisch Museum (National History Museum, NHM) in Arnhem and the Rijksmuseum (State Museum) in Amsterdam. An evaluation of both museum presentations and their use of experience would have been very interesting, the Rijksmuseum being an old museum restoring elements of its original 19th century interior and the NHM being a new museum full with the newest possibilities of the virtual world and media. Unfortunately the new presentation of the Rijksmuseum is due in 2015, five years after this research should be finished, and the NHM so far only exists in blue prints and websites. However there are many more Dutch history museums other than the two national ones that deal with the choices about historic objects, experiences and presentation. Four museums have been selected: The Nederlands Openlucht Museum as the winner of several prizes; the Amsterdams Historisch Museum (Amsterdam History Museum) as the closest thing to a national museum; The Historisch Museum Rotterdam (History Museum Rotterdam), advertising itself as an experience of the city; and the Limburgs Museum (Limburgian Museum) as a new and regional museum.

12 “Museum”, www.teylersmuseum.eu [6th of December 2009, 11.00h]
Many developments of and several sides to the use of experience have already been mentioned. Changes in content, management, form and function of the museums all had their influences. Incorporating all of them in the analysis of it however would be an immense task, so this paper will focus on just one element of museums, namely the exhibitions themselves. The exhibition is the final product of the choices a museum has to make on the presentation of a certain object or story. It is also the only product most visitors will see, perhaps together with the exhibition catalogue. Very few would read the museums mission statement or articles that have been published on the subject. Exhibitions are thus the main aspect of the museums and also the aspect that differs them from other platforms of history, like documentaries and books. The visual presentation of history is different from for example a monograph on a certain aspect. It leans heavily on the knowledge of the public and their capability to understand the context suggested. Visitors deduce the relations between objects shown, but this does not have to be the relations meant by the makers of the exhibition. In order to get a real view on how experience is used, museum presentations should be analysed. That is exactly what will happen in this paper. Several exhibitions, both permanent and temporarily, shall be analyzed by the author, focussing on the techniques used to present the story. To ensure that all presentations will be examined on the same points and to make comparison easier, a checklist has been developed from the theories mentioned in chapter two.

This paper will try to find out what elements of the different approaches and theories are visible in the presentations, focusing on the how of museum presentation not on the why or the what. All chosen presentations are developed in the 21st century. To limit the research, only exhibitions on general history after 1840 have been chosen, also to include the use of video documentaries, sounds fragments and original photographs. These modern technologies seem an important element in modern museum displays, both as source and as media to enrich the experience. Thus it would be interesting to select exhibitions that at least have the opportunity to include these documents (and as shall be shown, indeed did include them). The choice for modern history also opened up a more direct sense of nostalgia, for twentieth century history is our grandparents’ history.

The results of this analysis are by no means the opinion of the average visitor, and give probably little insight on visitor experience. Researching the visitors’ point of view is not the intention of this study. Even though it may give more insight into the way “experience” truly works, it would require more time and resources available for this paper, not to mention a firmer knowledge of sociology and statistics than the author has obtained. However, the comparison of museum displays with both theory on and the history of the presentation of objects is by no

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13 Some might argue that collections is what set museums apart from other institutes and media, but with international travelling exhibitions and museums without collections, this seems no longer true. Besides, some of the collections might be visible in digital databases, in only a very few cases museums open their whole physical depot to the public.
means useless. It will provide insights on the techniques used in presentation and hopefully will show certain trends, which might or might not be conform the theories. The intentions of the museum and its curator will also be left out of the equation, as this would require in-depth interviews and many more hours than available. Both the visitor’s point of view as well as the curator’s however could be interesting for further research.

There are few theories dealing solely with the authenticity and presentation of historic objects, so theories on the presentation of art and ethnographic artefacts will be used as well. These fields seem to be more aware of the issues of presentation and the value of the object on display, including all their controversies, than the history museum discipline. Art history has an even longer existence than the other disciplines and the problematic presentation of objects already has been addressed in the 1920’s by artworks themselves. Even though they are three different (sub)disciplines, they do have many things in common and meet each other on some elements, for example religious objects: the aesthetics of artwork, the meaning of ethnographic objects and the stories of historic artefacts. Where theories on art or ethnographic artefacts are used, the significance for the historic objects will be clearly stated. For as said, they have much in common, but they are not exactly the same. Art uses their aesthetics; ethnography often used “wonder” as a way to gain the attention of the public, focusing on the “otherness” (although the many changes in museology have changed the presentation of ethnographic objects most thoroughly and made them part of our own history instead of a different one). Historical presentations often try to appeal to existing values, to what people consider normal already, something S. Greenblatt called “resonance”, as opposed to “wonder”. The upheavals in the museum world have made the exhibitions more eclectic in their presentation choices, but elements of the old disciplines are often still visible. Practise changes usually in a lesser pace than theory.

The differences between these disciplines and their histories are the first subject of the next chapter, which shall provide a short historical overview. The second chapter shall contain the different theories on museum presentations and especially on the use of authenticity and experience. The impact and possibilities of the newer technologies shall be mentioned there as well. A detailed description of the checklist shall follow. The third part of this paper will contain the four case studies, first describing each individual museum presentation and giving a short analysis for each museum. The conclusion shall combine all three elements and compare the case studies to each other, giving both an analysis of the whole study as an actual conclusion with attempt to formulate an answer on the issue of authentic objects in Dutch history museums.

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14 S. Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder”, in: I. Karp, S. Lavine (ed), Exhibiting Cultures; the poetics and politics of museum display (New York, 1991) 42-56, 42
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History on display

The history of the museum as an institution has not (yet) been written and is most certainly not within the scope of this research paper. The practice of the museum has been influenced by and is at some points hard to distinguish from wunderkammer, world fairs and exhibitions, theme parks, department stores, libraries or scientific laboratories. Even though some modern criticism of museums, according to historian R. Starn, treat the museum previous to the 1980’s as a stable and undisputed institution, he shows in his paper quite the opposite. The term “museum” was used along side with “treasury”, “library” and “research centre” as far back as the “Ur-museum” of Alexandria. Even for Das Altes Museum, founded in Berlin in the 1820’s, the name was not a certainty. It is however in the interest of this research to provide a short overview of the presentation of objects and the ideas behind it throughout history. The different modes of presentation, developed in different types of museums, have influenced modern day exhibitions and are some times used to evaluate current day museum practices. No longer bound to only the art museum, aesthetic modes of presentation are used in for example Musée du Quai Branly, the new ethnographic museum in Paris, in order to circumvent controversies about the presentation of non-western artefacts. The Amsterdam Historisch Museum has several rooms covered in artwork, using it to show the 17th century Dutch society. These illustrations show that in order to be able to analyse a 21st century museum display, knowledge of the origins of museum techniques can be quite useful.

The first sentences of this chapter point out the diversity and the dynamic character of museums, but there are some general developments to be found. During the Renaissance the early modern predecessors of our current day museum collected the exceptional. Both the extraordinary works of nature and man, in wunderkammer and kunstkammer, showing the most beautiful and exotic the world had to offer collected by royalty and nobility. The art works often symbolically linked the humans to the divine order, shown next to the most exceptional pieces of God’s natural creation. They were also used to supplement the collections of exotic objects. These cabinet were often based on late medieval perceptions of creation, where the symbolic meaning of objects was often more important that its physical form. The objects mirrored the divine and showed the relations between the micro and macro cosmos. Slowly the objects became more categorised, although often after the death of the first collector. Most of the cabinets presented their objects around themes of symbolic meaning, not necessarily taking their natural

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16 Ibidem, 75
17 H. S. Hein, Museum in transition, (Washington, 2000), 19
18 A. A. Shelton, “Cabinets of transgression: Renaissance collections and the incorporation of the new world”, in: J. Elsner, R. Cardinal (ed), The cultures of collecting (London, 1994) 177-203, 179
form into account. These themes where however often personal, and entangled with the goal of
the collection, whether this was presenting the divine creation, or, as was often the case in the 17th
and 18th century, research. In some cases the cabinets were combined with a library, forge or even
laboratory.19

Whereas the collections mentioned above were first only accessible to their collectors and
their personal friends and visitors, under influence of the Enlightenment the collections slowly
opened their doors to a broader public. Art and scientific knowledge would help to form the
sought-after active civil society.20 The nature of the collections themselves changed as well, now
showing not the wonders of nature itself, but the wonders of nature as made visible by the
scientific revolution. The art collections were shown separately and the scientific collections
became labelled and showing the regular instead of the extraordinary. Specimen replaced
artefacts, and scientific labels replaced storytelling. With the development of the social sciences
and its many specialisations, museums started to differentiate in the 19th century as well.21
Disciplines as geology, biology, anthropology, history and art history used museums to present
their new organisation of the world and its contents. Each of these new approaches arranged
objects as part of evolutionary sequences, for example the history of mankind, of civilisation, of
the earth. This of course does neither mean that all museums changed their ways during one day
or even a year, nor that the new presentations followed the same pattern.22 However, at the end
of the 19th century museums presented their objects noticeable different than at the beginning of
the century.

For history museums the following example will illustrate the point made above. Where
as historic objects at first were presented in a general “antiquarian” fashion, as S. Bann calls it in
his article on Alexandre du Sommerard, an early 19th century collector, the 19th century seems to
be a turning point.23 Historic objects are more and more organised to present their story in
relation to other objects shown, instead of having the collector or antiquarian explain the
connections. The way the relations between objects are shown however can differ quite a bit. Two
methods, both still used and even combined in museums nowadays, were developed in this era.
Both came together in the Musée de Cluny when it was handed into the care of the French in
1843.24 The museum contained the collection of Alexandre Lenoir, a collector of antiquities, and
the collection of Du Sommerard. The former was presented chronological, grouped per century,
and it consisted mostly of leftovers of French national monuments salvaged from the destruction
of the Revolution. The focus was on the individual object, presented in a quiet environment.

19 Ibidem, 185
20 Hein, Museum in Transition, 21
21 T. Bennet, The birth of the museum; history, theory, politics (London, 1995), 96
22 Ibidem
24 Ibidem, 82
These “specimen” referred to their original “whole”, the monuments, which were grouped by the constructed idea of “century”. The approach of Du Sommerard was completely different. Not only had he collected other types of object, namely furniture and every day objects, he presented them in their organic context: Du Sommerard developed some of the very first “period rooms” that gave their audiences an “experience of the past”. All the objects in one room came from the same period and they were placed according to a rational logic. Even though objects where everywhere, as was the case with the antiquarian arrangement, the artefacts now where placed where they would have been placed if they had been still in use. This type of presentation became very popular, up to the famous Dutch “Hinderlooper room” on the World Exhibition of 1878 in Paris which even included puppets to make the room more life like.

The effect of these world exhibitions, presenting not only period rooms but also dioramas and sometimes even complete villages including their inhabitants, is still visible in museum displays. According to H. Heinrichs it is the second type of museums (the ethnic and anthropological museums) that mostly incorporated these. The first type consists mostly of the art museums that focused on collecting and saw art as a way to cleanse and uplift the citizens of the country. The latter has, so Heinrichs states, its roots in the Enlightenment movements, the former is formed out of the Romantic era and focused on educating and entertaining the public. The two examples correspond with the two presentations Bann mentioned. The historian D. Preziosi notices a swing between these to modes of presentation throughout the 19th century. With the focus on the public and exhibitions in all types of museums nowadays, the expo and the temple of art models become more and more intertwined. It is the latter model that is also known as the white cube, the presentation often found in art museums, with white walls, sober interior and small labels.

During the second half of the 20th century, the traditional museum types received heavy criticism from several sides, as is already stated in the introduction of this paper. Depending more heavily on the public, both for funds as for approval, the museums are forced to change their ways. This search for new modes of presentation is still ongoing at the dawn of the 21st century and this paper presents some of the current ideas in the next chapter. First however, an outline of the specific Dutch history of museums shall be given, giving insight in for example the lack of one national museum like the Louvre or the British museum. The current state of affairs, as the restoration of the Rijksmuseum and the discussion about the newly founded national museum will be included as well.

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25 Ibidem, 87
26 Ibidem, 82
27 A. De Jong, “Volkscultuur in het museale vaderland”, De Negentiende eeuw 27 4 279-293, 281
28 Van der Laarse, “Erfgoed en de constructie van vroeger”, 7
29 J. Noordegraaf, Strategies of Display, museum presentation in nineteenth- and twentieth-century visual culture (Rotterdam, 2004), 157-161
Museum developments in the Netherlands

The specific Dutch history of museums follows the general trends in most aspects except one; despite the efforts a national museum as the Louvre or the British museum was never achieved. The Rijksmuseum (literally “State Museum”) focused on Dutch art (mostly on purpose, but withstanding later efforts to make it more universal) and the history museums were never centralised. The history of the Rijksmuseum will be used to illustrate the general trends in the Netherlands, as it is both the best documented and the most publicly discussed museum. It has had a history department since the opening of the central building in 1887 and the relation between the art and the history section provides an interesting case for the status of history museums in general.

The Dutch museums started during the French occupation at the beginning of the 19th century, when the art collections of the ruling family were made into national treasures. Prior to this the art cabinet and the natural science cabinet of the House of Orange had been open to a select group of visitors, but it was with the revolution that the national potential of public collections was understood. Mostly paintings depicting historic scenes were collected and exhibited in one of the former estates of the stadtholder. The focus stayed on national history, both for paintings as for other objects, until Napoleon Bonaparte appointed his brother Louis king of the Netherlands. Louis had great ambition for his little kingdom, including a Louvre like museum. The new museum contained most of the previous mentioned collections, and followed the Louvre in most trends, including the new arrangement of the paintings by school, instead of subject or size. The institution was supposed to educate new generations of artists.

The museum, now located in Amsterdam, managed to survive the dynamic end of the French domination and the restoration of the old powers, or in case of the Netherlands, the installation of the new king, from the old stadtholder family of Orange. The paintings and other artworks, which had been brought to France during the French revolution, were restored to their rightful collections. This meant that besides the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam there were several other collections of interest, spread over several cities. The Royal Cabinet of Paintings was restored in The Hague, where it had been before the occupation. The university city of Leiden contained an archaeological museum; The Hague was rewarded with both the cabinets of coins and medals, and the cabinet of rarities, which contained a collection of Chinese artefacts, but also a collection of historic objects with national and nostalgic value. The Rijksmuseum was left with a collection of paintings and several historic objects. This situation led to an ongoing discussion on the nature of each museum and its collection. The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam wanted to focus on presenting a broad spectrum of paintings, with the 17th century Dutch paintings as a highlight. It was one of the few museums with an active collecting policy, most of the other

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30 G. Van der Ham, 200 jaar Rijksmuseum; geschiedenis van een nationaal symbool (Amsterdam/Zwolle, 2000), 21
31 Ibidem, 61-67
museums, and especially the Cabinet of Rarities, gained new objects only through gifts and incidental purchases. In general the Dutch museums at the beginning of the 19th century were visited mostly for educative and research purposes by artists and (social) scientists.

In 1848, like in the rest of Europe, liberal influences reformed politics in The Netherlands. Although without the violence most of the other countries experienced, for the cultural sector the change meant serious reforms. Government funds used to be the main source of income for the museums, but were now significantly decreased. Art and science were no longer considered a matter for the parliament, but for society. In the 1850’s this is visible in the amount of local initiatives for history, art and science societies. These organised exhibitions, collections and even local museums. The existing museums like the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam however were heavily criticized for their lack of professionalism and accessibility for visitors (partly due to the lack of funds). In order to solve these problems, the call for a separate building for the Rijksmuseum was heard, as opposed to the building of the Royal Academy of Science it was harboured now. During the next few decades this call was repeated and combined with several attempts at turning the Rijksmuseum into a national museum or a pure art museum.

With a change of policy the museum was consider a matter of state again in the 1870’s and plans for a new building were prepared. The Rijksmuseum was slowly turned into a national museum after all. Victor de Stuers, the new minister of Cultural Affairs, tried to collect as many of the small museums into the new Rijksmuseum. Its focus was planned to be on the golden era of Dutch art, the 16th & 17th century, but the building would contain two other museums on Dutch history and Dutch arts and crafts. The museum had to illustrate the history of the country with paintings of great men (sic), their possessions and pictures of important historic events. It was also supposed to demonstrate the great skill in arts and crafts and the creativity of previous generations. For the first time in decades the budget for new purchases for the museum was raised, in order to buy objects of the cultural heritage, both art and historic objects. The focus on purely Dutch arts and objects, and the combination of art and history made the museum differ from the great national museums as the Louvre and the British Museum. Most were focused on an overview of either world history or world art, showing the traditions of the whole of Western culture.

The new museum building opened in 1887, containing almost all state and some private collections and combining them into three museums: the Rijksmuseum, the Cabinet of Drawings and the Dutch Museum. Only two state collections were not included in the new institute: the Cabinet of Paintings in The Hague and the Museum of Antiquities, which stayed with the university of Leiden. The new building for the museums in Amsterdam was designed by the Catholic architect P. Cuypers and its style with renaissance and gothic features was supposed to

32 Ibidem, 100-103
33 Ibidem, 152-153
show off the Dutch culture. Both the building and its collections had to contribute to the national theme. Episodes from the Dutch history are visible on the outside of the building, but also the interior architecture was designed to complement the collections. The history collection was presented within alcoves decorated with architecture contemporary to the time on display, and the objects were complemented by reconstructions to provide the visitor with a full image of times past. This was criticized within ten years of the opening by the new director A. Pit, who stated that authentic objects and a few choice replicas in a space without decorations would provide better learning material. He focused on the authentic objects and did not mind to lose some of the completeness of the presentation for that. Pit also participated in the national debate in the early 1920’s on the state of the Dutch art and history museums.

The discussion was started by a document of the Nederlandse Oudheidkundige Bond (Dutch History Association, NOB) in 1918 on the current state of the museums in the Netherlands. It suggested separating art from history presentations and accommodating them in different museums. A government commission formed on the same subject came to similar conclusions, indicating that there should be three types on museums: one for the best art pieces, one for pieces with a high value for the history of art, and one type for purely historic objects. One of the comments on this was that the three types were undistinguishable and that historic artefacts just provided the context for the art. Historian J. Huizinga tried to disprove the superiority of art with his theory on historic sensations, which stated that historic objects could give sudden insights into the past and this could rival the aesthetic sensation people believed works of art could provoke. A separation of the two however would put both out of context. The trend to separate art and historic objects started with W. Bode, a German curator, who wanted to cleanse the rooms and use the works of art history for the specialists, presenting them with other objects so the zeitgeist becomes noticeable. For the Museum voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis (Museum of Dutch History) all this meant that it became secondary to the art collection of the Rijksmuseum. First the museum was divided into a history museum and a museum for sculptures and crafts. So instead of showing the developments of the crafts, the now purely historic objects were presented in symmetric and aesthetic arrangements, grouped together based on their use. The focus was on the higher culture, as most of the objects on folklore and traditions were donated to the in 1912 founded Museum voor Volkenkunde (Museum for Anthropology, now the Nederlands Openlucht Museum) in Arnhem. The new director, Schmidt-Degener wanted to achieve an evocation of the past, not a detailed account of

34 Ibidem, 154
36 Van der Ham, 200 jaar Rijksmuseum, 224-230
38 Van der Ham, 200 jaar Rijksmuseum, 251
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it, because as he said “History is documented in books, not in museums”.  

He did try to stay true to Huizinga and used material authentic objects to achieve his goal. The full exhibition on the Dutch history was opened in 1937 but deconstructed again in 1939 out of fear for the upcoming war. Most objects and art works of all Dutch museums were transported to safe houses. Only three years after the war the objects were restored back at the museum but it took until 1972 for a complete new presentation on Dutch history to be opened. The temporary presentation focused on a chronological overview, but the one that followed presented only the highlights again. The new curator accepted the differences between historic objects and art, but as it was still a history presentation in a larger art museum, art-historical influences played an important role. The exhibition was visible, with some minor changes, till 2000 when then Rijksmuseum closed for a full-scale renovation. That the presentation itself was relatively unchanged does not mean that the whole museum was without modifications. First the Museum for Nederlandse Geschiedenis became a mere section of the Rijksmuseum and it participated in the general trends. Education became one of the goals of the museum during the 1950’s and after the 1970’s exhibitions to illustrate memorials and holidays became an important part of the section Dutch History, as was the general trend for museum presentations since a couple of decades.

Two national history museums?
Since the 1980’s careful attempts have been made to restore some of the original ornaments. This is in line with other efforts to turn the internationally known and famed Rijksmuseum into a more national museum. Popular actions were taken to draw the Dutch public to the museum instead of the many tourists. The summit is the complete renovation started in 2000, which is still undergoing as this paper is written. The restored building is due to open in 2013 and it will be restored not only physically to the building Cuypers designed in the 1880’s, but also the nationalistic ideals behind the museum seemed to be revived. It is not only the original building that is supposed to put the collection in its historic context, since the mid 1990’s the presentations of the objects has been a mix of art and historic artefacts as well. This is also again the plan for the new expositions, a chronological presentation of the Dutch history in art and other objects. The new interior of the gallery of honour at the museum can be seen as symbolic for the new approach. Where it used to house foreign artworks until the restoration, it will soon focus on the Dutch art. The rest of the object concerning the Netherlands will be presented chronologically

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41 Van der Ham, 200 jaar Rijksmuseum, 373
42 Ibidem, 384
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over three floors, mixing art and artefacts, and only the corner rooms will contain foreign paintings.\textsuperscript{44} The current director of the Rijksmuseum, W. Pijbes stated that the visitor when they entered the new room of 17th century art, would experienced that period directly, without having seen a Rembrandt yet.\textsuperscript{45}

At the same time the Rijksmuseum turns itself into a more national and historic museum than the international famous art museum it used to be, there have been numerous discussions about a true national historic museum. These debates reached the Dutch parliament and since 2006 the Nationaal Historisch Museum has been the subject of government discussion. According to a leaflet by the new museums CEO’s V. Byvanck en E. Schilp published in December 2008, the NHM is going to be different from all other museums.\textsuperscript{46} The national past shall be presented in its multiple forms and voices, making use of various types of media. The museum will not acquire its own collection, but instead make use of the many existing collections. It is not supposed to be a museum of highlights, but the leaflet states that the object shall not be completely forgotten either. Historical experience and interactivity with the visitors are the key points for this new institute, which will not contain itself to its building.\textsuperscript{47} Websites, applications for mobile phones and pointers to sites all over the Netherlands will spread the brand “NHM” and bring history to the visitor. At the moment of this research, the museum has no physical form yet, but already exists in its virtual form, with its own website, collecting historical moments and memories of the general public.\textsuperscript{48} The URL of the website (jijmaaktgeschiedenis.nu, which can be translated into “you make history.now”) shows the intent of the whole museum setup, putting the visitor themselves in the spotlight. The new museum also cooperates with other cities and heritage places to extend itself outside its own building, as for example Dordrecht. The city, part of a heritage network with 14 other Dutch cities, and the museum will look at the possibilities of digitising the heritage of the cities and developing material for schools. The museum points out that it wants to “tell stories” and that it doesn’t matter where it does that.\textsuperscript{49}

So where it used to be a struggle to get one national history museum, the Netherlands now might end up with two. It seems in line with the renewed interest in (national) history and museums. The Rijksmuseum is going back to its 19th century roots, and the NHM is trying to be a postmodern museum without walls. But for the authentic object this means competing with either art or multimedia, and it is subjected to the larger story in both cases. Perhaps the theories and the other case studies show more interest in the treasures of the past.

\textsuperscript{44} R. Pontzen, “Hup Holland Hup: De gefnuikte ambities van het Rijksmuseum”, \textit{de Volkskrant}, 30th of April 2008
\textsuperscript{45} “Als je daar binnenkomt, heb je voordat je ook maar een Rembrandt ziet al een echte beleving van de Gouden Eeuw” [translated by the author] in: Pontzen, “Hup Holland Hup”
\textsuperscript{46} V. Byvanck, E. Schilp, \textit{NHM} (Arnhem, 2008)
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Ibidem}, 29
\textsuperscript{48} \texttt{http://www.jijmaaktgeschiedenis.nu} [7th of July 2010, 13.00h]
\textsuperscript{49} S. Cerutti, “Het museum dat er nog niet is”, \textit{Trouw}, 7th of December 2009
CURRENT DAY DEVELOPMENTS

Since the 1970’s the functioning of the museum as an institute has been severely criticised. Several issues have been addressed, among others the authoritative voice of museums, presenting their knowledge as the objective truth; the aesthetic approach to many types of presentations; and the distinction between “high” culture and “low culture, the former including the “pure” ethnographic culture and the history of important men. Museums have been challenged to take note of these comments and turn themselves into more flexible and postmodern institutes. Some turned their old presentation into a presentation of museum practice, thus adding a level to the exhibition and creating space for self-criticism. The subjectivity of the official museum practice became often somewhere visible in the new presentations, although not always appreciated. Another solution often used is to focus on the customer, also because of budget cuts and government regulations to encourage museums to attract a more diverse and broader audience. This has led to a focus on the experience of the visitor as the “real thing” that museums sell and no longer the objects on display, as philosopher H. Hein stated. The objects have become just another means to this end. Some authors speak of “edutainment” and Disney land presentations; others seem to embrace the new possibilities. In the previous chapter, a constant flux between an expo model and the museum as a temple was mentioned. It seems that at the moment the expo model rules the tide. J. Urry states that postmodern museums have lost their aura and authority because of the display of many every day items instead of the treasure pieces of art and history. This implies the loss of the museum as a temple, or as Urry puts it, the museum is no longer worth of admiration but has become a mode of communication. Other analogies used include the expo model and the museum as a forum, where truths can be discussed and opinions can meet.

As already mentioned in the introduction of this paper, it was this development that begged the question “is there still space for the authentic historic object with its magical aura of times past in the Dutch history museums?”. In the previous chapter, it became clear that presentations have had different goals through out history. From symbolic collections of earth and heavens to strictly organised specimen, from replicas for education to a historic convocation, the choice depended on wider trends and personal ideas. One of the latest trends seems to be to combine art and historic objects yet again, and let them with multimedia tell the stories of the past. The objective for this chapter is to find out what the trends are according to the theories, what the opposing ideas are and how they can help analyse museum presentations. Are the expo and the temple model indeed exclusive? Can a story still respect the individual object? And does the “experience” have to diminish the “authenticity”? The latter two terms are both often used

50 Hein, Museum in Transition, 66
51 Urry, The tourist gaze, 119
and seldom defined. To define them and their relation is the first endeavour of this chapter. They will be combined with two developments in current day museums; the first is the change from object-based museum presentations to more story-based presentations, the second the idea of interactivity with the visitors and the use of multimedia. This will present the opportunity to see if and how both authenticity and experience can be shown in museum presentations.

**Authenticity**

“Authenticity” is a term that has been used, misused and criticized so often in the past few decades, that the word has lost most of its meaning. It used to be one of the main features of the museum: the presentation of the “real”, of the authentic objects. Early twentieth century philosopher W. Benjamin and historian J. Huizinga were convinced of its value. And despite the dressing down it received, especially in its ethnographic context, the authentic keeps showing up in discussions on museums and heritage.\(^53\) It is even said to make a comeback.\(^54\) Even though the authentic object may seem less important than it used to be, a definition might bring some clarity.

N. Ex has developed a model for the restoration of art, but it can be also translated to the historic object.\(^55\) She divides authenticity into several aspects in order to clarify the problems of restoring art: material, functional, contextual and conceptual.\(^56\) The material authenticity focuses on the materials used and makes the distinction between the matter from which the object was original created and for example elements that were restored at a later date. Functional authenticity takes the continuation of the function of objects and places into account. Contextual authenticity is something that is seldom conserved when objects are placed into a museum. It refers literally to the context in which the objects where used or meant for. It is closely connected to the functional authenticity. The final aspect of authenticity Ex recognizes is conceptual authenticity. This focuses on the concept the artist had when making the object, and it is of course most noticeable in some forms of modern art. Whether this last aspect is also useful for historic objects will be discussed later in this chapter. Another matter Ex makes a distinction for is the historic or the non-historic authenticity of an object. The non-historic approach considers the object as it was finished after production to be the authentic object. It shows no signs of wear or tear and has not been altered in any way. This is the state restorers should strive to regain. The historic definition of authenticity however includes the whole life cycle of the object. Signs of use, reparations, missing pieces and even the placement in a museum context are all part of the package.\(^57\)

\(^{53}\) It was most of all the notion of “authentic culture”, the static state of non-western cultures before they came in contact with the western societies that did not survive the criticism, but also the “authentic” object seemed problematic in a time of Globalisation and tourism.

\(^{54}\) Mussmann, “Die Gestaltung von Gedenkstätten im Historischen Wandel”, 27

\(^{55}\) N. Ex, *Zo goed als oud, de achterkant van het restaureren* (Amsterdam, 1993)

\(^{56}\) *Ibidem*, 96

\(^{57}\) *Ibidem*, 115
This latter option is the authenticity Benjamin champions. He states that authenticity of a work of art is due to its uniqueness, which is partly formed by its own individual history. The different owners, the uses, its age, all these are part of the history of an object and give an object its authentic aura. Benjamin was defending the handmade unique artwork against the rise of photography and film in the 1930’s, but his ideas hold valid points for historic objects. Because for a long time it was exactly the uniqueness of an object that made it interesting for a museum, for example the sword of the 17th century Dutch admiral Michiel de Ruyter, one of the first historic objects in the National collection. The historic uniqueness of an object was a decennium earlier also the focus of the Dutch historian J. Huizinga, as was shortly mentioned in the previous chapter. According to him a historic object can create a historic sensation; a sudden insight in the ways of past. The object functions like a baton used in relay races, passed down by generations, providing contact with the previous holders. Because of the direct contact with past, the object can provide the insight. This insight in the past is highly individual and only possible within a structure of existing knowledge. The object will spark this knowledge, Huizinga also refers to it as “memory”, and either will transform it into a further interest into this past or it will disappear. He states that “this marvellous function of our mind, this open-mindedness to the instant historic suggestion, the history museums should serve first and foremost, to stimulate this, no matter how or with what”. He however also describes the historic sensation as individual and highly personal. It is no more subjective than other forms of historic research, but due to its personal nature it is hard to share with others. He does not suggest anything to the how of to share and stimulate the historic sensation in museums. One element that he does focus on, as do current day historians J. Tollebeek and T. Verschaffel, is the importance of the real authenticity of the object. The visitor wants, according to them, to see the real fragments of the past, not a “staged” presentation of it.

The fascination with objects of great individuals is also visible in for example the booming business of writer’s houses all over Europe. David Lowenthal refers to this phenomenon as an “authenticity cult”. It is not whether or not an object is authentic that matters, but whether it seems authentic. For example the city centre of Middelburg, which was bombed and rebuilt in 1940 in its original 17th century style, and now is promoted as a historic

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59 Van der Ham, *200 jaar Rijksmuseum*, 9
60 J. Tollebeek, T. Verschaffel, *De vreugden van Houssaye; Apologie van de historische interesse* (Amsterdam, 1992), 19
63 Tollebeek, Verschaffel, *De vreugden van Houssaye*, 23; Huizinga, “Het historisch museum”, 567-568
64 H. Hendrix, “Writers’ houses as media of expression and remembrance; from self-fashioning to cultural memory”, in: Idem (ed), *Writers’ houses and the making of Memory* (New York, 2007) 1-11, 2
tourist attraction. The trunk writer Hugo de Groot used in 1621 to escape his imprisonment is another example.\textsuperscript{66} There are several trunks on display, all claiming to be the real deal. According to historian W. Krul this poses however no serious problem. The object reminds us of an important event in the past, it is not the past itself, but just a remembrance of it. He argues that this memory could be called authentic as much as original historic objects. This can be compared to the “conceptual authenticity” Ex suggested, although the term “symbolic authenticity” seems more appropriate, as it does not refer to a concept an artist once created, but rather to objects that could have been the historic object central to the event on display. The object used represents the original, thus becoming a symbolic version of the specific original artefact. Even though Krul only refers to replicas in the form of original historic objects from the same period that could have been used as the object in the story, the step to a complete replica is for the viewer just a small one. For who can tell the difference between an original 17th century book trunk and a modern replica that has been artificially aged by just looking at it? Huizinga would horror of the use of non-authentic objects in historical presentations, but it seems more in line with modern thought on the use of experience in museums. Some authors even propose to let go of objects all together, as will be shown later on in this chapter.

Another trend the writer’s houses are a symptom of is “contextualisation” as museologist P. van Mensch calls it.\textsuperscript{67} Objects are not only presented on their own, but as clusters, in the context of their original use. History is displayed in all its detail. The tradition dates back to the late 19th century period rooms and has flared throughout the 20th century. The last decades it has been used to bring fictional settings to life, like the children books De Kameleon (which has its own village in Terhorne), but it has also found its way into museums, for it lets the visitor experience the past.\textsuperscript{68} Living history is also part of this trend, where actors enliven historic decors. There are several types of presenting these full blown decors, most often in the form of period rooms. First of all, the presentation that can be described as biographic, depicting an authentic cluster of object, that has been taken out of the living world as a complete unity. The second mode is a typical presentation, also known as a “period setting” or “artistic period room”, and is not necessarily an original cluster. It is often created by the museum curator, to present a typical style of a certain period.\textsuperscript{69} The authenticity of the latter as Van Mensch states is, is not found in the cluster, but in the individual objects. These can be exchanged, because they did not belong together in the first place. In the case of the biographic period room however, the whole presentation together contains the authenticity and exchanging or redecorating objects changes

\textsuperscript{66} W. E. Krul, “Valse en Echte geschiedenis”, Groniek, 128, 19-29, 29
\textsuperscript{67} P. van Mensch, “Context en authenticiteit”, in: Jaarboek Nederlands Openluchtmuseum 1999 (Arnhem, 1999) 78-101, 79
\textsuperscript{68} P. van Mensch, “Tussen narratieve detailering en authenticiteit; Dilemma’s van een contextgeoriënteerde ethiek”, in: Interieurs belicht; Jaarboek Rijksdienst voor de Monumentenzorg (Zwolle, 2001) 46-55, 48
\textsuperscript{69} Ibidem, 50-51
the essence of the cluster. Open-air museums is one place where these clusters are often presented, sometimes even in their original building. N. Ex and J. Lengkeek state however, that if you look at the whole building, the contextual authenticity is not to be found.\textsuperscript{70} The structures were been demolished on their original spot and have been rebuilt at the museum grounds. According to these authors, the worth of open-air museums is the conceptual reference they make to the past, more symbolic authenticity than contextual. This shows that the definition of cluster depends on the level the objects are analysed.

Experience

As stated, some authors are no longer interested in objects, whether on their own or in clusters. Museologist B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett states that because of the information society we currently live in, with most information free and available through improved education, databases, digital libraries and the World Wide Web, museums can be freed from their original informative role.\textsuperscript{71} The informative museum relied heavily on its objects to provide the visitor with knowledge, but with the knowledge everywhere available, new forms of presentation can be explored, in which the objects not necessarily play a part. She proposes a “performative turn” for museums, incorporating theatrical techniques into museum display.\textsuperscript{72} This falls apart in two main points, both in line with the general developments sketched in the introduction of this chapter. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett does not just follow those trends, but she encourages and embraces them. First of all she argues strongly for a more experienced based museum, for which she describes this term as the following: “"Experience" indexes the sensory, somatic and emotional engagement that with associate with theatre, world’s fairs, amusement parks and tourism. […] They create a mise-en-scène, a situation, a scenario – a total environment.”\textsuperscript{73} To justify this turn, she points out recent developments in pedagogy and similar disciplines. Emotions are recognised as valid ground from which people can learn. Also a more interactive “trial and error” manner of learning would be profitable, especially for the younger generations who have grown up with the new media techniques. The traditional museums are, according to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, not capable of interesting these youths nor equipped to include an emotional and hands-on presentation. The new expo like museums with their attention for stories, emotion and experiences are much more likely to survive. This shift from temple to expo is already visible in museums and in museum manuals. The \textit{Manual of museum exhibitions} states the goal of the museums nowadays as: “…an affective experience, inducing a new attitudes of interest, not whether visitors walk away from the museum

\textsuperscript{70} N. Ex, J. Lengkeek, “Op zoek naar het echte”, \textit{Vrijetijdsstudies}, 14 (1996) 1 24-41, 32


\textsuperscript{72} B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “The museum as catalyst”, keynote adress: \textit{Museums 2000: Confirmation or challenge} (Vadstena, 29-09-2000)

\textsuperscript{73} Ibidem, 7
having learned specific facts or having comprehended the basis principles of a scholarly discipline.”74 This shows a tendency to informal learning that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett promotes as well. Techniques based on the wunderkammer and the World fairs seem back in business, even though some authors would rather blame these developments on Disney.

A sentiment that can be used to evoke an experience is nostalgia. According to Urry it is a state of mind afflicting many postmodern museums, as people are no longer interested in seeing the great works of art or important artefacts. It is the “ordinary”, the everyday life of the average people that the public wants to see. He sees this as a shift from aura to nostalgia.75 Sociologist P. Gielen states in his research on the visitors of Belgium heritage that nostalgia in different forms affects the public.76 In general he sees it as a longing to a romanticized past, which is formed in the collective memory by for example literature, movies and heritage. It can be differentiated in Heimat nostalgia, a longing to home, as can be found in 19th century sources but also still with immigrants; existential nostalgia is the second form, coming forth out of an estranging from the modern society, and an active longing to the simpler and better past; latent nostalgia stands for the longing to the romantic past, while knowing that this past is a construction and that it will never be reached.77 These types can exist along side each other within a society and can all be found among the visitors of heritage and museums. The museums themselves employ what Gielen calls “manifest nostalgia”, they consciously try to evoke feelings of nostalgia to for example create a stronger local or national identity or to promote tourism.

In the conclusion of his book, Gielen encourages museums and visitors to become more aware of the techniques that are used to present the past and evoke experiences. Experience suggests understanding of the past, but the understanding of the “inside of the past” as he calls it, is not possible. The gap between the time now and the past cannot be bridged, and any experience suggesting this, only stimulates existential nostalgia. He suggests mixing experience with reflection, showing how the experience is created and how relative our knowledge of the past is.78 Nowadays catalogues and sometimes the wall texts on the floor do provide a more scientific approach to exhibitions, but only few visitors, according to Gielen’s research, actually read these. One way practical way to combine academic research principles like the relativity of our knowledge, he states, is to ensure further cooperation between the educational and research staffs of a museum.79 This could mean that guides on the floor provide academic information and methods or that the subject of the exhibition will be compared on an earlier stage with the possible knowledge of the potent public.

74 B. Lord, G. Dexter Lord (ed), The manual of museum exhibitions (Walnut Creek, 2002), 17, quoted in Starn, “A brief historians guide”, 91
75 Urry, The tourist gaze, 191
76 P. Gielen, De onbereikbare binnenkant van het verleden; over de enscenering van het culturele erfgoed (Leuven, 2007)
77 Ibidem, 27-30
78 Ibidem, 194-195
79 Ibidem, 196-197
Reflection is also a possible reply to the constant criticism on museums and their collections according to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. She wants museums to become transparent and put the museum itself with its own history on display as well. Reflecting on the choices that have been made in the presentation and in collecting and showing that a museum is a historic institution on its own are important elements in this. In her paper she shows several museums that have kept their old presentation but turned itself into a meta-museum, presenting museum practise itself as part of their story.\(^{80}\) She also sees a third way, which includes treating whole exhibitions as art works, letting artists function as curators, to create new ways of looking at the world. All three of her options, experience, meta-museums and museums as works of art, focus on new ways of seeing old presentations. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s weak point however is that she treats these three options as different approaches that exclude each other. Gielen already paid attention to the dangers of experience without reflection, but there have been more authors who warn against it. Hein states for example that even though the “experience” has replaced the object, there is no clear definition of the experience has been formed, nor are there clear criteria to judge the experience.\(^{81}\) Even though there seems to be a consensus that an experience is more universal and honest that cultural weighted objects, the intensity of a heartfelt experience is not a guarantee for cognitive merit or moral excellence. She warns against oversimplifying experiences, as they were fake or misinterpreted objects.

Several other methods have been proposed over the years to make the museum either more “real” and authentic or more reflective of itself. Museologist S. Vogel describes in her article “Always true to the object” the 1987 exhibition “Art/Artifact” on African art and objects, or rather on the presentation of them.\(^{82}\) The exhibition contained several rooms and each one of them showed the objects in another fashion: the white temple of arts, a diorama, a colonial room filled with objects and the grouped presentation of natural-history museums. By offering different views on the objects and putting the museum techniques on display as well, the exhibition shows the visitor the power of the museum. Another suggestion is offered by M. Baxandal; he proposes to label the objects on display with cultural facts, not directly related to the object, instead of the standard information like date, material, background of the maker and the use of the object.\(^{83}\) For labels could not be just descriptive, but they gave a background the curator thought would fit the object. This would give the viewer space to consider both the object and the opinion of the curator as well as to consider the “museum effect”. K. Hudson on the other hand argued for the complete experience, including the right smells, sounds and climate.\(^{84}\)

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\(^{80}\) Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “The museum as catalyst”, 11  
\(^{81}\) Hein, Museum in transition, 68  
\(^{82}\) S. Vogel, “Always true to the object, in our fashion”, in Karp, Lavine (ed), Exhibiting Cultures 191-204, 201  
\(^{83}\) M. Baxandall, “Exhibiting Intentions, some preconditions of the visual display of culturally purposeful objects”, in: Karp, Lavine (ed), Exhibiting Cultures 33-41, 35  
\(^{84}\) K. Hudson “how misleading does an ethnographical museum have to be?” in: Karp, Lavine (ed), Exhibiting Cultures 457-464, 462
For this would be the only way to get a complete picture of the culture the visitor is looking at in a museum. Every other presentation would be misleading, for how could objects from for example tropical areas be experienced without the moist, the smells, the heat and the noises?"

Various authors state that one of the problems the museums have nowadays is the conflict between the communicative function and the research function of museums. Van Mensch points out that the original combination of a cluster for example is interesting for research but it might not be an attractive way to present it to the public.\textsuperscript{85} He states that the material authenticity differs from the visual authenticity, as the objects will no longer look like they did when they were in use say 200 years ago. If you really want to show how it looked like in the past, reconstructions are the way to go, perhaps even in two different types of institutes. J. Spalding promotes the separation of presentation and research as well.\textsuperscript{86} He argues for innocent wonder in the museum display but open-minded wisdom and experience for research. The focus of the museum should not be its collection, but its audience, and this is where it conflicts with the research function. If museums could focus on the display of history, he expects a much more interesting display that for example allows to display historic artefacts along side tourist art, modern day objects or even fakes, anything to make the visitor wonder about the past.\textsuperscript{87} Another element that Spalding would like to see is that each visitor can choose his or her personal theme and get a customized route through the museum, hopping from time to time, from exhibition to exhibition, pointing out connections other than those the curators made visible themselves.\textsuperscript{88} This would be a possibility thanks to techniques already used in some museums, individual audio sets or even downloadable programs for mobile phones.

J. Bradburne states that these tools, digital handhelds, open the museum up to voices other than the curators.\textsuperscript{89} Mobile phones with Internet access, but also podcasts and downloadable information provide the visitor with uncontrolled information from outside the museum. This supplies the curator with options to introduce non-linear story lines like Spalding suggested, or bring in stories and references from cyberspace. According to R. Parry this allows the museum to be “a multichannel, decentred and disaggregated service and experience”, where the experience for the visitor starts at the website at home and continues at the museum itself, or even at other sites recommended by the museum.\textsuperscript{90} The digital handhelds are not the only new media in museums; computers containing databases and Internet access, video installations, projections, sound installations and even holographic projections bring the past and the outside

\textsuperscript{85} Van Mensch, “Context en authenticiteit”, 85
\textsuperscript{86} J. Spalding, The poetic museum: reviving historic collections (Munich, 2002), 99
\textsuperscript{87} Ibidem, 40
\textsuperscript{88} Ibidem, 100
\textsuperscript{89} J. Bradburn, “foreword”, in: L. Tallon, K. Walker (ed), Digital technologies and the museum experience (Lanham, 2008) ix-xii, x
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world closer. These are not only media, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out; they are also part of new types of objects. Photographs and videos have been accepted as documents of the 20th century, but at the verge of the 21st century, websites, digital documents and floating installations might deserve a place in the museums as well. This would challenge museums even further as it stretches the definition of “object”, creating dilemmas that would bring the discussion on the place of “aura” and the possibilities of the museum as a temple to the extreme.

The Checklist
The theories and ideas listed in the chapter above have been used to develop a checklist to evaluate museum presentations. In this paragraph the elements of the list shall be explained, as shall some of the terms used. Each element of research is defined in several opposites. In the evaluation of the exhibitions shall be noted which one of the two terms is the more dominant one. If neither is dominant or relevant the middle dot will be crossed. Besides the premade choices there is also room for notes. The checklist is a tool to make sure the same points were taken into account for each presentation. Therefore, the exhibitions have also been used to fine-tune the checklist. The checklist included in the attachments of this document is the final version and will be used as reference for the analysis of the museum presentations. Some terms on the list might seem very similar, but they are also used as an internal check. If they contradict, the exhibition requires a closer examination, both to see if no mistakes were made and what might explain the inconsistency.

First the context provided for the presentation will be taken into account; this counts the labels, the texts in the rooms, audio and video the visitor can activate, etcetera. The amount of context, but also whether it tells a detailed story or gives broader historical lines, and its relation to the actual display are part of the checklist. Another point is whether it focuses on emotional events or chooses a more rational and academic approach. Context can provide the reflection the previous paragraph deemed necessary for the new museum presentations and it can allow other groups than the museum to speak, or even profess doubt about the presentation. Whether or not the curator made use of these possibilities can also be expressed on the checklist.

Next the media used are scrutinized, not as context, but as an integrated part of the presentation. Five possible forms are considered; photographs (whether printed or projected), video, sounds, database and/or Internet access, and art. For the first three, it is mostly interesting whether they are originals or staged and whether the visitor can interact with the information, e.g. by activating it manually, or choosing the information they like, or whether the video, photographs and audio are static, that is, without visitor interaction. For the database and Internet access, visitor interaction is the main point of interest; what are the boundaries of the

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91 Frey, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Current debate”, 60
possible exploration? As most art is static (except for some installations and other uses of modern media, but these will be regarded as a database) the question is mostly: how is it used? Does it function as an illustration of the presentation, like most photographs, or is it meant to give the visitor a new and different point of view on the subject matter? It is also used as a reference point for the relation between art and historic artefacts, as they have been competitors throughout the better part of history.

Third on the list is the actual display; four points are differentiated. First the way in which the objects are presented is analysed; whether dioramas are used or objects are mostly presented on their own; is there visitor interaction and does the presentation focus on society or the individual stories of each object and their owners? Four words might need some clarification: resonance versus wonder and nostalgia versus aura. Resonance means the objects are presented in a familiar context, wonder refers to the exoticness of the objects is placed into the spotlight. Nostalgic and auratic follow the same distinction, although an aura can also be created by focussing on the aesthetic qualities of an object. The nostalgia meant here refers to Gielen’s manifest nostalgia. The second question focuses on the authenticity of the presentation, but only the authenticity that is visible and acknowledge in the presentation and context. Most visitors assume that the objects on display are at least material authentic, but the theories above have shown that this in no longer the “real thing” museum presents, as it has been replaced by experience. This suggests that the authenticity of the objects on display in no longer a sure thing, hence the question what types of authenticity are acknowledged. The third part also focuses on authenticity and experience, checking if re-enactment is used in anyway to enliven the presentation.

Last but not least is noted which other senses are used in the presentation besides vision, conform the suggestion of Hudson. The final part of the checklist is concerned with the way the exhibition theme is visible in the rest of the museum and the way the museum as institution is visible in the exhibition itself. This to check how far the museum has put itself on display and in how far a total experience includes the whole organization. The results of the use this checklist can be found in the next part of this paper, first as several short descriptions of the cases, second in the final analysis of this research, combining it yet again with the history and theory of museum presentations.
Historic objects in their natural habitat
Relive the Past!
HISTORIC OBJECTS IN THEIR NATURAL HABITAT

Four case studies

In this of the paper, a description and analysis shall be given of the four case studies used for this research. All museums have been visited only once specifically for this study, but three out of four had been visited by the author already on other occasions. The museum in Rotterdam was the exception. It was however an old article about “museum theatre” that made it seem a perfect addition to the other museums, embracing the experience and the theories of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett where the others seem more conservative. The Limburgs Museum was a second choice, as the first, the Catharijne Convent in Utrecht, was partly closed due to construction work. The Catharijne Convent is not technically a history museum; it presents itself as a museum for religious objects. However as it presents the history of religion in the Netherlands it seemed that it could provide interesting insights on the role of authentic objects. A regional museum was a logical replacement, filling the gap between the Openlucht Museum that is national oriented and the two city museums. There are three regional museums of note, the Fries Museum, the Zeeuws Museum and the Limburgs Museum. All three would have made an interesting case study; the Fries Museum because the Frisian identity is one of the strongest regional identities in the Netherlands; the Zeeuws Museum because its previous director is now director of the Nationaal Historisch Museum that is still under construction; and the Limburgs Museum as it is also a strong regional identity and the museum is only ten years old, with no older displays that could have been an excuse not to take notice of the most up to date developments and techniques. The choice for the latter is mostly one of convenience, as the author herself has spend her childhood in Limburg and also still has relatives in the province. The Amsterdam Historisch Museum and the Nederlands Openlucht Museum were obvious choices with the Rijksmuseum closed and the Nationaal Historisch Museum still to be built; the former because of its old and rich collection, the latter also because it was the winner of the 2009 Museum Prize for history museums.

All museum presentations have been visited once with the developed checklist in hand, taking notes and checking boxes along the walk. The results of this checklist shall first be analysed per museum, comparing the results of the specific exhibitions to the general impression of the overall museum presentation, with the goals of the individual museums themselves and if necessary and/or available with some reviews. Of course a short description of the museum, its history and its goals shall be provided, and the same goes for a description of the exhibitions.

Relive the Past!
The harbour city of Rotterdam has a longer history than most of the architecture in the city centre can account for. This is due to the German airstrikes that destroyed most of the buildings in 1940. One of the few buildings that survived is the “Schieland huis”, a 17th century office building, nowadays surrounded by its modern equivalents. Since the 19th century the building has harboured the collection of the city archives, which would eventually become the Historisch Museum van de stad Rotterdam (History Museum of the city of Rotterdam, HMR). Nowadays the museum is divided over two departments, the mentioned Schieland huis in the city centre and a former 19th century warehouse in Delfshaven, the Dubbele Palmboom. Both contain mostly temporary exhibitions on the city of Rotterdam and her history. In April 2010 the museum showed several exhibitions, two of these shall be discussed in depth, the others shall be used only to show the diversity of the museum. However, first the general approach of the museum shall be described and all exhibitions open when this research took place shall be mentioned shortly. Over the years the museum acquired a quite diverse collection. It started out as objects directly linked to the history of the city, but in the 1920’s and 1930’s the museum director focused on arts and crafts, wanting to turn the museum in a national arts and crafts museum. After the Second World War, mostly art was collected. This changed again in the 1970’s during which the culture of everyday life became most important. Nowadays this is still the main point of attention of the collecting policy, frames by a sociological approach of city culture. The museum itself focuses on spreading knowledge about the city of Rotterdam to a broad audience, hoping that this will result into an understanding of the city and increasing the level of identification of the Rotterdammers with their own city.

In the Schieland huis in April 2010 the following exhibitions were on display: “Nooit gebouwd Rotterdam”, about never executed building plans for the city; an exhibition on the 50 year anniversary of the Euromast, one of Rotterdams most famous landmarks; a presentation of drawings out of the Atlas van Stolk collection and the semi-permanent exhibition “Stad van Rotterdammers”, in combination with “Rotterdammers UP”, on the city of Rotterdam and its people. At the same time in the Dubbele Palmboom there were photographs on 40 years of Rotterdam on display, an exhibition called “hoezo waardeloos?”, on the value of objects both inside and outside a museum; the children route on police work and Crime scene investigation; and the permanent exhibitions on Piet Hein, a 17th century Dutch admiral, and “Oud Rotterdam”, a collection of interiors of little shops from the early 20th century. The exhibitions “Stad van Rotterdammers” and “Oud Rotterdam” were selected for this paper, as they both have

93 http://www.hmr.rotterdam.nl/ [15th of June 2010, 13.30h]
95 Historisch Museum Rotterdam, Cultuurplan 2009-2012 (Rotterdam, 2008)
late 19th and 20th century local history as their subject. The former exhibition was opened in September 2004, made by Ben Smit Multimedia, a company that designs edutainment software and is specialized in “audiovisual and interactive communication”.

It has been renewed a few times since its opening, the last time in March 2010, adding the “Rotterdammers UP” exhibition, containing documentaries on several families in Rotterdam from different ethnic backgrounds, grouped around themes like food and holidays. The latter was chosen so the presentation of interiors could be compared to for example the Openlucht Museum.

“City of Rotterdammers”
The exhibition starts in 1840 with an impression of a growing city, a photograph of the harbour on the background, some objects in a horizontal cases, others standing free, the sounds of horses on cobble stones are part of the exhibition. No labels are visible, all information was provided by the free individual audio that the visitor had so activate for each presentation separately. It provided little factual information, usually just enhancing the impression of the presentation or giving information in very general terms. No background information on the objects was given, and only half of the paintings in the exhibition were included in the audio tour. Most presentations are lighted by spotlights, focusing on the whole display, objects are usually not individually lit. The route leads the visitor through several displays with themes out of the history of Rotterdam; e.g. the construction of the first Bijenkorf, a department store, and the bombardment of the city during the Second World War. For the latter a model in the floor shows the town centre as it was before the bombs; a film on one of the walls shows the surrender of the city and the white flag next to it is (presumably, as it is never mentioned in labels nor on the audio tour) the flag from the film. Sounds of bombs falling and air sirens completed the presentation, together with photographs of victims of the war in a case on the wall opposite of the film projection. The next

http://www.bensmitmultimedia.nl/ [15th of June 2010, 13:00h]
display is the rebuilding of Rotterdam, which started already in 1940. The audio tour informs the visitor on the clean up and the mourning of old buildings, but again mostly in general terms. The presentation is a collage of maps, statues, photographs, video screens and plans for new neighbourhoods. The exhibition ends in the 1960’s rather suddenly with a number of fashion outfits. The transition to “Rotterdammers UP” is abrupt and not completely clear. Video booths offer the visitor the possibility to view the documentaries made about ten real families living in Rotterdam from varying ethnic backgrounds and their traditions surrounds various subjects like food, sports, holidays, traditions. On the wall surrounding the video booths portraits of the families are visible.

“Old Rotterdam”
The permanent exhibition “Oud Rotterdam” contained several interiors from the 1930’s to 1960’s, among others a barbershop, a tobacco shop and blue-collar living quarters. The rooms show living interiors, including candy in jars, hair products etc., but the interiors are shown more after closing hours than like someone would return straight away. It is not possible to walk through them, they are separated from the visitor by walls, windows and half open doors. In the case of the living quarters and the barbershop it is possible to view the presentation from several sides, as they have been built in the middle of the room and the path leads around them. The other interiors can be viewed only from the front and in the case of the toy story and the store selling buttons, wool and other knitting supplies only the shop window is visible. There is no clear routing and the exhibition is built around the other exhibitions. Very few labels are used and there is no audio provided. The existing labels give a general description and no clear dates. It is not shown where each of the interiors come from or how they came into the possession of the museum. No information on the individual objects is provided nor is it clear whether all objects are from the same shop or even if all are authentic. The fact that in for example the tobacco shop the candy in the glass jars still looks edible (and is of the kind still sold as “candy from the old days”), suggests that some things might be from newer date. No human beings are present in the exhibition, neither in puppet form nor in photographs or video.

Theatrical Rotterdam
The presentation of “the city of Rotterdammers” is promised to be an experience and a rollercoaster through history.97 This is visible in the collage-like presentation, combining different

kind of objects to present a broad story, enhanced by the sound effects. Lighting and video complement the presentation where possible, and the same goes for the artwork that illustrates the displays. No labels are visible, as background information is only provided by the handheld audio. This however is general and mostly tries to enhance the experience. The individual objects and their authenticity were not acknowledged. The latter is also the case with the exhibition “Old Rotterdam”, presenting the interiors more as period settings than as biographic clusters. Again the focus lies on the impression of a certain period, in this case combined with nostalgia and resonance, as the rooms show the time of most grandparents. It is however remarkable that it is not possible to walk through the interiors, as this would complete the experience. Another element that is noteworthy compared to another period setting in the Dubbele Palmboom, namely the impression of the office of Piet Hein, is that nowhere on the labels is mentioned that the interiors are either authentic or symbolic clusters. The label of the Piet Hein interior mentions that it is not sure how the original office looked, but that the presentation shows the typical 17th century furniture of a man of his standing. The children’s exhibition “how do you mean, worthless?” showed the awareness of the procedures and constructions of the museum, but this was completely absent in the two exhibitions used for analysis.

Both exhibitions try to provide an experience but do this in very different ways. “The city of Rotterdammers” in combination with “Rotterdammers UP” relies heavily on multimedia, but also on original documents (art, videos, authentic objects) to bring the visitor closer to the history of the city. It is a shame however that the authentic objects are nowhere acknowledged, even though the employees of the museum ensured the author when asked that every object is authentic. Small labels would not disturb the presentation, but could confirm that the flag you are looking at is indeed the same flag used in the original video on the surrender of the city in 1940. The presentation one could argue is in line with the wishes of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: a multimedia experience assuming the visitor has found the needed background information elsewhere. The exhibition however does not invoke any self-reflection, nor does it show alternate versions of history. It leans more towards entertainment than edutainment. Only of the last bit of the route, the “Rotterdammers UP” shows the visitor new elements and tries to grow respect for the multicultural city Rotterdam is. The presentation of “Old Rotterdam” is more the trip down memory lane, as Urry commented modern day museums have become, than the experience the other exhibition is. Here especially the lack of specific background information and critical attitude by the museum gives the exhibition more the feeling of a heritage park than an actual museum presentation. It is possible that the general approach of the exhibitions, which requires little knowledge or effort, and the diversity in presentations are used to attract a very broad public, as the museum stated as its goal in the Cultuurplan 2009-2012.
The story of Amsterdam is the story of many immigrants, both from other areas in the Netherlands as from other countries or continents, at least according to the website of the Amsterdam Historisch Museum (Amsterdam History Museum, AHM). It states that a “lively, international city like Amsterdam deserves an exciting museum. So the most modern forms of multimedia are used. Discover the surprising objects that make the past seem real. One moment you’ll be hoisting a horse out of the canal, the next you’ll be in one of the white cars of the 1970’s. Or ring the doorbell of one of the flats in the Bijlmer, in the southeast of the city, and hear all about how great it is to live there.” In 1926 the AHM opened its doors as an institution of its own, but the collections had been formed before that. Parts of the city’s art collection had been lent out to the Rijksmuseum, as had been several other historic artefacts. In the 1890’s the objects concerning the history of Amsterdam were brought together in the new Stedelijk Museum (City Museum). Almost thirty years later the collection finally got its own building, but was till the 1970’s connected to the museum. In 1969 the museum moved to its current building, the former city orphanage. The new Amsterdam History Museum acquired the archaeological collections of the city and a clear division between the Stedelijk Museum, the city archives and the history museum was made. The 1990’s signalled a policy change, the emphasis came on the recognisability of the presentation for the visitor, and more attention was given to “new” population of Amsterdam, people from different ethnic backgrounds. Also young visitors and families received special attention in the new policy. To make the collection fit the new presentation objects, a form of “biographic collection” was applied. The lives of the people of Amsterdam was collected in objects, photographs and interviews. The points of the new policy are still visible in the goal of the AHM on its website: it wants to make the history of Amsterdam accessible to a broad public by presenting it in line with the public debate, and at the same time inspiring and interactive.

The permanent exhibition of the AHM contains the story of the city of Amsterdam, starting in the middle ages

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98 “Your entry to the city”, http://en.ahm.nl/ [13th of May 2010, 14.00h]
100 Ibidem, 25
101 “Organisatie”, http://www.ahm.nl/ [13th of May 2010, 14.00h]
and ending in the year 2000. It starts out with a large map showing the development of the city and continues with archeologically finds. Besides the main story of Amsterdam, the museum contains one major and some smaller temporary exhibitions. At the time of this research this was a modern interpretation of the red light district and its history was the subject of the major exhibition. However, for this paper the last century of the permanent story will be analysed. Due to the size of the exhibition as well as its diversity it seemed enough to concentrate on the permanent collection, instead of analyzing several exhibitions, both permanent and temporarily, as is the case with the other museums analyzed in this paper.

“The story of Amsterdam”

The whole exhibition consists of 23 rooms has been remodelled in several phases around 2000. Only the last four, focusing on the 20th century, will be part of this analysis. Every room has a different theme and also its own type of presentation, some containing only artworks, others showing mostly everyday objects. A short impression of each room shall be given, after which the more general trends shall be discussed. The rooms are numbered and these numbers shall be used in the description. Room no. 20 shows a collection of paintings of Amsterdam, the artworks cover all walls, and a map in the middle of the room provides more drawings. Each painting is explained on the label, not only who made it and when, but also the context of the scene on the painting. They illustrate the history of Amsterdam like photographs or sketches would. All art is of the same time as the history told. Also pieces of the interior of a living room are on display. Shown in a glass case the visitors can walk around the little piece of history. The next room, titled “Children of the city”, shows several glass casings, each one telling the story of one specific child form different backgrounds and times. A photograph of the child outlines the case and objects that used to belong to this specific individual are shown. In one of the cases the toys did not belong to the subject, the label told the visitor that it was not of this child, it was general for children of his social status to play with these toys. Each individual was an illustration of general trends in society. Room no. 22 is devoted to the Second World War and again, individual stories of among others the mayor of the town, a Dutch soldier, people from the resistance and Jewish showmen but also of a German soldier and a Dutch NSB-er illustrated the different sides of the war. Original objects complemented each story. The room also contains a video booth showing a documentary on a family in hiding. Through an opening in the exhibition and a set of stairs the visitor can reach an attic-like room, where they can listen to episodes from Radio Oranje, the radio of the resistance.

The last room of the exhibition shows Amsterdam after the war, throughout the
sometimes violent conflicts of the 1950’s and 1960’s, the football success of Ajax, and up to the murder of Theo van Gogh. Politics, culture and social economic developments all are part of the exhibition, again mostly told by individual stories, showing the objects and their owners. In most cases the display is accompanied by video material. There are several installations, among others one showing video’s of the city’s most important square, the Dam, from different view points and times; another containing a 1950’s living room where the visitor can listen to political satire on the radio (according to the label that is, the author was not able to make the latter work on her visit). Nothing is re-enacted, all pictures, audio and videos are original documents. Throughout the whole exhibition, there are no background sounds, only fragments of documentaries, interviews and sometimes performances, but the visitor has to pick up a specific headset to be able to listen to them.

**Story of individuals**

The most remarkable feature of “the story of Amsterdam” is not the presentation itself, but its labels. Every painting, object and photograph is explained, linked to an individual story and then placed in its broader context of the society. In some cases the link with the museum is also mentioned, as was the case with the interior in room no. 20. All labels are both in English as in Dutch, due to the large amount of tourists visiting the museum. Objects, paintings, photographs, audio and video fragments, everything is used to illustrate the stories of the individuals that make up the story of the city. This approach is consistent throughout most of the exhibition. With all the objects in glass cases and only a few interactive installations, the presentation still looks like a traditional museum, except perhaps for the last room, where the wall is part of theme of the display and the display on Ajax, the local soccer club, is even in the form of a piece of stadium. However by giving information of the individuals the museum is able to provide a very diverse picture of the past, something they exploit to its limits. For example in the room on the Second World War, where the individual stories provide the different situations of the war but also give it a human face. Right and wrong are turned into several shades of grey. The specific information on each object also makes the material authenticity of it more apparent, especially because the labels mention replicas and objects of more symbolic authenticity. The exhibition follows general trends like the self-reflection but also the story-oriented instead of object-oriented presentations. However it does not turn out into a full-blown experience, even though some installations to this effect are present, nor is it nostalgia that controls the floor. Resonance however is an important element, the human stories make it that the visitor can easily imagine what it might have been like. The individual lighting of some objects and their specific labels however still provide the presentations with an aura and a museum atmosphere.
Relive the Past!
Unlike the museums of Rotterdam and Amsterdam, which are focused on a town, the Limburgs Museum includes a whole province, focusing on both its identity and its history. The museum is relatively new, it opened its doors in 2000 for the first time, and it is housed in a modern building. It was founded in 1994, by combining the collections of the municipalities of Venlo and Limbricht. It also takes care of the Limburgian film and photograph collection. The institute wants to present the visitor with a surprising journey through time, about history, traditions and lifestyles. It aspires to be the trendsetting institution for cultural heritage but at the same time it wants to be accessible for all kinds of visitors. Participation of the public and the amount of visitors are found imperative, and mentioned in the main goals of the museum. These are combined with an educational approach and the wish to further expand the collection into archaeology and art history. The opening of all collections, mostly digital, to the public considered to be of great importance.

The museum has a semi-permanent exhibition showing the history of Limburg (as an area, the political unity is a product of the 19th century), temporary presentations on both popular as scientific subjects complement the others. In May 2010, the time the museum was visited for this research, it showed a permanent exhibition on the history of Limburg, starting in the prehistory; another permanent exhibition on the making of Limburg as a province; two exhibitions on lifestyle, one focussing on the local Carnival and the other on cooking, food and kitchens. The two temporary exhibitions showed a multicultural caravan showing immigrants in the province and two famous cartoon figures Suske & Wiske. The presentation that will be the case study for this research is part of the semi-permanent exhibition “Limburg created... time and time again”, displaying the history and identity of Limburg since the French Revolution.

Five themes, government, religion, work, migration and identity form the base of the exhibition. Another element in the two room of the presentation is the “feeling of Limburg”, what makes a person a Limburger? An interactive language quiz and a digital presentation showing interactive video portraits of a quite diverse group of Limburgers are pointers for the visitors to form their own answer.

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102 “Over ons” & “Collecties”, http://www.limburgsmuseum.nl/ [20th of May 2010, 14.00h]
103 “Limburg onstaat... steeds opnieuw”, http://www.limburgsmuseum.nl [20th of May 2010, 14.30h]
“Limburg created... time and time again”

“Limburg created...” consists of two large rooms, with a glass display case all along its walls. The rooms are quite dark with no natural light. Spotlights light up the objects and the general story. Colourful bands maintain the five themes of the exhibition, a colour for each theme, running over every display case; the lines are marked with important dates and names. In the cases, objects, paintings, photographs and sketches illustrated the subject of the specific display. For the twentieth century, video documentaries are integrated in the presentation, playing muted until the visitor activates the sound of the individual video with a foot pedal. The objects are displayed on their own, often with extra lighting or a platform in the display. One subject usually shares several different types of objects, but they are not grouped or posed together. Some of the explanatory panels have holes cut out for artefacts that are given special attention. Individual labels are absent from the presentation; the story mostly focuses on general developments while sometimes paying attention to important persons like Queen Wilhelmina or the factory owner Regout. The glass cases provide the main history of Limburg, its place within the Netherlands and its specific culture.

Five inlets give room to multimedia presentations, each one focusing on a specific issue. These little side rooms differ in presentation significantly from the main rooms of the exhibition and are often not directly visible from the main presentation. Walls separate them from the main room, making them small exhibitions on their own. The first of these is about the borders of Limburg; maps are hanging from the walls and a table stands in the middle of the dark room. By pushing a row of buttons on the table one of the maps is lit up and a narrator tells about the situation in that specific time, mostly a short anecdote. The players are re-enacted by different voices; the map is projected on the table in the room. The projection also shows objects to match the sounds, for example money passing hands or a Napoleonic hat. The second inlet shows the products of the Regout porcelain factory, which has been a major actor in the region. On the far side of the side room there is a projection of women in local dresses working on the porcelain. No sound accompanies this presentation. The third contains an interactive programme, a dialect quiz and more information on the many dialects of the region. The last two inlets add a personal touch to the general story. One contains a relic store, as can be found at some local pilgrimage sites; statues fill the cases on walls of the very dark room; one glass case representing a counter and behind it stands the projection of a
saleswoman. She tells stories about growing up with Catholicism and the role of religion in her family. The last inlet shows the dining room of a miner’s family. No rope or glass separates the visitor from the objects on the room. A video portrait in the wall shows the son of a miner, telling about his father and his own life; in the door re-enacted scenes of his story are projected. The latter two inlets are accompanied by a general text on the wall but the authenticity of the assemblies are neither proven nor questioned and nowhere specified.

Aesthetics and experience
“Limburg created...” can be seen as two exhibitions in one. The overall display is rather traditional, with historic facts illustrated by aesthetic lighted objects in glass cases, original videos and photographs; a very visual presentation with some visitor-interaction focussing on the big events of the last two centuries. The installations in the inlets however provide a more personal multimedia experience, with re-enacted voices and in two cases life stories, completely in line with Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. The museum is not present in any of the presentations however, and the only critical note is provided by the interactive installation on the identity of the Limburger. The experiences are not completely without context thanks to the attention paid to overall history of the area. On the individual objects little information is provided, yet their aesthetic presentation provide them with an aura, while the videos on local traditions lean towards nostalgia, as do the installations on the miner and the relics shop. It is a shame that the sounds of each installation and video are audible in all of the main room, but they do provide the visual presentation with something extra, that sets it apart from for example an art museum. The authenticity of the individual objects is nowhere acknowledged nor contradicted, nor is there any information provided on the interior of the miner’s living room.

The slick presentation with its straight lines is in stark contrast to the rest of the exhibition about the region Limburg. The walls themselves are used to create hills, round walkways or cloister-like corners, providing space for scale models or again very aesthetic presented objects. Perhaps this is due to the goal of serving a broad audience and thus making presentations that are interesting for children and their parents or grandparents, but also for the individual visitor.
Relive the Past!
The Nederlands Openlucht Museum (Dutch Open-air Museum, NOM) has been rewarded with several prizes, like the Dutch Museum award 2009 and the European Museum award 2005. According to the museum itself this is because of their modern and diverse approach to the Dutch culture and the self-reflective exhibitions on for example collecting and saving.104 Concerned citizens founded the museum in 1912 to protect the diversity of Dutch traditions, threatened by the progressing industrialisation and urbanisation. They rebuilt half a dozen buildings on the museum grounds and the museum opened in 1918.105 Several more buildings have been rebuilt on the site since then and in 2000 the museum acquired an indoor exhibition area that included several permanent exhibitions and room for temporarily presentations. The outdoor area contains almost a hundred different elements of interest, ranging from a dovecote and herb gardens to several windmills; from a dairy factory to farms and houses from the 17th century until the 21st century. The buildings are located by area of origin and the visitors can either walk from one group to the next or take one of the old fashioned trams, which makes its round through the museum park. The slogan the museum uses in her flyers and other promotion is: “Een dagje naar gisteren” (A day out to yesterday). The goals of the museum have slightly changed since its founding; nowadays it wants to develop and stimulate knowledge on and respect for Dutch national and everyday history and heritage, and understanding for the cultural identity and those of others, all of this by using its multiple museum collections.106 On the website, the museum states that its mission is “to share experiences, to tell true stories about everyday life in the Netherlands to a broad range of visitors, whether native or new to the Netherlands, with the help of authentic objects and to encourage visitors to share their own experiences with us – and with each other”.107

For this paper three presentations have been selected which have been analyzed according to the checklist and which will be compared with the theories and the other museums selected. Open-air museums of course differ from the other museums due to their nature. It has the possibility to show a whole house in a more natural environment that it would have when just its interior would have been shown in a indoors museum. To make the comparison with the Rotterdam history museum and the museum in Amsterdam more reliable, one of the indoor exhibitions of the Open-air Museum has been taken into account as well. The temporary exhibition “Wat mag het zijn?” (How may I help you) on old-fashioned 19th and 20th century store interiors seemed a logical choice, both to compare the interiors with the ones in the historic

104 “Museum: Wie zijn wij: Geschiedenis”, http://www.openluchtmuseum.nl [13th of May 2010, 12.00h]
106 Nederlands Openlucht Museum, Jaarverslag 2008 (Arnhem, 2008), 42
107 “The Museum: who are we: mission”, http://www.openluchtmuseum.nl [English version] [13th of May 2010, 14.00h]
buildings on the museum site as with the interiors on display at the two other museums. The museum in Rotterdam city has a very similar (although more permanent) exhibition as well, which could make comparing the museums more interesting. The other subjects of this chapter are two 20th century clusters on the museum grounds, the steam-dairy-factory FREIA and the interior of a Chinese restaurant.

“Steam-dairy-factory FREIA”

The factory is rebuilt in the north-eastern corner of the museum park surrounded by farms, mills and other buildings from the northern parts of the Netherlands. It’s label states that the factory was closed down in 1969 and brought over to the museum. There it was returned to its pre-war state, which included demolishing and rebuilding several parts of the factory. Visitors can walk around and through the factory; its interior shows the processing of diary in a clinical presentation. Machines have been placed along the sides and are explained on schematics. The old steam engine is still working and keeps some elements of room rotating, even though these are no longer connected to any machines. In the second room there is a little store where a woman in a period costume of a Frisian farmer’s wife sells homemade cheeses. The next room contains shelves on the wall full with fake cheese forms and group portraits on the wall of the employees of the factory throughout the 20th century. The last three rooms contain the steam engine, a laboratory the visitors can take a peek at through the door, and another room with the machines for processing dairy. There is no audio and there are only natural sounds, like the steam engine and the sounds from outside. The labels focus on the process of making cheese and other dairy products but do not inform the visitor on its history or a broader history of the factory. Even the portraits are labelled with a date only.

“At the Chinese”

In the middle of the museum park lays a cluster of green 17th century buildings from the Zaanstreek, an area still known for its typical architecture. The presentation includes among others a carriage building, a merchant home, a local shop and a bakery. The latter two sell old-fashioned products to...
the visitors of the museum. The merchant home contains something else completely: the interior of a Dutch Chinese restaurant from the 1960’s. No details on the origins of the interior are given, just a general description of Chinese restaurants. The visitor can walk freely through the room between the tables and the several screens. One of these screens is a touch screen containing a database of pictures of Chinese restaurants and some background information of each photograph; the video behind the bar offers a peek into the kitchen of the restaurant. A third screen in the small provision room next to the main room shows a documentary about one of the first Chinese chefs in the Netherlands. A projection on one of the tables shows the objects of two guests, such as his pipe and her purse. A sound tape plays the conversations of these two guests, a third guest and the owners of the restaurant, including their child. Every time the video of the kitchen shows that the window opens, sounds from the kitchen are perceptible as well. The individual objects are not labelled nor are the voices specified individuals.

“How may I help you?”

The last case of the Nederlands Openlucht Museum is the semi-permanent exhibition in the modern main building near the entrance. The entrance to the presentation consists of an old-fashioned store door, including a little bell above the door. Several interiors of old stores are shown in the room, of some a full view of the store including the counter, at others the visitor can look through the store window. All interiors how ever are separated from the route and it is not possible to walk through them. Each interior is from a specific shop, and the labels tell the history of the shop and its owners. In the case of the tobacco store, there is even a documentary the owner and his family. The individual objects are however not mentioned. On the walls enlarged black and white pictures enliven the room with scenes from everyday city life. Each picture is labelled with a date and place. Besides the documentary and the sound of the bell above the entrance door, no additional sounds are part of the exhibition and no re-enactment of any form is present.

A day out to yesterday?

Ex and Lengkeek argued that the value of open-air museums is the conceptual reference they make to the past, more symbolic authenticity than anything else. This seems indeed the case at the Nederlands Openlucht Museum. The buildings themselves are grouped by their region of origin, but this means that structures of all ages stand together. The interiors do not necessarily match the exteriors nor is the material authenticity of either very important. The report for 2008
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shows this as well, stating that some buildings have been completely restored and for one of them an extra stable was built, based on old blueprints. The information provided on the different buildings is mostly in general terms as well, FREIA being one of the exceptions. Labels at the park grounds are mostly short, making the presentations into typical period settings, in at least one case even without providing any type of date or historical grounding. On the website however the original owners of the structures and their background are mentioned. Some buildings provide functional authenticity, for example the paper mill that is still in use. In FREIA however it is merely the illusion of functional authenticity; the steam machine is working but is no longer connected to anything else, and the rest of the factory has a museum-like interior. Authenticity is no issue at all at the exhibition “At the Chinese”, placed inside a house from a different time and culture. The only real thing the multimedia installation provides is the experience, including the re-enacted conversations by invisible costumers and employees. The focus on the museum grounds seems to be on a typical presentation of “history” in general, without much distinction between eras, and by giving the visitor the possibility to walk through most houses or even to participate by buying old-fashioned products or learning old crafts, nostalgia is closer than an aura. Although for example the Hindelooper room in one of the houses is presented like an art work on its own.

This is however the situation at the park itself. When one considers the exhibitions held in the main building the differences are only becoming more noticeable. The exhibition “How may I help you?” gives specific information on each interior it presents, offering no visitor participation. Personal stories are more apparent here. However by dressing the entrance to the exhibition like a store door, addressing history of only a generation or two ago and the black and white photographs on the walls, nostalgia seems present here as well. The Nederlands Openlucht Museum seems a heritage park with a museum attached to it, breaching the line between the two. The museum practices could have been followed through more completely however by making some of the more specific information on website available at the park grounds. This would make the true stories the organisation claims to tell more visible and provide an extra feel of authenticity to the whole museum.

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Nederlands Openlucht Museum, Jaarverslag 2008, 16
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Museum Experiences

Over the course of the last couple of centuries museums have grown from cabinets to treasure houses, to educational institutes and now to multimedia experiences. Neither the presentations nor the institution itself have ever been accepted without discussion. One way to describe these fluctuations is by Heinrich’s temple versus expo model, with the first being an institute to appraise art and uplift the people, the second presenting dioramas and entertainment. One could argue that the education-based presentations of the history department of the Rijksmuseum used techniques of the expo model, trying to present the objects in their “zeitgeist”. The discussion on the historic objects and art in the Netherlands before the Second World War could be seen as a discussion on what type of objects would fit in this temple of high culture. The influences of both models are still visible in the current day museums, but it does seem that after a period of temples, the expo model is the main influence again. Story and context based presentations, even at art department of the Rijksmuseum, “experience” as the buzzword for exhibitions and multimedia to expand the possibilities beyond the tradition diorama or actors.

The exhibition at the Historisch Museum Rotterdam provides such an experience, a path through its history, relying on sound and light-effects to give an impression of the past. Some authors champion this way of presenting history, pointing out that emotions now have a place in educational theories and also that the old aura is lost, leaving museums to fill the gap with nostalgia and experience. Databases and handheld audio help the visitor to individualize their visit giving them only the information on the displays they want to learn more about. This could in the end even lead to Spalding’s dream of individual routes throughout exhibitions, following a theme chosen on the audio, ignoring the curator’s choices. Authenticity has not stayed behind. Huizinga already pointed out in the 1920’s that a historic object could provoke a reaction close to the aesthetic experience, but the attention to different types of authenticity provides more insight on how to it works. The attention to the context of the object or even the collection of whole clusters opens possibilities for presentation forms that are often associated with experience, like dioramas and period rooms. The idea of symbolic authenticity could help to present scenes and objects that are no longer available, without resorting to newer replicas, thus keeping party of the historic authenticity alive.

One of the main points of critique on experience that Hein states is that there is no way of measuring it. Even more than with traditional displays, visitors will take their own view on the experience. And this while The Manual of museum exhibitions states that the introduction of new attitudes by affective experience is one of the current goals of museums. Providing no information does not seem to be a solution, also because Huizinga commented that the historic experience would only work if it would fit the knowledge the visitor already had. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out that all the information is out there, on the Internet and on databases, but this
does not necessarily mean that the visitors have made the effort to take it into account. Not to mention that the information might be out there, but it is mixed with large amounts of nonsense. One of the reasons to read a book or to visit an exhibition to gain knowledge over trying to find it yourself is because professionals have taken the effort to organise and test the random facts into an understandable story. This authoritative story can be nuanced by for example articles from outside the museum as Bradburne and Parry both argue, but the museum can also show its own presence, as Gielen and Hein would prefer. By providing self-reflection and showing how the museum techniques work, visitors could still enjoy the knowledge provided, but also judge themselves if they trust the information. It could also prevent the oversimplifying of the experiences or the wild growth of nostalgia, keeping them within a museum context. So both the broadening of the idea of authenticity as a more self-conscious approach of museums could open up possibilities to combine original historic objects and modern day multimedia experiences. At least according to the theories. The question is now, how is this visible in real museum presentations?

The four museums presented in this paper all showed very different presentations, sometimes even at the same museum. Most museums mixed experience with authentic objects, but do not always acknowledge that authenticity. It seems that only the Limburgs Museum still represents the museum as a temple, or at least it does so with the exhibition used for this paper. The aesthetic displays show the individual objects like small treasures, illustrating the history of the region. This is the only exhibition where it is at times hard to distinguish which has the upper hand: the objects or the stories. The installations and the videos seem part of the latter, but the artistic lighting and glass cases champion the former. The aura of the artefacts on display make the visitor believe in authority of the museum and the material authenticity of the objects. It is however a shame that this aura is lost for the objects of the installations. The museum tries to combine conservative display and total experiences, but perhaps the distance between the two it too big. The differences between the presentations at the Nederlands Openlucht museum are equally big and ranging even more extremes, but in all cases the story seems more important than the individual object. The individual stories of the museum exhibition and the more general impressions of the other two exhibits however both lack attention for the material authenticity of the authentic object. In the first case it is the authenticity of the cluster that seems more important, in the other cases a more symbolic authenticity is used. The whole relies more on nostalgia and resonance than on aura, providing the visitors a day to the pleasant past that has just gone by.

This is also the case with the Historisch Museum Rotterdam, where the individual object was not acknowledged at all. The objects used in the “city of Rotterdammers” exhibition were all original historic objects or art pieces and one could say that their authenticity complemented the rest of the experience. However their authenticity was never given credit nor was there enough
background information provided to experience a “historic sensation” as Huizinga called it. Or perhaps this was just the case for the author of this paper, as she is not from that area and has different background knowledge. The other exhibition focuses pure nostalgia to entertain the visitors, presenting a past with small business and cosy homes contrasting the sleek multimedia experience, but again the information is meagre and focused on the collective storyline. The Amsterdam Historisch Museum does not use general impressions but individual stories to bring the past closer to the public. The objects are a means to tell these stories, but at the same time get great amounts of individual attention. This is also the only exhibition used for this paper where the constructing influence of the museum itself is acknowledged. The other museums did show other exhibitions on the functioning of the institution, but did not follow through on this attitude in the other exhibitions. The approach also leaves room for a differentiated view of history, albeit not as multivocal as some of the theories champion.

Overall the museums tend to mix and match experiences with more traditional ways of presentations, but not as extreme as Vogel suggests with the different approaches to the display of objects itself. Most still rely on visual effects and perhaps a few added sounds to enliven the presentations. It is only the Nederlands Openlucht Museum with its mix of museum and heritage park that comes close to the ideal of Baxandal. The case studies show that even though the exhibitions have very different approaches, most of them still rely on materially authentic objects to show the visitors pieces of the real past. The story is the leading element in the presentation, but the objects are used to illustrate this, even in a full-blown multimedia experience as “city of Rotterdammers”. The material authenticity of these objects however is not often questioned; the museums maintained their authoritative voice in almost all presentations, in spite of the possibilities of the new media. It is also remarkable that the objects used in “experiences” in none of the cases are acknowledged as historic objects. The fact that the objects in use are every day objects or that perhaps many of them are available, does not change the fact that they still have a history. Or that when they replicas, symbolic ones or completely new produced, it would be interesting if this was mentioned. The self-reflection and the acknowledgement of the procedures of the museum are not visible at the exhibitions. The Amsterdam Historisch museum seems to reach the this ideal best of all, by giving an elaborate explanation of each individual object on display.

As now to return to the main issue of this paper, “is there still space for the authentic historic object with its magical aura of times past in the Dutch history museums?” Even though the authentic object seems to have become less important, it is still present in most presentations. Both the theories as the case studies show that the stories museums can present have won in importance over the individual object. This is also shown by the historical developments, especially by the fact that the Rijksmuseum is (again) planning to present both art and important
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historic objects surrounded by other artefacts and broader impressions of their era. On the other hand however there seem to be possibilities to use authentic objects in their own rights, supported by theoretical elements and also by evidence from the case studies. Of course the use of experience in museums turned out to be a very diverse practice, from interactive video booths to multimedia installations in 17th century houses and from tucked away attics with secret radio broadcasts to the personal stories of 3D holograms. This diversity was also visible at each museum individually, combining different presentation techniques per exhibition and sometimes even within one room. More often than not the experiences were illustrated with materially authentic objects, like the multimedia experience of City of Rotterdammers, littered with original costumes, objects and artworks. In other cases it was not the individual object that was important, but a cluster of objects, which can contain as Van Mensch argued its own authenticity. Once one accepts the possibility of a symbolical or even functional authenticity, harbouring a more indirect link to the past, objects could become even more important. Why not use a similar object as was used in the same period to illustrate the overall image, as was done with the chest of Hugo de Groot? Another way of presenting that makes use of the authentic object is the presentation at the Amsterdams Historisch Museum. Objects formed the base for the stories, telling the stories of each individual item as part of the greater whole. However the magical aura seems to have been greatly diminished, last championed by Huizinga, drowned out by the display of everyday history and uneventful lives. Nostalgia and resonance bring the past closer than ever, making people imagine about the lives of previous generations on a more mundane level, although seldom including all the grisly details as starvation, cold, pain or even boredom. A hint of the magical aura was still visible in the presentation of the Limburgs Museum, with its beautiful lit objects and small labels, but this seems both in theory and in practice to be the exception.

The call for more self-reflection in museums and a more critical attitude towards the own presentation, whether this contains experiences or objects or both, would reduce the magical aura even more. It would however also diminish unbridled nostalgia, showing the techniques museums use and turning it into a more academic endeavour. This would invoke the presence of the museum as an institution in its own right. The accessibility of Internet inside the museum, not only on the provided computers but also on personal objects as mobile phones can be used to bring different stories into the museum. A problem with this is however that there is so much information available, and not all is trustworthy, that it is hard for the individual to filter this on the spot. The fact that the visitor might know more than the museum presents is of course not new to the age of the internet. Books, school programs, TV shows and other sources have always provided the public with historical knowledge. A visit to the museum is often part of a school program, sometimes accompanied by a broader curriculum provided by the museum for at school. This leads to the remark made by Smidt-Degener, “history is recorded in books, not in
museums.” This would release museums from the duty to provide a more than aesthetic presentation and showing the whole diversity of the past. I agree that every medium has its own strong points and weaknesses, using different techniques and telling different stories. Museums are by history and nature a medium focussed on telling a story with strong visual means. This does however not mean that it is impossible to tell an entertaining story and present a diverse image of the past, as the Amsterdam Historisch Museum has proven. An understanding of the complexity and the different ideas in the past can lead to a better understanding of the present, but not everyone enters a museum with the same background knowledge. Self-reflective museums can show that they only present a part of that past and encourage the visitor to think about the other possible stories. Museums do not stand alone, as they more and more realise themselves; the actions of the Nationaal Historisch Museum prove this, trying to connect it self to websites, multiple other heritage sites and museums, and other events before it even exists in its physical form. They can however provide a centre of knowledge, easier accessible than a library or the Internet, bringing people in direct contact with the past. Authentic objects can be part of this.

A last problem for the authentic object is posed by the nature of modern objects themselves. Audio, photographs and video have been means to record the lives around us since the beginning of the twentieth century, but these have finished end products that can be collected. Websites and social media as Twitter are updated all the time and even though they are cashed and saved, this is at random intervals and without system. Email conversations are harder to save than written letters. An institute as Beeld en Geluid, presenting a giant archive of audio and video where people can browse through the collection themselves, might be more suited to capture these fluent media than a traditional museum. But even they have themed presentations that have the sound of exhibitions, organised to tell the visitor a more organised story.

Thus, the key to an interesting and fruitful museum presentation seems to lie in using different techniques, entwining experience with authentic objects, a general story with personal details as illustration. Nostalgia combined with experience, magical lit objects combined with multimedia presentations and dioramas combined with individual treasures. Museums are no solitary institutions, and the new media provide easier means to connect to other museums, websites and public discussions. Every museum in this paper harboured authentic objects, whether magical or nostalgic, whether acknowledged or not. A diverse presentation could enhance the entertainment value as the self-reflection of the museums, combining the temple with the expo and the authentic object with experience. So there still is room for authentic objects in Dutch museums, albeit perhaps not with their magical aura or would they have the prominent position they used to have. They would have to share the spotlight with other forms of presentation and not to forget the museum itself. Quite a few authors have mentioned self-reflective museum presentations as a solution to the criticisms the institution has received.
It would be interesting to see how this translates to the new presentations of the Rijksmuseum and the NHM, and the opening of either could be cause for expanding this research. Another element that could deepen this paper is research on the public experience, comparable to what Gielen did in his book *De onbereikbare binnenkant van het verleden* for Belgium museums and heritage sites. This has already been mention in the introduction, as have been the reasons not to include it into this specific paper. However, it could be interesting for a follow-up project. I hope this paper has laid down a start for research on current day museum presentations in the Netherlands and that its various case studies are a useful addition to the general discussion on authenticity and experience. I would like to end this story by expressing my gratitude to my tutor, professor W. E. Krul of the Rijksuniversity Groningen, who put up with my indecision and my ambition to write five books instead of one paper; and to professor R. Van der Laarse of the University of Amsterdam, who supervised my tutorials and internship and who introduced me to the world of heritage.

Groningen, 12th of August 2010
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