

# From Museum to Amusement Park: The Opportunities and Risks of Edutainment

Pierre Balloffet, François H. Courvoisier, Joëlle Lagier

## Background and Aims

“The suggestion that museums should become more like amusement parks is not only absurd but provocative. These two forms are traditionally diametrically opposed” (Chaumier, 2005<sup>1</sup>). “What does a museum have in common with an amusement park?” (Chaumier, 2011<sup>1</sup>). We chose these comments by Serge Chaumier as a starting point to explore a theme that has received little attention – the prospect of closer ties between the museum and the amusement park. This theme raises a number of questions: Should we distinguish between places where we go to reflect and places where we go to have fun? Should we put high culture and popular culture in opposition? Should cultural institutions be free to experiment with different forms – for example, to combine genres – in order to be more appealing to their audiences?

Radical changes are currently taking place in heritage institutions, defined broadly. These changes are affecting not only traditional museums but also interpretation centres, planetariums/astronomical observatories, science centres, historical monuments, nature parks and ecomuseums. Many heritage institutions, whether architecturally distinctive or not, are key attractions that play a role in reinforcing the image of a city or in promoting a region. Often, they must balance several different objectives, some of which go beyond the function of a museum as defined by the International Council of Museums

– namely, the conservation of and research on collections for the education and enjoyment of the public (<http://icom.museum/la-vision/definition-du-musee/L/2/>). For example, research has demonstrated that new technologies that stimulate the visitor’s senses make it possible to “recreate” the content of a cultural message, leading to its rediscovery (Kotler, 1999). This applies in the case of both education and entertainment and can also be understood from the perspective of experiential marketing (Roederer, 2012). In this case, the aim of the institution is to enhance the visitor’s experience by making it a unique and memorable event.

The trend described above has led to a hybridization of museum offerings characterized by growing porosity between the cultural and entertainment spheres and even between museums and amusement parks. Indeed, more and more museums are turning to innovative, lively environments that include recreational elements in order to mediate content that is perceived as serious. Conversely, amusement parks are seeking to enhance the recreational experiences of their visitors by including content that is more culturally rich (Pulh and Mencarelli, 2010).

This dual trend raises a number of issues. In their eagerness to boost attendance, museums, like many other tourist attractions, risk falling into the trap of “Disneyfication” (*Disneylandization*) (Brunel, 2006) or “McDonaldization” (Ritzer, 2000). This issue is all the more urgent considering that edutainment, an approach combining

The authors contributed equally to this article and are listed in alphabetical order.

**Pierre Balloffet** is an associate professor at HEC Montréal in Canada. In his research on marketing communication and branding, he favours an approach emphasizing originality, relevance and responsibility.

**François H. Courvoisier** (PhD, Economics) is a professor at Haute école de gestion Arc in Neuchâtel, Switzerland. His areas of research include cultural marketing and watch marketing.

**Joëlle Lagier** (PhD, Marketing) is a professor at Rouen Business School in France. Her research focuses on aesthetic perception and experience in the arts and cultural industries.

education and entertainment, appears to be a current trend in the museum landscape (Rheingold, 1992; Mencarelli, Pulh and Marteaux, 2007).

In this article, we attempt to answer two research questions: *What are the risks and opportunities associated with the edutainment trend in museums? What aspects of this trend put museums in danger of causing confusion by becoming too much like amusement parks?*



## Methodology

Adopting a traditional approach (Spiggle, 1994), we begin with a review of the literature. We extract several key lessons from previous research in order to construct a conceptual framework. This is followed by the presentation of a field study based on an exploratory qualitative approach. Using a semi-directive interview guide (see Appendix 1), we conducted nine interviews with museum professionals (directors and curators) from different countries. We analyzed and compared the interview data in order to explore the diversity of professional viewpoints. Finally, we present a critical discussion of this interpretative analysis in order to evaluate the importance and pertinence of the findings. In the conclusion we suggest future avenues of research.

## Literature Review

### *The Concept of Edutainment*

According to Addis (2005), edutainment is a portmanteau word combining education and entertainment. The emergence of this neologism and its rapidly growing use reflect a convergence of the two sectors, in what King (1993) calls “a curious amalgam.”

Authors such as Rheingold (1992) and Mencarelli, Pulh and Marteaux (2007) examine the phenomenon of edutainment. The latter highlight the CREDOC study, which found that more than half of visitors judged museums to be unwelcoming. This finding suggests that there are still shortcomings that museums must address in order to build customer loyalty and attract new visitors. Based on observation of the trends and on their own analysis, the authors show that contemporary museumgoers seek an experience that is shared, user-friendly and interactive (in terms of other visitors, staff, exhibits, etc.). The pursuit of sensory and emotional stimulation is also a factor. Visitors thus have an expectation of a co-produced experience that will enable them to play an active and relational role within an exhibition that combines playful and educational elements (De Barnier and Lagier, 2012). The acknowledgement of this new reality by some museum professionals has led them to place greater emphasis on edutainment by promoting a blend of entertaining and educational aspects. Other professionals and stakeholders in the museum sector, however, continue to believe that to accommodate the more experience-centred expectations of their audience would be to compromise their offerings (Mencarelli, Pulh and Marteaux, 2007).

In his essay on virtual reality, Rheingold (1992) points out that new communication technologies greatly increase the potential for convergence of education and entertainment. Multimedia applications can be used to present the content of an exhibition within a virtual environment such that it is an actual re-creation of the exhibition. An example of this is the Google Art project (<http://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/project/art-project?hl=en>). The experience offered by a virtual edutainment environment is an immersive and participative one that can be understood through the concept of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1977). According to Rheingold (1992), this convergence and the expectations it fosters in the museumgoing public

## ABSTRACT

Based on a literature review and exploratory interviews, this article examines the concept of “edutainment” within the museum sector. Edutainment refers to the tendency of cultural institutions to incorporate elements of entertainment and interactivity into their offerings in order to attract new audiences, particularly young people. Edutainment presents both opportunities and risks. One of the main threats associated with the trend is the “Disneyfication” of cultural institutions. Following a theoretical and managerial analysis, the authors offer recommendations and suggest new avenues of research in the field of museum management.

## KEYWORDS

Museums, amusement parks, education, entertainment, edutainment, Disneylandization, Disneyfication

pose a serious threat to institutions intent on preserving their history and the traditional managerial approach.

We must point out here that one of the underlying reasons for the shift towards edutainment by heritage and museum institutions is budgetary. The amount of funding these institutions receive – if any – often depends on their attendance levels, which puts them under constant pressure to maintain or increase attendance figures. Museums therefore strive to attract new audiences, with an emphasis on younger visitors, by offering more entertaining and interactive displays, even though these may be more costly to implement (Courvoisier, Courvoisier and Jungen, 2010).

### *Museum Versus Amusement Park: High Culture Versus Popular Culture?*

This article and work published by Serge Chaumier (2005, 2011) represent the perspective on this topic of several French authors, most in the museum sector. While these works reveal a broad range of opinions, generally there is widespread scepticism and concern about what is seen as a too-rapid and excessive shift towards entertainment on the part of cultural institutions. According to these authors, this trend distorts the primary function of cultural institutions, which is the rigorous, if not scientific, transmission of heritage.

We will discuss the main ideas set out in Chaumier (2005, 2011) while also addressing those of other, mainly Anglo-Saxon, authors.

While asserting that museums and amusement parks are diametrically opposed, Chaumier (2005) nevertheless underlines some points of convergence. There is no denying the growing trend among museums to adopt the techniques and ethos typical of theme parks, frequently as a

response to pressure from local and regional authorities eager to boost the image and visibility of the region in order to attract more visitors. In view of this trend, it appears urgent to examine the consequences of the possible melding of the museum and amusement park sectors as the lines between the two grow increasingly blurred (Chaumier, 2005). In support of his argument, Chaumier cites works that describe the new exhibition itinerary as “Disneylandian” (Prado, 1995) or as drifting towards the amusement park (Michaud, 2003) and that warn against display designs that overshadow the works themselves (Harouel, 1998). Mairesse (2002) argues that, for better or worse, the “spectaculaire muséal” (spectacular museum design) is the dominant trend.

Theoretically, three boundaries can be drawn between the museum and the amusement park (Chaumier, 2005). First, the two types of institution can be distinguished based on scientific criteria. This raises the question of how far we are prepared to go to simplify a work of art or make it more accessible. Second, methodological criteria can be applied, accompanied by the question of how to define the educational challenges and their relation to pleasure. A third distinction can be made based on ethical criteria.

To gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of convergence, a few historical considerations are in order. After all, the culture of entertainment is not a new phenomenon and theme parks go back more than a century. In fact, they trace their roots to the medieval fair, although the recreational and liberatory functions of these fairs, which also featured sideshows and circus acts, have been reinterpreted to suit 20th-century tastes (Viel and Nivart, 2005). Amusement parks, meanwhile, trace their origins to the world of film (Chaumier, 2005).

The term “Disneylandization,” in reference to the first theme park, opened by the Disney group in Anaheim, California, in 1955, was

#### RÉSUMÉ

Cet article, fondé sur une recherche documentaire complétée par des entretiens exploratoires, porte sur le concept d'*edutainment* (éduvertissement), soit la tendance qu'ont les musées à rendre leur médiation culturelle plus ludique et interactive pour attirer de nouveaux publics, notamment de jeunes visiteurs. Ce phénomène récent présente, en effet, des occasions de même que des risques face à la menace de disneylandisation de ces institutions. Après une analyse du sujet sur les plans théorique et de la gestion, des recommandations et de nouvelles pistes de recherche sont préconisées en lien avec le management muséal.

#### MOTS CLÉS

Musées, parcs d'attractions, éducation, divertissement, éduvertissement, disneylandisation

coined in France by Brunel (2006). Brunel's work describes the prevailing trend towards capitalist-based mass tourism marked by globalization and profit maximization and grounded in consensual and stereotypical content (Casedas, 2011). Disneylandization also refers to the commodification of culture and the boom in the mass leisure industry (Vander Grucht, 2006). Art and culture experts describe it as a universal and inevitable phenomenon that affects not only tourism, culture and museums but society in general. The term has gained particular currency in the museum community, where it is used to describe certain changes that are perceived as aberrations. A similar view is taken of the gradual convergence of the museum and the amusement park (Casedas, 2011, p. 43). Despite the frequency of its use, however, the word Disneylandization represents a complex and poorly defined notion. Although often equated with a "nightmare" scenario, it covers a number of different situations and realities (Eyssartel and Rochette, 1992).

The relationship of the museum to the amusement park also raises the issue of the opposition between high culture (museum as temple) and popular culture (amusement park as pure entertainment). However, many smaller, local museums can be seen as channelling popular expressions of high culture without any apparent contradiction or significant divergence from traditional curatorial discourse. Through his analysis of cultural practices, independent of the meaning given to them by their actors, Bourdieu (1979) contributes to the relativization of the line between museum and amusement park. For example, how should one classify the Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie in Paris, or the Futuroscope in Poitiers – as museums or as science amusement parks? Indeed, it is not always easy when visiting a cultural institution to determine whether one is in a park or a museum. The lines between the cultural and the recreational or entertaining are often blurred.

According to Montpetit (2005), theme parks incorporate images and themes borrowed from stories in popular culture. Walt Disney summarized the idea for his park in California as a cartoon in which the audience becomes immersed. He conceived Disneyland as a place for people to find happiness and knowledge (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). This objective is one that is shared by many museums.

It should be noted here that, while museums tend to inject elements of entertainment into culture, conversely many businesses attempt to incorporate culture into the area of consumption and entertainment. For example, shopping centres open their doors to cultural institutions in a bid to promote their offerings and attract new customers. A case in point is the Ivry-Grand-Ciel shopping centre in France, which played host to the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle in order to reach a broader audience (Girault and Lemire, 2000). Another example is when companies offer their customers spaces that are not easily classified, such as ESPN Zone (Entertainment and Sports Programming Network) (Kozinets et al., 2004) and Nike Town in Chicago (Penaloza, 1998). As a growing number of museum activities find their way into the retail world (e.g., department stores and shopping centres), it is becoming increasingly difficult to draw a clear boundary between the two domains (Mairesse, 2011).

### *Emergence of the Experience Economy*

In both the museum realm and the retail world, the emergence of new, experience-based economic forms is a clear trend. Traditional offerings of products and services now come with an important new ingredient. The "e-factor," or entertainment factor, has become a driving force in the global economy. Wolf (1999), for example, refers to the "entertainmentization" of the economy. This trend has increased the blurring of the lines

#### RESUMEN

*En el presente artículo, basado en una investigación documental complementada con entrevistas exploratorias, se estudia el concepto de edutainment (educación diversión), es decir, la tendencia que hoy día muestran los museos en hacer más lúdica e interactiva la mediación cultural para atraer nuevos públicos, principalmente jóvenes visitantes. Este reciente fenómeno comporta, de hecho, riesgos y oportunidades frente a la amenaza de disneylización de estas instituciones. Tras un análisis del tema desde una óptica teórica y de gestión, se preconizan recomendaciones y nuevas vías de investigación en el ámbito de la gestión museística.*

#### PALABRAS CLAVE

*Museos, parques de atracción, educación, entretenimiento, edutainment disneylización*

between entertainment and non-entertainment, with more and more consumers looking for the e-factor in everything that attracts their interest (Wolf, 1999). In an increasingly competitive market, offering entertaining content and a strong experience has become imperative in the race to capture the public's attention. When people buy an experience, they are paying for a memorable event created by an organization that is eager to connect with them on a personal level. The more effective the experience in engaging all the senses, the more memorable it is likely to be (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). This context has placed museums at the heart of a new economy that is based not simply on contemplation and the acquisition of knowledge, but also on the generation of creative and memorable experiences (Mairesse, 2011).

### *The Spectacularization of Museum Exhibitions*

The movement known as *Muséologie nouvelle et expérimentation sociale* (MNES; New Museology and Social Experimentation) was founded in the 1980s as a French-based European association whose aim was to demystify museums and make them accessible to a broader audience. The movement promoted the incorporation of storytelling and dramatic staging into exhibitions, signalling a shift from the didactic to the spectacular, or “from forum to decorum” (Mairesse, 2002). The spectacular museum is characterized by a preponderance of the image, the event and techniques (including publicity stunts) combined with playfulness. This approach is often associated with the pursuit of a consensual or unifying effect.

In Paris, the opening of the Centre Pompidou in 1977 marked a milestone in museum history. Large crowds turned out to visit this “factory of multicoloured tubes,” ride its escalators up to the exhibitions, sip coffee, browse through books or attend a concert (Mairesse, 2011<sup>1</sup>). As would be the case for many other museum institutions, the spectacular dimension of the Centre Pompidou was articulated first and foremost in its architecture and in the promotion of the venue itself.

Amusement parks have long been defined by their spectacular design. They offer spectacles designed to trigger a strong experiential charge supported by aesthetic concepts and principles aimed at inspiring awe and surprise (Counts, 2009). Until very recently, few museum exhibitions had succeeded in making effective use of

spectacle in their design, two of these being *Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition*, a touring show, and *Dinosphere*, a permanent exhibition at the Children's Museum of Indianapolis. Later initiatives, such as the *Star Wars Identities* exhibition in Montreal (Vigneault, 2012), illustrate that the convergence of spectacle and museum design can be extremely rewarding.

The attractions at Disneyworld, EPCOT, Universal Studios and the like have a strong appeal for the public. It is not surprising, therefore, that numerous other industries (sport, leisure, retail) look to them for inspiration. Counts (2009) identifies four categories of technique associated with the design of these spectacular offerings: dramatic effects (e.g., sound and light); plot (mainly through the development of a story that builds to a climax); grand scale (e.g., the use of IMAX or giant screens); and authenticity (i.e., credibility of the effects used). In the case of museums, authenticity is certainly a criterion. If this condition is met, a spectacular exhibition design can immerse visitors in the story, allowing them to become witnesses and active participants in some of the activities.

One of the criticisms made of spectacular exhibitions is that they tend not to ask questions or to offer a critical perspective on the subject matter. It is because of this undemanding, slightly enchanted aspect that these exhibitions have been referred to as “Disneylandian mechanisms” (Drouguet, 2005). In the absence of any systematic, global system of evaluation for this type of offering, attendance figures are the only gauge of success or failure. The investment must be amortized, leading to the frequent use of sponsorships, which can have a questionable effect on content and communication. Moreover, there is no evidence that attending this type of event – a museum-amusement park hybrid – significantly increases attendance at traditional museums by people who are not predisposed to visit museums (Drouguet, 2005).

According to Montpetit (2005), the visitor experience has become a priority for museums. In this regard, it is important to point out that the crisis in education is in many respects inseparable from the cultural crisis. By switching the focus of learning from content to experience, the new pedagogues have, since the 1970s, cultivated a new relationship with culture. Learning while having fun has become the mantra of many an education department. People must not be made to wait; pleasure must be immediate. By the same token, it is growing increasingly obvious

that playfulness has become a watchword for exhibition designers: Visitors must never be bored, must not be aware of the passage of time and must be given the opportunity to fill their leisure hours (Chaumier, 2005).

Some authors perceive in this trend a veritable paradigm shift – from museums whose business is objects to organizations whose business is information (Freedman, 2000). At the same time, where museums once depended on public funding or philanthropy for their survival, they now depend on fundraising efforts whose success hinges on the extent to which the museum is able to meet market expectations. Where a museum's richness was once measured by the objects it possessed, its true value is now represented by the dissemination of information related to those objects. The museum has become a hub of information, filled with objects that can be digitized and governed by the principle of edutainment. It can be seen as “a great packager of knowledge, building seedpods and dispersing them into the community” (Freedman, 2000).

Among other trends, four forces have shaken the foundations of the great museums over the years: the democratization of travel, the mass production of cameras, the advent of radio and television, and the digital revolution (Freedman, 2000). These developments have provided individuals access to previously closed worlds of “wonders,” which they can easily discover in numerous ways. Museums disseminate their collections in books, brochures and the electronic media. Many of today's museums have Web sites offering an abundance of rich and attractive content. It is easy to see why museums that have chosen to follow this path look to Disney as a model: No other company has been able to take a single fairytale and package it simultaneously in the form of a film, DVD, book, Web site and line of merchandise.

### Conclusion

Whether it be museum or amusement park, culture can be transmitted in numerous ways, using a playful or educational approach, static or interactive mechanisms, and a more or less spectacular design. Experts in museography and science parks are suspicious of forms of cultural mediation that do not encourage visitors to ask questions beyond the basic sensorial experience they may have in a cultural venue, while promoters of cultural or commercial events no longer

hesitate to mix educational ingredients into their entertainment offerings.

As a result, there are increasing similarities between the “Disneylandized” world and the “museologized” world. After all, museums and amusement parks both represent relatively closed, secure worlds that are timeless and subject to commercial constraints and that use artifice to create memorable moments, a sense of awe and emotional experiences. The distinction between the two worlds can be subtle and even confusing. One thing is certain: It is no longer possible to view them in terms of a clear opposition between public and commercial interest, culture and entertainment, and elitist “scientificity” and popularization (Casedas, 2011). As early as 1985 Umberto Eco voiced concern that some American museums, drawing their inspiration from fairgrounds and circuses, had taken to lumping together original pieces with facsimiles and reconstitutions, with a penchant for decoration and lighting and mirror effects. On the other hand, numerous amusement parks were modelled after historical sites associated with museums in order to make their offerings more immersive. Due to their early emphasis on the visitor experience and interactivity, science museums were also a source of inspiration (Eyssartel and Rochette, 1992).

Tobelem (2011) uses the phrase “grands équipements de loisir culturel” (GELC – major cultural leisure facilities) for large-scale projects at the crossroads between theme parks and conventional museums. He does not see any continuity between museums, interpretation centres, wildlife parks, water parks, science centres and theme parks. According to Tobelem, GELCs are above all a means to enhance economic development at the local level through facilities capable of attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors a year, such as France's Futuroscope, Vulcania, Océanopolis and Le Puy du Fou. These attractions clearly straddle the line between entertainment and scientific dissemination, leisure and culture, conventional museum, and theme park.

In the next section we examine the perceptions and attitudes of museum professionals regarding the risks and opportunities of the edutainment trend within their institutions. Our aim is to provide insight into the concerns raised on this topic and into the potential elements of confusion between museums and amusement parks.

## Results

In order to obtain input from professionals associated with cultural institutions in the museum field, we carried out a qualitative study in the form of semi-directive interviews. Nine interviews were conducted with museum directors and curators in different countries using an interview guide (see Appendix 1) based on our literature review.

Respondents were asked to give their opinion on the different trends now being observed in the museum field. Our aim was twofold: to understand how they define the mission of a museum in the contemporary context, and to gather their views on the advantages and disadvantages of the edutainment trend within their organizations.

We designed the following research protocol: In the initial phase of the interview, respondents were asked to describe the mission of a museum (based first on the philosophy of the respondent's museum and then on a more global definition provided later in the interview). In the middle part of the interview, respondents were asked to give their professional opinion on the trend towards the theatricalization and spectacularization of museum offerings. Finally, a discussion was held on the experience of museum visitors and on the potential forging of links between museums and amusement parks.

## Analysis

A horizontal thematic content analysis was carried out. This was followed by a cross-interpretation of the results, leading to a discussion of the findings (Spiggle, 1994).

An inductive-deductive approach was used (Andréani and Conchon, 2002). Themes were identified empirically using a coding grid based on theoretical elements from the literature. The unit selected was a phrase, sentence or paragraph, depending on the homogeneity of meaning (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The analysis was conducted by distinguishing between the three interview phases described above. Six themes were identified: the mission and vocation of the museum, the concept of leisure and entertainment, the concept of spectacle and event, views on experience and re-enchantment, the role and impact of new technologies, and potential links between the museum and the amusement park.

## Mission and Vocation of the Museum

All of the professionals interviewed had a clear view of the current mission of their museum. However, a number of differences were observed in how they defined this mission.

Some cited a predominantly educational approach: *In my view, the vocation of a museum is to educate before entertaining, since its mission is to open people's minds to the world of art and help them develop an appreciation of it.* Others insisted on the need to introduce an element of leisure and entertainment: *The fine arts have the potential to become a leisure activity for many people; The notion of pleasure must be present.* Respondents in the latter group pointed to the strong links between art and society: *The links between life and art are multiplying to the point where we are seeing a blurring of the boundaries between genres.* These respondents saw this trend as fostering a form of cultural democratization: *It draws people in . . . it encourages people to reflect while having fun; Playfulness and even irony are excellent vehicles for communication.*

None of the respondents voiced negative opinions about the introduction of more attractive displays aimed at fostering a better understanding of the exhibited works.

## The Concept of Leisure and Entertainment

Echoing these initial perceptions, the concept of leisure and entertainment was brought up by all of the respondents, although they approached these themes in different ways.

Some respondents questioned the use of an approach based on the idea of leisure or entertainment as a constraint – a regrettable but unavoidable concept in a highly competitive world: *Right now, we're clinging to entertainment as a lifeline to help us cope with the growing challenge of changing patterns of cultural consumption.* Others took a more positive view of the trend, seeing in it the potential for fruitful change. They cited the benefits of offering a pleasant, emotional, amusing experience in the museum environment as a way of triggering an unforgettable experience and memories for visitors.

All, however, expressed a need to set limits in order to avoid excesses: *A museum is a cultural centre first and an entertainment and event-based centre second.* Indeed, some activities or events

offered by museums were perceived as being too spectacular and ephemeral: *At the request of parents, I've tried organizing children's birthday parties in my museum, but it isn't ideal for their offspring, who would rather be at McDonald's.*

There was consensus among all the museum professionals that, if left unchecked, an approach centred on the event and the spectacle could have harmful long-term effects, distorting the mission of their institution: *You can't emphasize the event over the works. You have to strike a balance, creating a museum that draws in visitors, that is user-friendly, pleasant, human and welcoming.*

### The Concept of Spectacle and Event

The risk here stems from the fact that, by emphasizing style over substance, the spectacular effect being sought can function in a way that is detrimental to the works. While the incorporation of some elements of leisure and entertainment into the museum experience seemed to be generally accepted, attitudes were divided on the concept of spectacularization and an event-driven approach.

Attitudes ranged from total resistance – *The most outrageous . . . use of spectacle can be seen in the recent exhibitions of Jeff Koons and Murikami at the Château de Versailles! The choice of artists has become too easy . . . these days, you need "pompiers," artists who make people exclaim, "Wow, what a show!" . . . In my view, this attitude is pathetic. It's a reflection of the current pop market – to more moderate appraisals – A spectacular exhibition must be combined with real objects . . . however, it can still offer contrasts . . . contradictions.* This divergence of opinion reflects the key questions raised by the spectacularization of museum offerings: How far should museums go? What are the limits? Should one let the focus shift away from the works to serve purposes other than those originally intended?

For museum professionals, the theatricalization of the space or the event creates ambiguity between the museum sector and the tourism or business sector: *Night at the Museum events such as that held in Lausanne . . . work well, but many curators have the impression that visitors come to the museum that one time only and don't return the rest of the year . . . each time, only a few visitors are reached.*

A museum curator who is enthusiastic about one type of exhibition – *In museology, there's . . .*

*the notion of blockbusters, which are extremely lucrative and have very broad appeal – might take offence at another – The Bodies exhibition . . . can't be called a museum exhibition . . . its aim is purely commercial. Have you seen the entrance fee? Twenty dollars per child. That's not how a non-profit works. It's something else entirely. It's not museology.*

Thus, while the museum professionals were in favour of edutainment, they questioned the advantages of excessive spectacularization. Indeed, they could be strong advocates of this trend while at the same time expressing doubts about its true benefits.

### Views on Experience and Re-enchantment

Clearly, the major concern of all the directors and curators was to promote their works more effectively in a traditional museum world that is often perceived as drab and sterile. Many interviewees expressed a desire to transform the museum into a more playful and interactive place: *We want the experience to be enriching, pleasant, and consistent with the visitor's competencies.*

However, they had different opinions about what this renewed experience should look like: *We're breaking out of the box within which museums have traditionally presented their exhibitions – in other words, we're attempting to offer the consumer a richer experience; We're moving towards an experience-driven culture as a result of the democratization of culture . . . we have to accept this trend or we'll be lost.*

Within this dynamic environment, some museum professionals were embracing innovation and creativity. The curator of the Musée d'Ethnographie de Neuchâtel had introduced the concept of storytelling to help guide visitors through their museum experience. The director of the Musée des Beaux-Arts de La Chaux-de-Fonds had published a small book titled *Milton au Musée* (Milton at the Museum) giving young readers an opportunity to visit the museum in an entertaining way, accompanied by the humorous comments of a black cat.

At the same time, they were extremely cautious on this topic: *Experience is a very important aspect . . . it helps to demystify the museum and engage the senses; We must be careful – the experiential universe can distort the work, understood in the strict sense; The experience-driven approach could become dangerous if people start confusing*

*hyperreality and daily reality; Experience can distract visitors from the artistic reality . . . making them forget what they came to see or discover . . . they can become overwhelmed by the overly imaginary or fairytale aspect of the environment.*

The ambivalence of respondents' comments also reveals a reluctance to overstep boundaries. The risk in cultivating entertainment or experience within the museum's walls is that the public will be able to feel sensations and emotions only in an idyllic universe that is disconnected from reality: *We have to demystify art without confusing everything; The limits are determined by the world we want people to discover and the means used to help them do so; Augmented reality is fine if all we have are fragments or if we want to evoke missing elements; Hyperreality, such as that offered in amusement parks, can be used to produce contrast, but not as the basis for the entire exhibition.*

The museum professionals agreed, therefore, on the need to develop new experiential modes and to introduce re-enchantment, but they were acutely aware of the limits of this approach and the danger of the public losing its bearings. They clearly did not want fiction to overtake reality, or reality to imitate fiction by sublimating the works being displayed.

### **Role and Impact of New Technologies**

The interactive devices (audioguides, tactile panels, video screens, information kiosks, immersive spaces, etc.) implemented by museums were seen as presentation elements that facilitate access to and complement the works but that must not under any circumstances obscure them or eclipse their true meaning: *Interactive devices are fine when they encourage people to discover the work but without straying too far from the artist's discourse.* The exasperated comments of some respondents reveal genuine concern: *I find [interactive displays] irritating . . . they distract from the work . . . being in front of a screen gets in the way of sensations and emotions; Touch screens, visits via the Internet? Those are virtual visits. Nothing can compare with the sensation of standing in front of a real painting or sculpture.*

At the same time, all of the respondents agreed on the informative and practical value of the new technologies: *People nowadays are accustomed to always having information at their fingertips . . . when they find themselves in a museum that gives only the artist's name, the title of the work and the*

*date, it's no longer acceptable . . . and since you can't put reams of text up on the walls, the only [alternative is] these new technologies.* This acknowledgement does not mean, however, that they saw technology as playing a primary role: *Technology is just one means behind the concept . . . the exhibition design . . . all of the team's efforts were focused on giving meaning to all of this, and we used a bit of technology to do so but [mainly] we used exhibition design.*

The adoption of interactive devices is therefore not something to be taken lightly. The main objective remains to convey information essential for an understanding of the works being displayed. However, the implementation of these devices – whether on site or off site (via Web sites, blogs, applications or social networks) – must not overshadow the nature and philosophy of the objects presented, because the museum professionals first want to consider the significance of the devices they will be adopting.

### **Potential Links Between the Museum and the Amusement Park**

The issue of potential links between the museum and the amusement park did not seem to be a significant concern for the directors and curators. In their view, the museum is still primarily a space that encourages questioning and artistic exchange: *Exhibiting [works] means disrupting harmony and taking the visitor out of his or her comfort zone.*

Only one respondent mentioned a problem in this regard: *The architecture of a venue such as the Guggenheim Museum can shift the focus . . . people come more to discover the beauty and grandeur of the building than to admire the works . . . An exhibition is appealing only if it's compatible with the work of the artist . . . otherwise it's of no interest whatsoever.* The reference here is to cases where the building becomes at least as important as the exhibitions or collections presented. Parallels can indeed be drawn between this approach and amusement parks, where the design of the space is paramount.

Other respondents mentioned possible links with the works on display: *The work itself can be an attraction, as in the case . . . of a sound or visual installation that attracts a very large number of spectators; The work can . . . become the true spectacle by virtue of its size or scale.*

None of the museum professionals appeared to be concerned that convergence of the museum and the amusement park might be dangerous or negative, as they all believed they were acting in an ethically responsible way by ensuring that the work remained central at all times.

### *Interpretation of Results*

One of the aims of these nine face-to-face qualitative interviews was to determine the views of museum professionals on the advantages, disadvantages and limits of the principle of edutainment in relation to their institution. There appeared to be consensus on the inevitability of the edutainment trend in a globalized world that prioritizes entertainment and the experiential. Once again, while some respondents expressed grudging acceptance of this new reality, others had adopted a more positive and spontaneous attitude. In the view of the latter group, there is nothing inherently reprehensible about developing a happy, pleasant and sensory relationship between the audience and the works on display.

On the other hand, all of the museum professionals voiced extreme caution regarding the dangers of edutainment initiatives. Their wariness can be linked to a concern that an emphasis on the spectacular or the ephemeral will result in the works having only a passing effect on visitors and that the use of technique and artifice will overshadow the artistic approach. They agreed unanimously that every effort must be made to ensure harmony with the main focus – that is, the work, its discourse and its inception. The setting and design (including any interactive devices) must not be allowed to obstruct the discovery of and access to the work.

Content, in this context, takes precedence over form, which is viewed simply as a facilitator. The respondents believed that this constitutes the main strength of a museum; while the visit may incorporate elements of entertainment and leisure, the focus must be on the conservation and enhancement of the works on display. Given this imperative, the establishment of closer ties with the world of amusement parks is still a long way off, and even highly uncertain in some cases. Whereas amusement parks are perceived as places to have fun, museums are conceived as places for learning and cultural development.

While a clear dichotomy continues to exist between these two worlds, the museum

professionals did not appear to feel threatened by the potential Disneylandization of their activities and were even cautiously optimistic. At the same time, however, there was consensus on the need to guard against the commodification of culture and to avoid excessive spectacularization, especially where the sole aim is to boost attendance.

Though some divergences could be noted, the views of the museum professionals are consistent with those presented in the literature. In a number of cases, the vision of the museum experience and potential sources of re-enchantment seemed to be well developed. This suggests that museum professionals are receptive to the influences of edutainment, in keeping with the inescapable logic of the blockbuster shows that has taken root in our society.



### **Discussion**

Conducting a mainly exploratory qualitative study is always a difficult undertaking. Adding to the difficulty in our study was the sensitive nature of the issues for the interviewees. Indeed the very concept of the museum and the definitions of the roles and responsibilities of those who work in them are called into question by the seemingly unstoppable edutainment trend. In order to validate our results it would be beneficial to interview a larger number of museum directors and curators and to seek greater variation in the types of institution and positions within them. The research would also be enriched by interviews with representatives of companies specializing in the implementation of edutainment devices. Finally, surveying the different publics for their reactions would contribute to our understanding of the edutainment trend. We use “publics” in the plural here to emphasize the fact that, like museum professionals, visitors can have varied views on the phenomenon of edutainment. The studies and indicators currently available do not allow us to capture the reactions in all of their diversity.

We can assume, however, that the process by which visitors apprehend and assimilate the museum and amusement park experience is based on different mechanisms: While a visit to an amusement park generates a highly emotional, family-centred memory that is mainly temporary, a visit to a museum leaves a deeper, more reflective mark that contributes to the individual’s enrichment over a longer period (Gob, 2011).

In spite of these limitations, a number of conclusions can be drawn from the results. First, while museum professionals did not always agree on the appropriateness or potential risks of edutainment, they did not seem to harbour any strong or direct hostility towards it. Their attitude usually depended on the conditions as well as on the different forms of the new edutainment tools, including whether commercial brands were being promoted. We are now seeing the emergence of an interstitial space between the museum in the traditional sense and the amusement park with its vocation of pure entertainment. This new intermediate space forms a continuum along which our respondents can be positioned based on the specific characteristics of each situation. It is clear that the attitude of museum professionals depends, globally, on the nature of the museum, its history, its strategic direction and the type of collections or exhibitions it presents. All indications are that this continuum will inform the broad trend that museums can be expected to follow in the future.

Some institutions that are more ambiguous in status opt for a “third way.” They reject the image of the museum as boring while remaining faithful to their educational role. At the same time, they borrow recreational elements associated with the amusement park in order to offer their visitors cultural leisure experiences. Two examples from France will serve to illustrate. In its press kit, the Nausicaa Sea Center in Boulogne-sur-Mer is touted as “neither a museum nor an aquarium.” On its Web site, it is described as “a place to learn and to dream. . . . Powerful, emotive experiences at Nausicaa give you unique insights about the world’s seas and oceans” (<http://www.nausicaa.co.uk/>). The other example, Paléosite in Saint-Cézaire, is promoted as a “new, interactive, thematic concept devoted to prehistory and combining education and fun, without the static collections typical of museums” (Casedas, 2011<sup>1</sup>).

With regard to our two research questions, several criteria appear to influence how a museum positions itself on the museum–amusement park continuum: a credible scientific posture as opposed to a purely entertainment approach based on an inclusive, mainstream orientation; a heritage mission, whether explicit or implicit; the display of objects according to a predetermined arrangement, or, conversely, openness to combinations based on an interactive approach; the natural topography of the venue, or an artificial or even hyperreal topography; the presence or absence of spectacular and immersive displays; and the popularity of the region as a tourist

destination (Gob, 2010, 2011). While these criteria alone do not allow us to establish a clear typology of edutainment, they can nonetheless help us to better understand the world of edutainment institutions.

Finally, our findings suggest some avenues for future research. First, each of the limitations cited carries the potential for interesting work beyond this exploratory analysis. The topicality and importance of the phenomenon more than justify further efforts. Second, a more detailed study of edutainment in the museum field could provide a rich illustration of increasingly hybrid cultural and commercial strategies, as evidenced by the intersection of art with science, games, entertainment and business. Beyond the cultural sector, the convergence of marketing, entertainment and art seems to be a key element in many of today’s branding and positioning strategies, as suggested by Wolf’s (1999) concept of the “entertainmentalization” of the economy. An in-depth exploration of this complex issue and the challenges it poses for society should include a closer look at the redefinition of models for museums and cultural management in order to gain a better understanding of their effects. One of the questions raised, for example, is how to ensure that the strategy of openness pursued by numerous museums does not amount simply to a “form of imitation of the leisure and entertainment sector” (Tobelem, 2005<sup>1</sup>).

Our findings lead us to offer a number of managerial recommendations for museum professionals. Cross-fertilization between the museum sector and the entertainment sector through partnerships, conferences and educational programs could prove very useful. One of the benefits might be an opportunity to offer edutainment experiences to audiences who are hungry for creative and entertaining activities. A more detailed study of visitor expectations would deepen our understanding of the level of engagement sought by visitors in order to form new economic relationships, such as those encountered on eBay or My Major Company, where the user becomes a veritable actor-entrepreneur in the economic models developed. Web 2.0, for instance, allows visitors to become co-contributors in museums’ online communications, in the process turning them into co-curators and co-creators of works (Mencarelli and Pulh, 2012).

#### Notes

1. Translated from the original French.

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# PDF Editor

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Introduction

The aim of this interview is to learn about the philosophy of your museum and to gain an understanding of its objectives and its mission. To this end, I will first ask you to describe your museum, its history and its educational strategy. I will then ask several questions relating to current trends in the museum field and ask for your professional opinion about these trends. The interview should take no longer than one hour. Do you agree to start?

### 1. Begin by describing your museum – its history, philosophy, personality, etc.

*Probes:*

- What type of museum is it (art museum, contemporary art museum, art and science museum, other type of institution, entertainment or recreational site, etc.)?
- Is your museum’s mission primarily entertainment-oriented or educational?
- Has this mission changed over time? If so, why and how?

**2. What do you think of the following definition of a museum:** “A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (International Council of Museums)?

*Probes:*

- What do you think of the term “enjoyment” as used in this definition? Can it be associated with the field of leisure and entertainment? Within what limits?
- In your expert opinion, what techniques or devices can a museum use to achieve these (its) objectives?
- For example, should museums consider having commercial activities to ensure their viability and meet their needs (merchandise, accommodation, restaurant services, etc.)?
- In your view, is there a difference between the promotion of elitist, “legitimate” culture (whose understanding requires a certain amount of effort and reflection) and a more accessible or popular culture (acquired through experimentation and sensitive reason)?
- What type of culture should a (your) museum promote? Why and how?

### 3. Can you tell me what you think of the current trend towards the “spectacularization” of the offerings of museums (or museum institutions)?

*Probes:*

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the thematization, spatialization and incorporation of storytelling in the offering?
- What should be offered to visitors in a museum? What is expected of visitors to a museum?
- Cultural learning? An experience rich in emotions and sensations? A moment of unforgettable discovery? A return to one’s roots?
- In your opinion, what is (are) the best and most intelligent way(s) to make art more accessible?
- What do you think of the scandal (or success) surrounding recent and current exhibitions at the Château de Versailles (Jeff Koons, Murakami, etc.)?

**4. Do you believe that visitors to a (your) museum should be offered a specific type of experience?**

*Probes:*

- If yes, how and why? In the form of a special route through the museum? A certain type of discourse? Interactivity?
- Is the emotional, sensorial dimension the most important one in this experiential context?
- If not, why?
- Does the work of art itself not suffice to generate this emotional experience?
- Is there not a risk of distorting the work in an overly experience-oriented universe? Of creating distance between the visitor and the artistic reality?

**5. Do you think that links can be drawn between certain museums (or museum institutions) and certain amusement parks today?**

*Probes:*

- In your opinion, are these links normal or dangerous?
- Are there limits to this trend? If so, what are they?
- Do you think there is a great need on the part of visitors for re-enchantment and to see the world through the eyes of a child?
- What are the main reasons for this?



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