


## ***Liberté, Liberté Chérie* or How an Engaged Exhibition is Received by High School Students. An Ethno-Didactic Approach**

### ***Liberté, Liberté Chérie* ou Como uma Exposição Engajada É Recepcionada por Alunos do Ensino Médio. Uma Abordagem EtnoDidática**

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#### **Abstract**

This article analyses a very special school visit with high school students to a museum that is the former prison in Nice (France) and which presents the exhibition, *Liberté, Liberté Chérie*, on the concept of Freedom. After presenting the museographic and scenographic options of this exhibition, the reflection proposes a theoretical orientation and methodological tools that define an ethno-didactic approach and make it possible to analyse how the reception of the exhibition and the works of art is constructed individually and collectively.

**Keywords:** museum; exhibition; reception; freedom and loss of freedom.

#### **Resumo**

Este artigo analisa uma visita escolar muito especial com alunos do ensino médio a um museu que é a antiga prisão em Nice (França) e apresenta a exposição *Liberté, Liberté Chérie*, sobre o conceito de Liberdade. Após apresentar as opções museográficas e cenográficas dessa exposição, a reflexão propõe uma orientação teórica e ferramentas metodológicas que definem uma abordagem etnodidática e permitem analisar como a recepção da exposição e das obras de arte é construída individual e coletivamente.

**Palavras-chave:** museu; exposição; recepção; liberdade e perda da liberdade.

We were thus trying out an education that seemed to us to be the one we needed. Identified with the conditions of our reality. Really instrumental, because it was integrated into our time and space and led man to reflect on his ontological vocation to be a subject. And if we were already thinking of an active method capable of criticising man through the debate of challenging situations posed to the group, these situations would have to be existential for the groups. Otherwise, we would be repeating the mistakes of an alienated, and therefore instrumental, education (FREIRE, 1967, p. 106, personal translation).

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## Introduction

*Liberté, Liberté Chérie* is the title of an exhibition held between 28 June and 15 September 2019 at the Espace culturel départemental Lympia (now Espace Lympia), the former penal colony that has been preserved and transformed into a museum space<sup>2</sup> in the city of Nice in France.

The exhibition attracts many visitors and some school visits, mainly from local high school students (aged 15 to 18). The exhibition was held during the summer holidays in July and August, so few classes signed up. Three classes came in the first week of September, but they were geographically close to the museum and only visited part of the exhibition due to lack of time. On 9 September 2019, two classes from a secondary school in another city signed up, and the museum educator invited me to observe them. I met the two teachers outside the museum, briefly introduced myself and mentioned the work I was doing (research to understand how students can appropriate the works in the museum) and asked permission to accompany them, observe them and take notes of everything they said and where they went, knowing that everything would be anonymous. They authorised me to make an audio recording with my mobile phone. The situation was unprecedented. In my previous research<sup>3</sup>, I was the one who chose the classes (at least the academic level) and the museum, and everything is planned weeks in advance, according to the focus of the research project. The museum educator I had met on my previous visits to this exhibition questioned her attitude and how to adapt to a school audience. I had a long interview with her at the museum (the Saturday before the school visit), where she confided in me about the difficulty of changing from one audience to another (adults, young people, schoolchildren) and the lack of "adherence" with the school audience, the need to adapt to their culture and experience... however, she is convinced that the theme of freedom is of interest to them, that the engaging exhibition should make an impact on visitors whatever their age.

I usually draw up research projects and select the museums, schools and audiences that allow me to address the questions posed. The context of this research experience changes and upsets the way I work methodologically. I didn't know the classes or the context of the visit, which was presented to me by the teachers at the end of the visit, and I didn't film the visit (which is what I usually do) but I had many discussions with the museum educator. I became a visitor observer, which the two classes accepted, observing the visiting subjects and mingling with the groups that formed, recording the exchanges, following some visitors more than others... I experimented with ethnographic observation, blending into the exhibition environment with the agreement of the visitors.

A recurring question in my work guides my observation and the reflection developed in the rest of this article: what happens during a school visit that weighs on, influences, makes possible or not the reception of an exhibition and the works that make it up? Visiting a museum is both a social practice and a sensitive, intimate (individual) and shared (collective) experience that allows each visitor to receive a message that the curator's museography and museology work has conceived through a few choices that

<sup>2</sup> I use the term "museum space" in a generic way because this exhibition space does not hold any artworks and does not have its own collections.

<sup>3</sup> At the time of this research, I was a professor with a doctorate at the University Côte d'Azur and led the LINE research group (Laboratory for Innovation and Digital Education).

display the works. Davalon (2010, p. 230) distinguishes between two conceptions of exhibition, the first involving the arrangement of things in space to make them visible, and the second in which exhibiting "means making something visible in order to make it understood - in other words, to say something". This exhibition falls into this second category.

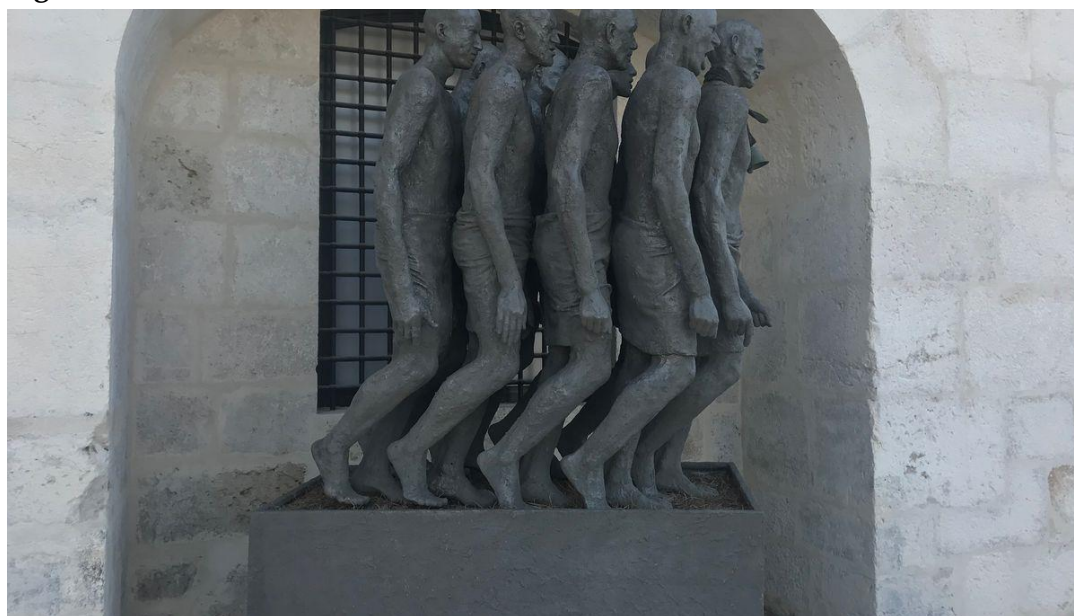
In the context of this article, I am developing a three-pronged approach. Firstly, I look back at the unique context of this visit, its observation and the exhibition that made it possible to build up analysable data. The second concerns the didactic approach to theoretically analysing the reception of the works. The final section focuses on certain exchanges that shed light on the receptions constructed in the tension between the collective and the individual.

## 1 Observing a School Visit to a Dedicated Exhibition

### 1.1 A Space Steeped in History

Espace Lympia is an atypical space made up of the former penal colony of Nice and the Pavillon de l'horloge, which have been restored and converted into exhibition galleries. The space has a history and a symbolism that lead to a unique reflection on freedom and the need to value it. Although no exhibition is neutral, since an exhibition always says something about the world and presents a vision of it, this exhibition invites us to reflect on freedom in a place that was precisely the loss of all freedom. The symbolism and tensions between freedom and lack of freedom are revealed from the outset.

**Figure 1** – GACSI, *Esclaves*



**Source:** Gacsi (2016). Exposição *Liberté, Liberté chérie* © Radio France - Daria Bonnin.

The two exhibition spaces are superimposed: the prison on the ground floor, with no direct communication with the upper floor, and the Pavillon de l'horloge, accessible by an external stone staircase that leads to a vast terrace, a courtyard, one could say, that is nothing more than the roof of the prison, offering a view of the

Mediterranean that invites reverie and travel. The pavilion has four floors, each with a room. The height and brightness of the pavilion contrasts with the dark, vaulted, L-shaped rooms of the penal colony. Women were imprisoned in the pavilion, while men were chained in the penal colony. The tour of the exhibition begins in the Penal Colony and continues in the Pavilion. Visitors are welcomed in the courtyard of the former penal colony in front of the sculpture *Esclaves* by Bernard Gacsi (2016), which recalls the history of the site and introduces the theme of the exhibition.

At the entrance, visitors discover a few lines from the poem *Liberté* by Paul Éluard (1968)<sup>4</sup>:

Sur mes Cahiers d'écolier  
Sur mon pupitre et les arbres  
Sur le sable et la neige  
J'écris ton nom  
Je suis né pour te connaître  
Pour te nommer  
Liberté  
Pau Éluard

This poem, written in 1942 during the German occupation of Paris, is a cry of hope and is considered in France to be a hymn to the Resistance. During the war, it was parachuted from Royal Air Force aeroplanes into the free lands of France, calling on everyone to join the Resistance. The title *Liberté, Liberté Chérie* isn't neutral either: it's one of the verses from *La Marseillaise* by Rouget de Lisle (1792), which became France's national anthem.

Amour sacré de la Patrie  
Conduis, soutiens nos bras vengeurs  
**Liberté, Liberté chérie,**  
Combats avec tes défenseurs! (*bis*)  
Sous nos drapeaux, que la victoire  
Accoure à tes mâles accents,  
Que tes ennemis expirants  
Voient ton triomphe et notre gloire!<sup>5</sup>

All these elements at the entrance to the exhibition set the tone, making freedom a common good and a historic achievement.

As Cristina Carvalho and Tamaris Lopes (2016, p. 911, personal translation) said:

The open space of the museum is also an integral factor in the acquisition of knowledge and differs in many ways from school spaces. Regardless of the age group or the type of museum, the visitor needs to be captivated by the exhibition throughout the journey, among themes and objects that produce meaning.ibo

<sup>4</sup> On my puppet and the trees / On the sable and the snow / I wrote my name / To name you / Freedom / Paul Éluard

<sup>5</sup> Sacred love of the Fatherland / Lead, support our avenging Arms/ Liberty, cherished Liberty / Fight with your defenders! (*bis*) / Under our flags, may victory / Accompanied by your masculine accents / May your expiring enemies / See your triumph and our glory!

### 1.2 An Engaged Exhibition

The exhibition features more than sixty works by thirty-two artists, including sculptures, paintings, videos and installations. The space is managed by an association, the Union<sup>6</sup> Méditerranéenne pour l'Art Moderne (now UMAM), chaired by Simone Dibo-Cohen, who is also the exhibition's curator. This association was created a year after the Second World War in response to the need for living artists to exhibit and express themselves again and for the public to visit museums again after six long years of deprivation of art and freedom. The association is committed to the idea of helping emerging artists and accompanying them through the exhibition process. The exhibition brings together works by established and sought-after artists and others who are generally exhibiting for the first time or almost for the first time.

At the opening, the curator confided that *La Liberté dévoilée* by artist-photographer Gérard Rancinan (2008) is the work around which the exhibition has been organised from a museography point of view. The scenography choice is interesting, as it is displayed on the penultimate floor of the Pavillon de l'horloge, as if to bring together all the key elements of the exhibition's message, before releasing visitors to make them feel at ease. She is also on this floor because the room is large enough to accommodate her, which would not have been possible in the (low and dark) prison room. The intention of the exhibition can be summarised in a few words:

The words Freedom and Art have always gone hand in hand. The artist's testimony seeks to provoke a reaction from the viewer. Challenging art that is content to be aesthetic and decorative, UMAM has chosen works and creators that can sometimes be disturbing, but above all open a door to hope (Dibo-Cohen, in UMAM<sup>7</sup>, 2019, p. 14, pers. transl.).

The main aim of the exhibition is to disturb. However, the artists and museography are guided by two guiding principles: freedom is questioned both as a quest and a condition of the artist's creative activity, and as a social and philosophical concept that allows us to reflect on the human condition. The entire exhibition is organised around these two themes, which are highlighted in the museography.

In this sense, this exhibition is a totally engaged art form, in which the visitor-spectator cannot simply look at and admire the works, but the exhibition must make the visitor react and act, become aware of their condition as men and women in relation to freedom and in relation to others. Engaged art therefore leads to an encounter with oneself and with others, as Sonja Kellenberger (2006, p. 191) says: "Similarly, it is appropriate not only to talk about the presence of otherness in the works (referring above all to the question of its representation), but above all to place the encounter with the other (as a principle of action and a vector for creation) at the center of the examination." (2006, p. 191, personal translation) The mediation observed converges in this sense, with the aim of shocking the individual to regenerate the collective and involve everyone, if not in a political conscience, at least in a civic struggle.

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<sup>6</sup> Mediterranean Union for Modern Art

<sup>7</sup> UMAM refers to the exhibition catalog editors; the authors are sometimes identified only by their initials.

### 1.2.1 The Freedom to Create

One of the structures for the works on show is the reference to other works and the connections between them. Many of the artists in this exhibition are following in the footsteps of others who have gone before them, not to borrow an idea from them, but to create a new idea that is part of art history and echoes history. Gérard Rancinan's *La Liberté dévoilée* (2018) is inspired by Eugène Delacroix's *La Liberté guidant le peuple* (1830), but alongside the Plexiglas photograph is a film showing actors acting out the creation of the work. So, it's not so much a tribute to Delacroix that's on show, but rather what his work inspires in our society, where barricades take on other forms:

He chose to develop the very conflicting religious freedom in our society, through a veiled woman guiding the people, while freedom of opinion wants to find its echo on television, the press covering the barricade and the crumbling Berlin Wall. (Gaudriault apud UMAM, 2019, p. 68, personal translation)

Philippe Nuell (2017) also talks about the restrictions he imposes on himself when working with works that he takes the liberty, according to him, of "appropriating". This is the case with *Life is good*, in which he portrays Duane Hanson's 1971 sculpture *Sunbather* in a new setting. While the latter denounced the American dream, Philippe Nuell invites us to reflect on the freedom to consume a luxury that may not exist. "This artificial freedom is only a reflection of a dream of happiness, that of contemporary individualism, which is both illusory and alienating." (J.L./A.L., apud UMAM, 2019, p. 60). In *Le Petit Prince*, Ramezani Kianoush speaks out against self-censorship, arguing that artists, like everyone else, are just little princes on their own planets, in reference to the work of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (2007):

I think that each individual is unique, and each person has their own orbit of freedom, like a planet. So, freedom doesn't end where other people's freedom begins! In my orbit, freedom is essential, fundamental and, of course, it never ends. (Kianoush, apud UMAM, 2019, p. 48, personal translation)

The reference here to the literary work shows, on the one hand, that the artist is seeking to create a connivance with his spectator, who is supposedly capable of mobilising the emotion and capital of sympathy that the image of *Le Petit Prince* carries in French society and beyond, but also the way in which he inscribes his militant act: to reach the largest number of insurgent spectators against incomprehension and self-censorship.

If every text is an intertext (Barthes, 1973), we can see here how artistic creation also invokes this creative process of borrowing, deviation, allusion and reference to other works. "Intermediality" (Müller, 2000) takes on its full meaning here, showing how art goes beyond the limits and categories in which we try to classify it. The exhibition reveals a wide range of artistic practices, in which absorption, recycling, borrowing, winking and hijacking are sources of creation.

### 1.2.2 Freedom to Think

The artists in the exhibition have a unique view of freedom. For Victor Soren, freedom is an illusion, a fantasy; even before birth, freedom no longer exists. *The Great Inheritance I* and *The Great Inheritance II* represent a world kept on a tight leash by the military and finance: "The whole planet is under control, and everything is fine in this world," he writes (Soren *apud* UMAM, 2019, p. 76).

The artist The Kid continues the metaphor of a freedom aborted before birth, asking the question about our heritage: "Will it limit our opportunities?" The sculpture *Too Young to die* (2013) depicts a premature baby in an incubator, his face and body tattooed with the colours of the gang he was born into. Gerard Taride's work is a reflection of determinism: determinism can become fatalism.

While Gérard Rancinan's work questions religious freedom, Gérard Haton-Gauthier's *Freedom to Think* (2019) asks about choice at the crossroads: does religion allow us to make that choice or does it restrict it? Religions are sometimes moral and sometimes they are also "forces of death", but "where would freedom be if, in the name of secularism, they became a force of prohibition?" (J.L. *apud* UMAM, 2019, p. 40) The artist Shadi Rezaei presents *Goemetry of pain* (2016) accompanied by a video on two screens depicting a filmed performance, *When the Curtain Fall*, Video and Sound, 2017. The video shows a woman's body constrained, bound and in pain, from which liberation requires the greatest contortions: what are Iranian women liberating themselves from? From the weight of tradition and religion? Or from themselves, allowing themselves to be free?

History is invited to take a look back at freedom. Mauro Corda presents five plaster statues, each representing a dwarf-sized dictator (Caesar, Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini and Mao). *Un autre monde* (2019) invites us to reflect: if they had been represented as dwarfs, off their pedestals, would they have been followed? What role does appearance play in the attribution of power? Stefano Bombardieri's (2010) installations explore the role of lies in establishing Nazi ideology and the process of negationism, in particular "Lüge macht frei" (Lies set you free), which refers to the expression "Arbeit macht frei" (Labour sets you free) inscribed at the entrance to the Auschwitz camp. In this way, the character in the fable *The Adventures of Pinocchio* allows us to revisit the history of the Holocaust:

The victims are transformed into lying Pinocchios and the concentration camps in *Toyland*. The installation evokes the seductive power of lies in political discourse, but also invites us to reflect on the meaning and possibility of freedom in one of history's darkest chapters. On the one hand, the artist questions the desirability of the victims being able to recover it, even in a physically liberated state; on the other, he criticises the fallacious attempts to free themselves from the memory of the Holocaust, a memory that must necessarily be preserved (E/G. *apud* UMAM, 2019, p. 30).

Social criticism is also present, with two themes in particular: consumer society and homosexuality. Gérard Taride, an artist from Nice, designed an installation especially for this exhibition: *Prison dorée* (2019), in which visitors can enter and discover all the elements of permanent alienation: screens, social networks, Xanax and other drugs, digital codes, permanent surveillance cameras... in the center, an armchair and a

firearm, the only way out... maybe! Finally, *Déjeuner sur l'herbe II* (2006), by Miryan Klein, shows a social shift towards the freedom to expose one's homosexuality. It refers to the famous painting *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) by Édouard Manet, which caused an aesthetic and moral scandal in its day by showing a naked woman sitting on the grass, looking at the viewer, accompanied by two clothed men. Davide Meneghello is presenting a triptych *Untitles (Sailors)* (2018). Each triptych (30x40 cm) displays images obscured by historical conservatism, focusing on images of homosexual intimacy that history has sought to suppress.

Without presenting all the works, this retrospective presents the museography choices that led to the conception and creation of an exhibition that affirms its freedom to expose, to provoke, to shake, to disturb and, above all, to raise awareness that freedom is the most fragile and perhaps the most important thing for humanity to cherish.

### 1.3 The Context of the Visit

The visit observed and studied concerned two classes at a technological secondary school, one of which is part of the micro-lycée project. This program allows students (between the ages of 16 and 25) who have left the school system to resume their studies with a view to going on to higher education. Freedom is a subject close to their hearts, and they have a shared and sometimes unique concept of it, linked to their own life story. In the students' words, freedom seems to mean the possibility of doing what they want, without restrictions, but some also refer to freedom as opposed to prison.

These students are part of a "Le Jardin de la Paix" (Peace Garden) program that involves their school and many other citizens in the commemoration of the victims of the attacks that have taken place in Nice and France in recent years. They are used to encountering a discourse of tolerance and are sensitive to the issues that permeate French society in relation to immigration and racism, terrorism and the acceptance of religious differences.

So, this visit is part of a cultural and civic education program that will undoubtedly influence the way they take an interest in the works of art on display.

### 1.4 Ethno-didactic Observation

The didactic approach I propose is based on an understanding of real, observed situations, which the theoretical model transforms into didactic situations, i.e. the situation is analysed through what is transmitted between the subjects that make it up. A didactic situation brings together elements of knowledge and culture, and didactic subjects whose function is to transmit knowledge to others whose function is to appropriate it. Didactic study explains what allows each person to assume or not assume these roles, how these roles are transformed and what happens to the knowledge or culture transmitted in the context of this situation.

A didactic situation is therefore an unfolding of reality with a before and after; various situations can be analysed to identify the characteristics of school, media or disciplinary genres (Cohen-Azria; Dias-Chiaruttini, 2014). The question arises of how to observe the situation. Espace Lympia is also unique in France, even though other prisons have been turned into museums; the exhibition is a one-off creation in an



exhibition space that has no collection; and visitors are involved in a cultural project that is unique in France, even though there are others. Above all, it is based on ethnographic methodology, where the researcher is immersed in the visit, among the visitors, recording what they say and, above all, taking note of their movements, gestures, emotions and much of what they say. "Ethnography is a great methodology for discovering people's way of life and experiences - their view of the world, feelings, rites, patterns, meanings, attitudes, behaviours and actions. This perspective makes it possible to grasp the human phenomenon in its entirety." (Lima *et al.*, 2006, p. 27, personal translation). I would insist on the fact that the totality of a human phenomenon is never accessible; it is always a reconstruction made by the researcher based on specific situations (didactic in the case of this research). The whole ethnographic process must, however, ensure that: "the person reading this study is able to interpret what is happening in the group studied as appropriately as if they were a member of that group" (Wolcott, 1975 *apud* Lima *et al.*, 2006, p. 25, personal translation).

This observation was complemented by interviews with the mediator before the visit and with the two teachers afterwards. I was fully immersed, as I stayed throughout the visit, waiting for the classes outside the museum and leaving with them. However, the observation is unique, there is no immersion with the subjects in their daily lives either before or after the visit. Whatever posture the researcher wants, it can only be qualified *a posteriori*. While any didactic situation is always a reconstruction of unforeseen events that arise in a relatively prepared situation, in the context of a museum visit, the unforeseen events are part of a museography itinerary planned before the visit. In this situation, the teacher interrupted the planned visit by telling the students to visit the penal colony room for twenty minutes, choosing one work that they liked and another that they didn't like. She then told them that the museum educator would present the works they had chosen during the group discussion. Two visit routes intertwine, one for small groups of students through the penal colony room and another that follows the route planned by the museographer, echoing the works between them or contrasting the reflections on freedom. This type of mediation restricts the reception of the exhibition in this context.

In short, the construction of the data is specific and raises the question of the "administration of evidence" (Broqua, 2009, p. 383). The material consists of audio recordings and handwritten notes. I chose to divide the situation into several moments in order to reconstruct the synopsis (Schneuwly; Dolz; Ronveaux, 2006). As the students were divided into groups, I only followed one group, which was not fixed, as some students changed groups. The visit to the Pavillon de l'horloge was collective and more conventional, with the museum educator choosing the works and questioning the students. The synopsis is completed by the transcript of the discussions in front of the chosen works. Many exchanges escaped the researcher in this methodology, but some exchanges (in the form of dyads - two students whispering) that escape video recording were accessible. The transcription of the exchanges respects the standards proposed by Robert Vion (1992). As for the analysis, it is based on the study of interpersonal relationships (the relationship between the linguistic functions of each person - the symbolic "function" of each person (Vion, 1996) and the relationship of each and everyone to the object of discussion in the context of the exchange in order to understand how the discourse on the works is constructed.

## 2 Didactic Model for Analysing Situations Involving the Reception of Works of Art

Unlike the theories of reception ((Jauss, 1978; Iser, 1985), which are interested in the relationship between the work and the reader (in the sense of receiver), the didactic approach takes into account the elements that structure the didactic situation. As I've already said, the didactic situation allows for the study of a didactic phenomenon, i.e. something that happens (in terms of teaching and learning, mediation, reception) that allows the researcher to analyse what they are trying to clarify. For me, reception means an interaction between the activities of understanding, interpreting, judging, reacting to and appreciating works of art (Dias-Chiaruttini 2019). I understand the didactic situation of reception as a structure of constraints that I approximate to the interpretive community proposed by Stanley Fish (2007) (Dias-Chiaruttini 2019, [2024]).

### 2.1 *The Notion of Interpretive Community*

The work of Stanley Fish (2007) is particularly heuristic in the approach I am proposing. The researcher is not a didactic specialist, but reflecting on his own courses constitutes a segmentation of didactic situations that allow him to develop his analysis of what makes interpretation and reception possible. The didactic subjects (the students) understand and interpret on the basis of what the "institution has automatically bequeathed to them", on the basis of "its way of producing meaning, its system of intelligibility" (Fish, 2007, p. 80, personal translation) and transforms them into an interpretive community.

Thus, what characterises a situation of reception are the constraints that weigh on it and with which the subjects compose or not to produce the meaning of what happens and the work they have before them, whatever it may be. Stanley Fish never explained how the constraint structures of each interpretive community are constructed. However, from a didactic perspective, identifying them is essential.

### 2.2 *Constraint Structures*

Constraint structures are made up of three universes, three subsets governed by a certain number of laws. The first universe is observable, the other two are heuristic, they allow the observed situations to be analysed and the results to be interpreted. The division of the didactic situation does not deprive it of analysing the elements that surround it, it constitutes it and inserts it into a complex reality that is partly actualised in the didactic situation.

The first is the universe of communication, which refers to the museum educator-student relationship and the interactions that take place between them, the way in which the guide welcomes a didactic subject under construction, a student visitor to an exhibition; the guide revisits the exhibition according to the way in which he or she envisages the new course of the school visit (which is always a cutting and rewriting of the exhibition), which the students recompose according to their understanding of the situation. Students also mobilise the museum visitors who are what they are not. They can mobilise an image of the visitor that they too would be. Mediation takes cognisance of museography, art history, but also the knowledge of visitors that mediators imagine they might possess.

The second is the "épistémè"<sup>8</sup> universe which refers to both the works on display and the exhibition itself, which reorganises its reception through the scenography choices made, which formalise an exhibition intention and a reading of the exhibition and the works on display. All the "objects" have a meaning, a history that each exhibition rethinks in a new way through museography and scenography writing. This set is a possible reservoir of interpretations from which visitors can draw resources to receive the new exhibition.

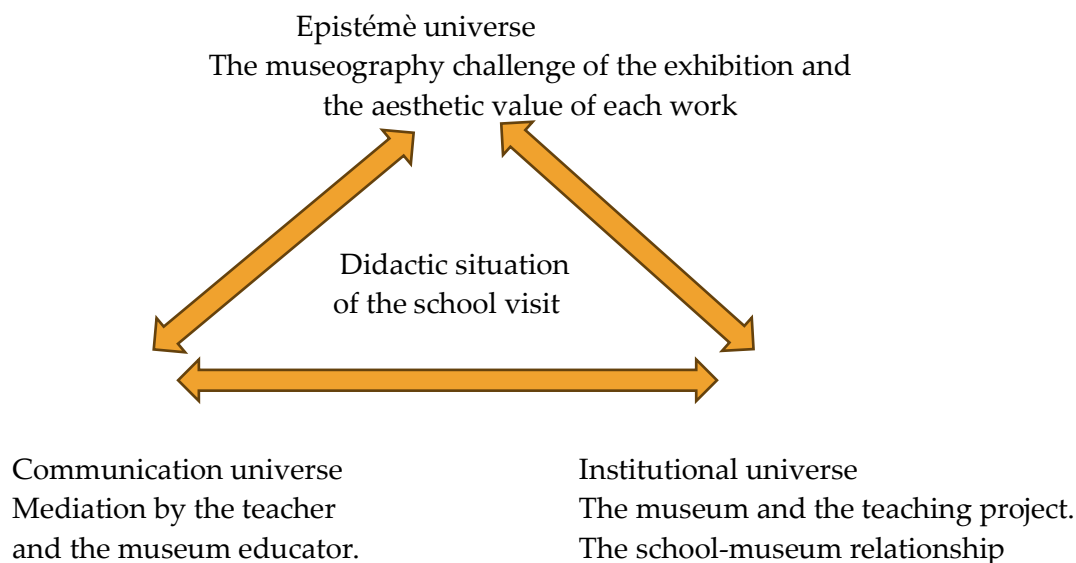
Finally, the institutional universe must be considered in the context of the school-museum relationship and a "didactic continuum" (COHEN Cohen-Azria; Dias-Chiaruttini, 2016). The school visit is part of the history of a class, the history of school visits and the history of museum visits. It remains a structure of constraints arising from the two institutions of the school and the museum. The notion of the didactic continuum allows us to analyse this.

### 3 The Reception of the Works and the Exhibition

How is the discourse about the works constructed in this situation? And how are the works and the exhibition received through this discourse?

To understand this, we need to consider the three universes of constraints of the didactic situation.

**Figure 2** – Model of the didactic situation of the school visit



**Source:** Dias-Chiaruttini [2024]

It is the synergy between each of these worlds that allows us to reconstruct what happens during the visit and how the reception is constructed.

<sup>8</sup> I use the term in reference to Foucault, who considers that the episteme describes the conditions of possibility of knowledge (Foucault, 1966). In 1971, in a filmed debate with Noam Chomsky, he said: "to understand the transformations of knowledge within the general domain of the sciences and also within the somewhat vertical domain constituted by a society, a culture, a civilization at a given moment." (Debate [...], 2013).

### 3.1 The Universe of Communication

The teachers and the museum educator have different objectives, the former trying to give their students an experience around a project on tolerance, involving them in various actions (visits to the museums, the Jardin de la Paix, but also writing an argument against violence, a text on terrorism in Nice, etc.). As for the museum educator, she tried to share the messages of the exhibition, but was a little confused by the teacher's instructions which changed the route she had planned and a mediation with which she was unfamiliar, but which she later declared to be interesting. Exchanges were thus built up between the students and then between the students and the museum educator. The teachers, as we'll see, always return to the idea of tolerance, because the exhibition can invite reflection on this. The students are used to these "cultural" outings and the debates between them. We can say that when they arrive at the Espace Lympia museum, they are intrigued and very surprised by the museum educator's first words. They allowed themselves to wander around the museum and share their reactions to the works of art; they didn't follow any particular path, they moved according to the works that attracted their attention.

The teachers took care to place this visit in the continuity of the cultural project and other visits to museums. As soon as they entered the museum, the teacher (T1) told the students that they knew Paul Éluard's poem and that the title of the exhibition was a verse from *La Marseillaise*. The students recited these texts without commenting on them. These links between the school and the museum reappear later in the exhibition, when a student makes the connection between a work of art and a text read in class:

S<sup>9</sup> - Actually / the monkey in the ending you chose (work by Ramtin Zad, *Antar bedoon Looti*) doesn't know how to be free / if you set him free after he's been in captivity / he doesn't know how, and here men have also domesticated men / they keep him on a leash like in the fable // sir

T2<sup>10</sup> - yes / do you remember the fable *Le loup et le chien* by La Fontaine? (the teacher reminds the students that the dog is enslaved by man and the wolf can't do it, he runs away when he sees the traces of the collar on the dog's neck)

ME<sup>11</sup> - (who continues talking to some of the students and concludes) basically // this girl is going to inherit all of this / in spite of herself / she's going to reproduce the gestures in the world that will haunt her (personal translation)

This exchange is interesting because it shows a specific element of this visit (never observed in the context of my work): the mediation is twofold, the discourse of the teacher and the museum educator intertwine, but each remains in their own field: the school compared to the exhibition. However, it should be remembered that teacher T1 interrupted the planned mediation in the penal colony room by inviting the students to visit and choose two works before the museum educator's mediation. In doing so, she took the lead, but above all, she reintegrated this visit into the continuity of those carried out with the students in other museums. Thus, the discursive functions (Vion,

<sup>9</sup> S stands for student

<sup>10</sup> T stands for Teacher 1 or 2 (1 is a woman / 2 is a man). They are numbered according to the order in which they are spoken

<sup>11</sup> ME: Museum educator

1992) in the exchanges were constructed under the impact of the institutional universe. The school public had little opportunity to visit this exhibition, since the dates coincided with the holidays, which was a major concern for the museum educator. The students, on the other hand, were more or less independent visitors, used to this type of school trip. In addition, teacher T1 often referred to the school's project on tolerance:

T1 – it's important in your work / it reveals your situation / but there's no judgement (personal translation)

And, almost implicitly, the students integrated this way of reacting to what might seem like a provocation:

S - I think it's nice what she's doing, but I'm not Muslim, but I'm not sure if she's provoking Muslims (personal translation)

### 3.2 *The Institutional Universe*

This concerns the relationship between the school and this exhibition, which has been very successful. The class project echoes the theme and some of the artists are known to the students. What's more, these students are young adults, most of them adults, and they feel concerned about certain evils denounced by the exhibition, which resonate very strongly with them. This visit is part of a continuum of school visits carried out as part of the school project, but it also has an impact on their life experience:

S: It's Victor Soren / we know him (personal translation)

It's not so much the double painting that catches the students' attention, but the atmosphere of the painting, which is familiar to them: the existing culture (built up in the school project) allows them to enter the work.

S: he usually draws animals differently / but the atmosphere is the same / it's always dark

S: we know him / we've worked with this artist / he's good / (personal translation)

This culture stimulates the students' curiosity and guides their understanding of works of art. One student ends up saying:

S: but this painting is scary (personal translation)

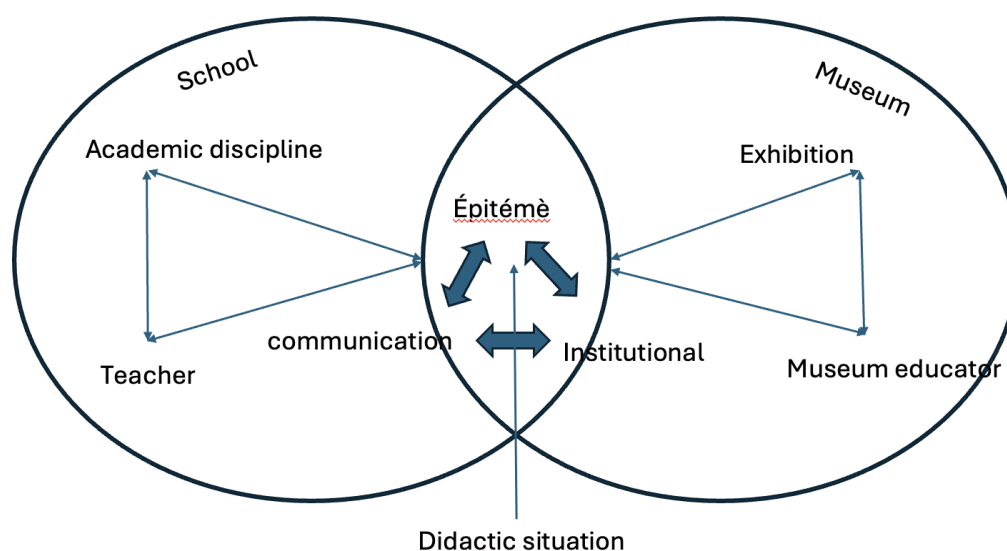
Thus, we return to the exhibition and its theme. The visit is built around going back and forth between the school and the museum, between what they already know and what they are discovering.

The institutional universe is important in this reflection, the school visit to the museum is situated at the intersection of the two institutions, and we have seen that discourses are constructed at this intersection. It is here that the museum visitor's experience is realised and formed. We know that in France, as in Brazil, family visits to museums are highly sociologically marked. On this point, Pinto Faria's analysis is very accurate for both countries (and undoubtedly beyond).

Visiting museums depends on a few factors, including the habit of frequenting cultural facilities, the level of education and income of users, familiarity in understanding artistic language, the quality of the collection, the public and private resources available for operating and maintaining the facilities, management practices, educational policies, publicising exhibitions, among others [...] (Pinto Faria, 2015, p. 3, personal translation)

Familiarising students with all cultural spaces, especially museums, is the motivation behind the micro-lycée project, which aims to reconcile these students with academic learning and culture in the broadest sense.

**Figure 3** – Systemic model of the school visit to the museum under the influence of both institutions



**Source:** Dias-Chiaruttini [2024].

### 3.3 The *Épistémè* Universe

This is based both on the works on display and on the museography and scenography message: the aim is to make visitors reflect on freedom and be shocked. This means that the exhibition must provoke negative emotions (visitors must feel embarrassed) that lead them to react. It is also clear that the exhibition space influences the reception of the works through an effect on the visitor, but also through an effect on the works themselves. The contrast in light between the two exhibition spaces can influence visitors. The penal colony itself is a site, but also an object of the exhibition: there are still the chains with which the prisoners were mutually bound at night. The chosen museography (presented in the first part of this article) invites visitors to make connections between the works on display and to find the references to which some of them allude. Students can also perceive a work or the exhibition through their own past

experiences, through other school visits or not, but above all through their own relationship with freedom, which may or may not be in tension with the messages of each artist and the aims of the exhibition.

I propose to focus on some transcribed exchanges that show a reception to the work that is based both on the aesthetic and identity clash and on the visitors' cultural baggage, but also on the distant position they can assume, especially through the relationship between the works in the exhibition.

In front Shadi Rezaei's work we see this exchange:

S - this is beautiful  
 S - THIS / this really shocks me (6 girls gather around and two boys look at them)  
 S - there you saw the bandaged woman and the naked woman (the girl points to a friend).  
 S - humm  
 S - no / it's really inappropriate to put a veiled woman next to a naked woman.  
 S - she must be cold  
 S - it's really weird (other students join them and the teacher)  
 T1 - what's shocking?  
 S - it's really inappropriate // I'm Muslim // it's really bad to show a Muslim woman like that // in the Muslim religion you can't show your breasts // there's respect and it's shocking  
 S - I think it's nice what she's doing, but I'm not Muslim, but I'm not sure if she's provoking Muslims.  
 S - yes / of course / you don't have to put a veil on a woman and then put her topless // it's to criticise Muslim women and I don't wear the veil but I respect it // - yes, I understand.  
 S - yes:: I understand that she's shocked, but when you're a Muslim, you feel attacked // yes (personal translation)

Fifteen minutes later, the shocked student called the museum educator:

S - I have a work that shocks me, it's too out of place, it's over there (the group of two classes moves)  
 S (boy) - I was shocked too.  
 ME - it's a video installation by a young Iranian artist / women used to be unveiled in her country and since then there's been a very harsh regime / do you know Persepolis?  
 S - yes::::  
 S - huh:: is she Muslim? it's serious // she's looking for trouble  
 ME - it shows how Islamic art has been influenced by Spain and India (...) it also shows that the Arab world is at the forefront of technology // you know they are great mathematicians (students laugh) they are very good at geometry // but since then they have censored many artists and expression is not free in their country (turns to the work and asks:) why do you think a woman's body is tied up?  
 S - To show that she is a prisoner / tied to a thread that is hardly visible.  
 ME - Yes, to look at her body?  
 S (boy) - I think it looks like torture

ME – Yes, looking at her body / the bandage symbolises bondage, but she's also trying to overcome the pain / she's squirming / she's looking for a way out.

S - yes / it's like she's trying to free herself from a prison inside her

ME – exactly: she shows that there is no situation that is final / ok in her country it's like that / the woman is bandaged / veiled / hidden / she suffers but she can find a way to free herself /// she frees herself little by little

T1 – it's important in her work / she reveals her situation / but there's no judgement

S – yes, I understand better / without knowing that it's shocking (personal translation)

**Figure 4** – Shadi, *Geometry of pain*.



**Source:** Shadi [...], 2017.

The first reception is shocking for the student, who projects onto this work the political and media debates taking place in France about wearing the veil in the street. The exchange thus evokes the weight of religion. The student realises this tension and the universe of communication allows her to express it. She summons up her conception of values: is it good or not; is it authorised or not; is it respectful or not, and positions herself as a young Muslim woman in front of a work that talks about the body of a woman forced to veil and hide her body. Finally, what she judges is the idea of judging a religion that doesn't respect women's bodies: it activates strong tensions in French society. The museum educator places the work in its context, restores the artist's intention, evokes the greatness of Muslim art and the desire of women living in Islamic countries to liberate themselves and regain power over their bodies. The student is also able to hear this message, but, as a young French Muslim woman, he defends another struggle.

Forty-five minutes later, in front of the work of art, *La liberté dévoilée* by Gérard Rancinan:

ME - what do you see?

(students list the elements of the photograph)

S - is that Marianne<sup>12</sup>?

ME - does that shock you? It's a veiled woman and the title is veiled freedom

S - it shocks me less, she's less naked

<sup>12</sup> Marianne is a symbolic figure of the French Republic. In the form of a woman wearing a Phrygian cap, she represents the French Republic and its values embodied in the motto: "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity."



S – she's really sexy (laughter from all the students)  
S - it looks like a disguise  
ME - What does this veiled woman have to hide?  
S - she wants to defend the wind (students laugh)  
S – she's trying to break free  
S - but it's not necessarily oppression  
S - she wears the veil // she lives it well / it's around her that everything falls apart  
T1 - there's a veil and a veil / the full veil is the Burqa and here it's a veil // transparency // it hides and also shows // it's a question of nuance // but you see / there's no judgement / it doesn't be stigmatising (personal translation)

In the situation of a school visit, the personal reception of the works becomes a collective exchange that creates a shared reception, acceptable to all, despite each person's sensitivity.

**Figure 5** – Rancinan, *La liberté dévoilée*



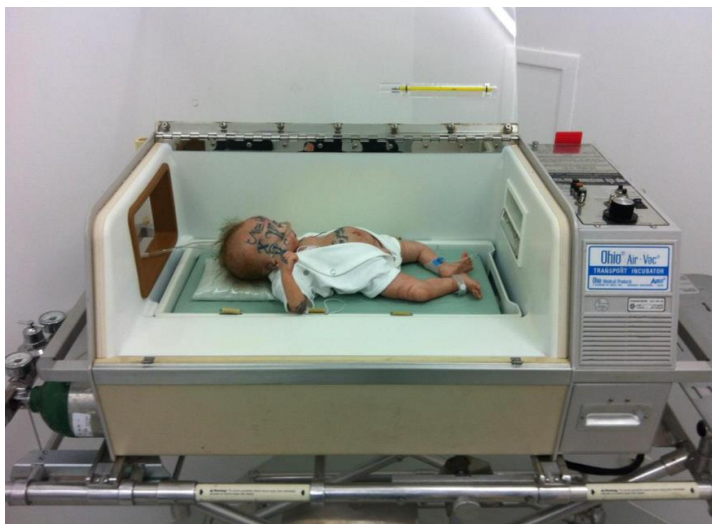
**Source:** Rancinan (2008).

This extract shows how the universe of communication established by the teacher's instructions and how the museum educator welcomes the students' reactions allows them to express themselves and finally enter the museography game of the exhibition: they question the evidence of what is shown in order to reconstruct the significance (A – she's in the process of freeing herself / A - but it's not necessarily oppression). In addition, the teacher and the museum educator ensure that this discussion is framed: the museum educator listens to the reactions, the teacher takes up the discussion, insisting that the works don't judge, but invite reflection. The student who was shocked by the representation of a veiled woman undressing is no longer shocked by a veiled, half-naked woman: the body is not represented in the same way, but above all she seems to have realised throughout the visit that it is freedom that is being questioned and not the status of the veiled woman, and even more so a Muslim woman. In this sense, the mediation structure (universe of communication) made it possible to take in the words of each student without judging what they think, what they

are, without finally rejecting each one's value system (and the interpretive communities) where each one develops outside the school and beyond the situation of the visit.

In front of the artwork by The Kid, *Too Young to Die*, a pupil called the museum educator:

**Figure 6** - The Kid, Too young to die



**Source:** THE KID [...], [2023].

S (boy) – there's a work of art / I think it's serious / the baby  
ME – let's see  
S - the baby is bothering me  
S – he's sick  
S – it's a fake (laughing)  
S - yes, a baby is pure and here it's exactly the opposite  
S - yes, it's super violent / he doesn't have a face anymore / he's been attacked... attacked... he's dying...  
ME - So the artist is 28 and self-taught [...]  
S - what? (the teacher explains the word "self-taught")  
ME - what do you see there? (showing the face)  
S- tattoos  
ME - yes / so the artist is of Dutch and Brazilian descent, and he reveals the hidden face of the American dream in North America tattoos have a particular meaning / you see?  
S - Gangs  
ME – yes, the newborn is in an incubator / he's premature / and then when he's born he's already tattooed / he's already joined a gang / he has no choice, it's from birth  
S - but he could die / he's in an incubator / he might not even have time to join a gang  
S - no / actually he's already born into the gang  
S - So it's because he's in the gang that he's premature / that he's in danger?  
EM – that's a good question you're asking / that's the question The Kid wants you to ask  
S - yes / I understand / you don't really have a life / if you live in a gang / if you belong to it

S – it's serious, really  
 S - that reminds me of the faceless portrait I saw earlier  
 ME - yes, his destiny is already set [...]  
 S - (girl) is it a boy, if it were a baby?  
 S - yes / well / so we're born free and equal? It's all a joke for artists  
 S – It's just a joke (the student bumps into the student who has just spoken and walks away through the museum) (personal translation)

The choice of this work is also based on a representation of the world that is disturbed by the work (there's a work / it's serious I think; the baby bothers me; a baby is pure and here it's exactly the opposite), but a representation that is no longer based on personal, identity-based values as before, but on universal values. Although not all the elements are present in the students' discourse, there is in fact a reception of the work that is based on an effect it provokes: disquiet. Finally, we should note that the students associate the works ("reminding me of the faceless portrait from before") with the work by Anthony Mirail (*Blessures de guerre*, 2015), thus showing that the scenography and museography writing helps to create an interpretative community in which the subjects can construct themselves as visitors to this exhibition. By inviting the students to walk through the first room and choose two works, the communication structure gave them the opportunity to look at the works and say what moved them so that they could share it with others. Their first reactions were identification: not that they identified with the works, but that the works questioned their value system and their relationship with the world.

## Conclusion

Not all the exhibitions and visits I have seen produce the same visitor involvement or reception: the theme undoubtedly has something to do with it, but what makes this reception possible is a set of elements that characterise the didactic situation: the mediation (choice of two works / discussion of the mediator's contributions) the exhibition the exhibition aims to disturb visitors into reacting to reflections on the works: the communication structure makes this possible; previous knowledge and experience make it possible to build a continuum between what already exists and what the exhibition disturbs, relying on ways of being together: questioning without judgement. School knowledge feeds the visitor's experience, and each person's relationship with the world is altered within an acceptable perimeter, without rejecting what is expressed. The three universes of the restriction structure are intertwined and show the uniqueness of this visit and this exhibition. In this way, the ethno-didactic approach allows us to reconstruct the way in which the students are authorised and allowed to visit this exhibition, establishing links between the works, between the values they have and those of the works, in order to understand other points of view, respecting who they are and how they feel and apprehend freedom. From this point of view, a school visit to the museum can contribute to the formation of the citizen and to awakening the ability to listen to others and think critically about our world. Mediation plays a fundamental role in this respect. It must be able to make students and all citizens capable of "criticising man through the debate of difficult situations placed before the group, (these) situations must be existential for the groups" (Freire, 1967, p.106, personal translation) and for museum mediation.

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