



Child and Museum

Transdisciplinary study of children's rituals in Museum



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- 1. Child and museum : formal, non-formal and informal cultural education**
 - 2. Between transmission and marketing : a child's ritual in museum**
 - 3. How to study a ritual from media data**
 - 4. What museum does to rituals**

1. Child and museum : formal, non-formal and informal cultural education

1.1. The educational goal of Museum

- Today it seems obvious that **children are welcomed to museums**, by school or with the family. Having a large audience of children and young people is an important **indicator of success** for museums, as in all cultural institutions.
- This is considered an indication about democratization of culture.
- Yet it is a **recent phenomenon**, because at the beginning the educational responsibility of museum was different :
 - Originally (French Revolution, 1793), the educational mission of the museum is the **artistic training of professionals**: artists, architects, engineers.
 - The opening to the public was an another dimension, but **without educational goal**

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- In the XXth century the educational mission of the museum changes :
 - ❑ 30': museums become **free for schools** and a few **teachers are provided** in museums
 - ❑ 50' and 60': **educational services** (for schools)
 - ❑ 80': **cultural services** (for other audiences). Example: Musée d'Orsay (artistic heritage of XIXth century) created in 1986
 - ❑ 2000': national and regional **Trusts for resources in arts and cultural education** (ex : Museum or Theater + educational documentation center + training institute for teachers) and a **new website** about role and activities of all cultural institutions in education.

1.2. Actors and actions for education in museums

Actors

- **tour guides** (Culture / Tourism degree)
- **teachers provided** in museums, specialized in hosting school groups and design of educational records
- **cultural mediators** specializing in the creation of mediation tools, research public away. They are gradually replacing seconded teachers
- **webmasters**, designers of digital contents, interactive and educational games for museum
- **community managers** through social networks

Activities

- guided **tour**
- creative **workshop**
- **investigation**, information research, report
- cultural **twinning** with schools
- **illustration** of art history's lessons in schools

1.3. Formal, non-formal and informal education in Museum

Formal education	Non-formal education	Informal education
school activities, programs	–	–
qualification, degree	–	–
explicit educational intentionality	explicit educational intentionality	–
School	Adult training, adult education, socio-cultural and extracurricular activities	Learning by non-conscious everyday experience, familial transmission

International definition of the three ways of education (1997,2000)

Formal education	Non-formal education	Informal education
illustrating a course	activities for discovery and initiation	visiting with family or friends
learn	appropriate	entertainment, pleasure, cultural experience
secondary socialization		primary socialization
These three ways of education and these two outlines of socialization are anticipated and organized differently by the Museum. This is one of the challenges of cultural mediation		
visit	playful visit workshop information research meeting with artists or professionals	free visit guided tour during spare-time birthday party in museum

The three ways of education in Museum

2. Between transmission and marketing : child's rituals in museum

2.1 Educational activity or artistic joke?

Exhibition “Our History” (Paris, Palais de Tokyo, 2006)

Saâdane Afif, *Lost World*



Abdel Abdemessed, *Habibi*



Laurent Grasso, vidéo *Projection*



Kader Attia, *Arabesque*





Matthieu Laurette, *The Freebie King*



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- At the end of the exhibition, flyers are available to visitors. Among them, a prospectus inviting children to **celebrate their birthday at the Palais de Tokyo**, and therefore have a **joyous and festive time**.
 - It was really surprising because the exhibition was typical of contemporary art : ironic, dark, critical. With a **strong critique of consumer society**
So this proposal could be an **artistic hoax**, like a joke ?
 - But after checking, it appeared as a serious proposal and I could verify in websites of many museums that it is a quite **recent and growing activity in museums**
 - However it make think to birthdays organized in **fast food** (like McDonalds) or **spare-time spaces** (like lasergames).
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Like McDonald's ?

Private Birthday Photography at Mac Donald's
(2013 ou 2014)



Advertising birthday parties at McDonalds (2010)



With the same effects and goals ?



Private Birthday Photography at Mac Donald's (2011)

Advertising "Baby Mac Donald's" (2006)

Children's birthdays are part of the marketing strategy of McDonald's to win in the childish imagination from an early age



2.3 Researching scientific question and hypothesis

First question : what did I wanted to demonstrate ?

- That birthdays in museums contribute to **social diversification** of the audience ?
- On the contrary, that they **strengthen inequalities** between social classes?
- Are they **imposed by parents** because of strategies of **social distinction** ?
- Are museums wanting to **increase sales and benefits**?
- Are museums opening to **new social practices** ?

Second question : in what concrete conditions ?

- Ethnographic field **observation** of children during the party ?
- **Interviews** before and after the party with families to determine the socioprofessionnal categories , goals, customs and mental representations ?
- **Analysis** of contents of activities?

4 great difficulties for an ethnographic research with children :

- Impossible to know in advance a **sufficient number of volunteer families**
- Families doesn't want to receive a researcher during private family events with their children
- Strong **legal constraints** to investigate with children
- Lawrence A. Hirschfeld ("why ethnologists do not like children?", 2003) : there are **two problems with children** :
 - investigator and investigated have not the same language and references
 - we can't study children like primitive populations

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- **So there was 3 significant risks**, because of these difficulties,
 - **Not enough** observations
 - Only little **monographs**
 - transforming specific situations in “**ideal type**” (M. Weber, *Essay on the theory of science*, 1904-1917) : “homogeneous table of thought”, as connecting in a common frame some different and disparate phenomena of experience
 - These concrete and scientific problems have led me to **renounce starting with ethnographic fieldwork**

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- So I build my object of research by adopting a point of view more centered on :
 - 1) the concept of **device (“dispositif”)**. It is a rather polysemic concept, which I define in two points (not in its philosophical meaning) :
 - **environment designed** to produce effects or results
 - **mixing social dimension and semiotic operation** (production of meaning)
 - 2) the concept of **ritual**, well-adapted for children, families, birthday and Museum (visiting museum is a cultural ritual)

Scientific references :

- **Sociology of childhood** (since 2006 in France), especially :
 - studies about children's birthday parties (Régine Sirota)
 - studies about children's cultural practices (Sylvie Octobre)
- **Research in Science communication** about museums, exhibitions and the experience of visit, especially :
 - studies about visitor's trust in Museum as cultural institution (Joëlle Le Marec)
- The definition of the **3 ways of education**, especially :
 - Non-formal education
 - Informal éducation

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- The **question of research** became :
 - what the museum **does to birthday party**, as one of the most important anthropological rituals for children ? How concrete conditions define the **meaning of the experience** for children?
 - The **approch is both** :
 - In science communication (mediatic data)
 - In anthropology (ritual)
 - The **methodology**, according to this large question, is :
 - Take the **measure** of the phenomenon
 - Analyze the **strategies of communication** of the museums on this topic (mainly in their websites)
 - Describe the **material conditions** of the birthday party
 - Specify **macro-sociological data** before doing monographs
 - Combine data from **high culture and low culture** (even **sub culture**)
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3. How to study a child's ritual from media data

3.1 Take the measure of the phenomenon

- **1300 museums** are listed in France (Muséofile digital repertory)
- The study is conducted on websites in french langage, from a query on Goggle with keywords "birthday - museum"
- **96 occurrences**
 - 59 museum websites
 - 37 general or specialized information websites

		%
France	37	62,71
Belgique	7	11,86
Suisse	7	11,86
Canada	5	8,47
Luxembourg	2	3,39
Monaco	1	1,69
Total	59	100,00

Cultural legitimacy of museums identified

- 57% of French museums located in Paris
- others are located in medium-sized cities and small towns
- Important degree of legitimacy for the museums identified (presence or absence of label "Museum of France" as defined by the Law of 2002 about Museums, or supervision by a local authority)

Museums labeled "Museum of France" (under supervision of a public authority)	23	62 %
Museums under supervision of a public authority (no label)	10	27 %
Private museums (no label)	4	11 %
	37	100 %

Type of museums

- **specialized museums and art museums are in the majority**
- **specialized or thematic museums** are generally small museums, far from major cities, affecting local population

Examples : Sport, Post, Magic, Games, Railway, Mines, Doll, Food, Coins, Photography, Communication...

	Nbre	%
Specializing (toy, fashion, car ...)	17	30
Art: Fine arts, modern and contemporary art, archeology and antiquities	14	24
Air museums, museums of society, non-European civilizations	9	15
Other (mixed, children museums ...)	9	15
Sciences, natural sciences, technologies, industries	6	10
History	4	6
total	59	100

3 major orientations in the thematic museums :

- Museums of **everyday life objects** (post, money, boats, trains ...)
- Museums of **childhood** objects (toys, games, dolls ...)
- Museums related to a **local heritage and identity** (mine, rural life, photography, industry)

Families prefer identity museums and museums that do an **echo to the culture of childhood**.

The motivation to go to the museum is cultural, but large, in **anthropological** meaning.

Legitimacy is guaranteed by the institution, but the cultural content are close to **popular culture** (child's culture, objects of every daily life, work culture)

Rate

Between **8 and 25 € per child** (400-1250 rubles)

→ More than a birthday in a **Mc Donald's**

→ Almost as expensive as **e-bowling** or **e-games**

→ Cheaper than a birthday in a **water park** (Aquaboulevard)

3.2 Communication strategies in museums

- Birthday parties are **rather difficult to find on websites**, and sometimes in very strange places.

For example : under " young ", " business ", " visits ", " young people ", " entertainment ", " news " " go for a stroll " ... and even "exposure" .

- It is a **recent activity**, that does not correspond to the **traditional categories** of museums in their websites :
 - **Cultural category**: information content (collections, exhibition themes , photographs of objects)
 - **Market category** : timetables, prices , shop, postcards
 - **Educational category**: school activities , conferences for adults
 - **Social category** : private public (disabled)
- It's likely that museums , with their mission of public service, have some **discomfort to propose private activities**, with higher rate than usual (museums are generally free for children)

3.3 Educational strategies of museums

- Birthday party in museum is an **opportunity for non-formal and informal education**
- There is an **ambiguity** between these two ways of education
- We can deduce it by comparing :
 - the **contents** of activities proposed during birthday parties
 - the **contents** of school activities (workshops)

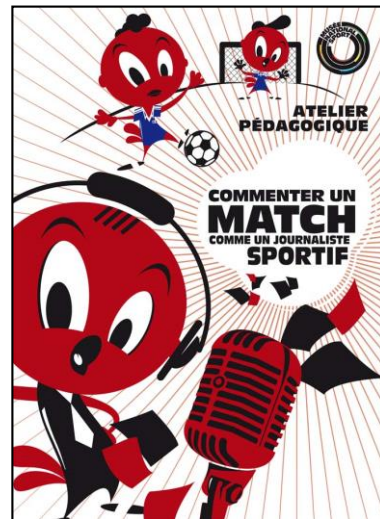
No obvious informations about the contents	29	50 %
Contents similar with workshops for schools	20	34 %
Contents just partly similar with workshops	5	8 %
Specific contents, totally different between birthday parties and workshops	5	8 %
total	59	100 %

3.4 Specific visual birthdays: popular culture in high culture institutions




- **Specific visuals** are rare and difficult to find.
- **No invitation card**, only 3 cases inventoried
(2 examples from Museums of doll and Museum of sea)



- The visual universe refer mainly to **popular culture**: bright colors, mascots, humor, dynamic graphics (examples from Museums of Iron Mine, Sports, Electricity, History of town)



It makes a great contrast with documents for schools and teachers, much better designed

 <p>ACTIVITÉS JEUNESSE 2009 - 2010 Scolaires & Péricolaires musée des arts et métiers premières découvertes, premières émotions...</p> <p>3500 S.O</p>		 <p>visitez sur www.rainouf.org - service éducatif</p> <p>à l'attention des enseignants, des médiateurs et des familles</p> <p>Les dossiers pédagogiques</p> <p>Musée Préhistorique de Vallée</p> <p>J'entends, j'oublie ; je vois, je comprends ; je fais, je me souviens.</p>
<p>Scientific museum</p>	<p>Alimentarium</p>	<p>Prehistoric museum</p>

4. What the Museum does to the three key-elements of modern birthday ritual

4.1 The Birthday Cake



- A **central element** of the birthday ritual (Sirota, 2004)
 - **Candles** symbolize crossing towards the next year
 - It cause the **applause** to encourage the child to grow
 - A “**masterpiece** of family work“, the child both receive it and give it to his friends
 - **Meal is an institution** that provides socialization of the child by giving him a central role
- But, for reasons of hygiene and safety, **many museums refuse the ritual cake and candles blown out**
- This is fundamental to understand what the Museum does to birthday party : it **changes the profound significance of ritual** and substitute the **cultural function** (anthropological) by **cultural activity** (professional)

(picture : Museum of children, Bruxelles)

4.2 The gift to the “king/queen of the feast”



- Birthday in the Museum is part of the category " **Birthday - event** " and the party is a "**gift in itself.**" (Sirota, 1998). The websites emphasizes the **magical and uniqueness** of the event : the frame is outstanding and the activity is unusual .
- Museums refuse consumerist approach and **never mention the time of the offering of the gift** to the “king of the feast”. Unlike commercial places (Mc Donalds, E-games), they do not offer special gift for the child.
- Instead, they exhibit **social and educational values** and consider the group of friends as if it was a **school group** .
- However, in birthday parties at home or in the classroom, the group accepts without problem that one child is the king, because each in turn will know that pleasure. At school, this principle is so respected that birthdays of children who are born during holiday periods are celebrate in advance.

(picture : Museum Jacquemard André, Paris)

4.3 Gifts in return (return-gifts)



- A gift is offered to all children (to thank them for coming and to give them a remembrance of the party) and this part of ritual is very important.
- The activities are usually devoted exclusively to make **aesthetic and original objects** (they are **never already made industrially**). Children leave the museum with objects **they made themselves** (and which have not been made by the child or its parents, like in birthday party at home).
- So the **ritual of gift** (Mauss, 1923-1924 ; Sirota, 1998) is transformed into **workshop** (non-formal education)
- These activities can be classified into three categories:
 - **childhood objects** (rolling toys, old toys, ancient games)
 - Supports for **artistic expression** (jewelry, theater, puppets)
 - Appropriation of **adult culture and museum culture** (creating in the way of Dubuffet , making porcelain in the manner of Sevres porcelain)

(picture : Museum Quai Branly, Paris)

Conclusion

- We have seen different reasons why birthday in the museum is at the **intersection of three strategies** :
 - That of the **child** , who needs **ritual crossings for socialization** and the symbolization of changing age
 - That of the **family** , who must resolve practical problems of hosting a group of excited children in an apartment or a house and wants to **offer the best** to her child, such as museum
 - That the **museum**, which seeks to **diversify its audience** and its activity, but **not completely assume** hybridization between public duties and private uses

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- The **analysis of media data** has brought out :
 - The **social logics** which evolve during long time (the new modes of modern occidental children 's birthdays)
 - The **structural features** (characteristics) of these new forms of acculturation
 - **The adaptability** in museums towards social needs
 - We can now make fieldwork with **traditional methodologies** of anthropology and sociology (observations, interviews, questionnaires) about several subjects , like :
 - **degree of familiarity** with the museum culture felt by the families
 - **delegation** to museum by families of their traditional role in informal education
 - **Negotiations** between children and parents about the choice of the museum
 - The modalities of children's acculturation in museum with their friends
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Thanks for your attention

