



Tools to Understand: An Evaluation of the Interpretation Material
used in Tate Modern's Rothko Exhibition
Tate Paper by Minnie Scott and Renate Meijer



<https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/11/tools-to-understand-an-evaluation-of-the-interpretation-material-used-in-tate-moderns-rothko-exhibition>

Tate Modern's exhibition [Rothko](#), opened September 2008 – February 2009

The Interpretation team, working with the exhibition curators, developed a set of interpretative materials for visitors:

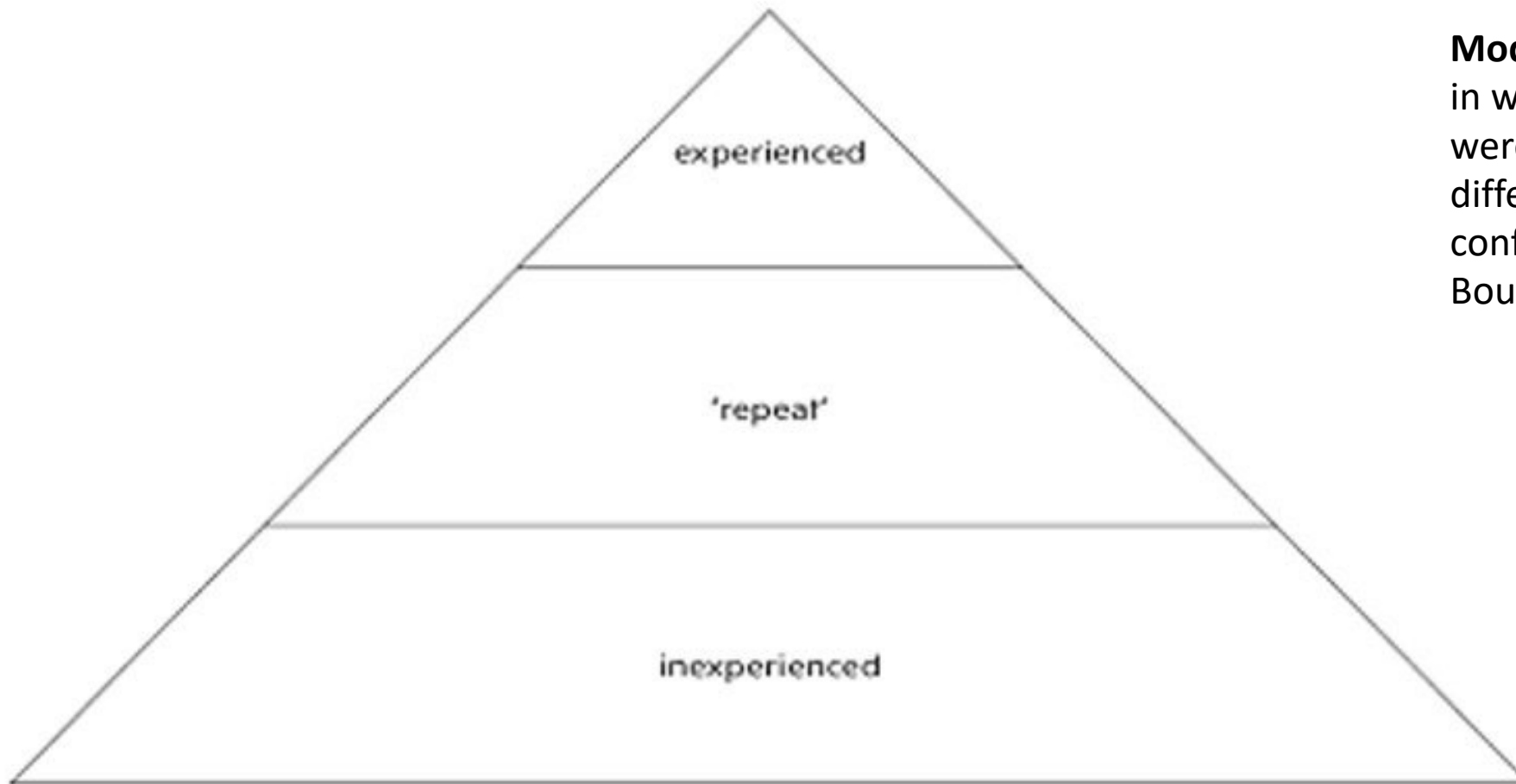
- Wall texts and captions
- Booklet
- Multimedia tour

The number of wall texts was limited but the multimedia tour quite elaborate, including poetry, music and different perspectives on the work.

The booklet provided the overall idea of the exhibition and context, while the multimedia tour focused more on the (appreciation of the) object, providing help to look at the works.

Audience Segmentation

Model 1 used at the Rijksmuseum in which educational resources were tested on visitors with different levels of experience, confidence, or, to borrow Pierre Bourdieu's term: 'cultural capital'.



**VISITORS
WHO SEE TATE
AS A...**

**DIVIDE
INTO THESE
8 SEGMENTS...**

DESCRIPTION...

CHURCH

▶ **AFICIONADOS**

Visual arts professionals looking for inspiration and escapism

▶ **ACTUALISERS**

Non-visual arts professionals seeking inspiration and soulfood

SPA

▶ **SENSUALISTS**

Culture vultures seeking uplifting, moving, sensory experiences

ARCHIVE

▶ **RESEARCHERS**

Visual arts professionals on research and development visits

▶ **SELF-IMPROVERS**

People wanting to develop their knowledge of the visual arts

ATTRACTION

▶ **SOCIAL SPACERS**

People meeting with others who want to make the space their own

▶ **SITE SEERS**

Mainly tourist visitors wanting to 'do' Tate

▶ **FAMILIES**

People wanting an enjoyable and educational trip for children

Audience Segmentation

Model 2 used by Tate generally where museum visit is personally customizable experience focused primarily on meeting the needs and desires of the visitor.

Tools of marketing and branding from studies by consultancy Morris, Hargreaves & McIntyre.

Findings of Survey

- * 77 percent visitors read the introductory wall text
- * 50 percent of visitors use the booklet
- * 19 percent of visitors use the multimedia tour
- * 8 percent of visitors use no interpretation resources

Preference for wall texts: (excerpt from the report)

Visitors generally assumed that wall texts would be the most straightforward resource and they were very widely used.

The introductory text was read by three-quarters of visitors, and in the rooms where a wall text was offered, it was the first resource turned to by most visitors.

Visitors with different levels of experience reported using wall texts in different ways

– to give structure to their visit or to enable them to make their own route.

Wall text was understood as a resource that needed the smallest commitment in terms of time, and so were expected to be suitable for people in a hurry or for visitors who wanted to relax.

The introductory text was used by visitors across different confidence levels.

These different forms of appreciation indicate a wider pattern:

Confident visitors use the introduction to gather context, allowing them to negotiate the works with informed agency (i.e. giving them the freedom to develop their own route and approach).

Less confident visitors look to the introduction for stability – to ward off surprises and give them a framework for what they are about to experience.

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Our interview respondents provided some feedback on their motivation for reading the wall text:
one (highly confident) visitor appreciated that the 'concise overview' provided 'enough information to enjoy the room';

Another less assured visitor explained that the introductory text was crucial 'so you know what to expect'.

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