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Dear colleagues,

As you already know by now, My name is Odette Peterink, I work in the Museum Plantin-Moretus/Print Room in Antwerp, Belgium and I would like to give a presentation about “mediation in a printing museum, an active approach”. The museum belongs to the City of Antwerp, which is symbolized by the city logo that you will find on this presentation, the so-called “radiating A”.

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After a short introduction in which I will introduce the museum a bit closer to you,

I will talk about mediation versus education. Maybe you will think: What’s in a name? But we consider using the right terminology for the work we do very important. I will tell you about the choices the museum made in this specific context.

Then I’d like to go into detail into several activities the museum developed for its visitors. Three of these activities are consolidated in our programme, one is a ‘work in progress’ and the last is something we are developing right now.

After that I will reach a probably very obvious conclusion.

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The Museum Plantin-Moretus is not just a printing museum. It’s a patrician residence from the 16th and 17th century. It was the home of the printers and publishers dynasty Plantin-Moretus, founded by Christoffel Plantin in the middle of the 16th century. Parts of the building are from that time, although the present building was largely built during the time of the grandson, Balthasar Moretus.

It is also a printers and publishers business with fully fitted workshop. You can admire the printing room, containing the two oldest surviving printing presses in the world, our type store with a stock of 10 tons of lead type and a foundry workshop.

We host about 158 running metres of archives, a virtually intact company and family archive. It’s history goes back to 1555 and is a proper goldmine of information, not only about printing and typographic technology, but also about everyday life and about doing business in the 16th, 17th and 18th century.

It is a museum with period rooms and a beautiful art collection. For instance in the Great Drawing Room alone you will find 10 portraits painted by Rubens himself. Precious cabinets,

gold leather, tapestries, furniture are standing side by side to show cases from the 19th century with our books and prints. Being the oldest printing museum, we are also a little bit a 'museum about museums'.

We have a Print Room with exceptionally rich holdings from 16th and 17th century Antwerp and Southern Netherlandish graphic art, where you will also find drawings and graphic art from today.

All of this is situated around an inner court, dating from 1639 with a new old garden, a contemporary design based on renaissance models.

Yesterday I found out that we are not a printing museum by the definition of Mr. Münch. We are not solely about printing and printed media, technology or part of a technological museum. In fact we are a bit of everything.

Mr. Grude wanted us to be critical about ourselves, and Mr. Münch asked for new questions. Thinking about that, two questions popped up in my mind: What is the position of our museum within the group of printing museums? I really want to give this a good thought, together with our museum staff. The second thing I started to wonder about is the connection between the old printing techniques we show and teach to the public, and the world of today. I'll have to find an answer for that.

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The museum is part of the Unesco World Heritage.

The recognition of the unique authenticity of this museum started in 2001, when our archive was added to the Unesco Memory of the World Register.

This programme aims to preserve and provide access to the world's most significant documentary heritage.

In 2005 we reached a new chapter in the Unesco book, when the Plantin-Moretus house – workshop – museum Complex was inscribed in the famous list of Unesco World Heritage itself.

It is the first museum on this list. To go back to the different definitions of museums given by Roger yesterday, I think we are a traditional museum. We are not constructed as a working museum or living museum, let alone as a phenomenological museum, but we are integrating workshops in our activities. We are an art museum as well, and a historical museum, but in our attitude we want to place the visitor in the center.

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As you have seen, we are not just an ordinary museum. So when it comes to welcoming visitors in this unique monument, we can't just open our doors and let the public in. The museum and its collection deserve a high standard quality visitors programme. And so I reach my subject 'education versus mediation'.

In the past, the educational role of our museum was painstakingly executed by large and scientifically correct (although not always understandable) information for the visitor. Schoolish publications provided a lot of book learning about history and printing, all executed by a Educatieve Dienst (Educational Service). High in quality, but so boring sometimes... Over the last 10 years this educational service developed more and more into a mediating service, or Publiekswerking. Literally this word means working with or for a public. And that is what we started to do. Off course this was not something we found out ourselves, it was a large discussion in the museum education field in Flanders. We learned from Elaine Hooper Greenhill and Kolb that every visitor has its own learning profile, that there are several very different ways in which people enjoy a museum visit and that no visitor is the same. The museum choose to mediate more than to educate. In our vision the visitor is in the center of the museum now. Take e.g. our old leaflets: there were no people on the pictures we used. Right now we are developing a new one, with visitors this time.

But to go back to the theme of education vs mediation: The difference between education and mediation in a museum is best illustrated by the difference between an educator and a mediator. An educator is a teacher, a guide who stands before the group. The audience is passive. They are spectators. The educator is omniscient and all knowing.

On the contrary, a mediator is a go-between, who stands within the group. The audience is active, they are participants. The mediator and the visitors are exploring the museum together.

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Especially in a printing museum the choice for mediation instead of education is an important one. We swiftd from giving written information about the printing process to learning by experience through 'hands on' experiences and workshops. You will never forget the technique of etching when you made one yourself.

To do this you need highly trained guides and coaches and you have to work in small groups. That can be difficult sometimes, but we choose to upgrade the quality of the museum visit rather than to raise the amount of visitors (although more visitors are welcome of course).

We are quite critical for our guides and coaches. They have to give attractive tours, nice

tours, but just “nice” won’t do. It is not because it has been fun, that it has been good. I don’t like what we call in Dutch the “verleuking” from museums, it means making everything “nice”. The information given has to be right and the methods used to give this information have to be right as well.

An active approach, through mediation, stimulates the visitor. Exploring all the different aspects of our museum makes a lasting impression. The information sinks in properly, and people enjoy their visit a lot more.

As a reaction to Ervins’ presentation, I want to add the following remark: It doesn’t have to go quick. In this fast forward life, we are very much attracted to the “slow” concept. Slow food, slow cities, are already a known concept. We want to be a slow museum (but still active!).

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The following examples of this active approach will show you how we are trying to let our visitors participate in an active way.

We offer different workshops to groups, aged 6 to 88. Those workshops all have one quality in common: they are unique and authentic. The techniques learned during a workshop are not easily learned in school by lack of the right equipment and skills.

Our type casting, type setting and printing workshop is given in a separate room in the museum, that is open to the public. The group members help the guide with really casting new type with the aid of old and new material. Then they set a text (the names of the group and the group members), which they print themselves. Of course everyone gets his or her own print to take home.

A second workshop is the bookbinding workshop, in which they learn simple techniques to bind paper into a book. The guide herself is a skilled bookbinder. These are some examples made by workshop participants.

A third, very popular one is etching. The group members all make their own design, inspired by our museum collection. They scratch it into a zinc plate and finally they make a print on a huge 19th century etching press.

During school holidays we also organize different workshops around techniques linked to printing, books and letters, like marble or mottle. This frame is a nice example.

All these workshops are given in a museum room especially designed for these purposes. The other visitors can catch a glimpse of the activities through the large window.

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As the workshops concentrate themselves specifically around printing techniques, we also developed an active way to explore the other aspects of our museum. Since 1997 the museumplay museJA! Is an important part of our activities. museJA! Means 'Say yes to every museum'.

museJA! Is an overall concept in 7 different municipal museums. It was designed for kids between 6 and 12 years old. The concept is the same in every one of those 7 museums: it is a way of exploring the museum by means of several very different assignments and searches.

The tasks are all about 'to see, to do and to think'. Instead of a search on paper, the kids work with objects.

They explore the museum together, in small groups.

The level of the tasks is adjustable to the needs of the group. Here I have an example of an assignment. This board has a written description of the activities done in one of the rooms. Without using the word, it says what was done in the print room. There are several different boards like this, all symbolizing different rooms. Two kids get one board, they read the description. For kids with reading problems, or very young children, we also have a version with pictures. Then we start the search in the museum. When the kids find the room, they tell the guide and together they talk about the things in that room. After the visit, and after every child found its room, they come together in the museJA! play room. There they will find a simplified, metal floor plan of the museum ground floor. The backside of the board is magnetic, and the children place the boards in the right order on the floor plan. Together they evaluate their visit and what they have seen.

As you can see, the guide is a mediator.

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'Druk bezig in de 17^{de} eeuw' (Busy printing in the 17th century) is our programme for young people.

It is kind of an adult version of museJA! This programme is a work in progress: it was developed as a learning tool, very closely attached to the teaching programme in high school. But our guides were not satisfied by this programme: they got very little attention and participation from the youngsters, and they felt a lot of pressure to do the whole programme. It turned out to be stressing for them and for their public. So now we are turning it into a more active system, like museJA!

We are changing the fixed and immovable system into a more adjustable one. You can

compare it with a toolbox, out of which the guide takes those assignments best suited for the group in front of him or her.

We designed 8 different assignments, every one consisting of something to do, something to look for and something to think about. The class is divided into small groups and each group is given an a task.

They explore the museum by themselves. After a given time they come together again and then the peer teaching starts. Because every group has to tell about their exploration to the other class members.

Here, again, the guide plays a mediating role.

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Another very popular activity is a printing demonstration.

In the room where the printing workshops are given, we have a replica of one of our oldest presses by John A. Williams.

The original press can be found in the printing room.

Printing demonstrations are given on request to groups. We do not offer demonstrations on a regular basis yet.

We are trying to organize this with the help from volunteers, but right now we lack the place to be able to give a demonstration and to give a printing workshop at the same time. It is a puzzle we have to get out by the summer. Maybe I will have news about this next year...

A demonstration is by definition not active. In our philosophy that is a problem. We try to involve the public as much as possible by letting them ink the type and pull the press!

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The last activity that I like to share with you is the Big Crazy Letter party.

This museum party for families is something that we have never done before. During the summer holiday, kids between 5 and 12 are encouraged to bring to the museum their own drawn, stamped, glued, handcrafted letter. All those letters will be exposed in one of our exhibition rooms. On the first Sunday in September, they will be able to look at their own letter in the exposition during the Big Crazy Letter Party.

The aim of this party is to break down the barriers between families and the museum. We want to promote the museum as an enjoyable place to be with the whole family. We really

want to attract the so-called New Europeans with this project. The museum entrance will be free that day.

And there will be several accessible activities. An actor will be reading aloud, there will be nonstop printing demonstrations, kids can participate in different workshops and museum explorations, they can make their own button and after the visit every child gets a small bag with letter cookies.

For me it is always interesting to have a lasting result from a once-only event. In this case we use the big crazy letter party as a steppingstone towards a permanent cooperation with the public library. The library will put a choice of books to our disposal during the summer holiday, while we make a reading corner in one of the museum rooms. After the summer we will evaluate this cooperation, and I hope that we will be able to make the reading corner permanent.

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And now I will come to the conclusion of my presentation:

(Printing) museums: do they have to boring?

The answer of the Museum Plantin-Moretus is no: a museum isn't boring when it gives the visitor an authentic and unique experience.

It isn't boring when the guidance and accompaniment is mediating rather than educating.

The quality of the mediation is very important to upgrade the museum experience.

The visitor isn't bored when he plays a participating and active role during the visit.

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I would like to end this presentation with the biggest compliment I once got from a very difficult teenager after a guided visit from an hour and a half: is it already over?

If you want to keep in touch after this conference: you can always reach me at this email address.

Please take a look at our website: it will be renewed in a few months.

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Are there any questions?