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## User Reception of Minority and Creative Approaches to Visual Art AD: Poetry, Metaphor, and Synaesthesia

### Abstract

This article discusses a focus group reception study of the more frequent visual art audio description (AD) style as described in previous corpus-based studies, along with minority and creative styles also found among current practices. These different approaches are described from a cognitive linguistic perspective that allows for a deeper understanding and comparison of the different AD styles. The results from the qualitative analysis of the focus group discussions show that users' experience of the AD styles varies amongst participants and there are several layers to their experience, since the discussions progressed from specific aspects to much broader questions regarding the very definition of AD and its function.

### 1. *Introduction*

Greco (2018) identifies three shifts in the various disciplines that deal with accessibility, the second shift being a movement from a maker to a user-centred approach, leading to the proliferation of reception studies in Media Accessibility (Di Giovanni and Gambier 2018). According to Romero-Fresco (2021), this shift is also present in accessible filmmaking, where collaboration between filmmakers and accessibility experts is leading to increased creativity and deviations from standard practices.

In the fields of film, TV, and theatre audio description (AD), a number of reception studies (Bardini 2020; Walczak and Fryer 2017; Ramos 2016; Szarkowska 2013; Fryer and Freeman 2012) have dealt with AD styles that offer

an alternative to the standard approach that is recommended by guidelines and implemented by a majority of professionals. In the field of visual art AD, Neves has analysed how the majority style found in visual art AD guidelines and resources in this field is received, with special focus on cultural references (Neves 2016). Szarkowska et al. have dealt with information quantity and use of interpretive descriptions in connection with a universal-design or inclusive approach to creating audio guides for art museums (Szarkowska et al. 2016).

This article discusses a reception study of minority and creative styles of visual art AD that draws on experience and dialogue-based art education theories and methods (Burnham and Kai-Kee 2011). These approaches highlight the importance of individual experience, heuristic and dialogical methods for an art education where educators have a facilitating and guiding role. The study seeks to shed light on users' overall experience, from their perceptual response and psycho-cognitive reaction to the repercussion of contextual factors (Gambier 2018, 57) in their reception of different AD styles. It uses a focus group discussion method where the researchers' authority is mitigated (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2014, 325) while users "negotiate their reception experience and interpretation with each other [...] and the data is enriched by agreements, disagreements, clarifications, and challenges presented in the course of the discussions" (Tuominen 2018, 82).

This reception study has investigated the majority or more frequent style as described in corpus-based studies of visual art AD (Soler 2016, 2018; Perego 2019), which we refer to as the 'objective' or traditional style, along with minority and creative styles and features also identified through descriptive corpus-based studies of this AD modality (Lima and Magalhães 2013; Soler 2019, 2021; Luque 2019; Luque and Soler 2020). We advance that these are, in addition, creative styles and features in the sense that they deviate from guidelines and standard practices and, therefore, they imply the development of original ways to approach the AD of visual art. It is necessary to highlight that these are sometimes linked to subjectivity, but they could refer to any type of non-frequent AD, such as the 'gist' or very short AD. In addition, our focus is on standard versus non-standard practices in visual art AD, rather on just subjectivity levels. For these reasons, we use majority and minority as the main distinguishing criterion in our study. This article focuses on two of the minority and creative styles and features we have identified; namely the poetic style and the synaesthetic metaphor feature, which are more subjective as compared

to the objective style and are described in the next section. To this end, we draw on cognitive linguistic theories that allow for a deeper understanding and comparison of the different AD styles and features, and their underlying cognitive operations.

## *2. A cognitive linguistic account of visual art AD*

In Cognitive Grammar, Langacker posits that language is a symbolic system of structures with a semantic and a phonological pole ([1987] 2008, 15). The phonological pole invokes or provides access to a conventionalized semantic value that consists of conceptual content and a particular construal or “interpretation” imposed on that content. Croft and Cruse (2004) compiled and reviewed previous research on cognitive linguistics, psychology and phenomenology, including that of Langacker, and proposed four dimensions of this construal. These construal dimensions are based on the type of cognitive operations involved in each case: Attention/salience, Judgement/comparison, Perspective/situatedness, and Constitution/Gestalt. Within the Attention/salience dimension, they distinguish four operations: selection or focus of attention, scope, scalar adjustment (related to Langacker’s specificity), and static/dynamic attention. The Judgment/comparison operations include categorization, metaphor, and figure-ground alignment. Perspective/situatedness operations include viewpoint, deixis, and subjectivity/objectivity. The Constitution/Gestalt operations deal with “the very structure of the entities in a scene” and consist of three operations: structural schematization, force dynamics, and relationality (Croft and Cruse 2004, 46 ff.).

In previous corpus-based studies of AD in art museums of Spain, the United Kingdom, France and the United States of America, we focused on the identification of the most frequent features of the product (Soler 2016, 2018). As for the Attention/salience dimension, the results of our studies showed that visual artworks are described as a static product, using static verbs and focusing on the states of the visual components. Within these visual components, iconic signs, composition, and colour are more frequently described. The work is described from an external viewpoint (Perspective/situatedness), that of a visitor who contemplates the artwork, and progresses from a general description to a more specific and detailed one (Constitution/Gestalt). Most

ADs begin with the information provided on the label: the title, author, year, and media or materials. This is followed by an overall description of the subject matter (i.e. the iconic signs) if the work is not wholly abstract, style (medium and technique), composition, and colour. Next, the AD offers a detailed description of the different visual components. This detailed description is organised sequentially (top to bottom, background to foreground, left to right, etc.), using language to clearly indicate the location and other qualities of the different elements within the space of the artwork. This sequential progress thus has three levels of specificity, by which we mean the amount of detail used to communicate the artwork through language (Attention/salience).

These results coincide with the findings of other corpus-based study of visual art AD (Perego 2019). One conclusion that we may draw from these investigations is that the described features come together to create the objective, well organised, and detailed descriptions recommended by existing guidelines for creating visual art AD (ADC 2008; Neves 2014; Salzhauer Axel, Hooper et al. 2003; Snyder 2010). Additionally, it was identified by users as their preferred AD style in a study carried out by the RNIB and VocalEyes, prior to creating their set of guidelines (RNIB and VocalEyes 2003). More recently, a context and process-oriented study conducted by Hutchinson and Eardley's (2020, 480) showed that this style matches the approach proposed and followed by professional audio describers. However, the referenced corpus-based studies of visual art AD also revealed alternative, less frequent approaches and features that may be a valuable asset for enhancing accessibility in visual art and art museums.

One of these minority features is the describer's focus on the opinion or evaluation of the sensations, feelings and ideas triggered by the work in question (Attention/salience). In this regard, the results of corpus-based studies have noted considerable levels of this feature in visual art AD and have argued that it implies higher levels of subjectivity in the description of the artwork (Lima and Magalhães 2013; Soler 2019). Another minority feature that involves increased subjectivity is cognitive metaphor (Judgement/comparison), which has been similarly analysed in corpus-based studies (Luque 2019; Luque and Soler 2020). Metaphor is defined here as a cognitive operation where an element of reality, known as the target domain, is compared to a different conceptual domain, called the source domain (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 41; 120). This conceptual or cognitive definition of metaphor is central to Conceptual Metaphor Theory

(CMT), which “builds on centuries of scholarship that takes metaphor not simply as an ornamental device in language but as a conceptual tool for structuring, restructuring and even creating reality” (Kövecses 2017, 13). The visual component being described is the target domain in the deliberate metaphor operation, and the conceptual domain used to describe it is the source domain. One of the types identified in the referenced corpus studies is the synaesthetic metaphor (Steen et al. 2010, 175), which recreates a sensation through a sense that, while being alien to it, helps us understand it through bodily experience. Within the corpus, this approach is found in ADs created by Lou Giansante and Art Beyond Sight for the Brooklyn Museum and the Whitney Museum in New York, and Wendy Moor for the Tate Modern in London (Luque 2019), as illustrated below:

- “The figures in his paintings appear fluid and soft... not drawn with hard edged lines” (Thomas Hart Benton, *Louisiana Rice Fields*, Brooklyn Museum), where the adjectives “fluid” and “soft”, related to both a tactile and a visual experience, are introduced to describe the physical appearance of the figures and the technique, which are both clearly visual in nature;
- “All this empty space makes the sculpture feel light” (David Smith, *Hudson River Landscape*, Whitney Museum), where the emptiness of the space transforms a visual experience into a weight;
- “The closest anyone could get to a visual representation of jazz” (Jackson Pollock, *Summertime N 9A*, Tate Modern), where music is introduced to translate the painting;
- “The deep maroons reflect the point at which the project went badly wrong” (Mark Rothko, *Seagram Murals*, Tate Modern), where a colour is capable of introducing the abstract idea of losing something.

Although it is impossible to be fully objective (Udo and Fels 2009), most of the above-mentioned guidelines for creating visual art AD (RNIB and Vocal Eyes 2003; ADC 2008; Neves 2014; Snyder 2010) recommend against using metaphors (Chmiel and Mazur 2012) except to convey the artwork’s dimensions. However, one set of guidelines recommends using synaesthetic metaphors, which they name as intersensory analogy (Salzhauer Axel, Hooper et al. 2003). Besides, users’ preferences in the reception study carried out by the RNIB and VocalEyes varied with regard to information type and amount, and

in one specific study within the project, users actually preferred more subjective descriptions, with abundant metaphors (RNIB and VocalEyes 2003).

Both opinions and metaphors are essential features of the poetic AD style, as identified in a recent corpus study (Soler 2021). It is found in the AD created by Claire Bartoli for a guided tour that she conducted at the Musée d'Art Contemporain du Val-de-Marne (MAC / VAL) in Paris, for an installation by Éric Hattan entitled *Lèche-Vitrynes* (Window-shopping). Below is my English translation of the original French AD (available at: [vimeo.com/38136237](https://vimeo.com/38136237); the installation may be seen at: [www.macval.fr/Eric-Hattan-4410](http://www.macval.fr/Eric-Hattan-4410)).

A fantasy of architects!

A very long horizontal window carves out a cinemascope landscape over the trees in the garden and the buildings in the background.

Making it angle, from window to window, a second window, it, all vertical. It rises from the same level as the first.

Help! Do not open the window! The city is just behind. The city, people's lives, people's lives thrown away! They stick, they clump there! Behind the glass, they accumulate. They begin to eat the garden!

Overall, the amount of detail or the level of specificity is much lower than in the majority style. With regard to the Gestalt or structure, it is completely altered, as the artwork is not identified, nor are its dimensions and materials given. Additionally, the location of the formal components is not indicated in detail. More importantly, Bartoli's AD is notably subjective. It includes objective descriptions of the artwork ("a very long horizontal window", "the trees in the garden/ and the buildings in the background", "making it angle... a second window... vertical... from the same level as the first"), but it also offers abundant subjective opinions or evaluations of the sensations ("a cinemascope landscape"), feelings ("help!", "do not open!"), and concepts ("a fantasy of architects", "people's lives thrown away") elicited by the work and metaphors to convey them ("they stick, they clump... they begin to eat the garden"). These subjective opinions or interpretations are consistent with the author's intended meaning for this conceptual installation, as stated in publications about his work. This piece of contextual information is not included in the description



and, therefore, the numerous opinions are presented as belonging to the describer. Bartoli's AD during the guided tour at the museum is preceded by an introduction by the educator she collaborates with, and therefore, visitors are already familiar with the work. However, we propose that this type of poetic AD be offered in the first place to offer an alternative experience of the work.

### *3. Diversity and creativity in accessing the visual arts*

Researchers and practitioners in the fields of visual art (Neves 2012; Magalhães and Santiago Araújo 2012; Hutchinson and Eardley 2019), television (Fels et al. 2006), theatre (Udo, Acevedo and Fels 2010), and film AD (Kruger 2010; Szarkowska 2013) have called for alternative AD approaches and features similar to the minority styles found in the corpus research described in the previous section, including a narrative style, more subjective and interpretive content (including metaphors and intersensory or synaesthetic content), more multisensory content that includes descriptions of sensations other than visual ones (tactile, olfactory), and using voice qualities and other sounds and music to describe the artwork and its experience. There have also been reception studies in these fields that have demonstrated the benefits of these alternative styles for some users (Bardini 2020; Walczak and Fryer 2017; Ramos 2016; Szarkowska 2013; Fryer and Freeman 2012).

From a functional translation perspective, Hutchinson and Eardley (2020, 52-53) have stated that different AD styles should coexist, with the AD ranging from providing access to the object and mental imagery to providing access to a meaningful experience of the artwork. These authors have also suggested that AD should be deemed similar to poetry translation, where different methods coexist with various levels of translator's creativity and visibility.

This heterogeneity of approaches and emphasis on translating the experience of the artwork is closely related to museum studies and art education theories and methods. Increasing importance is given in these fields to the visitors' individual experience of museums and artworks (Eisner 2002), which may and should be supplemented with interpretations and factual information offered by experts and educators (Kai-Kee 2011, 48). The visitor's experience and interpretation should be built in a collective and collaborative way through dialogue and conversation (Burnham and Kai-Kee 2011).

Regarding this experience, a study of visitors in art museums (Kirchberg and Tröndle 2015) showed a variety of profiles according to their type of experience. These authors identified three types of visitor profile and experience: contemplative, enthusing, and social. The contemplative experience corresponds to “a high degree of sentience and sensitivity to the exhibits... connects deeply, reflects and thinks about, as well as improves her/his understanding of the exhibited arts” (Ibid.: 177). The enthusing experience corresponds to “the recognition of famous art already experienced and known before... fame might be a criterion for assessing a work of art as beautiful” (Ibid.). Finally, the social experience corresponds with “the experience of companionship... and correspondent entertaining situations” (Ibid.) Interestingly, a similar conclusion had been reached regarding blind and partially sighted (BPS) visitors of museums and heritage sites and art museums (RNIB and VocalEyes 2003). Hayhoe’s study (2017) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York confirmed this variety of profiles and experience among BPS visitors to this art museum.

One relevant aspect of visitors’ profile is their stage of aesthetic development, which is determined by the individual’s amount and type of experience of visual art. For BPS people, these stages seem to apply (Housen and Desantis 2003). The type of experience BPS persons have of artwork and AD is influenced, additionally, by their type and level of sight. Studies of BPS individuals show that visual imagery is common in people with visual memory, but congenitally and early-blind individuals produce mental imagery related to other senses (Eardley et al. 2017).

All in all, these studies indicate that a variety of AD approaches may help to improve access to visual art for BPS people. The goal of this article is to investigate user reception of a variety of AD approaches as identified in previous corpus-based descriptive studies. The following section is devoted to describing and explaining the materials and methods used to investigate this research question.

#### *4. Materials and methods*

Based on the above-mentioned theories and methods of art education that focus on the importance of individual experience, interpretation, and dialogue, we designed a focus group to discuss BPS people’s experience of visual artworks and alternative AD styles and features.



The focus group was constituted online with a group of seven participants. The group met for one hour once a week over a period of five weeks in June-July, 2021. One week prior to each session, participants were sent a set of materials consisting of two alternative ADs for the same artwork and images of the work. For every artwork and session, the goal was to offer participants not only a chance to experience and discuss ADs, but also to experience and discuss art. For this reason, materials were created to provide them with an objective description and relevant contextual information on the work, as well as a description focusing on the minority and creative approach or feature being investigated. The authors of this article acted as facilitators. In addition, Ruben Ramila Gonzalez, who is blind and has experience as a reviewer and consultant in visual art AD projects, took part as a collaborator, being invited to the focus group sessions to serve both as a participant and a facilitator. For every session, we used the same two guiding questions that inquire about participants' experience of the work first, including sensations, emotions and ideas elicited by the work, followed by their experience and impressions of the different ADs.

The participants in the study are members of the ONCE (Organización Nacional de Ciegos Españoles - National Organization of Spanish blind people). The group was created after the Basque regional department of the ONCE offered their members to participate in the study and we conducted an informative session on it. The participants in the study are all the members who decided to take part in the study. They are blind and partially sighted adults with various levels of sight and experience of visual art and AD, which translated into a rich variety of experiences and comments during the reception study. However, none of the participants is congenitally blind. During the study, we could conclude that their experience in alternative AD methods was non-existent, which is not surprising as they are hardly present in Spanish museums. The focus group sessions were video-recorded, and the relevant sections were transcribed and analysed inductively through coding. A code in qualitative data analysis is "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña 2011, 95). This coding process organizes the data into units of analysis that are then analysed inductively, "reasoning from the level of specific units to broader concepts" (Carey and Asbury 2016, 91).

To study the poetic style, we chose *Summertime N9A* by Jackson Pollock. The poetic AD used in the study is based on the AD created by Claire Bartoli for *Lèche-Vitrynes* (see previous section). The AD we created for the study includes abundant opinions and metaphors. However, rather than associated concepts, it focuses on the sensations and emotions triggered by the work in order to be consistent with the author's declared intention and understanding of the abstract expressionist art movement. Below is our English translation of the Spanish AD we created for the study:

let's feel the lines  
let's feel the shapes  
let's feel the colours

an enveloping piece  
shapes, repeating lines  
curve, straight, area, dot

an enveloping rhythm  
black, yellow, blue, grey  
black, yellow, blue, grey, red

a dance of lines  
a melody of colours  
that wrap our bodies

which find balance  
feeling, feeling  
with no expectations  
with no destination

The second AD used for this session was created by Wendy Moor for the Tate Modern in London (see below). Overall, it is an objective AD of the work, but it presents some minority features (Soler 2021). These include a low specificity level in the description of the formal components of the work as compared to the majority style, as only the first paragraph is devoted to the description of the work and the rest consists of contextual information that focuses on the artist's intention and creation process. Additionally, the initial descriptive paragraph includes metaphors and opinions related to the sensations triggered

by the work. Regarding the Gestalt or structure dimension, this AD starts with a single long sentence that highlights the connections between the different visual components of the work and relates them to the viewer's experience. This type of description emphasizes the connections between the constituent entities, as well as between the work and the person experiencing it, thus understanding it as a relational entity (Soler 2021). This AD indicates the materials and size of the work at the beginning, but the title and artist's name are delayed. The typical discourse structure is altered, thus offering a different experience of the work. This experience resembles one preferred by museum-goers who prioritize their individual experience of the work and so view the work before reading its associated label and text panels.

Within the tangled mass of swirling, looping black and grey lines taking up the cream canvas of this long dynamic abstract painting nearly 19 feet wide and only 2 and a half feet high, almost-vertical thicker black lines at more or less regular intervals, with blobs at top and bottom, suggest a frieze of frenzied dancers. This sense of rhythm is heightened by evenly spaced patches of yellow and blue – and smaller blotches of red, purple and other colours.

The work is called *Summertime N 9A*, and the American artist Jackson Pollock created it in 1948 by literally dancing or at least moving rhythmically around the canvas laid flat on the floor, dripping and flinging house paint from a stick or brush-handle, or pouring it direct from the can. Here he is talking about his method: "... I paint on the floor, which isn't unusual, because the Orientals did that. Most of the paint I use is a liquid, flowing kind of paint. The brushes I use are used more as sticks than as a brush. The brush doesn't touch the surface of the canvas – it's just above..."

The flowing lines here certainly have a calligraphic quality about them, and the sweeping arcs give a real sense of Pollock's arm swinging just above the canvas. He tended to work in trance-like bursts, only stopping when he felt the painting looked as it should. He said that the floor allowed him to be completely in a painting, almost unaware of what he was doing, so the painting took on a life of its own. Pollock often listened to jazz while he worked. *Summertime N 9A* is probably the closest anyone could get to a visual representation of jazz without actually writing notes on a stave.

Pollock's exuberant lines are a direct expression of pure feeling, reflecting his belief that "The modern artist... is working and expressing an inner world – in other words expressing the energy, the motion, and other inner forces." It's because of his liberation of the line from its traditional function of depicting objects that he's considered to be one of the major exponents of Abstract Expressionism.

Pollock achieved the mesmerizing, balanced perfection of *Summertime* N 9A freehand, in an age before computers. But what's even more extraordinary is that recent computer analysis has shown his innate sense of harmony was far greater than previously thought. To hear more press play in a moment.

To study the synaesthetic metaphor feature, we chose *Les Nymphéas* (Water Lilies) by Claude Monet. We decided to use our Spanish translation of an existing description created by Wendy Moor for the Tate Modern and add several synaesthetic metaphors to it. The original AD is of the objective type, but it also presents some minority features (Soler 2021). These include numerous opinions related to sensations, metaphors, and the same initial structure found in the previous AD of Pollock's painting. The researcher and third facilitator in the project, who specialises in synaesthesia for BPS and non-BPS people applied to visual art and other fields, added several synaesthetic metaphors to the original. The synaesthetic metaphors created for this study build a connection between sight and two other senses, namely tactile and auditory. Below is the original English AD with our Spanish translation of the synaesthetic metaphors used for the study (underlined in the text).

The misty pale greens, warm yellows, mauves and rosy pinks of this almost-abstract oil painting 13 feet wide and 6 and a half tall glow vibrantly and invitingly.

It's hung low, in a simple burnished gold-red frame like bamboo pole. Viewed from close to, the encrusted canvas is an amorphous mass of splodged, swirling layers of multi-coloured paint. But with distance, separate shapes begin to emerge. Paradoxically, the further away from the painting we are the more it draws us in; as if we were too close at a music concert. The sound would be distorted in our ears due to the short distance and high volume. On the other hand, if we moved away, we would draw the sound of each instrument more clearly and we would be able to hear the melody in its entirety.

It's called Water Lilies, and it was painted after 1916 by Claude Monet.

Eye-shaped areas of dark blue and mauve contain horizontal groupings of greeny-yellow and aquamarine ovals with blobs of red and pink water-lily leaves and flowers. These contrast with patches of vertical squiggles and smudges in greens, tans and pinks, like indistinct veils.

The work divides into three vertical sections slanting gently towards the right. Up each of the left and right sections are three lily groups one above the other with blurred areas between. Where on the left side there's a group, in the corresponding position on the right

side is a blurred area and vice versa, providing a kind of equilibrium in which the elements are perceived as connected, successively, giving a great sense of almost palpable coherence and harmony.

Towards the top the oval leaves are more squashed, hinting at the tilt of the water surface as it recedes from us, as if time slowed down.

The middle vertical section is predominantly pale pink and bounded by bulging mauve forms suggesting the reflections of trees with a sunrise or sunset sky between, creating a sensation of fluidity and simultaneous spaces that are perceived at the same time. In the centre of this is a particularly smudged area, perhaps where the breeze has ruffled the water. And towards the top right of the work is another, maybe the fleeting movement of a weeping willow, almost like a whisper.

## *5. Results and discussions*

In this section, we present the results of the sessions on synaesthetic and poetic ADs, and we focus on participants' experience of the description, as opposed to the experience of the work itself. As previously mentioned, we followed an inductive coding analysis method, which allowed us to identify the following emerging topics: user reaction (understanding, emotion, and sensation), preference (liking or disliking), characteristic (identification of the features of each AD style), AD concept, audio describer, art and blindness, and suggestions. Through this coding process, we have gained insight into the participants' relationship with AD, and we have conceptualised this relationship from a variety of perspectives.

Regarding the objective AD of Pollock's work, Luis observes it as "a valuable informative-descriptive review for the interested visitor". As opposed to the poetic AD that "dumps an intuition, dumps something that is much more spontaneous, more unreflective", he adds, the objective AD "tries to cover a schema, a structure". Vanessa refers to the poetic AD as "nice, as if I were reading a poem and such, but I don't get the idea", in a similar way to Guillermo, who considers the objective version to be "rational", because "it explains the work perfectly". According to Carlos, the poetic AD could apply to many images because it focuses on sensations, it is not informative of the visual components. Rosa agrees that the poetic AD does not describe

the work but focuses on emotions and sensations. She also states that the objective AD includes both types of information, although “[the objective AD] may need to have a greater touch of sensations or emotions”. We see how Luis, who observes the poetic AD as “a kind of thrilling invitation to the profound primary” that “flees from the intellectual and goes to the dream world and to a deeper, more poetic world of sensations”, later believes that his comments “say very little about the work itself”. Like other participants, Carlos alludes to the importance of contextual information, which is not included in the poetic AD.

In the case of the synaesthetic AD, the experience of the AD is described in connection with sensations and feelings, such as pleasure, plenitude, and calm. These sensations are present when participants comment on the synesthetic metaphors, leading to expressions of feelings and comparisons with nature, for example, “that feeling of eternity, of water moving, you can almost hear even the wind in the willow”. In the synaesthetic AD session, the relationship of the AD with the work is more obvious. Several participants feel that they do not know whether they liked the work or the AD itself, and it is a new sensation for them. They allude directly to the synaesthetic characteristics of the text, to its subjectivity, but they have fewer qualms about enjoying it sensorially, like Rosa: “because my remaining vision often makes me uncomfortable, prevents me from seeing further, so by closing my eyes I see it, and reading the AD I see everything: the colours, the sensation of eternity, of water moving, you can almost hear even the wind in the willow tree. That’s what I felt with the painting”.

During the discussions, participants also refer to the role of the audio describer. Luis defines the creator of the poetic AD as an “artist” who “gives free rein to her interpretation of an image without conforming to any agreed discourse, without sticking to any established code of verbal communication, creating new paths leap by leap, sentence by sentence”. He comments that “In a kind of novel audacity, the audio describer enters a dream-like narrative of shapes, lines, dots, alien to all familiarity, alien to the habitual, the analogical, the known”. It is interesting how he later moves on to discussing the tools with which the process of audio describing starts: “a task that is not designed in what it has to consist of”, showing his understanding of that process.

Reflections regarding the characteristics of the ADs and participants’ reactions to them led to the emergence of two broader topics, namely the



concept and function of AD and art and blindness. Participants discussed what an AD must look like and the line that separates the expectations of a more objective AD style from what 'cannot' be called AD. Their concept of AD makes it impossible for some to approach the poetic AD as AD. Ruben separates the idea of poetic AD from AD per se: "It's more like that, it's a performance, a happening, I don't know how to call it, a poem based on that painting". He feels that his conception is unfulfilled, although it helps him "a lot" to experience the work. He goes a step further and asks himself "what is the function of AD in visual art" and adds, "more than a hyper-detailed description of that painting, I am interested in trying to feel the sensation of it". This connects with his suggestion that "the ideal would be to merge both ADs, because each of them fulfils a function". Luis distances himself from his initial view of AD (influenced by film AD) as "an auxiliary" and understands the synaesthetic AD "almost as a literary genre". It is not a complement, but it is everything, it is what allows a blind person to access the work.

The debate about people's concept about how art should be experienced was also very important. Inma explains that Pollock's work leaves her "cold", she doesn't "like it" and it "makes her uncomfortable" and "dizzy", although the AD "is phenomenal" and she has "been able to visualise the work". The limits between the AD and the work are narrower than ever when the subjectivity of the AD increases. Carlos resents the fact that poetic AD can "influence you a lot in what you feel".

Finally, the participants had a series of suggestions. They recommended that poetic and objective styles be merged or otherwise used to complement each other. However, the start should be with the objective style. They also had recommendations on the type of music to be included in the AD (Vanessa suggests Aretha Franklin, because the lines "dance" in the poetic AD; and Inma, Ravel's *Bolero*, because the work and its AD go "again and again, spinning and spinning", and Satie for the synaesthetic AD). Moreover, the topic of touch appeared at several points. In relation to the poetic AD, Guillermo noted that the poetic invitation to "feel the shape, the line" made him imagine himself touching those shapes and lines. Other participants proposed combining the sensations of the poetic AD with a tactile image, in the attempt to become more involved in that subjectivity.

## *6. Conclusions*

The results from the study show that both the experience of the artwork and that of the AD styles vary among participants. Overall, the study showed that there are several layers to the participants' experience of the work and the ADs. The group was able to talk more or less freely about the specifics and the general aspects of their experience: as the discussions evolved, their comments started to incorporate technical aspects along with emotions, preferences and experience. This is probably related to the opening of possibilities and their acceptance in this context. In addition, the discussions progressed from specific aspects to much broader questions regarding the very definition of AD and its function. Their approach to the concept of AD changes as the conversation reaches the end of the session, as we could see a wider and freer conception in their analysis of the work of art and the AD. This might be connected to our preconceptions of AD, users and audio describers alike.

With this on-going research we seek to put BPS people's experience in the centre of the AD research process. Its findings are already being applied in Spanish museums for the guided tours and audio guides developed by the Kaleidoscope Access association we are founders of, and will be presented to museums and audio describers so that there are more options available to make art accessible, entertaining, and enjoyable. This study is to be enriched with new participants in order to gain a better knowledge of users' reception, including congenitally blind users. In addition, it would be beneficial to complement the focus group method applied in this study with further qualitative and quantitative research that can help researchers shed light on this important matter.

To conclude, we have no doubt that guidelines and standards have been and still are extremely helpful for promoting and improving accessibility. However, the experience of AD users may be enhanced even further by close collaboration with them and acknowledging the diversity of their needs and preferences. Museum visitors are diverse. BPS individuals are diverse. Therefore, the resources available to access museums and visual art should be diverse, so that people are exposed to creativity and diversity and may choose the tools that best suit them. Guidelines should offer the possibility of using different styles, choosing different paths depending on users, context, the type of work, and focusing on the myriad of experiences that may be had in a museum.

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