# Chapter 1 – Performance of the everyday

## Chapter Introduction

A few years ago, I missed a flight for the first time in my life. I told the taxi driver I was running late to the airport, and he raced along the motorway, only to get his tire punctured in the rush. I still managed to pass security, check-in my bag, go through passport control, but once I had got to the boarding gate, it had closed. A security officer walked me back through these several areas of the airport, from passports through to the check-in area, through temporary paneling and partitions, unlocking doors I had never noticed before.

I felt I was almost performing the actions we go through when we board a plane, but in reverse. I saw the airport like I had never seen it before – with spaces multiplying behind closed doors, almost like a series of backdrops and stage 'wings'.  The security officer and I were walking against the flow of people, clearly attracting their attention. Almost like in a procession, I was individually escorted through a crowd and scrutinized by multiple gazes and reached the starting point, where I was invisible again. For the first time, I saw an airport as a site of a continuous performance.

In performance studies, performativity[1] is the ability of speech or actions to produce change or to have an effect on the reality around us – how we live, how we relate to

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[1] First advanced by philosopher of language J.L. Austin (Austin, 1962). The concept has been adopted and interpreted by several authors in performance studies, including the influential reading of the concept by Judith Butler (Butler, 1990).

one another, and the possibilities we have for that in the future. Each of the single actions from the moment of entering an airport through to when we board the plane, have the power to allow us to get on a flight, or not. We may almost see these as performative actions: the inability to perform any of these affects how we proceed to the next stage of action and, therefore, to board a flight.

When walking around the city, we read and follow visible signs and pathways – for example, road signs, public notices, commercial advertising. We also follow internalised or acquired knowledge of social customs of behaviour in a public space. During the Covid-19 pandemic, visible signs and invisible rules of physical behavior became more visible and acquired a new relevance for many people. Physical proximity or distance truly became a matter of life and death – the simple act of being close to another person could lead to a potentially fatal disease (Kourlas, 2020). We are all too familiar with some of these experiences – feeling a sense of threat and anger when a jogger runs close past us as while we walk down the street, worrying about them exhaling near you; in the supermarket, hearing other people huffing and puffing as you get too close to them to reach out to a product on the shelf; on public transport, staring inquisitively at the person who is not wearing a face mask, or being stared at if you have forgotten yours.

During the Covid-19 lockdown periods, many of us took part in online video calls, and became more aware of the choreography of these interactions – with the interplay between looking at image of themselves in the video, looking at the video of the other person on the line, muting/unmuting the microphone, switching off the camera and starting to do another activity while still on the line. In *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Kaprow, 1993) artist Allan Kaprow speaks about the

performative qualities of everyday actions and suggests to script everyday situations, framing them as performance 'readymades' (Kaprow, 2003, p.188). He specifically gives the example of a telephone call, with the pauses, silences, nuances in the tone of voice in the conversation, the actions reaching quickly to the phone receiver, or slowly, scratching an itch or doodling while on the line, are not casual and are often revealing of emotions.

Other physical interactions in a public place, both at the time of the pandemic and prior to it, reveal more subtle dynamics. For example, the strange and awkward play of giving way to another person when walking down a corridor or narrow pathway or an alley. Our choices of movement are negotiated in our mind in such a short time, that it is almost impossible to take notice or remember having taken those decisions and why. In *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Kaprow attempts to script the movement of a moment of minimal movement between three people as they negotiate going through a door (Kaprow, 2003, pp.181-194).

As Kaprow points out, 'the performance of everyday routines, of course, is not really the same as acting a written script, since conscious intent is absent' (Kaprow, 2003, p.187). I read Kaprow here to mean that, although everyday movement can be seen as performance routines, these are not carried out with the intention of performing. Rather, they reflect scenarios that 'are learned and practiced over lifetime' (Kaprow, 2003, p. 187), using a vocabulary that often draws back to our learnt physical behavior since childhood. One example Kaprow brings is table manners.

In my thesis, I analyse everyday movement in the institutional space of the museum. At public-facing level, I am curious about the movement of visitors, in relation to

more or less explicit forms of directing movement, and I refer to these as 'scores'. These may be tangible – for example museum maps, signs, labels, panels, audio-guides, front-of-house staff – or inherent or implicit. I identify the latter in two ways. On the one hand, there are codes of socio-physical behaviour belonging to the museum as a public space, for example, walking slowly and speaking quietly.  On the other hand, each visitor will have their own ideological, cultural and personal preconceptions about the specific museum they are visiting and, also feelings and beliefs about museums as institutions that are derived from  the collective imaginary. All these elements shape and influence how bodies move in such spaces and, as a consequence, affect intellectual engagement with the artworks. With my research, I aim to shift awareness and draw critical attention to visitor movement in the museum space, and I hypothesise how this shift may allow greater agency in performing the movement and, consequently, in engaging with the collections. Simultaneously, my research aims to investigate how concepts drawn from performance theory and contemporary dance practice may be the effective strategies to observe and analyse this movement, and complement the visitor research strategies currently in use in museum practice in the UK.

In this first chapter, I aim to demonstrate how the museum may be seen as a site of continuous performance by referring to literature on everyday movement produced in the field of performance studies, or texts from other disciplines that have been influential in this field. I initially introduce the ideas of resistance and social codes of physical behaviour, drawing on Andrew Hewitt and Judith Butler (Hewitt, 1995; Butler, 1988), both of which are a fundamental theoretical premise to my research. I then link these ideas to sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of the *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) and cultural capital, and discuss his theories' legacy in

museum studies. Bourdieu's ideas provide a springboard to contextualise one of my PhD aims to investigate the mechanisms of exclusion that are founded in institutional operations.

Subsequently, I outline how the performance of the self plays out during the museum visit, in a complex interplay between public and private spheres. In close relation to this, I explain in what ways my research connects to a 'spatial practice' approach (Lefebvre, 1974; De Certeau, 1984; Rendell, 2007) as it aims at revealing hidden or latent social and cultural power dynamics present in the act of museum visiting. At the end of the chapter, I refer to Richard Schechner's descriptors of performance (Schechner, 1988) to reflect on the determiner of time in the museum as a site of continuous performance. Finally, by referencing the discourse on immaterial labour, and on recent theories on temporarily in museums and art galleries, I highlight different qualities of the act of museum visiting and visitor attention modes.

## Social choreography: conforming and resisting

Everyday movement is not only learnt, practiced and performed, but it is also 'pre-scripted ideologically' (Hewitt, 1995, p.15): it is revealing of social structures, acquired patterns and social motives. In line with Hewitt's analysis of the concept *Social Choreography*, which spans through literature, philosophy and history[2], I believe that everyday movement is not a metaphor, or a representation of social order. Rather, movement is a means by which we navigate, shape and rehearse social order. In distinguishing different forms of performance, such as play, sport,

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[2] This concept was later adopted and expanded in performance studies by several authors. Particularly relevant to this research is Cvejić, B., Vujanović, A. (2015) *Public Sphere by Performance*, Berlin: Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers

ritual and the dramatic arts, Richard Schechner (Schechner, 1988, p.15) proposes how through theatre, in a similar way to sports and games, people express their social behaviour. Schechner proposes that in theatre, games and sports have a framework of rules within which there is a certain freedom to express social motives and dynamics. To an extent, everyday movement in a public space is also framed within a set of more or less explicit rules.

Visitor movement in a museum may not seem as profound as it is often limited to very minimal and extremely simple physical acts such as walking, standing, looking. With reference to a prolific academic discourse across performance, literature and philosophy on gesture and on the act of walking (Butler, 1988, Agamben, 1993, Hewitt, 2005), I start from a consideration of visitor movement as profoundly connected to internalised codes of behavior and societal needs and beliefs. I then relate this analysis to the museological debate stemming from Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* as theorised in *Distinction: A Social Critique in the Judgement of Taste* (1976) - an unspoken wealth of heritage inscribed into people's bodies and mind at birth and during upbringing - so subtle, fluid and ever-changing that it is difficult to discern, and yet deeply affecting the human being and their interaction with others, especially when in public.

In line with Bourdieu, Hewitt[3] argues that gesture is a construct of the European bourgeois society, used to 'universalize and naturalize […] the cultural language of a specific class' (Hewitt, 2005, p.81)[4]. To explain this, Hewitt recalls Agamben's

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[3] Hewitt bases this argument on is on Francois Delsarte's observations – a French teacher in acting and singing who influenced Laban's studies on movement (Hewitt, 2005, p.231)

[4] In connection to the idea of excess in protest of a codified system of regulation, Performance studies scholar Kelina Gotman (Kotman, 2018) also proposed an important study of how European travellers encountering unfamiliar movement from other cultures led to classist/racist/ableist 'othering' and producing a lasting dehumanising discourse to describe bodily actions of anyone who was not an able-bodied white European.

interpretation of Tourette's syndrome read as a deviation from a codified movement language[5]. The body that produces involuntary twitches, gestures or words, is a body rebelling against the 19th Century bourgeois culture based on a hegemony of verbal communication: spitting out words is to expel them out of the body in an uncontrolled one-person riot.

Gesture contributes to solidify social and cultural identities and conform to norms of behavior and, by doing so, it sets the preconditions for ruptures and deviations. In this framework, actions such as stumbling or laughter occur at a junction between the mental and the somatic: they are at once anti-social and, at the same time, rely on a social community as their precondition to be perceived as ruptures. Hewitt then goes on to identify not only gesture, but specific ways of walking, as a way to contain the body within the boundaries of a social norm.

Similarly, Judith Butler explains[6] how it is through stylized gestures and acts, practiced since childhood and through repetition, that gender norms are constructed and perpetuated. In line with Bourdieu and Hewitt, she maintains that what is perceived as physiological or biological dispositions are indeed learnt behaviors and attitudes. For example, women are taught to sit crossing their legs or to have a preference for the colour pink. Quoting anthropologist Victor Turner and his concept of 'ritual social drama'[7], Butler emphasizes how repetition is key to the performance of gender and so is its public nature, and these two combined act as legitimation.

Nonetheless, Butler argues, 'the body is not passively scripted with cultural codes,

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[5] Hewitt quoting Giorgio Agamben G.(1993) *Infancy and History, On the Destruction of Experience*, London, Verso

[6] In her analysis (1988), Butler quotes several authors in feminist studies including Marleau-Ponty, De Beauvoir, Foucault.

[7] Butler quoting Victor Turner (1974), *Dramas, Fields, Metaphors*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press

as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural relations' (Butler, 1988, p.156). Here again, I am interested in the tension between internalized codes of behavior and the possibility of resistance, and how this is manifested through the body. Interestingly to my research, Butler uses the idea of 'script', to explain:

> 'Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives' (*idem*, p.156).

Despite the set conditions, the limitations or 'confines' (*idem*, p.521) that the social arena and physical conditioning, the body is 'a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities' (*idem*, p.521) to be continually realized. As I will investigate further later in this paper and through the practice element of my research, and with reference to Kaprow's point made above – that the script of everyday movement is mostly not intentionally performed[8] – the very act of pointing to that script, and raising an awareness of the body's possibility to divert from it, is the very first step towards an increased agency in museum visiting.

In a conversation between Judith Butler and artist and activist Sunaura Taylor, as they 'walk' across San Francisco (Butler, Taylor, 2010), the pair discusses in what ways everyday body movement may challenge the physical norms of behavior and unsettle the social arena. Specifically, Butler asks Taylor, who moves across the city in a wheelchair and is affected by a physical disability, whether she feels she has 'freedom of movement' (2:40-3:35). Taylor brings the example of carrying a coffee

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[8] 'the performance of everyday's routines, of course, is not really the same as acting a written script, since conscious intent is absent', Kaprow, 2003, p.187

cup in her mouth, rather than with her hand, outside of the standard ways of moving a body, rather than her physical impairment, that creates discomfort in the people around her. Her freedom of movement is restricted by the social norms of physical behavior, or the material conditions of her physiology.

Butler also theorises the possibility of outright political protest, collective or individual, through gesture and movement. She famously exemplified a performative act in Rosa Parks' brave refusal to move seats on the bus in the context of the 1950s African American apartheid (Butler, 1997). In support of 2011's series of uprisings linked to the Arab Spring and the Occupy movements, Butler also wrote about mass protest, highlighting the force of unitary action of bodies taking over the street (Butler, 2011). Here, Butler explains how the very presence of bodies in a public space - a space where these bodies are not expected to 'appear' (Butler, 2011, p.3) next to the other - causes the distinction between the public and the private sphere to collapse, and therefore constitutes in itself an act of protest. In instances where the body of those who are normally excluded from participation to political action and discourse – the stateless, the occupied, the defranchised (*idem*, p.5) – appears in a public space, a further statement is made through that appearance: that of exercising the 'right to have rights' (*idem*, p.5).

Moving away from performance studies, a seminal text proposing the idea of creative resistance through everyday movement is Michel De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). In a passage that is strikingly relevant to both dance and visitor research, De Certeau defines 'turns' or turning as stylistic figures of the act of walking (De Certeau, 1984, p.100) arguing that, through walking, the walker manifests their own 'fundamental way of being in the world' (Idem, p.100). He also

equates styles of walking to figures of speech, to emphasize the possibility of 'going against' the direction of a walk and the meaning of words – with this analogy itself playing with the word 'sens' ('sense' or 'meaning' of words and 'direction' of a movement or walking (*idem*, p. 103).

In the fields of urbanism and psychogeography the possibility of the body – collective and individual – to make a detour and draw 'lines of desire' ('lignes de désir', Bachelard, 1958) outside or beyond the pathways outlined by the city scape marks a possibility for resistance. A vivid example of this is the trail in a public park formed by means of people deciding to walk beside and away from the preestablished pathway. This idea has been taken into the practice and theory of urbanism to develop behavioral architectural modelling. Elena Dorato and Gianni Lobosco from the University of Ferrara in Italy, conceived spatial models which can adapt to preferred behavioral patterns and current circumstances, including the recent Covid-19 pandemic (Dorato, Lobosco, Tait, 2020).

## Bourdieu's theory in museology

For Bourdieu, *habitus* is a set of intellectual preferences and behaviors – 'dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1977) – learnt from childhood which allow the individual to navigate the social arena[9]. Repeatedly performed and reinforced throughout adulthood, the *habitus* is recognised by other human beings and, as a consequence, it allows them to assimilate or otherwise discern and 'distinguish' themselves from others, thereby

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[9] This is first theorised by Bourdieu in Bourdieu,. P. (1972) *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique; Précédé de "Trois études d'ethnologie kabyle"* Geneve: Drox; Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of* Practice, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [English trans.] Bourdieu, P. (1980) *Le Sens Pratique*, Paris: Minuit; Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*, Polity Press [English trans.]

asserting their belonging to a social class. It is a mostly unconscious process whereby these preferences are interpreted by the individual as natural dispositions and, instead, are internalised and reproduced through the body.

Bourdieu's vision is central to my research because of its idea of unconscious embodiment of social and cultural norms, a notion that is key to performance studies, too, and has an extended legacy in the field of museology. His work is also extremely relevant to my research both for its methodology and ethos. In *Distinction: A Social Critique in the Judgement of Taste* (1974), Bourdieu follows quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis including questionnaires, to support the political and philosophical argument that taste is not universal, and the appreciation art is learnt since a very young age, rather than being innate to every human being.

Bourdieu's questionnaires for *Distinction* were conducted in France between 1970-72 via national statistical agencies, with questions spanning from the respondents' favourite painter to their favourite car, or their most or least desirable personality traits. Resembling the format of many museum visitors' questionnaires today, Bourdieu's interviews go beyond what today may seem acceptable to ask, linking the idea of *habitus* to details such as whether the respondent makes grammar mistakes in speaking, or their hairstyle or clothes.

Although this method has later been widely questioned, as I will outline below, what it is relevant to my research is its central conceptual premise and, also, its legacy in the field of museum studies.  Moving on from Kant's *Critique of Judgement*[10], where taste is seen as derived from a natural disposition of the human being, and therefore beauty is considered a universal parameter, Bourdieu identifies an individual's

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[10] Kant, I. *(1790) Critique of Judgement*

response or their attitudes towards art as socially constructed. This philosophical argument allows Bourdieu to support a political one – to expose and condemn elitism in the art world, art institutions and everyday life in general, and this is also a key line of enquiry in my research.

In *The Love of Art: European Museums and Their Public*, Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper define museums as 'sites of symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, Darbel, Schnapper 1972, p.), because by attributing value to forms of art preferred by the dominant classes, they perpetuate and reinforce social injustice and power relations. This idea resonates today, when art heritage museums continue to be places of exclusion in terms of socio-economic status and ethnicity. I identify with Bourdieu's intellectual approach of using this political and ideological concern as a main driver for my research. Additionally, as I will investigate more closely in Chapter 2, museums' close connection with the dominant classes, both in terms of historical origin of the collections and the exclusionary interpretation and communication methods, and the demographics of their visitors, contribute to perpetuate social and ethnic inequality.

A Marxist, Bourdieu also formulated the effective term 'cultural capital'[11], which points to an individual's wealth of knowledge and intellectual tools passed on from generation to generation, allowing them to become almost more influential and powerful than through material wealth. For example, Bourdieu explains how a university degree is comparable to a 'nobility title' (Distinction, p. 146): not only does it give an individual the required knowledge and a qualification to access a range of

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[11] Bourdieu then developed the concept, alongside the concept of 'social capital' in the essay Bourdieu, P. (1986) 'The forms of capital', in Richardson, J.G. (ed.) *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education.* New York: Greenwood Press, pp. 241–258

professions, level of income, and selected social circles, but it also provides them with the ability to navigate and forecast current opportunities, and to identify the best strategies for future cultural investments. It is one of Bourdieu's major contributions to Marxist theory to have identified cultural capital as separated from material wealth and in a complex relation to social structures.

Bourdieu's legacy in the field of museum studies and museum practice in Europe and North America is significant in the 1980s and 1990s, when numerous studies were modelled on his theory and methodology. Until today, it is a common practice for museums and galleries to commission surveys that explore the perceptions and connotations of museum visiting not only of audiences, but among those who do not visit (often referred to as 'non-visitors'). For example, several US studies were led by Paul Di Maggio on behalf of the National Endowment for the Arts in the late 70s and 80s[12]. A later study conducted in 1991 by Mark Davidson Schuster, applies Bourdieu's model, comparing data from the USA and several European countries, re-shifts the focus from social class or ethnic group to differences in level of income and education.

These later applications of Bourdieu's theory also reveal its theoretical and methodological shortcomings, with the fundamental one being the risk of stereotyping and over-generalizing the artistic taste of specific social or ethnic groups. In his lecture as part of the Congress held at UAL in 2014 'Taste after Bourdieu', Tony Bennett points out how 'although Bourdieu devotes considerable attention to the internal differences of taste within the dominant class and the petit-

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[12] For example, Di Maggio, P. Useem, M. Brown, P. (1978) *Audience Studies of the Performing Arts and Museums: A critical review*, Washington: National Endowment for the Arts; Di Maggio, P, Ostrower, F, Francie, A. *Race, Ethinicity, and Participation in the Arts: Patterns of Participation by Hispanics, Whites, and African-Americans in Selected Activities from the 1982 and 1985 Surveys of Participation in the Arts*, Washing, D.C.: Seven Locks Press.

bourgeoisie, he treats the working class, except in its gender divisions, as largely homogenous with respect to the organizing principles of its tastes, and he defines these, in negative terms, as a lack' (Bennett, 2014). This led, Bennett continues, to a significant under-representation of the working classes in *Distinction*. As Bennett notices, the reason for this shortcoming, was an ideological one – 'Bourdieu claimed he already knew what was significant about working class cultural practice: the uniform exclusion from legitimate culture' (*idem*).

In the UK, some museological studies conducted in the 1990s apply Bourdieu's methodology, while flagging its determinism and suggesting the possibility of individual agency on taste within socio-economic groups. For example, Nick Merriman's study *Beyond the Glass Case* (2000), reaffirms the idea of an inevitable bond between museum visiting and a privileged access to education and culture, explaining the increased popularity of museums in the UK since the 1970s with economic growth and expansion of the middle classes. Using Bourdieu's terminology, Merriman describes museum visiting as almost an initiation rite to a higher social rank and a substantial increment to one's cultural capital. He however contrasts his theory of 'the choice of the necessary' (Bourdieu, 1974, p.389-390) which maintains that the choices available to us are limited and inevitable according to our social class. Gordon Fyfe and Max Ross, conducted in-depth research on a number of families on the traditionally working-class area of Stoke-on-Trent, to investigate how their artistic taste and attitudes towards museum visiting reflect the complex mixture of individual motivations and a sense of belonging to a plurality of social entities: the working class, the nation, the city itself, the family, and so on.

Although not directly deriving from Bourdieu's methods, statistical studies conducted by museums all over the world today are similar in methodology, and partly, in intention. For example, in 2017 the V&A commissioned market research agency BDRC a major study to understand its audiences and with the intention of reaching out to those who do not visit. The study resulted in identifying 7 'segments' which are still used in the museum's audience strategy today. Although these groupings sometimes include ethnic or socio-economic identities, they aim to classify people according to their attitudes towards visiting and experiencing art [Image 1]. For example, some of the questions entailed: where they are from, their age, what level of education, and questions such as the below [Image 2].
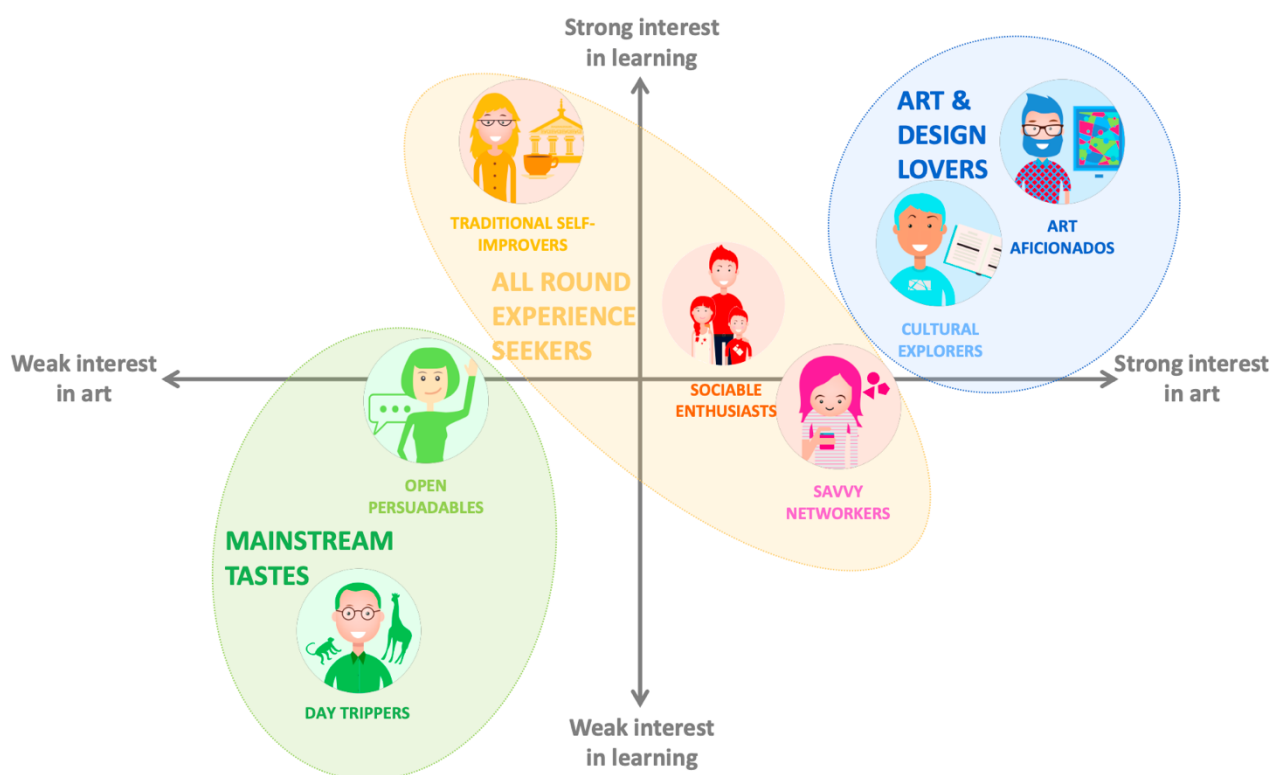


**Image 1:** V&A Audience Segmentation Full Report, 3rd Aug 2017 (internal document)

**Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each sta**

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|---|
| I often do things on the spur of the moment |
| I prefer visiting attractions which I have been to before |
| I'm always on the lookout for new and different experiences |
| I'm quite traditional in my views |
| Other people tell me I am difficult to please |
| I often go to events or exhibitions just so I can say I've been |
| I usually choose places to visit based on where I'll have most fun or entertainment |
| I try to avoid visiting attractions at times when there are likely to be lots of children visiting |
| I like to keep up with the latest trends and developments |
| I like to share my experiences at visitor attractions on social media |
| I usually research the collections/ content of a site  before visiting |
| I am interested in attending additional events or tours when visiting attractions to extend my knowledge |
| It's important to me that I learn something on a day out |
| When viewing art, I always look for insight into the artist's technique |
| Viewing objects in glass cabinets is boring |
| Museums and galleries are usually just a backdrop for meeting up with friends |
| I'd rather spend more to get better quality |
| I always look out for special offers and discounts |
| I usually buy something from the shop when on days out to visitor attractions |
| I would be interested in volunteering at a museum |
| I donate to cultural institutions |
| If I lived close enough, I would buy membership for any attraction that I really enjoyed |

**Image 2:** V&A Segment Allocator Tool

Despite the similarities between quantitative and qualitative methods used by Bourdieu at his time and those used in museums today, it is important to highlight the differences in motivations and approaches between the two. As mentioned above, Bourdieu's surveys were conducted to support a political and philosophical argument against the perpetuation of elitism and power relations through the art and cultural system, and to explore a socio-demographic context evidencing this argument. Market research studies are partly conducted by museums and galleries today in response to an incredible financial pressure to expand their audiences and to either justify public funding, seek new ways to increase self-generated income, or subsidize the insufficient public funding.

## Public and private

My research also starts from the understanding that museums are public spaces where we know that we are 'seen' by other people. From the moment we enter a museum space, we are performing.  As in any public space, we are aware that we are being seen by others, and our movement is always performed in relation to other people around us.

Several contemporary art works have highlighted the performance of everyday movement in the museum as a public space. In Roman Ondak's 'Good Feelings in Good Times' at Tate (2007), a small group of performers forms a queue where there is nothing to line up for. With humour, Ondak draws our attention to the social choreography of queueing and how this becomes a mirror for the onlookers' desires and expectations, their attitudes around gaining and losing, or around conforming and resisting to social customs.

In Bojana Cvejić's *Spatial Confessions* at Tate Modern (2014), the audience is asked to perform simple movements in response to a series of provocations that reveal their ideas, beliefs and social status. For example, the performer asks the audience to move to a part of the room if they would like to change their job; or 'form a line according to the degree of capitalism of the area' (Cvejić, 2014) they live in. Choreographer Christine De Smedt, who co-produced the Tate piece, notices how the work 'acts as a sort of choreographic survey' encouraging participants to show through their body movement 'quite literally, what they stand for' (De Smedt, 2014). This work was also an inspiration for the audience 'score' I devised and performed as part of the one-day symposium 'How Do Insitutions Choreograph Us?', as I will

discuss in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

I reference the above and other artworks throughout my thesis as research material and I connect with these in the same way I do with academic literature - as investigative tools to emphasise the relevance of visitor movement and of different choreographic modes present in the museum space. I do not intend to analyse how visitors move in relation to these specific artworks.

De Smedt also notices how the museum space makes people aware of their 'performing selves' (De Smedt, 2014) and points out how 'people take it really seriously, but they also know they can lie' (De Smedt, 2014). As I have outlined above, Judith Butler also asserts a parallel between the performance of everyday life and theatre as interpretation of a given 'script', however, she also underlines that we must acknowledge the difference between the two. Anything acted in an established context of performance creates a framework of fiction and therefore poses a distance between the audience and what it is observed. For example, the ability to say, 'this is just an act' or 'it is only a play' (Butler, 1988, p. 527), brings an audience to applaud a performer in drag, while the same sight on a bus may cause reactions of fear, rage or even violence.

The performance of the self in a museum space and the complex interplay between private and public dimension reveals itself clearly in certain aspects of museum visiting. For example, in *A Pedagogy of Witnessing'* (2014), Roger Simon points to the performance quality of visitors' comments book. By analysing current and historical examples of museum comments books dating up to the mid-16th C, Simon

points out how museum comment books allow one to express thoughts publicly and anonymously, and therefore often includes more uninhibited responses. They are often acts of social positioning or they assert a social or cultural status, working in relation to other commenters, like in the example of the Aldrovandi book (late 16th C), or they may be seen a symptom of fragmented society like in 1962's comment book for the *30 years of MOSKh* exhibition in Moscow during the period of de-Stalinisation (Simon, 2014, p.123).

But most importantly to my argument on the interplay between private and public, is that comment books are often revealing of what is not said, what is self-censured in the public arena. As Simon points out, 'each comment may be understood as a letter, or better, a note written to a presumed unknown reader' (Simon, 2014, p. 129). And, in the case of *Without Sanctuary*, an exhibition about race violence in America (*idem*, p. 128), the comment book is a tool to continue or extend the public conversation on a topic that may provoke intense emotional reactions from the public – where these may either be of distancing oneself from the perpetrators or bystanders of violence or for the comment to mark a performative moment of 'becoming somewhat different than one was before the act of written expression' (*idem*, p.131).

The fact that our behaviour in public spaces is inevitably self-censored, and inextricably linked to the individual's response to social codes of behaviour or an act of social positioning, is also an important and potentially problematic knot for my PhD's practical methodology of visitor observations. This method derives from 'fieldwork' anthropological and sociological studies and, as such, carries its inherent conceptual paradox: the researcher's point of view is bound to their relative cultural,

social and historical perspective and, at the same time, it has the intent for the observer to remove themselves and gain a separate perspective from that context. As Gore and Grau point out, fieldwork requires researchers 'the ability to 'relativise' things first by distancing themselves from their own cultural values and presuppositions and, secondly, by learning to suspend their judgements from those of others' (Gore and Grau, 2014, p.132). This problematic is shared with movement observation practices in choreography, where the observant is present in the same space of the subject observed, and their presence affects the person's movement. I will investigate this problematic further in Chapters 3, in relation to issues of epistemology in social research.

## Spatial practice

In the development of my practice-research of live scoring presented later in Chapter 3, I strongly connect to ideas in the area of research of 'spatial practice', and particularly philosopher Henri Lefebvre's idea of 'social space' (1974), Michel De Certeau's understanding of 'practice of everyday life' (1984) and Jane Rendell's practice of 'site-writing' (Rendell, 2007). I am interested in what bodily practices and behaviors emerge beyond and in between the 'actual' space created by architecture and urban landscape, to observe 'the lived everyday experience of space' (Rendell, 2007). This type of space is produced by an individual's ways of navigating the architectural and urban space in relation to their own interpretations of them, and through social interaction with others, all of which include the possibility of resisting or disrupting the built environment through physical behavior.

Henri Lefebvre introduced the idea of a space that is produced by the 'hypercomplex'

(Lefebvre, 1974, p.88) interweaving of social interactions. Building from Marx's idea of production of goods and the relations created by it, Lefebvre puts forward the necessity to elaborate a 'critique of space' as something that is not identifiable in a particular person or group, or an object or good, and not even in the material features of an architectural or urban environment. Rather, social interactions at various levels - from the home, street, city to the global level - create invisible spaces or reveal 'inherent' or 'latent' spatial relations (Lefebvre, 1974, p.90). Some examples of these interactions are buying or selling, traveling or moving around the city, working or playing. As I will analyse in more detail in Chapter 3, my methodology of live scoring aims at noticing and scripting these social interactions and 'social space'.

For Lefebvre, fragmenting the study of space into separate disciplines (geography, science, mathematics, architecture, and so on), has failed to recognize the fundamental connection between the various levels of space and, most importantly, its connection with time. Lefebvre acknowledges critical spatial practice to be a somewhat 'paradoxical' and 'outrageous' concept (Lefebvre, 1974, p.92), because it does not focus on space as a specific object of study, but on the relations embedded within it.  For Lefebvre, it is precisely by joining up the understanding of space with that of time that reveals inherent relationships of power. In Chapter 3, I will demonstrate how this connection of space with time has informed my methodology conceptually and in the development of my practice of producing hand-drawn visitor 'maps.

Following Lefebvre's imprint, Michel De Certeau distinguishes between *spaces* and *places* in the context of his theory of the practice of everyday life. While a place is fixed and relatively stable throughout time - for example, an architectural or

urbanistic feature such as a square or a street - it may encompass several spaces. Spaces are connected to relationships between people and between objects and subjects, and they contain dynamic narratives. Spaces are constantly produced and the experience of them changes from person to person – they are subjective because they are dependent on practices. In brief, 'space is a practised place' (De Certeau, 1984, p. 117). This concept has also strongly informed my practical methodology of live scoring presented in Chapter 3, where I aim to discern what spaces emerge in between bodies in space, and in between bodies and the architectural or urban space, and the objects displayed within it. This idea is also fundamental to my research as it allows me to show how each visitor's experience is different and subjective, and it cannot be reduced to the material aspects of the museum as a 'place'.

Similarly, *tours* create or take us through a space while *maps* represent a place. Tours function as narratives as they script a series of actions, while maps describe the characteristics of a place in a particular moment in time. Referencing C. Linder and W. Lubov (De Certeau, 1984, p. 119), De Certeau summarises a map in the statement 'The girls' room is next to the kitchen' and a tour in 'You turn right and come into the living room' (*idem*, p.119). With reference to J.L. Austin's terminology (Austin, J.L., 1976), from a widely influential book in the field of performance studies, we may say that places and maps are constative, and spaces and tours are performative, where the former report on a condition of reality and the latter produce a reality which may have a different outcome every time they are performed.

Similarly to Judith Butler, who highlights the necessity to 're-describe' (Butler, 1988, p. 530) existing gender identities, Jane Rendell's practice of site-writing aims at

using words to re-build narratives and 'fill in the gaps' of 'objective' architectural structures with untold, subjective histories. Following Lefebvre's idea of the social production of space, Rendell aims at describing how a space was used to reproduce social relations, including those of oppression and domination. For example, in *Subjective Space: A Feminist Architectural History of the Burlington Arcade* (1995), Rendell explains how the reflective glass and luxury shop fronts were a mirror to the commodification of women on several levels. On the one hand, wealthy women were sent to shop there as customers to express the status of their husband through their purchases, their clothes and the amount of leisure time spent in the arcade. The staff working in shops were mostly female - milliners, hosiers, hairdressers, jewellers and florists - and referred to as 'shop girls' were the focus of sexualized male gaze. Finally, the district the Burlington was located in was famous for gambling and prostitution and the upper-class prostitutes often used the arcade to pick up clients. The shops were hired out to prostitutes or used by the shop girls themselves for prostitution to compensate for their otherwise inadequate wages. Even representations of the arcade in literature, art and magazines were 'structured around images of the female body' (Rendell, J., 1995, p. 6).

I am interested in taking Rendell's approach to reveal hidden narratives of social inequality and perpetuation of gender power relations in the museum space, and to integrate her idea of site-writing as part of my practice in combination with textual choreographic scoring of visitor movement. Furthermore, Rendell's analysis of the spatial practice of the Burlington Arcade echoes the museum's politics of seeing and being seen.

## The museum as a site of continuous performance

In this section, I discuss the hypothesis that museums are a site of continuous performance. I use performance studies' author Richard Schechner's framework of four defining characteristics of performance, and then question this in relation to the more recent discourse on immaterial labour in art institutions. I argue here that the museum environment frames the action of visiting as performance and, equally, that this performance can only be interpreted in relation to the capitalist system where museums produce experiences as goods. I then focus on an analysis of temporality in museum spaces and connect them to different types of visitor movement and attention modes. Setting the scene to understand this apparatus enables me to zoom in, later in the thesis, on the ways in which visitors' agency may be increased or re-valued starting from a focus on the visitors' body and movement.

Richard Schechner (Schechner, 1988) describes performance as a wide specturm encompassing play, sport, ritual and the dramatic arts, all of which have four fundamental traits in common:

1) A special ordering of time
2) A special value attached to objects
3) Non-productivity in terms of goods
4) Rules[13]

A museum is a repository of objects that not only visitors and members of staff, but

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[13]Schechner (1988), p. 8

those who took care of preserving them in the past and traded them to us attribute

an incredible amount of value to. Especially for heritage museums such as the V&A,

holding a national collection, the value of these objects is considered so high that it

cannot be quantified financially, and the objects are protected by law from being sold

or disposed of (*National Heritage Act*, 1983). In a capitalist system, taking an object

out of the market so that it cannot be sold or traded, attributes it an even higher

value. Far from being free from the laws of the capitalist market, museums are an

integral part of the system, which attaches special value to material objects.

Looking at the second descriptor in the list, it is indeed not a primary aim of art

museums to produce goods in the sense that Schechner intends it. Differently from

commercial art galleries, which directly participate in the art market by selling or

commissioning art works to be sold, the mission of national museums, in the UK at

least, is to make their collections accessible to the widest possible audience and

acquire new objects to be preserved and prevented from being sold or traded.

It is important to note, of course, that this does not take art museums out of the

equation in terms of playing an active role in the capitalist system. In the V&A

mission, for example, condensed and publicly stated on the museum's website (V&A,

2022) the second strategic objective is to 'Focus and deepen the relevance of our

collections to the UK creative and knowledge economy'. While art museums' primary

mission is not to produce tradable material goods, the value of collections within the

system of commodification of knowledge and cultural experiences is clear and

publicly stated.

Although the V&A's position as an active player in the creative economy has been considerably re-ignited and rebranded in the past 15-20 years[14], this was indeed a founding principle of the museum at its inception. Its original mission as the 'Museum of Manufacturers' was, in fact, to foster the design industry and the production of applied arts by educating artists and designers (V&A, 2022). And its close and formalised links, then and now, to the neighbouring Royal College of Arts confirm that. Other museums, such as Tate, acknowledge their connection with slavery as a crucial motor of the capitalist imperialist system the Tate gallery originated from. The Tate collections were in fact accumulated thanks to the founder's wealth built on human exploitation through their sugar trade company, Tate & Lyle (Tate, 2022).

Furthermore, and more importantly to my analysis, art museums today continually create immaterial products: the experience of museum visiting itself is commodified and marketed as a good. Several authors in the fields of museum and curatorial studies discussed the commercial quality of contemporary art museums[15], described by Clare Bishop as 'populist temples of entertainment' (Bishop, 2013, p.6). Some of these experiences, especially temporary exhibitions, are explicitly priced in the form of entry tickets[16]. Although UK museums, unlike most European museums, do not charge for admission, they market their visitor experience as part of a brand building exercise not dissimilar from what companies and businesses do in the current 'experience economy' (Pine, Gilmore, 2019). Head count is a key factor for museums in reporting to public funding bodies in the UK: each visit corresponds to financial

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[14] Since 2006, the 'Victoria and Albert Museum' was rebranded into 'V&A' to attract new audiences. A signature part of the operation of rebranding was the introduction of the programme 'Friday Late' – a late opening of the museum with music, participatory events and alcoholic drinks – which had the specific purpose of increasing younger audiences (17-30 years old).

[15] See Foster (2015), Steyerl (2013), Fraser, A. (2005) Krauss, R (1990), O'Doherty, B.(1986)

[16] Going back to Schechner's frame of analysis, theatre, where tickets are sold, is not classified as producing goods. However this discourse is precedent to the analysis of immaterial labour becoming predominant.

income for the museum. Therefore, even if admission is free, the visit is monetised as part of funding bids.

The commercialization of the experience of museum visiting also reflects on the movement practices of visitors and their mode of attention.  In *Is the Museum a Factory?*, Hito Steyerl (Steyerl, 2009) emphasises the immaterial labour performed by museum visitors, who are hyper-stimulated by the multiplicity of the experiences offered, and whose attention is relentlessly stretched and split between different levels of interaction or mediums (film, audio, installation, and the traditional artworks). Visitors are thus drawn into producing and reproducing the cognitive toil of 'actively montaging, zapping, combining fragments - effectively co-curating the show' (Steyerl, 2009).

As Bojana Kunst argues (Kunst, 2015), the museum as part of the post-Fordist model of capitalism is founded on a system of exchange of work with the visitor. This system produces a modality of visiting where the museum does not 'organise the gaze' (Kunst, 2015, p.62) and the visit is shaped through 'endless rearranging […] of paths taken and decision made' (Kunst, 2015, p.62). What the museum encourages as 'going with the flow' (Kunst, 2015, p.62) demands of the audience a social, cognitive and affective 'effort' that often results in exhaustion (Kunst, 2015, p.62). In this framework, the 'audience performs the work and performs the public' (Kunst, 2015 p.61), and this is 'a new form of exploitation' (Kunst, 2015 p.62).

In light of these theories, and to revise the discussion of Schechner's third point, although it is true that museums' main mission, unlike commercial art galleries, is not to produce artworks to be sold on the market, they, however, play an active role in the system of production of goods and, equally, they participate in the current experience economy, where goods are immaterial. However, it may still be argued that those experiences are staged as performances, orchestrated by a combination of curatorial, marketing and front-of-house strategies.

When working in Marketing at the V&A, I learnt that the café and the gift shop are a 'must-stop' in the majority of visitors' itineraries and a key added 'perk' to the museum visit as a product. As museum marketeers, we identify the 'visitor journey' as encompassing the pre-visit (everything that the visitor hears and pre-empts about the visit), the actual visit, and the post-visit (what visitors take home, from souvenirs to brochures to pictures on their mobile phone to stories to tell their friends and family). Although the visit is free, designing the visitor journey is an operating of 'shaping of affects through virtual or actual contact' (Heathfield, 2020, p.3).

Looking at the fourth point from Schechner's list, there are certainly rules of behaviour when entering the museum as a visitor. We are all familiar with the 'do not touch' rule, which we are occasionally asked to break for certain types of interactive or participatory artwork. The majority of museums will display a set of rules in the form of signs or panels at the entrance of the museum or of each gallery, for example, 'no food or drinks', 'no photography'. Tate has their rules stated on their website (Tate, 2022). While working as a member of staff dedicated to the care and display of objects, I was made aware that there are precise rules to follow in relation

to security, conservation and handling of objects.

I have outlined above the relevance of Schechner's descriptors of performance to the museum space while acknowledging that this analysis belongs to a time when discourses on immaterial labour had not yet come to the fore, and I have highlighted the evident commodification and monetisation of experience in museums today. I will now go on to discuss Schechner's point 1, 'the dimension of time' (Schechner, 1988, p. 8) in relation to the time frame of the museum visit, to then integrate it with more recent studies that utilise a performance theory framework to investigate the temporality of museum visiting.

Schechner characterises different types of performance time as:

1) Event time

2) Set Time

3) Symbolic Time[17]

Either of these three descriptors of time may characterise a museum visit, depending on the curatorial rationale and the visitor's approach to the visit. When a museum's spatial arrangement is chronological or by style or 'school', visitors may decide to go through it sequentially, therefore committing to complete all the steps before they leave, however long it might take. This type of time frame is close to Schechner's idea of 'event time', typical of other types of performance such as baseball, hopscotch and shamanic rites – or, I would add, most video games – where you

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[17] Schechner, R. (1988), p.8

have to complete one stage to go to the next and going backwards is rare and only happens if you fail.

Although this type of curatorial arrangement is not often used in museums today, audiences often still expect or imagine their visit to progress in a linear way. When I was working as Gallery Assistant at the Victoria and Albert Museum, even when the exhibition or gallery arrangement was not sequential or chronological, and in fact it deliberately encouraged a non-linear visit, visitors seemed confused and often asked me 'So, where does it start?' Visiting exhibitions or galleries during my Bachelor's Degree in Art History, I felt proud, as I newly discovered myself as an 'expert', to have the courage, against what all other visitors were doing, to go back to the first room, or to quickly walk to the last room to begin with, and to then slowly visit the exhibition in the 'wrong' order. One of the reasons I was doing this, was that I wanted to check how long the exhibition was going to take me to visit.

Indeed, one of the main causes of 'museum fatigue' (Falk, 2013; Davey, 2005) is that we do not know how long it is going to take us to visit, and we do not calibrate our physical and mental energy throughout the visit. We often start with great enthusiasm, to then gradually realise that 30 mins have passed, and we have only visited 2 rooms as we have read all the labels in great detail. Partly for this reason, visitors often decide to assign a limited time for their visit, for example, one afternoon. But also, this is often circumstantial – a tourist who has only one afternoon before they move on to something else, a local who has one afternoon off. This 'set time' corresponds, in Schechner's analysis, to a similar time frame to sports like football or basketball, where the game will end after a certain amount of time, for

example, 90 minutes, wherever the score is at.

Finally, a museum visit can also be described as having a dimension of 'symbolic time' in the way Schechner intends it – 'when the span of the activity represents another (longer or shorter) span of clock time' (Schechner, 1988, p.8). While walking through the museum galleries and observing objects produced at very different times in history, we 'pass through' several years, centuries or millennia. The time span of our visit contains pools of expanded time for each object. Art historian and museum theorist Clare Bishop, referring to Didi-Huberman's reading of Aby Warburg's work, describes artworks as 'temporal knots, a mixture of past and present; they reveal what persists or 'survives' from earlier periods, in the form of a symptom in the current era' (Bishop, 2013, p.20). Museum objects may also be seen as time capsules in the sense that each visitor will engage with them for a different amount of time, with some works intended to be experienced for longer (for example, a video presented in a gallery). Additionally, whatever time the artist has intended the work to be experienced for, visitors may choose to stay with it for a different amount of time, depending on their interest in the work and their level of engagement with it.

Schechner also explains how each of these three ideas of time can exist in performance in combination. Similarly, our choice of spending more or less time for the visit, might be influenced by different factors and also, while we may have decided to spend a certain amount of time in the museum or go through it sequentially, we may then decide to turn around and go through the same pathway twice or more.

Dorothea Von Hantelmann, distinguishes between the time modalities of the 'appointment' (Hantelmann, 2018, p. 3), defining theatre, where audiences have to arrive and leave at a certain time, and that of the 'opening hours' (Hantelmann, 2018, p. 3), which include spaces in modernity such as museums and exhibitions, but also shopping markets and arcades. Hantelmann states how art spaces today constitute a hybrid of these two models: one can attend ticketed or timed events inside a museum, for example, a talk or a performance, or walk in and out at any point within a set time frame, for example, 10am-6pm. In line with Schechner, Hantelmann also analyses this time dimension in art museums to emphasise the connection of this kind of temporarily with ritual in liberal, modern societies which normally 'lean toward a certain anti-ritualism' (Hantelmann, 2018, p. 3).

In the last part of this chapter, I have put forward an analysis of the museum space using key concepts on temporality in performance theory in combination with the discourse on immaterial labour, to come to distinguish possible qualities of visitor movement and related attention modes in museums. On the one hand, I identify a relatively still, sequential, progressive quality of visitor movement. This 'processional glide' (Heathfield, in Wee, 2016) can be associated with a contemplative attention mode, traditionally expected in museum spaces (Bishop, 2018). At the other end of the spectrum, I see a hyperactive, incessant stimulation produced by museums as integral agents in the capitalist system, where the experience of visiting is branded as a product.

Both modes lead to what could be described as different types of exhaustion (Lepecki, 2006, 2010, 2016). As pointed out both in performance theory (Heathfield, 2016) and in museum studies (Davey, 2005), the slow, gradual pace of traditional

museum visiting, where there is an almost obligatory trajectory forward, is unsustainable. After an average of 30 minutes, our body is fatigued and, as a consequence, our mind shuts down (Falk, 2013). On the other hand, as Bishop has noted (Bishop, 2013), the hyper-stimulation and hyper-activity required by visitors in an intensified interactive museum experience does not often entail a deeper engagement with the artwork and, once again, is exhausting.

It is interesting to notice how, in many contemporary art museums, and through certain types of art works including installation, video, participatory and performance art, a new temporal aesthetics has emerged whereby the visit becomes 'a long experiential passage' (Heathfield, 2014) and the 'ethics of slowness' (Lee, 2002) challenges the temporality of everyday life in the capitalist framework. To an extent, this type of aesthetics seems to reconnect to the 'contemplative' mode expected in traditional museum spaces.

In *Black Box, White Cube, Grey Zone* (2018), Clare Bishop points out a 'moral' assumption associated with the 'contemplative' mode – we assume that everything we give our fully-focused attention to, is valuable. Indeed, the traditional museum code of behaviour is that we must be quiet, walk slowly, not interact with other people too much, not take photographs, in a revered and almost religious respect for the artwork. Despite largely criticising the hyper-activity of the today's museum spaces in her previous writings, in this essay Bishop analyses how the new modes of attention required by museum or exhibitions which encourage interaction and participation, including performance and dance work, challenge this traditional way of moving and looking in a positive way. For example, from 'no photography', we have come to a constant sharing of experiences on social media during the visiting. As

she points out:

> 'Attention exists on a continuum of other states not necessarily attached to the optical, including trance, reverie, daydream, hypnosis, meditation, and dissociation. These internal states were once thought essential to creativity, but today tend to be devalued as nonproductive time.' (Bishop, 2018, p. 38)

Through my practice-research described in Chapter 3, I aim to observe and investigate different ways of moving and related modes of attention may exist in a museum environment where objects are still and not likely to be durational or interactive. I refer, however, to studies of such works and theory on attention and movement modalities generated by these in museums to inform my study of visitor movement in a traditional museum space.