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Thinking Inside and Outside of *The Square*

Barriers, audience engagement, and contemporary art in Ruben Östlund's film *The Square*

A Master's Thesis for the Degree Master of Arts (Two Years) in Visual Culture

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ABSTRACT

It is easy to see that not everyone belongs in the same social circle as those who regularly engage with art and who visit contemporary art museums. I take this as intuitive. In 2017, Ruben Östlund's film, *The Square*, garnered tremendous critical acclaim for satirizing the problems in high-end contemporary art culture. In my research, I take these issues seriously, using *The Square* as a point from which to inspect contemporary art world. A wealth of research is dedicated to exploring the museum's role in society. In this thesis, I claim that the museum bars meaningful engagement by some members of society. In other words, the contemporary art museum distinguishes two classes of citizen: the uneducated, disinterested, culturally unaware and the educated, engaged, culturally aware. As museums have evolved, so have art and the social institutions that support art at large. Art and museums necessarily share a symbiotic relationship. Despite that engagement with art is seriously challenged by various aspects of art, the museum, and contemporary culture more broadly, museums and galleries multiply at a breakneck pace. Why? Relying on research from Foucault, Bourdieu, Debord, Duncan and Danto among others. I try to understand all these developments in relationship with one another. I take *The Square* as a good exemplar for various problems in the museum and in the art community. Approaching this area of study without preconceived notions, without agenda, and without expert knowledge, I deploy a phenomenological approach in order to try to authentically investigate these issues through points of interest and resonance.

Keywords
Contemporary art, White cube, Artspeak, Audience, Discourse

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

> A good piece could be written on the art audience and the educational fallacy. We seem to have ended up with the wrong audience.
>
> Brian O'Doherty

This paper investigates Ruben Östlund's feature film *The Square*. It achieved critical and commercial success and it was one of the most discussed films in 2017. However, I believe that the film also deserves its attention for its relationship to visual culture.

The film is a satire of the art community and of modern Western culture. Its narrative centers on a new museum of contemporary art – the X-Royal museum – located in the former Royal Palace Stockholm. Östlund creates a multilayered and complex work that consists of ideas about the role of art and its audience, the sense of community, and contemporary moral values challenged by egocentric market economics. These themes slowly take shape while the storyline develops. Among these layers, the interest of the current study is film's depiction of art. We have witnessed the set of episodes happening at the museum that reveals the gap between 'intention' and 'action', outlining significant issues in the field of contemporary art.

The art museum in the film appears to include the standard features of a Western modern art gallery: uniform white walls that produce enclosed space, a feeling of disembodiment highly conceptual artwork, few visitors, visual observation devoid of any sound, visitors' rapid moving from room-to-room, and guards who sit on their chairs and survey the visitors. It likely comes as no surprise to readers who occasionally visit modern art museums that besides art on display, the fictionalized X-Royal museum also organizes lectures given by artists wearing pajamas to packed audiences, prepares large-scale PR-campaigns, holds press-events that accompanied by posh cuisine, hosts events for celebrities and patrons in tuxedos, and throws hip late-night parties. Östlund's fictionalized modern art museum is true to its real-life referent: the king of today's art museums. In this essay, I interrogate the way Western modern art museums share the experience of art. What are contemporary audiences' views on art, especially in relation to the role of the museum? Is it about contemplation, interaction, and learning, or rather, is art merely about passive spectatorship? How does the act of viewing art shape and reflect values? In this paper, I focus on audience experience of contemporary art in

the shape of the film. I constrain my argument to include questions of audience engagement. I define engagement as a form of what John Berger described as 'the way of seeing,' i. e. the relation between objects and ones who look at them. As he states, the act of seeing is always a choice that defines how one relates to something that (s)he chooses.[1] Using Berger's participatory conception of visual engagement as a guide, I argue that, when looking at something, one always makes a (un)conscious decision if the object under observation is (in)significant in the eye of its beholder. Hence, I direct my interest toward audience engagement with contemporary art[2] in Western contemporary art museums.

Purpose and research question

This thesis problematizes audience experience of contemporary art in Ruben Östlund's feature film *The Square*. With focus on audience engagement I aim to suggest answers to the following question: What barriers could be identified in audience engagement with contemporary art in Western public museums, as it is depicted in *The Square*?

This investigation examines selected scenes in Ruben Östlund's feature film *The Square* in order to analyze audience experience of contemporary art. Noting the significant issues in audience engagement that are depicted in the film — issues that also taken place in actual realm of contemporary art (as I discuss in Chapter 2) — I do not claim that every person' experiences difficulties interacting with contemporary art. This study has no ambition to make a universal claim or a complex museum survey. Rather, I am interested in examining the way that art museums shape some visitors' experience, as exemplified in *The Square*. In contrast with a universal claim, this investigation states that some visitors experience problems of engagement with contemporary art and examples of some of these issues are analyzed through the film.

For interpreting visual materials, I follow the methodological approach elaborated by Gillian Rose.[3] In my research, I pay most attention to the sites of production and to audiencing in their social modalities, while briefly touching other sites of production. Considering the

[1] See more in J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London, Penguin, 2008, p. 8.
[2] The definition of modern and contemporary art see in D.Karlholm, 'Surveying Contemporary Art: Post-War, Postmodern, and then what?', *Art History*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2009, pp. 712-733.
[3] G. Rose, *Visual methodologies: an introduction to researching with visual materials,* London, Sage, 2016.

museum as a discourse, I focus my visual analysis on the effects/affects produced by certain museum technologies in terms of what they produce.

Documentary or fictional?

On first glance, *The Square* merely assembles popular assumptions about art museums, namely that such institutions justify the display of meaningless objects or that many visitors do not consider artworks at galleries to be art but they are too polite to explicitly express their concerns. The film shows that rich patrons admire art as long as it does not cross the line of their comfort zone. Indeed, in the field of visual studies, the relevance of a fictional piece could be questioned. However, the film is a satirical image of the modern art museum, hence directed from real life events. As Östlund confirms in his interviews, the fictional story has actual references. He calls his filming style 'a naturalistic approach.'[4] Some stories are actual experience of the film director or people he knows; other scenes were inspired by sets of art theory and real figures or events within the cultural field.

This thesis does not suggest that *The Square* is a documentary,[5] or a feature film based on real events. I believe that characters in the film follow the same social norms as people in the contemporary Western society – as long as the image of today's society is depicted closely enough to reality. Hence, I am aware that the empirical material cannot provide my conclusions as much validity as, for example, a sociological research of the audience can. Instead of this, I offer my interpretation of the material on the screen and additionally will take into account that there are some real life examples that happened under the similar circumstances. Fiction can be considered as a link to some cultural motifs and stereotypes or as a first step for further investigations and more objective claims afterwards.[6] This is why I argue that the fictional realm of the film can be seen as a link to some issues existing in the

[4] B.Boucher, ''The Art World Is Hard to Satirize': Ruben Östlund on Sending Up Curators in His Award-Winning Film 'The Square,''*Artnet*, 9 November 2017, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/ruben-ostlund-the-square-1135943 (accessed 3 March 2018).

[5] However even in a documentary film authenticity of the content can be questioned and considered as manipulation due to the cinematic techniques.

[6] These are some other implementations when fictional events can be analyzed in a broader context. For example, see M.Liljefors, 'Screening Biotechnology: Bioscience Portrayed in Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema', in S.Lundin, M.N.Petersen, C.Kroløkke and E.Muller (ed.), *Global Bodies in Grey Zones: Health, Hope, Biotechnology*, Stellenbosch, SUN MeDIA, 2016, pp.139–163.

actual field of contemporary art. My analysis of the film offers the author's identification of these issues and provides evidence of its relevance.

Background and relevance

Despite the contemporary museum propagation boom, the motivation for today's art museum visitation can be questioned. Between the white walls of the modern art museum, anything can be art and contemporary art often significantly differs from its predecessors. Previously, art was displayed in monumental and lavish palaces, it was framed in gold or standing on marble pedestals to amaze and dazzle the public. It is undeniable that visitor culture has changed. Museums have elaborated a particular norm of behavior that many readers are familiar with: visitors slowly walk through galleries, speak quietly and try to not produce any noises while under the watchful eyes of the museum's uniformed guards. At the same time, the ritual walk, accompanied by the state of withdrawal within this white cube, is only part of the experience that art institutions typically offer. Commenting on needs of the museum's audience today, curator and critic Simon Sheikh says that people 'are not generally interested in something as particular as art, unless this art can be seen as part of […] the entertainment industry.'[7] Art researcher Colin Trodd argues that 'the display of social behaviour, the rituals of leisure and the performance of the visit' take an important place in the visibility of art museums.[8] This leads me to problematize possible implications. Is there a new way of viewing art?

I draw on Tony Bennett, Carol Duncan, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Charlotte Klonk, Claire Bishop and David Carrier,[9] to mention a few, to argue that museums shape visual experience of art. They do this through a bundle of interwoven visual forces embodied in content of displays, installation models, architecture, and marketing strategies that communicate belief

[7] S.Sheikh, 'Public Spheres and the Functions of Progressive Art Institutions', inV.J.Müller and N.Schafhausen (ed.), *Under Construction – Perspectives on Institutional Practice*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln, 2006, pp. 192-194.
[8] C.Trodd, 'The Discipline of Pleasure; or, How Art History Looks at the Art Museum', *Museum & Society*, vol. 1(1), 2003, pp. 17-29.
[9] T. Bennett, *The birth of the museum: history, theory, politics*, London; New York, Routledge, 1995, C. Klonk, *Spaces Of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors From 1800 To 2000*, New Haven, [Conn.], London, Yale University Press, 2009; E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the interpretation of visual culture*, London, Routledge, 2000; C.Bishop, *Radical Museology, or, What's 'Contemporary' in Museums of Contemporary Art*, Koenig Books, London, 2013; D.Carrier, *Museum skepticism: a history of the display of art in public galleries*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2006.

and values. In this sense, museums' narratives define ways of seeing works of art while these narratives produce social construction of vision. As Hal Foster points out, 'vision suggests sight as a physical operation, and visuality sight as a social fact,' meaning that society helps to determine 'how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see.'[10] This emphasizes that it is important to integrate into our understanding what are the conditions that shape our vision. At the same time, I argue that modern experience of art gains another mediatic and aesthetic dimension, different from the historical 'original' form. Contemporary visuality is often grounded on the spectacle. In order to understand the shift toward spectacular visuality, I briefly examine the history of visitor experience in Western art museums (Chapter 2) to see how it helps us understand this shift. In the contemporary situation, authentic experience and ways of seeing art turn into a contemporary entertainment, a spectacle. Hence, my examination sheds light on some barriers in audience engagement with contemporary art.

This thesis has the form of essay, in which the starting point was the reflection on my current academic experience in visual studies and its comparison with my professional background in cultural management and audience development. This reflection reveals questions concerning visual culture as applied science. Thus the current investigation began when I identified my professional and scholastic concerns. I elaborate a theme of audience engagement with contemporary art, aiming to improve my knowledge and seek answers using theoretical and methodological perspectives of visual culture. I believe that the abilities of critical and reflective thinking are the most valuable outcome that I have gained as a result of this academic journey. In this paper, I problematize audience engagement as a scholar, a professional, and a museum audience member. With recent work experience at a contemporary art gallery, I see and hear that many visitors are puzzled by today's art. I know that, even working within the cultural field, it is challenging to be in dialogue with contemporary art and to 'read messages' that artists or art institutions aspire to convey. As Rose points out, the contemporary visual inquiry provides significant study that analyzes how museums attract audiences, but it 'says little about audience response to their efforts.'[11] I aim to contribute to the field of audience reception.

I *see* Ruben Östlund's feature film *The Square* as a strong example: its satire of art institutions' functions was delivered to a worldwide audience and it triggered critical

[10] H.Foster (ed.), *Vision and Visuality, Seattle*, WA: Bay Press, 1988, p. ix.
[11] Rose, *Visual methodology,* p. 183

discussion beyond academics' walls. I argue that this empirical material is worth investigation with audience engagement in mind. When I saw the film for the first time, it evoked my response, 'I experienced it. I have heard that people experienced it. I noticed that people act in this way.' This directs me to seek concepts that explain audience experience and employ them in my film analysis. I analyze selected episodes in *The Square* in order to identify barriers in audience engagement and investigate causes. This thesis can be considered research relevant to the field of audience experience that, so far, rarely gets scholar's attention, demonstrated by Rose's comment on the scope and focus of contemporary visual investigations.[12] Insofar as there are visitors (or potential visitors) who feel a distance between the intention of the art museum and their own experience of being there, this investigation aims to contribute to a discourse of audience engagement. This can be a valuable contribution to the field of visual culture, museum studies, and cultural administration, as well as presenting a practical approach to analyzing Ruben Östlund's feature film *The Square*.

Empirical material and delimitation

This paper deals with selected scenes from Ruben Östlund's feature film *The Square* as the empirical material. In order to guide readers, I will offer a detailed synopsis in the section Prologue.

In order to analyze the film, I draw on theoretical concepts, research, and other materials. Due to modern interest in visual and museum studies, a vast literature has become available and this field has entered a multi-perspectival academic realm. Still, I want to point out that this paper is neither a complex survey in audience engagement based on a film nor a full film analysis. As the above makes clear, I have limited the scope of this research to the analysis of the collection of images from *The Square* with the focus on audience engagement and experience in contemporary art museums. Based on a phenomenological approach, I appeal to concepts that have something in common with my perspective. I am aware that my selection of materials and the phenomenological method influence the investigation and narrative. I want my reflection to frame the result.

[12] Rose, *Visual methodology,* p. 139.

Another delimitation comes as a comment on discourse analysis. Incorporating this method in some parts of my study, I take into account that my conclusions cannot be seen as the only true analysis of the chosen empirical material. My analysis rather aims to be persuasive.[13]

Another aspect that should be emphasized is the combination of satire and fictional format of the film that implies two significant properties of the empirical material. First, it is known that a piece of satire is directed from real life, hence we can extend results that come from the analysis of a fictional piece. Second, a story is always a selection of pieces that will be linked into a storyline, and, as with any selection, this limits the scope of observation because an author (director, scriptwriter, producer or others) has to delimit material. It works in our case, too: the results of the analysis can be considered broader – beyond the film's frame – however, the range of issues available for analysis is constrained by the author's choices.

When it comes to critical reception of the film, I am aware that scholars and professionals who comment that *The Square* represents the art field in a particular way – through a broken lens – emphasize negative sides in art institutions.[14] It is important to note, as I stated above, this thesis does not aim to provide a critical analysis of the representation of art at large as it is depicted in *The Square.* I also do not examine this film from a perspective of an art or film critic, thus I do not aim to provide the answer to whether Östlund's film can be considered a masterpiece. In the scope of my research, I argue that certain scenes in *The Square* allow investigation of gaps in audience engagement.

This research also deals with visitors who experience barriers in their understanding and interaction with pieces of contemporary art. I do not claim there are no museumgoers who achieve an immersive experience or who understand what they look at. I rather leave this group beyond the scope of my research. I also do not define audience engagement through marketing studies and marketing measurement of attendance or satisfaction according to answers in questionnaires.

[13] F. Tonkiss, 'Analysing discourse', in C.Seale (ed.), *Researching Society and Culture*, London, Sage, 1998, p. 260.
[14] Some examples of criticism can be found in 'Listen: Screen Life/Real Life', *Frieze Talks* [audio recording], Frieze, https://frieze.com/fair-programme/listen-screen-lifereal-life (accessed 21 July 2018); S.Belpeche, '"The Square": "une caricature", selon le monde de l'art contemporain', *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 8 October 2017 https://www.lejdd.fr/culture/cinema/the-square-une-caricature-selon-le-monde-de-lart-contemporain-3465944 (accessed 21 July 2018)

Theory

For identification of barriers in audience engagement with contemporary art in Western museums, I draw on selected theories that help to elaborate upon the theme.

As pointed out above, visitors frequently feel dislocated and detached when they come to the modern art museum. I consider this to be a significant aspect to be examined. I will approach it through the theoretical framework of heterotopia. Michel Foucault defines the heterotopia as the dualistic reality of spaces that embody contradictions, self-resistances, challenges, controversies, and variegated functions, often making them difficult to relate to and to fully detect in the 'here and now.'[15] The range of these places can include, from penetrable airports, train stations, libraries or movie theaters, to formally isolated prisons, psychiatric hospitals, and even more abstract phenomena such as texts. Foucault defines XIX-century museums as heterotopias that accumulate in one place and time – exhibition space – pieces of art made in various times, places, and artistic techniques – i.e. 'slices in time' – to establish a broad collection demonstrating development of art. Thus, according to Foucault, an attempt to create 'a place of all times' accumulates different historical moments (depicted in art) in one immobile place, producing contradiction that could not happen in the real world outside of the museum.[16] In Chapter 2, I take this theoretical perspective as a starting point for further examination of audience experience and conclude the chapter by comments on a new form of heterotopia that frames experience in the modern art museum.

Additionally, I take into consideration Foucault's theory of the panopticon by which we internalize mechanisms of monitoring and surveillance embodied in different forms, from architecture and visual devices like security cameras to statistics and social media. This principle of surveillance is realized through social institutions including museums, thus Foucault claims the institutionalization of surveillance. The parts of my research in which I apply discourse analysis have theoretical roots in Foucault's concept of the *apparatus* [dispositif] that is, in my case, based on the methodological framework suggested by Gillian Rose.[17]

[15] M. Foucault and M. Jay, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1986, pp. 22-27.
[16] Foucault and Jay, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 26.
[17] Rose, *Visual methodology,* pp. 164-186.

As mentioned above, I also refer to art critic John Berger, who points out that the way of seeing is the essential connection between the image and the way that a particular spectator constructs meaning by looking at it.[18] For Berger, then, the additive element of one's socio-cultural conditioning is why visuality is socially constructed.[19] This approach further implies that the position and experience of a viewer is a crucial aspect in the production of an image's meaning. Through this perspective, I define audience engagement as an invested and involved way of seeing the image. These meanings that we construct bear strongly on our social and cultural practices.

In order to understand cultural consequences of the contemporary capitalist social paradigm and the growth of leisure and consumption, I draw on Walter Benjamin's study on the birth of consumer culture in his *Arcades Project*.[20] This work makes a major contribution to the field of visual culture and to research on entertainment and consumption. Benjamin demonstrates how the development of urban life and the emergence of the first European department stores in France in the 1850s led to the display of commodities in order to lure customers. The increasing fetishization of the commodity helped to alienate people who seek superficial and/or ephemeral pleasure. This fact significantly influenced the development of consumption at large. Benjamin considered museums in XIX century to employ the consumerist logic of 'a department store, with works of art on offer like commodities.'[21] The rapid development of free consumer markets made the consumerist mode of spectatorship a crucial characteristic of museum engagement in XX century. I add that, in addition to the shift toward consumerist art consumption,[22] Guy Debord adds the notion of 'the society of the spectacle,' defining it as 'relationship between people that is mediated by images.'[23]

Furthermore, the current investigation refers to another theoretical perspective elaborated in Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility' that reveals the shift in artistic production prefigured by mechanical reproducibility. Benjamin argues that reproduced forms of art, such as photography or films, lose value and spiritual

[18] J.,Berger, *Ways of seeing,* London, Penguin, 2008, pp. 8.
[19] J.,Berger, *Ways of seeing*.
[20] S., Buck-Morss, The dialectics of seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades project, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989, p.118.
[21] Klonk, *Spaces Of Experience,* p. 28.
[22] I would like to stress that I do not mean that Debord's concept was born as a successive theory, although both Benjamin and Debord root their theoretical framework in Marxism.
[23] G. Debord, *Society of the spectacle,* trans. K. Knabb, 2nd ed., London, Rebel Press, 1987, thesis 4.

quality by becoming standardized.[24] The change in the embodiment of art changes how we engage with it. In the current study, I extend the original Benjaminian notion of technologically reproducible art to also consider aspects of digitization and its influence on audience experience.

This paper also credits French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who, in collaboration with Alain Darbel and Dominique Schnapper, examines the actual public of European art museums in the 1960s and contributes to the field of museum studies.[25] Even though I share certain concerns and admire Bourdieu's work, the current investigation is not a sociological study of art and does not consider the full force of Bourdieu's perspective or consider it as key grounds for my argument. I leave much of his thought beyond the scope of my research. However, I argue for the relevance of his concept of cultural capital in the analysis of issues of audience engagement.[26] Defining cultural capital as the set of entrance requirements related to particular knowledge and education, advanced skills, and good taste in 'high culture,' Bourdieu attributes cultural capital as a feature of elite groups who, based on exceptional knowledge and status, decide what is valuable and what is not, giving preference to 'high culture' in contrast to popular culture. Moreover, cultural capital does not only create social divisions and confirm the status of the elite; it also has lifestyle parallels – the term that nowadays is familiar to everyone, but was originally grounded in Bourdieu's theoretical study.

To sum up, my critical lens includes but is not limited to certain theoretical concepts mentioned above. It is worth noting that I use the set of theories as a toolkit in order to shed light on different aspects of audience engagement. These tools together form the framework for understanding and analysis.

[24] W. Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility' in M. W. Jennings, B. Doherty, T.Y. Levin and E. F. N. Jephcott (ed), *The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility, and other writings on media*, Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 19-56.
[25] P. Bourdieu, A. Darbel and D. Schnapper, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public,* Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997.
[26] P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste,* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.

Method

In my research, I use mixing methods that include phenomenology and discourse analysis. I do this in order to study a particular phenomenon – audience engagement – and to determine its structure and further on use discourse analysis for the empirical material.

My methodological framework is rooted in phenomenology, namely the hermeneutical approach. I apply phenomenology to investigate a phenomenon when questions arise taking self-consciousness and self-reflection as a starting point of my research. As stated above, this paper reflects on audience observation and issues that I experience as a scholar of visual culture, as professional in audience development, and as a visitor of contemporary art museums. My experience evokes a strong resonance with major critical themes in *The Square*. Hence, the film's scenes serve as references that elucidate barriers to audience engagement. The phenomenological approach provides a way to study phenomena and determine their structure in order to their meanings for my experience. My methodological framework uses phenomenology to analyze meaning, which helps to elaborate knowledge step-by-step, posing questions and moving in a spiral to produce knowledge.

As suggested by Rose, discourse analysis is a relevant tool for examining how institutions produce visual images (the concept of 'art,' for example) and subjects (such as 'visitors' or 'sponsors'). Thus, this analysis reveals how institutions construct visualities (specific images of the world) through discourses. As the sources for discourse analysis, I use concepts that will be presented in Chapter 2.

Previous research

Given its recency, Ruben Östlund's *The Square* has not yet been the object of academic research or published papers. However, there are critical and journalistic review, news, and interviews with the director that I draw on in my discussion in Chapter 3.

The first thing that needs to be said here is that there is a broad and diverse literature that can be applied to the current research question from different angles. Also, this multidisciplinary field – where visual culture, museum studies, art history, and philosophy of art intertwine – is

notably fragmented, often containing controversies and conflicting ideas and concepts. Thus, this paper does not aim to provide a complex observation[27]; rather, it uses concepts that resonate with my position. I offer texts that examine roles and functions of art institutions, audience receptions and issues in contemporary art. The conceptual framework, discussed in Chapter 2, includes references to both scholarly literature and mainstream media that further detail resonant sentiments and ideas.

Carol Duncan, in her book *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, investigates the function of art museums. She investigates how museums shape experience through complex narratives that include architecture and art display together. Her concept centers on civilizing rituals that determine certain ways of visitor behavior. These behaviors are supposed to foster learning and contemplation of art. She also provides a series of architectural links between museums, on one hand, and religious temples and royal castles, on the other hand. She asserts that these architectural forms structure audience performance in a particular way. Thus, Duncan considers the art museum – the modern temple of art – as the ritual-setting space that imposes narratives on the audience.

Tony Bennett's seminal book, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, examines the historical development of museums in XIX-XX centuries, drawing parallels between them, on one hand, and fairs, exhibitions, and department stores, on the other.[28] Bennett's research shows how art institutions organize both art collections and visitor behavior. This work is significantly influenced by Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*[29] and reveals institutional power over the roles of individuals.

Discussion concerning display and space appears in selected books. Charlotte Klonk's research in *Spaces of Experience* provides a comprehensive account of the history of art gallery interiors and strategies of display in XVIII-XX centuries.[30] It shows transformations over centuries with regard to changing theories of perception, aesthetics, and roles of visitors. She analyzes these transformations in a broader social context, linking them to historical, political, and commercial aspects. A predecessor to Klonk's study was an influential work, *Inside the White Cube*, by Brian O'Doherty who critically discusses the white cube

[27] For this reason, as one of suggested sources, see R. Starn, 'A Historian's Brief Guide to New Museum Studies', *American Historical Review*, vol. 110, no. 1, February 2005, pp.68-98.
[28] Bennett, *The birth of the museum*.
[29] M. Foucault, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991.
[30] Klonk, *Spaces Of Experience*.

convention and the position of artists and audience in this exhibition space. In his book *Beyond Objecthood*, James Voorhies considers the exhibition space to be an artistic medium and he outlines its developments from 1968 onwards.

Artur Danto works *The Artworld* and later *What Art Is* make significant contributions to the definition of art, its criteria, and to the philosophy of art. Both works are here heavily applied for understanding the roots of audience engagement with contemporary art.

The field of visitor experience is mostly defined by sociological and anthropological research. Kerstin Smeds, in her study *Here comes everybody!*,[31] analyzes audience engagement in the age of individualism. Through a phenomenological lens, she examines relations between the individual and the institution. John Falk, in his book *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*,[32] elaborates a categorization of museum visitors based on identity-related motivations. It includes the following types: explorers, facilitators, professionals/hobbyists, experience-seekers, and rechargers. Lisa F. Smith and Jeffrey K. Smith provide systematic research on visitor experience of art, focusing on the time visitors spend viewing artworks.[33] Among recent investigations and new approaches could be mentioned research conducted by Senseable City Laboratory (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) that analyzes visitor behavior at the Louvre Museum by monitoring visitors' length of stay and most frequent paths taken.[34]

Among other research that makes important contributions but are beyond the scope of the current investigation – without rejecting their valuable insights – could be named Hooper-Greenhill's exploration of the museum's role in education and visual culture[35]; David Carrier's[36] survey of a history of art display and how it defines ways of seeing art; Jennifer

[31] K.Smeds, 'Here comes everybody!', in A.Davis, and K.Smeds, (ed.), *Visiting the visitor,* Bielefeld, transcript Verlag, 2016, pp. 105-126.
[32] J.H.Falk, *Identity and the museum visitor experience*, Walnut Creek, Left Coast Press, 2009.
[33] J.K.Smith and L.F.Smith, 'Spending time on art', *Empirical Studies of the Arts*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2001, pp. 229-236; J.K.Smith, L.F.Smith and P. L. Tinio, 'Time Spent Viewing Art and Reading Labels', *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2017, pp. 77–85.
[34] Y.Yoshimura, A.Krebs and C.Ratti, 'Noninvasive Bluetooth Monitoring of Visitors' Length of Stay at the Louvre', *PERVASIVE computing*, April-June 2017, pp. 26-33.
[35] E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the interpretation of visual culture*, London, Routledge, 2000. Giving credit to Hooper-Greenhill's significant place in the field of visual culture, the current study draws attention to some issues that are not covered in Hooper-Greenhill book. For example, she does not take into account that objects itself could look challenging for audience (one can think, 'Is it art?'). Among other aspects that I take into account is (1) the language as a challenge that implies superficially reasonable vocabulary and (2) the aspect that today a visit of the art museum often could be an act of symbolic consumption rather then education.
[36] Carrier, *Museum skepticism*.

Harris[37], who examines the affective level of audience experience; M. Elizabeth Weiser's[38] investigation of the museum's function as a tool for shared history-building; Helen Rees Leahy[39], who draws attention to visitors' embodied experiences and the experiential role in audience engagement.

Disposition of the thesis

In chapter 1, I provide a brief presentation of the method and I outline the origins of my phenomenological approach. This approach allows me to inquire through systematic reflection and to structure my assumptions. In that same chapter, I argue that phenomenology provides scholars from neighboring fields, such as visual or cultural studies, a methodological tool for examining art. Additionally, I present my method for the film analysis, namely, discourse analysis.

Chapter 2 is a conceptual extension of Chapter 1. I refer both to philosophical concepts and to mainstream media discussions that provide evidence for my claims in Chapter 2 concerning audience experience. These claims are further used in film analysis.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to empirical analysis, in which I use the film *The Square* as a collection of examples that relate to audience experience in contemporary Western art museums. Being a piece of satire, and thus directed from real-life events, the film reflects on current issues in visitors' engagement. I offer my interpretation of selected scenes in the film in order to demonstrate how they function from the perspective of audience engagement that they problematize.

[37] J. Harris, 'Affect-based Exhibition', in A. Davis and K. Smedsn (ed), *Visiting the visitor,* Bielefeld, transcript Verlag, 2016, pp. 18-21.
[38] E. Weiser, 'Individual Identity/Collective History', in A. Davis and K. Smedsn (ed), *Visiting the visitor,* Bielefeld, transcript Verlag, 2016, pp. 39-41.
[39] H.R.Leahy, *Museum bodies: The politics and practices of visiting and viewing*, Surrey, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012, p.7.

PROLOGUE
FILM SYNOPSIS

In order to guide readers, I provide an overall description of the film and I stress key moments in the story that can be considered triggers for the discussion in following chapters. The chosen scenes will be analyzed through the lens of audience engagement in order to identify barriers to audience interaction with contemporary art. Hence, it should be taken into account that I analyze not only the scenes when the 'audience looks at art,' but I involve scenes that function as prerequisites within the larger narrative.[40]

Ruben Östlund's *The Square* (2017) takes place largely at a modern and contemporary art museum, the X-Royal museum located in the former Royal Palace in Stockholm. The story's protagonist, Christian (Claes Bang), is the influential chief curator of this museum who, from the first glace, resembles a popular image of a person belonging to an artistic/creative community: a man in a trendy suit and a scarf, whimsical eyeglasses and with swept-back hair, a quintessence of suave manners and elegance. His works allows him to make decisions on what art the museum displays and how it is placed – for example, he has torn down an equestrian statue of XIX-century monarch Karl XIV Johan in front of the museum's new entrance. He gives speeches for wealthy patrons at gala dinners and drives a Tesla. He prepares to unveil an installation 'The Square' that consists of an empty square frame outline on the floor with the inscription 'The Square is a sanctuary of trust and caring. Within it we all share equal rights and obligations.'[41] According to the artist's statement, the artwork is devoted to provide a zone where everyone can go when a person needs help, safety or kindness, thus promoting altruism and responsible behavior toward others.

In the opening scene we meet Christian giving an interview to American journalist Anne (Elisabeth Moss). During this conversation he expresses his expert opinion how the success of an art museum nowadays depends on the budget that is invested in the expansion of collections and attraction of audience. However, in the next question his expert knowledge does not help to avoid an embarrassing situation when the journalist asks him to explain, in

[40] J. Monaco, *How to read a film*, 3rd ed., New York, Oxford University Press, 2000.
[41] *Magnolia Pictures: The Square Official Press Kit*, www.magpictures.com, 2017, http://www.magpictures.com/thesquare/press-kit/ (accessed 3th of March 2018)

layman's language, an academic-sounding quote from a press release on the museum's website. Christian is confused and after an awkward pause gives a loose definition.

Further on the film's plot occurs at three different levels of abstraction: on one level, the starting point is a central square in Stockholm; on another level, the plot follows 'The Square' in the museum; finally, the story follows Christian, as he deals with personal situations.[42] While crossing a busy square, Christian, after deciding to help a woman, becomes a victim of a theatrically staged scam. This accident leaves him deeply shocked. This simultaneously deals with the macro socio-political analysis, while also producing Christian's personal narrative. Simultaneously, the museum, concerned about the number of visitors, hires a team of millennial marketers to promote the X-Royal's next blockbuster and get 'The Square' widespread media coverage. Being distracted by the accident in the square, Christian does not pay enough attention to the marketing pitch for the promotion of the upcoming show. His absent-mindedness later will lead to a crucial result.

Soon we see Christian's choice for how to introduce 'The Square' to journalists. In a restroom mirror, he rehearses a speech, including the moment when he 'spontaneously' decides to go off-script, putting away his notecards and asking if he can start over. However, the journalists' interest in Christian's 'from-heart-to-heart' speech about the value of altruism and cooperation comes under question when his speech ends and the journalists single-mindedly rush toward the food.

Among other scenes depicting audiences and publics, we witness a young man who takes a rapid glance at the wall text about the installation and later gives the same rapid glimpse to an artwork. The piece consists of a few piles of gravel next to a neon sign reading, 'You have nothing'; two men even leave the room without looking at the installation. When the museum hosts an artistic talk with a famous artist, Julian (Dominic West), who created the gravel installation, a visitor with Tourette's syndrome repeatedly interrupts onstage discussion by shouting obscenities. The audience is faced with choosing between demanding the visitor's political correctness and the political incorrectness of asking someone with Tourette's to perform political correctness. Later this same artwork was accidentally vacuumed by one of the cleaners. Christian suggests reinstalling it without informing the insurance company what

[42] M. Koresky, 'Any questions?', *Film Comment*, vol. 53, no. 6, 2017, pp. 30-35.

happened. Later still, the museums hosts a posh dinner for celebrities and patrons, during which the artist performs as an ape (Terry Notary), attacking tuxedo-wearing guests.

To go back to the personal level of abstraction, Christian attempts to get back his stolen phone and wallet using a tracking app and sending threatening letters to the people who live in the building that the app tracks the phone to. Thanks to this plan he retrieves his belongings and goes to the museum's season-opener party, where he ends up having a one-night stand with Anne. The next day he gets a letter, in which someone threatens to pay Christian back for the thieving accusation. In the midst of these troubles, Christian ignores an important PR meeting. The hired marketers seek to draw media attention and create a viral video of a blonde beggar girl who enters 'The Square' and is blown apart. Within a few hours, the video reaches 300 000 YouTube views and leads to a huge scandal. Because Christian was responsible for the final marketing decision, he then has to arrange a press conference to announce that he will step down as curator.

CHAPTER 1:
METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Phenomenology

In this chapter, I establish the basic principles of my investigation. My research employs a mixed approach, based on elements of methodological structures such as phenomenology and discourse analysis. For me, phenomenology provides a fundamental foundation for studying in a new research area; it can structure and make sense among vast outlays of information, as I will explain. Being more precise, I apply the hermeneutical branch of phenomenology that allows me to find concepts and sources providing answers to my questions about the phenomenon under analysis – in this case, my object of study is audience engagement – and it helps me to determine a structuring mechanism. Hence, the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 is grounded by phenomenological methodology, namely hermeneutics. Additionally, I draw on discourse analysis to identify barriers in audience engagement with contemporary art, using selected scenes in the film *The Square* as exemplars of the social phenomena under discussion.

With my methodological framework rooted in phenomenology, this thesis reflects on the cases of audience observation that come from my experience as a scholar of visual culture, as a staff member of a contemporary art gallery, and as a visitor of art institutions.[43] Phenomenology entails systematic reflection such that it allows investigation of a phenomenon as it is experienced through the observing subject. In this thesis, broadly, I apply phenomenology as a style of critical thinking: it helps to elaborate knowledge step-by-step, leading to questions, and moving in a knowledge-producing spiral. My analysis follows methodological grounds that classical phenomenologists practiced for analysis of experience and for identification of significant features in emergent knowledge. I describe my experience and memories that lead me to this investigation as a form of complex data. Merleau-Ponty's defines this kind of data: 'upon seeing something, we organize former experiences to explain

[43] In order to be precise for the reader, the experience that became the starting point does not involve any interviews, which can be conducted based on sociological or anthropological tools. However, interviews and other forms of research-oriented interactions with the audience can be considered as a further step in examining audience engagement on a larger scale.

the patterning of data, the imposition of meaning on a chaos of sense data.'[44] Hence, I am aware that my position is defined by my historical situation as well as by my multi-sensorial experience. I situate myself not only as a museum-goer but also as one who discursively analyzes, and forms a critique of previous experience. My position also includes my role as a scholar, thus defining my experience as a form of knowledge in the related fields of visual culture, philosophy of art, and museum studies. My background experience gives me some existing knowledge that will be taken into account.

I received my first inspiration and trigger to use phenomenology as a method from Kerstin Smeds and her study 'Here comes everybody!' She examines relations between the individual and the museum through a phenomenological lens. She argues that a visitor 'rather than a mind and a body, […] is a mind with a body,' drawing on Merleau-Ponty[45] who also implies that vision is relational and seeing is cultural and a physiological process.[46] Smeds elaborates on it saying that experience is situated and defined by 'social, cultural, historical and institutional contexts.'[47] In order to understand the act of meaning-making, Smeds suggests applying hermeneutics. She follows Martin Heidegger's definition of hermeneutics as 'ability to understand and interpret' and, at the same time, emphasizes that Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Gadamer believe that understanding is the act of participation, 'our being-in-the-world.'[48] Thus, for my study, Smeds became a source of inspiration to use phenomenology as a method. This also means that I apply phenomenology by not limiting it to hermeneutics, but specifying my approach as hermeneutics, a phenomenological method of interpretation.

Mentioning above the fact of self-consciousness, I draw on Heidegger and Gadamer who state (unlike Edmund Husserl) that the experience of the researcher and self-reflection are essential to the interpretive process.[49] Despite the focus on self-consciousness as the core of the method, Wilhelm Dilthey emphasizes that 'in knowing oneself one also comes to know about the external world and other people.'[50] In order to arrive to this knowledge about the external

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[44] M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception,* trans. D. A. Landes, New York, Routledge, 2012.
[45] Smeds, 'Here comes everybody!', p.113.
[46] S. Biernoff, 'Carnal Relations: Embodied Sight in Merleau-Ponty, Roger Bacon and St Francis', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 4, no. 1, p. 49.
[47] Smeds, 'Here comes everybody!', pp.114.
[48] Smeds, 'Here comes everybody!', pp.115.
[49] M. L. Susann, 'Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Phenomenology: A Comparison of Historical and Methodological Considerations', *International Journal Of Qualitative Methods*, vol 2, no. 3, 2003, pp. 28.
[50] W.Dilthey, *Selected writings*, trans. H.P. Rickman, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p.162, cited in C. Moustakas, *Phenomenological research methods,* Thousand Oaks, Calif.; London, SAGE, cop., 1994. Available from: Library catalogue Lovisa (accessed 20 August 2018).

world, hermeneutics — as Heidegger, Gadamer and Dilthey determined it — examine experience through the lens of historical groundings and reflect on such aspects as historical events, politics, economics, and social structure. Applying this approach to the study of visitor experience in art museums, I consider this experience as socially, culturally and historically defined.[51]

As a method, which helps me to study visitor experience and identify some barriers in audience engagement, I refer to Dilthey, Ricœur, and Gadamer who think that hermeneutics imply 'the art of reading a text.'[52] However, it is important to note, for these authors hermeneutic phenomenology is more complex rather than a method of interpretation of texts. As Gadamer suggests, text is a prevailing form of interpreting understanding because most often lived experience is expressed in the language, but interpretation is the universal way of meaning-making.[53] Ricœur explains it from another angle saying that text should be considered as a 'point of departure for a new worldview,' thus a text is not only a literary source but also a trigger for our actions.[54]

In order to achieve understanding of visitor experience and barriers in audience engagement, I will use the hermeneutic circle, which corrects my prejudgments (that above I named as my experience and reflection). I will draw my attention to certain texts (that will be discussed in Chapter 2) to understand more about visitor experience from the moment of establishment of the first Western art museums to nowadays. This historical perspective allows me to understand the external world beyond my experience, as I mention early. The hermeneutic circle — as Gadamer defines it — implies that I start posing questions and search for answers. Thus the circle of questions and answers will correct my prejudgments. Step-by-step this method leads from personal experience to generalization to key features that characterize a phenomenon. Phenomenology can facilitate the development of a critical lens through which to look at all variety of concepts and theories, choosing those that resonate with personal experience. Within hermeneutics, reflection and interpretation are the mechanism that allows

[51] In this sense, hermeneutic phenomenology differs from heuristic inquiry that does not take into account how history, politics and social structure explain experience. See more in C. Moustakas, *Phenomenological research methods*.

[52] C. Moustakas, *Phenomenological research methods;* М.Соболева, *Философская Герменевтика: Понятия и Позиции* [M.Soboleva, *Philosophical Hermeneutics: Definitions and Dispositions*], Moscow, Академический Проект [Academic Project], 2014.

[53] Соболева, *Философская Герменевтика,* p. 78.

[54] P. Ricoeur, 'Der Text als Modell: hermeneutisches Verstehen', in H.G. Gadamer and G.Boehm (ed.), *Seminar: Die Hermeneutik und die Wissenschaften*, Frankfurt am Main, 1978, p. 101, cited in Соболева, *Философская Герменевтика,* p. 39.

inspection into the structure of phenomena. However, it is worth noting, contemporary phenomenology has revised the idea of the hermeneutic circle and rather suggests using the term hermeneutical spiral[55] that illustrates the dynamics of understanding. According to Jürgen Bolten, the progressive nature of understanding implies a constant growth of knowledge. Hence, these dynamics are better described by moving in a knowledge-producing spiral rather than by the model of the hermeneutical circle.

I am also aware of the weak sides of the phenomenological approach, namely the lack of objectivity. The use of the hermeneutic circle/spiral means that the selection of materials and the phenomenological method influence my investigation and narrative and my reflection and consciousness frame the result. However, in the current research I also demonstrate how reflection, as a starting point for a scholar, can be a tool for approaching a new research area. Thus, I argue that phenomenology is a relevant method for my study.

Discourse analysis

As suggested by Gillian Rose, discourse analysis is a relevant tool for examining how institutions produce visual images (the concept of 'art,' for example) and subjects (such as 'visitors', 'sponsors').[56] Thus, this analysis reveals how institutions construct visualities through discourses. As the sources for discourse analysis, I use concepts that will be presented in Chapter 2. I use discourse analysis to identify barriers in audience engagement with contemporary art, analyzing selected scenes in the film *The Square*.

Following Rose, she defines two types of discourse analysis: Analysis I is of visual images and verbal text; and the second type – Analysis II is of the practices of institutions. Mostly, I will apply discourse analysis of institutions, but partly the first type also will be applied. At the core of discourse analysis of institutions lies Foucault's theory from *Discipline and Punish*. According to Foucault, institutions create discourses in 2 ways: by using apparatuses (architecture, statements, laws, morals, etc.) and technologies (labels, rooms, layouts, etc.). Discourse analysis examines what effects institutions like museums produce using technologies and apparatuses, in addition to how museums produce their visitors.

[55] J. Bolten, 'Die Hermeneutische Spirale: Überlegungen zu einer integrativen Literaturtheorie', Poetica, no. 17, 1985, pp. 355-371, cited in Соболева, *Философская Герменевтика,* p. 35.
[56] Rose, *Visual methodology,* pp.135-186.

Talking about museum discourse, I also shape the perspective of Beth Lord, who considers museums as heterotopic places because they always are constituted by objects, concepts, and the ways by which they come into conflict with one another.[57] Museums always require interpretation, and Lord clarifies 'without representing a relation between things and conceptual structures, an institution is not a museum, but a storehouse'.[58] For Lord, discourse analysis is a tool that reveals the strategy (system) that assigns concepts to things on display. In my research, understanding how this strategy assigns meaning to objects, or how broad concepts order things, can help me to examine what causes barriers between objects on display and audience members who look at them.

However, Rose notes, discourse analyze does not have clear guidelines. Foucault in his study rather left the concept vague than offering a concrete methodology. This aspect of discourse analysis I take into account. In my case, the film examination applies discourse analysis within the conceptual framework that is elaborated in Chapter 2.

[57] B.Lord, 'Foucault's Museum: Difference, Representation and Genealogy', *Museum and Society*, no.4 (1), 2006, pp.1-14.
[58] Lord, 'Foucault's Museum,' p.5.

CHAPTER 2:
CONCEPTUAL ORIGINS OF THE ANALYSIS

In the title of their recently published book, art curators Kyung An and Jessica Cerasi ask, *Who's Afraid of Contemporary Art?* They seek the attention of those who have contradictory feelings concerning contemporary art institutions who have experiences similar to this:

> You step into a gallery and suddenly you feel like you have to be on your best behavior, stand a little straighter, use obscure vocabulary and try your hardest not to say anything stupid.[59]

The authors raise a significant question and describe the behavior of many museum visitors. Frequently, people feel dislocated and detached in particular types of places, from transportation depots and quiet cultural institutions to spaces designed to isolate socially unacceptable elements, like criminals and psychiatric patients. These places challenge and contest. They perform functions that are difficult to relate to, giving entrants the surreal feel of being in a place that is other. As previously discussed, this describes Michel Foucault's dualistic (in the sense of a place's contradictorily banal roles in opposition to its hidden and/or confusing roles) conception of the *heterotopia*.[60] There is no universal form of heterotopia, as he states; the heterotopia rather functions in different ways and takes varied forms, changing functions over time but always juxtaposing incompatible or contradictory existential elements. Heterotopias presume symbolic and territorial remoteness, always requiring opening and closing rituals that isolate these places. They are impenetrable to those who do not adequately perform the ritual while they invite those who faithfully and properly adhere to it. Access to heterotopic places differs from access to other types of public spaces. In non-heterotopias, the coding of rituals is not so specialized or so fraught. In heterotopias, the rituals can be crucial for acceptance, among other concerns.

Among examples of heterotopias, Foucault mentions that Western museums in XIX-century form emerged as institutions that collect and evaluate art in order to replace predecessors: cabinets of curiosity. For Foucault, the art museum assembles disconnected pieces of history and makes sense of them in the present through a historicized, progressive narrative of past and contemporary art. Thus, the museum's present-moment historicist, as well as its present-

[59] K. An and J. Cerasi, *Who's Afraid of Contemporary Art?,* Thames & Hudson Ltd., United Kingdom, 2017, p.56.
[60] M. Foucault and M. Jay, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1986, pp. 22-27.

space cosmopolitanist, aggregation forms a contradiction: these artifacts of moments and places could never be arrayed side-by-side anywhere beyond the museum's walls.[61] It is only fair to note that Foucault only briefly and fragmentarily mentions museums in his discussion on heterotopia. Tony Bennett expands on Foucault's work. In Bennett's book, *The Birth of the Museum History, Theory, Politics*, he helps to further describe the establishment of the first Western art institutions.[62] He suggests that museums as public and educational institutions are distinguished from predecessors: the cabinets of curiosity and exhibitionary institutions of the XIX-century. In part, this is because they elaborate museum strategies that let to achieve order and rationality in 'a place of all times.'[63] The rational organization of art objects that helps to determine narratives and visitors' experience is carefully taking into account in Carol Duncan's book, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*[64]. I will examine her research in order to understand the origins of visitor experience and how visitors accommodate themselves to complex museum arrangements. I also argue that looking into the history of audience experience in art museums will help to reveal significant modifications to visitor culture and to reveal key moments that result in barriers to audience engagement with artworks.

Public art museum and civilizing rituals

In the book *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*[65], Carol Duncan raises the question of 'what fundamental purposes western museums serve in the context of western society' and searches for the answer from the perspective of ritual structures.[66] According to Duncan, the central meaning of art museums is 'structured through its rituals,' thus a museum acts as a stage, inducing visitors to perform in particular ways, which she calls 'rituals,' whether or not

[61] Foucault and Jay, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 26.
[62] T. Bennett, *The birth of the museum*. Among other scholars who offer alternative points of view on museums as a form of heterotopia see: Lord, 'Foucault's Museum'; K. Hetherington, 'Foucault, the museum and the diagram', *Sociological Review*, no. 59(3), 2011, pp. 457-475
[63] Foucault and Jay, 'Of Other Spaces', p.26.
[64] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995.
[65] To be clear, one supposes Duncan might owe a great debt to Walter Benjamin, who considered such aspects as the historical role of religion in art, modern display of art, effects produced by embodied art, the role of ritual, communal meaning-making, undetected intentions and other undetected aspects of art, and the effects of different forms of art production, among other thoughts. See in W. Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility' in M. W. Jennings, B. Doherty, T.Y. Levin and E. F. N. Jephcott (ed), *The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility, and other writings on media*, Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008;
[66] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.3

visitors are conscious of it.[67] Duncan's intention is to examine museums as 'environments structured around specific ritual scenarios' that communicate meanings and offer values addressing social, sexual and political identities.[68]

Duncan states that the ritual character of art museums has existed since the establishment of the first art institutions, so it is the essential nature of museums. She develops this statement, saying 'art museums have always been compared to older ceremonial monuments such as palaces or temples'[69], illustrating how the power of art institutions replaces the influence of the church. Indeed, religious and secular buildings have similarities, but they were founded to reflect and serve different forms of truth that shape society. In Europe, the conceptual shift in the understanding of the function, purpose, and meaning of art – through cultural secularization – was institutionalized through the emergence of art museums as 'the displacement and the destination of art.'[70] The Louvre was opened as a museum on 10 August 1793 and became the model of museum arrangement and management for leading European countries that established national art museums following this example. The previous union of art and religion was terminated. Drawing to the Hegelian 'end of art,' the Age of Enlightenment proclaimed it the cultural secularization of art when, as Duncan said, 'the form of art has ceased to be the supreme need of the spirit.'[71] According to Duncan, secular truth is rational and verifiable knowledge, and art museums are part of this realm of 'preservers of the community's official cultural memory.'[72]

Duncan stresses that the term 'ritual' is typically associated with religious practices but also can be habitual, automatic, or (un)conscious performance. In secular and religious fields, definitions of 'ritual' can be antithetical.[73] In opposition to religious rituals, civilizing rituals

[67] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.6
[68] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,*1995, p.2.
[69] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,*1995, p.7.
[70] D.Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press and Cornell University Library, 2011, p.35.
[71] G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 103.
[72] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,*1995, p.8.
[73] As Duncan suggests, on the subject of ritual in modern life, see A.Cohen, *Two-Dimensional Man: An Essay on the Anthropology of Power and Symbolism in Complex Society*, Berkeley, Cal., University of California Press, 1974; S.Lukes, 'Political Ritual and Social Integration,' in *Essays in Social Theory*, New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1977, pp. 52-73; S.F. Moore and B.Myerhoff, 'Secular Ritual: Forms and Meanings,' in *Moore and Myerhoff* (eds.), Secular Ritual, Assen;Amsterdam, Van Gorcum, 1977, pp. 3-24; V.Turner, 'Frame, Flow, and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality,' in M.Benamou and C.Caramello (eds.) *Performance in Postmodern Culture*, Center for Twentieth Century Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1977, pp. 33-55; and V.Turner, 'Variations on a Theme of Liminality,' in *Moore and Myerhoff*, op. cit., pp. 36-52. See also M.Yamaguchi, 'The Poetics of Exhibition in Japanese Culture,' in I. Karp

are supposed to foster learning, may be less spectacular, and may include 'informal-looking moments of contemplation or recognition.'[74] Being rich with symbolism, art museums often produce ritual scenarios, equipping visitors with a map or a handbook 'to guide them through the universe they [art museums] constructed.'[75] Applying rituals, art museums become providers of civilized culture and aim to preserve community by shaping cultural memory. In order to control representation of a community's values and truths, the museum thrusts upon the visitor a set of messages. This occurs through carefully-planned stage management and offered ritual scenarios during the visitor's journey through the museum's realm of secular knowledge. Visitors who respond to the imposing, framing, and ordering of art objects are best able to perform the expected ritual, physically following a museum's routes and rules, and are rewarded with the confirmation of the visitor's identity.

The conceptual core of Duncan's book, therefore, is that museum spaces are sites through which civilizing rituals are normalized. Referring to monument architecture, the author explains that museums resemble religious or ceremonial sites such as Renaissance palaces, churches, and Greek temples—not so much because of specific architectural features but because the buildings, inside and out, serve rituals. Inside a museum, as a palace or a temple, one finds 'corridors scaled for processions, halls implying large, communal gatherings and interior sanctuaries designed for awesome and potent effigies.'[76] Concerning the exterior, museums are normally set apart from other structures frequently occupying parkland and containing elements of monumental architecture and sculptural markers such as fountains, statues, and impressive stairs, 'guarded by pairs of monumental marble lions, entered through grand doorways.'[77] These elements create the atmosphere for future contemplation and appreciation of art. They also make the building distinct from normal everyday activities and places. Duncan calls this approach of framing and separation of art buildings 'liminality.'[78] Thus, she argues that museums create a secular equivalent to religious experience and they immerse the visitor in liminality. This mode not only defines the special position of museums

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and S.Levine (eds.), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Washingto; London, Smithsonian Institution, 1991, pp. 57-67.

[74] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.8.

[75] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.8.

[76] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.10.

[77] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.10.

[78] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.11.

and art organizations but also allows justifies museum experiences' ritualistic character – 'detached, timeless and exalted'[79] – through which the sense of time and space is lost.

According to Duncan, another aspect that ritual settings activate is performance. Visitors, whether wittingly or unwittingly, act individually by following particular scenarios related to the history or meaning of the site. Even when it comes to selected artworks or a singular exhibition, a spatial arrangement, a strategy of displaying, labeling, describing, and navigating shapes larger narrative structures and contributes to the overall meaning of artworks. However, as Duncan argues, there are no visitors who 'read' all museums' cues as originally programmed. The audience rather interprets the institution's prompts based on their background and often modifies programed rituals or invents their own. The author sums this up by pointing out that enactment, interpretation, or invention always has a purpose that a visitor aims to achieve – confirmation or renewal of identity through enlightenment. In this context, the invention of aesthetics was the next step in consolidation of secular realm since the moment when art started laying claim to supersession of religion as a source of spiritual values. The interest in visual experience and aesthetics of such theorists as Hume, Burke, Rousseau, Kant[80] was one of the reasons for the emergence of art museums as places where art objects were collected for visitors' contemplation and spiritual transformation. In the museum's role of forming any instance of 'a marked-off, "liminal" zone of time and space,'[81] it helped to isolate objects, reinforcing visitors' performance of contemplation and withdrawing from the hustle and bustle of daily life. Duncan adds that installation practices aim to isolate artworks as much as possible, and 'the more "aesthetic" the installations – the fewer the objects and the emptier the surrounding walls – the more sacralized the museum space.'[82] Duncan draws on César Graña who said that 'modern installation practices have brought the museum-as-temple metaphor close to the fact […] isolating important originals in "aesthetic chapels" or niches.'[83] Thus, Duncan believes that models of art display bear a resemblance to some religious practices. Museums may be designed for aesthetic experience, but they also construct modes of vision that aim toward spiritual enrichment or equilibrium.

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[79] G.Schildt, 'The Idea of the Museum,' in L.Aagaard-Mogensen (ed.), *The Idea of the Museum: Philosophical, Artistic, and Political Questions, Problems in Contemporary Philosophy*, vol. 6, Lewiston, NY and Quenstron, Ontario, Edwin Mellen Press, 1988, p. 89, cited in C.Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums, London*, New York, Routledge, 1995, p.8.

[80] As Duncan notes, 'Kant definitively isolated and defined the human capacity for aesthetic judgment and distinguished it from other faculties of the mind (practical reason and scientific understanding)', see in Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.14.

[81] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.20.

[82] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.17.

[83] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.17.

Duncan introduces the origin, and historical development, of art museum rituals, presenting specific scenarios that serve museums' functions. It was common in continental Europe that royal figures demonstrated their collections and conquests in richly decorated galleries of their palaces. Later spaces of princely galleries[84] designed especially for displaying royal collections and for glorifying the image of the prince were turned into public art museums. Ceremonial spaces that dazzled and defined exclusivity became public, allowing everybody to enter by right rather than privilege. Public access to royal palaces and their treasures signified the modern ideal of equality, helping to make art museums into tools of political and social change. At the same time, as a new kind of public ceremonial space,[85] these modern art displays also reshaped or distorted old meanings of object display and created new meanings.

(Re)defining the content of display, art museums form visitors' identities; the ritual character of the museum encourages the audience to try on and perform a role appropriate for the setting. The previous function of princely galleries implied the visitor as a connoisseur, challenged to express 'good taste' and recognize without labels or other prompts significant artistic qualities of an artwork. This ability affirmed his (her) membership among the elite. Unlike aristocratic installation of princely galleries, visitors of public art museums sought enlightenment, so art institutions used clear labels for all art objects and carefully planned spatial strategies. As Duncan points out,

> in certain ways, the old building [the princely gallery] was well equipped for its new symbolic assignment. It was, after all, already full of sixteenth-, and seventeenth-century spaces originally designed to accommodate public ritual and ceremonial display. Its halls and galleries tended to develop along marked axes so that (especially in the rooms occupied by the early museum) visitors were naturally drawn from room to room or down long vistas.[86]

Newly established art institutions created settings that, through civilizing rituals, provided civilized culture for normal citizens. The museum has the power to transform signs of glory and luxury as treasures and trophies into civilizing and spiritual valuated instruments.

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[84]As Duncan suggest, for princely galleries see: N.v.Hoist, *Creators, Collectors and Connoisseurs*, trans. B. Battershaw, London, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967, pp. 95-139; T. da Costa Kaufmann, 'Remarks on the Collections of Rudolf II: The Kunstkammer as a Form of Representation,' *Art Journal*, 1978, vol. 38, pp. 22-8; H.Trevor-Roper, *Princes and Artists: Patronage and Ideology at Four Habsburg Courts 1517-1633*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1976; J.Tomlinson, 'A Report from Anton Raphael Mengs on the Spanish Royal Collection in 1777,' *Burlington Magazine*, February, 1993; A.Wittlin, 'Exhibits: Interpretive, Under-Interpretive, Misinterpretive,' in E . Larrabee (ed.), *Museums and Education*, Washington, DC, Smithsonian Institution Conference on Museums and Education, 1968, p. 98.

[85] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,*1995, p.24.

[86] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.27.

Duncan points to the Louvre as the most influential example, the archetype of first European museums and explains the appearance of ritual scenarios. The first installation models aimed to educate the audience by arrangement of all pieces of art chronologically into art-historical schools, demonstrating particular qualities of each national school, outlining the development of civilization 'in nations and individuals.'[87] The structured and visualized history for particular ideologies and constructed beliefs. Thus, the ritual task for visitors was to be civilized by 'reading' visual messages and reproducing the history. Visitors were conceived of as progressive, self-improvement seekers, ready to learn and eager to achieve enlightenment. At the same time, for example, the first collection of the National Gallery in London was not formed by the same principles because the museum lacked a royal collection as the core of an exhibition and because of the gallery's management's lack of expertise. The range of displayed art was extended beyond 'the traditional favorites among gentleman collectors'[88] and let the middle-class believe that they were no longer excluded. In XVIII century, artworks—previously hung only in private art galleries accessible to the elite and emergent British oligarchy—united different social classes in Britain's first public art museum. Appropriate performance allowed visitors to ritually assume the identity of the elite. It is important to again note that 'appropriate enactment' has always already implied the production of particular subjectivities (according to background, class, sex, and education) by all visitors and that these prescribed behaviors work 'appropriately' so long as people understand the museum's narrative. Ideally (at least in the ideas of those who developed this paradigm), the museum as a complex entity, including art and architecture, communicates relevant ideas and values about identity and it civilizes visitors. Even if not everyone could appreciate communicated meanings of the art, the value of equal access proclaimed by public art museums should belong to everyone.

In XVIII and XIX centuries, art institutions were a place where visitors expressed 'good taste' and upper-class features. In contrast, XX century art invented new 'visual languages and creative techniques' allowing artists to reflect on and depict 'subjective experience, including the artist's struggle to renounce the exterior world.'[89] Thus, superior capacities of mimetic depiction—traditional compositional schemes, creation of convincing volume, light, shadow and other visual effects—turned into free association, color experiments, the law of chance,

[87] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.27.
[88] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.45.
[89] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.108.

use of unconventional materials, readymades, etc. This liberated 'painting from frame and stretcher and thence from the wall itself'[90], pushing the boundaries of art. Artists sought unique ways of representing their reflections. Often, the more alienated their art was from any recognizable referent, the higher were their spiritual development and artistic achievement. As a result, the progress in modern art was measured according to the extent of abstraction. Duncan states that the intentional alienation leads to transformations of exhibition spaces and ritual scenarios. The older museum form she calls, 'universal survey museum.'[91] She argues that it celebrated the development of civilization and civic society. Collections from broad timeframes formed shared narratives that reinforced belief in an objective, external world. The new form of a museum deemphasizes the role of external reality and refigures subjectivity as partly constituted by alienation.[92] New, unconventional visual codes distance artistic experiences from one another, effacing previously commonly-held meanings. Therefore, modern art expresses and encourages individualism. Depictions that can be understood only in contingent, subjective terms (among other issues) make the meaning of any art-object selective and exclusive. The white cube as the display space for art museums[93] contributes to 'detachment from the mundane and material need.[94] Under these circumstances, intense concentration, in which the visitor is found tête-à-tête with an artwork, is appropriate. Thus, Duncan argues that modern art museums have developed rituals different from those of pre-modernity such that the new rituals differently subjectivize museum visitors.

Visual narratives in the modern art museum are built around artists' spiritual transcendence, and the visitor is invited to grasp these achievements of moral development. Duncan stresses that a way of performing rituals depends on visitors' ability to recognize the 'artist's spiritual-formal struggles through the work, its surfaces, composition, symbols, and other manifestations of artistic choice.'[95] This requires audience competence for interaction with abstract artistic forms in order to enact enlightenment and the sense of liberation that comes from movement beyond the material world. Another significant note is that the historical development of art transforms static images of good and evil, as part of the objective external world, and challenges modern artists to overstep an always-changing world. Modern artwork

[90] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.109.
[91] The term was coined in collaboration with Alan Wallach, see the article A. Wallach and C. Duncan, 'The Universal Survey Museum,' *Art History*, December 3, 1980, pp. 447-469.
[92] Even new artistic approaches such as participatory art or relational aesthetics have critical comments.
[93] Pioneering by MOMA in 1930s.
[94] A. Wallach and C. Duncan, 'The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis,' *Marxist Perspectives*, no. 1, Winter, 1978, p.45.
[95] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.110.

depicting absolute spirit—invisible, non-representational essence—appears through abstract forms and has led to new ways of demonstrating art.

The highly exclusive nature, and the distance from traditional pictorial predecessors, have built a wall between modern artworks and some visitors.[96] As mentioned above, Duncan points out that a visitor's experience in the modern art museum depends on whether or not visitors can knowledgeably interact with the complex museum entity. She quotes Michael Compton[97], the former keeper of the Tate Gallery, who assumes that visitors look briefly at many artworks in the collection. They do not look long enough to make sense of contemporary art because 'they can hardly be thinking anything but ah, that's an example of Cubism; an example of Pre-Raphaelitism; what a nice Mondrian; and so on. They never actually confront the individual painting.'[98] Additionally, museum setting and display techniques impressed audiences in XVIII and XIX centuries, demonstrating rich royal collections in lavish interiors and glorifying the ruler and the nation. This intensified aesthetic experience, but the white-walled environment and abstract forms could work in an opposite way, confusing visitors instead of contributing to their spiritual and moral elevation. However, Duncan's concept has limits, as I will make clear.

Duncan's inquiry helps to uncover how the museum shapes visitors' experience. It does so through architectural symbolism, spatial arrangement, display strategy, and ritual associations. However, Duncan did not go further in examining issues related to ritual performance in modern art museums. This is one of the main drawbacks of Duncan's research. Duncan distinguishes 'traditional' and new artistic practices, pointing out key factors that changed artistic outlook and production. However, she did not attend to audience engagement; instead, she stated that visitors are able to 'read' visual museum narratives and thus grasp conveyed meanings. Another weakness in her research is the brevity of the analysis of rituals in consumer culture: in-depth analysis of contemporary culture could have allowed the identification of leisure and entertainment components in modern museums. These cultural realities prefigure different grounds for knowledge and experience that audiences engage in when visiting museums. We should further take into account that the concept of civilizing rituals has long been established and substantiated. Visitors' experience shifts due

[96] This paper aims to focus on this category of visitors and does not claim that everyone who visits a modern art museum acts in this way. See more in Introduction.
[97] He joined the Tate Gallery as Assistant Keeper of the Modern Collection in 1965 and worked there until 1987.
[98] A. Wallach and C. Duncan, 'The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual', p.34.

to digitalization and globalization, among other reasons; nowadays, these shifts form an essential part of museum experience. The last gap that I see in her inquiry is its complete separation between the roles of different actors. For example, Duncan makes no mention of media that often assign meanings or shape ways of seeing objects as artworks. Hence, I suggest that the concept of civilizing rituals in modern art museum is more complex than what Duncan briefly described, so I will examine it more closely.

'Artworld' and the definition of art

Contemporary art is often difficult for lay audiences to engage with due to the problem that modern and contemporary artworks do not look like any recognizable object or, on the contrary, they only look like ordinary objects. Art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto points out that 'when they see work that puzzles them, people ask, "But is it art?"'[99] He elaborated this issue in his acclaimed essay *The Artworld*. He said that Western art began as imitation (mimesis)[100] of the real world – 'Imitation Theory' according to Danto – when artists tried to bring images closer to visual appearance, making them resemble the real world. These artists carefully learned such subjects as anatomy, the study of colors, light, shadow, perspective, and others in order to achieve excellent mimetic skill. The emergence of abstract paintings that do not represent the world as a mirror image was the first step to shifting the paradigm.[101] The previous format, later named realism, implied that 'looking at a picture was like looking through a window onto the world.'[102] It did not provide rationales for explaining why something without naturalistic representations would have artistic value. Danto remarks that one of the most significant examples—Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*—was initially not identified as a piece of art and provoked disagreement. It received professional acknowledgment only 20 years later, and was acclaimed as the most influential work of art of the last 100 years.[103] Danto defines Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol as key figures of the

[99] Danto, *What art is*, p.5.
[100] In this essay the history of art is divided into Imitation Theory and Reality Theory mostly to stress differences between Western art before and after the late XIX century. For further explanation see A.C.Danto, *What art is*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.
[101] Here and further the term paradigm is borrowed from Thomas Kuhn and means a system of knowledge that allows considering something as valid (legitimized). See more in T.S.Kuhn, *The structure of scientific revolutions*, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1962.
[102] A.C.Danto, *What art is*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013, p.12.
[103] P.Plagens, 'Which Is the Most Influential Work of Art of the Last 100 Years', *Newsweek*, June 23, 2007 https://www.newsweek.com/which-most-influential-work-art-last-100-years-102269 (accessed 21 July 2018).

new artistic paradigm, arguing that 'Marcel Duchamp found a way of eradicating beauty in 1915, and Andy Warhol discovered that a work of art could exactly resemble a real thing in 1964.'[104] The new artistic forms were intended to reflect artists' feelings or thoughts, rather than invoking something visible. For this reason, abstract techniques, mass-production, and utilitarian objects rendered outdated the concept of imitation as the key aspect of artistic creation.[105]

Imitation was a convenient framework that made identification of art possible for a wide audience. 'The eye of the beholder had been trained to recognize art by its historical form,' but sight as a physical operation was challenged when the meaning of an artistic production has ceased to be visually connected.[106] Danto states that it is not possible to identify art by looking at it. Then, how to recognize anything as art if its format does not visually translate a valid artistic expression? Danto believes that it is a role of theory to define something as art. He coined the term 'artworld' that implies a world of ideas (theories) that introduces new practices and movements into the artistic realm. Hence, in the artworld, objects that look like pieces of the ordinary daily world, or altogether odd images, obtain the status of art because they could be explained through a particular art theory. But, what if one lacks the relevant theory necessary to notice that it is an artistic expression? Danto elaborates through and explanation of a layman's response to Rauschenberg's bed or Oldenburg's bed, which are acclaimed pieces of art:

> A certain Testadura – a plain speaker and noted philistine – who is not aware that these [beds] are art, and who takes them to be reality simple and pure. He attributes the paintstreaks on Rauschenberg's bed to the slovenliness of the owner, and the bias in the Oldenburg bed to the ineptitude of the builder or the whimsy, perhaps, of whoever had it 'custom-made.' They mistook art for reality. Except for the guard cautioning Testadura not to sleep on the artworks, he might never have discovered that this was an artwork and not a bed.[107]

What a layman's eyes see is a bed with unusual elements. While the aesthete sees the same, different ways of constructing vision are constructed for the layman and for those familiar with the theory that makes two beds 'special' and significant for the artworld. New artistic

[104] Danto, *What art is*, Preface, p. xii
[105] Mimesis was not rejected as a criterion of defining art, but rather was no longer a sufficient condition.
[106] H.Belting, 'At the Doom of Modernism', in D.A. Herwitz (ed.) and M. Kelly (ed.), *Action, Art, History: Engagements with Arthur Danto*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 114-115.
[107] A.C.Danto, 'The Artworld', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 61, Issue 19, American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division Sixty-First Annual Meeting, October 15, 1964, p. 575.

practices emerge in relation to 'art as form and as concept.'[108] Thus, according to Danto, the identification that distinguishes art and non-art requires the frame of theory that legitimates something as an artwork.

Talking about 'theory', Danto asserts that there is a universal[109] conceptual framework that allows one to say whether something is art or not. He includes two criteria: 'Something is a work of art if it has a meaning—is about something—and if it embodies its meaning'.[110] As Noël Carroll[111] interprets Danto's elaboration in the book *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, the emergence of an 'embodied meaning' implies several stages that I will briefly sum up here. For example, there is an object X that could be considered an artwork in certain circumstances. For this, 1) X must consist of a subject matter (it must be about something); 2) the artist must determine a way to see the object in order to form a subject matter; 3) this artistic statement must be connected through metaphor; 4) in order to understand how a historical moment and art theories of the time when an artwork was made, knowledge must be given 'historico-theoretical context' and explain the artist's claim (as a simple example, one might ask 'Why could not readymades be an artworks at the time of Renaissance?); 5) X must prompt the audience to respond in any relevant way—namely, to find an interpretation of an object that appeals to historico-theoretical context and an applicable explanation of a metaphor. Thus, to grasp an artwork means to interpret a metaphor.

The interpretative nature implies that an artwork has different meanings and these meaning is a production of art criticism. Depending on the viewer, time, and place of observation, meanings of an artwork could be variant. Art criticism is dedicated to applying art theories that demonstrate what an artwork means and how this meaning is embodied in the object.

As mentioned above, new forms challenge viewers since most viewers are not familiar with art theories and find it difficult to make sense of contemporary art. Without requisite knowledge, identifying artistic significance poses a significant challenge. For this audience, the way to the artworld is limited. Excepting Danto's particular conception, the artworld turned into an idiom to define the network of art experts, connoisseurs of art, and elite in a

[108] H.Belting, 'At the Doom of Modernism', p. 114.
[109] A.C.Danto, 'Response', in in D.A. Herwitz (ed.) and M. Kelly (ed.), *Action, Art, History: Engagements with Arthur Danto*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 126.
[110] Danto, 'Response', p. 126.
[111] N. Carroll, 'The Transfiguration of the Commonplace Arthur Danto', *History and Theory*, 1990, no. 1, p. 113-114.

context, as demonstrated in a news headline: *Donald Trump's UK visit sparks backlash from the art world*[112] or *Open Letter Condemns Sexual Harassment in Art World*.[113]
The idiomatic definition is closer to the concept of George Dickie's institutional theory of art: a group of influential people in some way connected to art who make decisions on what qualifies as an artwork. However, Danto distances his theory-driven 'artworld' – even using it as a single word, i. e. a proper noun instead of the two-word singular 'art world' frequently used idiomatically – from institutional theory[114] and other references to the network of connoisseurs related to cultural institutions. Nevertheless, Danto acclaims art professionals in their role of legitimating artworks. His artworld is inhabited, first of all, by art critics who mediate by constructing meanings of artworks. He also says that his conceptual framework 'applies to widely – really to everything that members of the art world [two-word term] deem worthy of being shown and studied in the great encyclopedic museums.'[115] Thus, Danto's concept implies the existence of significant people who make a work of art possible and who are assumed to explain its meaning to viewers who are not familiar with the theory that legitimates a certain artwork.

Despite that, thanks to art books, reviews, museum labels and leaflets, the audience can learn more about a conceptual frame that defines a certain contemporary artwork, the question is how often an average visitor does it. Gail Gregg, in an article for *ARTnews*, unfolds the results of museum survey notes that among the most common visitors' responses are: 'I do not know where to start,' 'Your labels make me feel stupid,' 'Why would a museum put this on display?' 'Have I looked at this long enough?'[116] She also refers to Whitney Museum's education director Kathryn Potts, who is aware that 'for visitors who are not familiar with contemporary art, there is a feeling that they are being tricked.'[117] There are good reasons to explain audience experience and engagement in a museum.

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[112] A.Shaw and G.Harris, 'Donald Trump's UK visit sparks backlash from the art world', *The Art Newspaper*, 12 July, 2018 https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/donald-trump-s-uk-visit-sparks-backlash-from-the-art-world (accessed 21 July 2018).
[113] A.Russeth, 'Open Letter Condemns Sexual Harassment in Art World,' *ARTnews,* 29 October 2017 http://www.artnews.com/2017/10/29/open-letter-condemns-sexual-harassment-in-art-world/ (accessed 21 July 2018).
[114] For further explanation of conceptual differences between Danto and Dickie's theories see M.Lacertosa, 'The Artworld and The Institutional Theory of Art: an Analytic Confrontation', *The SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research*, Vol. 8, 2015, pp. 36-45.
[115] Danto, *What art is,* pp. 5-6.
[116] G.Gregg, 'Your Labels Make Me Feel Stupid', *ARTnews*, Summer, 2010, http://www.artnews.com/2010/07/01/your-labels-make-me-feel-stupid/ (accessed 21 July 2018).
[117] Gregg, 'Your Labels Make Me Feel Stupid'.

Spending time on art

First, where Duncan believes that museum visitors are supposed to recognize the artist's spiritual statement and feelings as a consequence of composition, symbols, and other artistic techniques, she assumes that the audience will spend a sufficient amount of time for contemplation. However, the average visitor spends around 30 seconds (mean time is 28.63 seconds) in front of an artwork and this quantity has remained stable over the past 15 years. This empirical evidence appears Lisa F. Smith and Jeffrey K. Smith's widely referenced article on viewing times in art museums that they conducted in 2001 and 2017.[118] According to The Smiths, visitors typically being by casting a glance at the artwork; they then read the label, which takes most of the time; finally, they briefly look at the piece of art one more time before moving on. Alternative investigations[119] provide more facts and figures. For example, *ARTnews* shares this insight:

> How many words visitors can tolerate in object labels (about 50), room labels (no more than 150), or longer introductory texts (300 is the maximum) […] They know that for most people museum fatigue sets in after about 45 minutes.[120]

Even the visitors of the biggest and the most popular art museum—the Louvre, which displays approximately 35 000 art objects—stay there between 1,5 hour (short stay) and 6 hours (long stay). There is no doubt that both time intervals do not allow one to explore much. However, research shows that whether on short- or long-term stays, audience members usually visit all the same artworks.[121] Thus, one could reasonably assume that, from the beginning, visitors know what artworks they would like to see. When it comes to world-famous museums that have high volumes and extreme varieties of artworks, Smith and Smith suppose that seeing the most acknowledged masterpieces from the list within a short period of time requires a specific behavior of visitors that affects their viewing experience.[122] This common behavior could also cause long queues and crowds that prevent art contemplation. For example, the average viewing time of the most famous painting in the world, the *Mona*

[118] J.K.Smith and L.F.Smith, 'Spending time on art', *Empirical Studies of the Arts*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2001, pp. 229-236; J.K.Smith, L.F.Smith and P. L. Tinio, 'Time Spent Viewing Art and Reading Labels', *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2017, pp. 77–85.
[119] See more in J.K.Smith, *The museum effect: how museums, libraries and cultural institutions educate and civilise society*, Lanham, Maryland and Plymouth, UK, Rowman & Little eld, 2014; C.C. Carbon, 'Art Perception in the Museum: How We Spend Time and Space in Art Exhibitions', *i-Perception*, January-February 2017, pp. 1-15 and Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture, Volume 2.
[120] Gregg, 'Your Labels Make Me Feel Stupid'.
[121] Y.Yoshimura, A.Krebs and C.Ratti, 'Noninvasive Bluetooth Monitoring of Visitors' Length of Stay at the Louvre', *PERVASIVE computing*, April-June 2017, pp. 26-33.
[122] Smith et al., 'Time Spent Viewing Art and Reading Labels'.

Lisa, is 15 seconds. That raises the question if it is enough to understand this masterpiece's value. Or is it simply enough to take a snapshot? Is their interest in being sure to say that they have seen it? John Falk, in his study on visitors' motivations, believes that this behavior characterizes a particular group of museum-goers that he defines as 'experience seekers'—namely, visitors who seek to spend good time in a museum to address their tick-off list by seeing the most important masterpieces.[123] Another reason for the short visits may be that visitors experience the pressure of the long queue behind them and do not have time to better explore the painting. This is just to mention a few factors that could result in brief encounters with artworks. For instance, economics play a key role in helping to determine these (or perhaps any social or cultural) outcomes.

Art and the process of globalization

Many aspects mentioned above relate to the ongoing and complex process of globalization. I will not discuss issues of economics and politics that are frequently claimed in academic literature as the main aspects of globalization. The rise of technological developments – from affordable international air service to electronic communication systems – increases the flow of goods, information, and people that reshape social and temporal-spatial relations. In the morning, one leaves his or her apartment in Prague and in four hours one can enjoy looking at the *Mona Lisa* in Paris, just before saying to a friend living in Brazil, 'Look where I was,' sharing it on social media, and without waiting for dinner, send an mms to mother. The power of textual-visual techniques allows us to construct representations of people or events, and new media help users to share with a broad audience. José van Dijck appeals to the emergence of the culture of connectivity, wherein sociality is constructed through technologies and digital relations.[124] It should come as no surprise that a new Smith and Smith study (2017), aimed at revisiting their first investigation after 15 years, found 'the large percentage of visitors taking what we term arties, that is, selfies taken with the artworks.'[125] This fact shows that even if the average time that a person spends in front of an artwork did not change, the behavior of audience has changed. The research shows that the practice of taking pictures of artworks could demonstrate consumption without engagement. Anne Quito,

[123] J. H. Falk, *Identity and the museum visitor experience*, Walnut Creek, Left Coast Press, 2009.
[124] J. v. Dijck, *The culture of connectivity: a critical history of social media,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
[125] J.K.Smith et al, 'Time Spent Viewing Art and Reading Labels', *p*. 77.

in her observation on the unveiling of Barack and Michelle Obama's official Smithsonian portraits in 2018, remarked that visitors were waiting in a long queue 'to take a picture of the painting; they turned around to snap a selfie with the painting as backdrop; or they posed next to the portraits.'[126] Furthermore, over the past few years, there has been running a worldwide movement, Museum Selfie day, selected examples of which are demonstrated in *Figure 1* below. This initiative and experience of art through a phone screen could raise concerns, but I will put here only one question that could be a starting point[127]: *Where is an artwork and where is one looking?* I argue that generic visual forms, such as a snapshot, in this case, transform audience experience and transform the authenticity of an artwork.[128] The digital age increases the flow of content and connections that require quicker consumption in order to 'stay tuned,' affecting different forms of engagement with reality.

Figure 1. Museum Selfie day 2014, selected examples. Source: The Guardian, 22 January 2014

Provocation or pleasure for the eye?

Another interesting observation was carried out by art critic Philip Hensher, who spent with colleagues two days at Tate Britain to learn if there is a difference between the amount of time that visitors spent on looking at classic paintings and at modern art.[129] Visitors were

[126] A. Quito, 'The many layers of meaning in Barack and Michelle Obama's official portraits', *Quartzy*, 13 February 2018, https://qz.com/quartzy/1204480/obama-portraits-kehinde-wiley-and-amy-sherald-express-multiple-layers-of-meaning/ (accessed 16 July 2018).
[127] Further discussion should be a topic of a complex investigation.
[128] See more in Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility'.
[129] P. Hensher, 'Modern art: How gallery visitors only viewed work by Damien Hirst and Tracy Emin for less than 5 seconds', *The Mail on Sunday*, 13 March 2011 http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1365672/Modern-art-How-gallery-visitors-viewed-work-Damien-Hirst-Tracy-Emin-5-seconds (accessed 27 July 2018).

significantly more interested in classic art, spending in front of Whistler's, Hogarth's, and Sargent's painting 1-2 minutes on average, while artworks of Tracey Emin, Damien Hirst and Rachel Whiteread caught visitors' interest only for 4-5 seconds. Hensher's conclusions have something in common with Danto's ideas: Hensher supposes that audiences are more engaged with naturalistic representations and they can grasp a visual story. He reasons about William Hogarth's *The Roast Beef Of Old England*: 'it's a complicated painting, with lots of small incidents and stories bursting out, 12 major figures […] it's also painted with wonderful bravura.' As confirmation, one visitor commented, 'you can admire the artist when you look at this. It's not just slapping on the paint.' Hensher suggests that there was little sense of connection, for example, between the ordinary public and Damien Hirst's *Away from the Flock*, a dead sheep in formaldehyde, commenting 'it is not something to go on looking at for half an hour' and one of the visitor's reflects 'it would look good as a coffee table.'[130] It seems that art devoted to provoking rather than to pleasing the eye, does not complete its mission in this experiment.

Figure 2. William Hogarth, *The Roast Beef Of Old England* (1748) and Damien Hirst, *Away from the Flock* (1994). Source: Tate.

It is fair to note that 4-5 seconds is not enough to establish a connection between the audience and an artwork. Even the average 30 seconds most likely will not engage visitors with a piece of art at least because the general audience is supposed to find time for reading labels in order to link an object on display with a particular theory, as Danto believes. One could argue that visitors should come theoretically prepared having read books, reviews, and/or visiting the museum's website or social media. One assumes that a person who is familiar with an

[130] Hensher, 'Modern art'.

artwork's background will not see it 'as a coffee table' or 'a bed and some paintstreaks' as discussed above. A director of the Chisenhale Gallery Polly Staple notes, 'There are so many people who come to our shows who do not even look at the programme sheet. They do not want to look at any writing about art.'[131] One of the barriers between the general audience and modern art seems to be art language.

The art of artspeak

When it comes to communication about contemporary art, many people find themselves confused when reading books, review, artists' statements, exhibition leaflets, and wall texts that are full of jargon, ambiguous descriptions, vaguely defined phenomena, and overcomplicated sentences. Sometimes, even if a text consists of only familiar words, they are connected in a way that frustrates readers. This could puzzle laymen and provoke feelings of bafflement or irritation, rather than enlightening them. Sociologist Alix Rule and artist David Levine problematize the rhetoric of the modern art world by stating that art experts developed a specialized language used to express ideas concerning contemporary art.[132] They point out that the art language creates 'a community of users' that looks very much like Danto's 'artworld':

> That community is the art world, by which we mean the network of people who collaborate professionally to make the objects and nonobjects that go public as contemporary art: not just artists and curators, but gallery owners and directors, bloggers, magazine editors and writers, publicists, collectors, advisers, interns, art-history professors, and so on.[133]

However, if Danto believed that this network of professionals explain artworks' meaning to viewers, Rule and Levine note that the style of artspeak[134] implies specific vocabulary with

[131] A. Beckett, 'A user's guide to artspeak', The Guardian, 27 January 2013 https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/jan/27/users-guide-international-art-english (accessed 27 July 2018).
[132] A. Rule and D. Levine, 'International Art English', *Triple Canopy*, no. 16, 2012 https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/series/international_art_english/contents/international_art_english (accessed 27 July 2018).
[133] Rule and Levine, 'International Art English'.
[134] Rule and Levine coined a term 'International Art English' that I intentionally do not use in my observation due to some doubts concerning the idea of the 'internationalized art world' mentioned more detailed by Mariam Ghani and Ben Davis. Nevertheless, I do agree with authors' main point that art writing often implies superficially reasonable vocabulary. See more in M.Ghani, 'The Islands of Evasion: Notes on International Art English', *Triple Canopy*, 28 May 2013 https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/the-islands-of-evasion-notes-on-international-art-english (accessed 27 July 2018) and B.Davis, '"International Art English": The Joke

many metaphors and vaguely-defined phenomena in order to describe immaterial world. Therefore, this lexical design is not what a non-professional could understand, which is why the narrative among some people is that the aim of artspeak's users 'is to sound to the art world like someone worth listening to.'[135] As authors argue, even art professionals experience difficulties in understanding art texts; artists often receive large positive responses to their concepts from 'ones who have been through master of fine arts programmes.'[136] However, even if we assume that these principles of writing help to evaluate competency, this entails a significant drawback: excluding a general audience who would perhaps appreciate to see a text that is delivered in a way that speaks to them.

The language I use in this paper reflects my conscious decision to present my reflections in a more inclusive form. I aim to present my argumentation in a clear and accessible way, minimizing obscure language and extending the potential audience of readers to professionals as well as ones who are intrigued and open-minded toward art. Working on the current investigation, I experience difficulties with understanding artspeak in the mass of art literature. Thus, there were no doubts over whether to include this barrier in audience's engagement in my analysis. Being a professional working with audience development, I came to the cultural field with a degree in sociological research. Working on new cultural projects, I always ask such questions as 'Who is my audience? What do I know about them? What do they like? Why would they make the decision to attend an event? What outcome can they receive?' When I used to study my potential target audience, I noticed that people rarely understand highly specialized or ambiguous language and descriptions; they rather appreciate plain language that makes sense of a cultural phenomenon. As my professional approach, I prefer to develop a narrative starting with what the audience most likely is familiar with and, from common knowledge, build further relevant meaning.

Consumer culture

But what makes art museums attractive for an audience if arguments above demonstrate that there are significant barriers in engagement? How do we explain the ongoing museum boom?

That Forgot It Was Funny', *Huffington Post*, 6 July 2013 https://www.huffingtonpost.com/artinfo/international-art-english-the-joke-that-forgot-it-was-funny_b_3397760.html (accessed 27 July 2018).

[135] Rule and Levine, 'International Art English'.

[136] Beckett, 'A user's guide to artspeak'.

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's work[137], it seems that the experience of going to a museum improves people in some ways, providing value and prestige, and a feeling of being a 'cultured' person. Today, a museum visit does not imply that pieces of art will be a primary goal. One can visit the museum, glance at the exhibition, and stay longer for lunch or go shopping in the museum. Who needs boring mugs from a supermarket when MOMA offers Mondrian Color-Changing Mugs? MOMA Exclusive even sells a 'microwave miracle.'[138] Would you rather share the check-in from the Tate Modern café or McDonald's? These examples are evidence that aesthetic experience has been extended from the sphere of 'high' art to the realm of popular culture and everyday life often blurs boundaries between art and the banal. We also can refer to artistic movements that triggered aestheticization of everyday life, exploring how everyday commodities have been aestheticized (the Dada, historical avant-garde, and Surrealist movements), while, on the other hand, reflecting on consumer culture (Pop Art).[139] Another reason for the blurring of boundaries is the increased interconnection between art, advertising, design, and visual content industries. Hence, the aestheticization of practically everything has caused the shift from reality into imagery, where the way of consumption defines particular lifestyles.

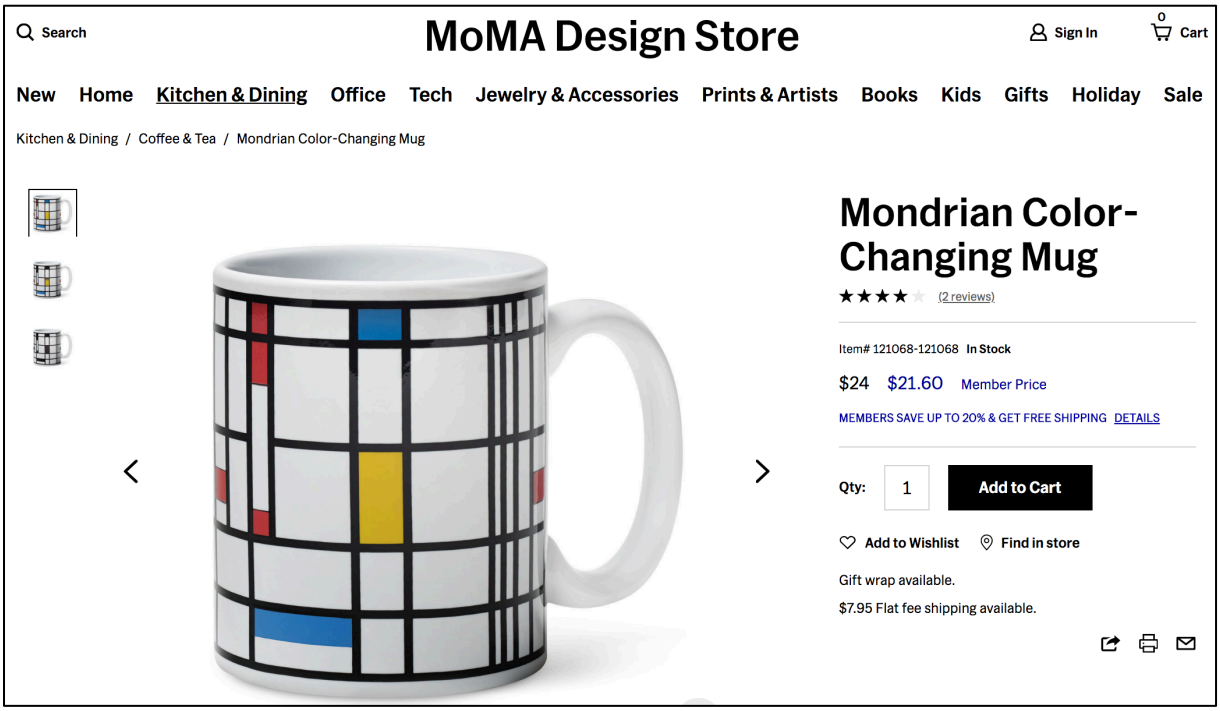

Figure 3. Mondrian Color-Changing Mug where art and design are interconnected. Source: MOMA online store

[137] P. Bourdieu, *Distinction*.
[138] *MOMA online store* [website] https://store.moma.org/kitchen-dining/cookware-kitchen-tools/microwave-grill/4295-139206.html (accessed 27 July 2018).
[139] M.Featherstone, *Consumer culture and postmodernism*, 2nd ed., London: SAGE, 2007, p. 65.

As Mike Featherstone states, culture plays an important role in lifestyle construction.[140] Experience of authentic art could be replaced by commodities, thus commodifying experience. Guy Debord called this turn from authentic life toward representation, 'spectacle'; he says spectacle 'is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.'[141] Hence, art institutions originally dedicated for connoisseurs and enthusiastic learners are turned into sites for spectacles engaging a broader audience in 'the play of the real'.[142] By the 1970s, most art institutions changed their organizational structure and established departments of marketing, in which experts commodify the museum and transform the palace of enlightenment into the marketplace.

Here, drawing on Charlotte Klonk's study, I would like to take a step back and note that there may have been more direct parallels between a museum and a marketplace.[143] Indeed, London in early XIX had areas of retail distribution – bazaars – where marketers displayed and sold works of art among other commodities. However, those days this 'new kind of artistic exhibition'[144] served to attract audience's attention and invite them to visit the stores. These retail areas were predecessors of the first European department stores – arcades – which emerged in France in the 1850s. Both bazaars and arcades had specific architectural references to first museums: monumental pillars, long corridors, and series of connected rooms with objects on display, but marketers used art for the commercial purpose of luring customers. Arcades are usually associated with the further development of consumption at large, but according to Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, museums in XIX century could be considered the 'continuation of the bazaar and department store, with works of art on offer like commodities.'[145] In comparison with smaller art institutions, respectful national art museums responsible for the image of the nation as a whole aimed to establish a more moral way of seeing art. However, the rapid development of the market makes the consumer mode of spectatorship a crucial characteristic of art experience in XX century.

[140] Featherstone, *Consumer culture*.
[141] G. Debord, *Society of the spectacle*.
[142] Featherstone, Consumer culture, p. 59.
[143] Klonk, *Spaces Of Experience*.
[144] Klonk, *Spaces Of Experience,* p. 26.
[145] Klonk, *Spaces Of Experience,* p. 28.

Figure 4. Queen's Bazaar, Oxford Street 1833, Source: C. Klonk in *Spaces Of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors From 1800 To 2000.*

Nowadays, an art museum is a cultural department store, in which one of the departments is responsible for marketing and commodification of visitor experience. Offering museum-goers a variety of visual stimuli as promises of fulfillment, the essence remains empty.[146] Modern departments of marketing, trying to reach a wider audience through advertising, exhibition catalogues, and other media, promote the value of being a 'cultured' person. Spectacular imagery has allowed them to reach a new public, among which are often the types of visitors examined above.

Lianne McTavish argues that in the race to attract a new audience, the entertaining function in many art institutions has come to dominate, as in the case of 'the blockbuster exhibition, a gala event marketed with splashy advertising campaigns and merchandising.'[147] She denies the museum's statement that these events increase cultural understanding. It is a common opinion among scholars that the underlying cause lies in the museum's obsession, in the

[146] This idea is influenced by Benjamin's concept of phantasmagoria. See more in W.Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, transl. H.Eiland and K.Mclaughlin, Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 1999.
[147] L.McTavish, 'The Decline of the Modernist Museum', *Acadiensis,* XXXIII, 1, Fall 2003, p. 100.

interest of funding, with attendance figures, numbers of followers, clicks, shares, references, grant-income revenue, and other statistics.[148] The art institution that is able to attract a wide audience and receive professional and public acknowledgment will represent the interests of its patrons more successfully, conveying the message that culture has become possible thanks to significant investments of the most influential citizens or companies. Drawing on Foucault's concept of panopticism, these same metrics being placed in the center of the museum survey also serves to survey, developing further[149] panoptic mechanisms in museums.[150] This aspect also blurs the border between the public and the private spheres, making more information available publicly: we know where our friend spent last evening, where she bought her new dress, or what she had for lunch. However, transparency of information does not contribute to social integration. Consumer culture rather creates individuals who, according to Henrik Kaare Nielsen, 'monologically present themselves through their life styles.'[151] In other words, we aim to represent ourselves more than we aim to open ourselves to social experiences. Examining the aestheticization of every day life, he states that public spaces were turned into consumer zones that do not stimulate interaction between individuals; dialogical exchange is suppressed when we perform the act of purchasing. Isolated consumers live through images.

[148] See more in L.McTavish, 'The Decline of the Modernist Museum', *Acadiensis,* XXXIII, 1, Fall 2003, pp. 97-107; Bishop, *Radical Museology*; C.Storrie, *The delirious museum: a journey from the Louvre to Las Vegas*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2007, p.23; T.Rachman, 'Nice Museum. Where's the Art?', *The New Yorker*, 13 May 2016 https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/nice-museum-wheres-the-art (accessed 27 July 2018); I.Kaplan, 'How Long Do You Need to Look at a Work of Art to Get It?', Artsy, 25 January, 2017 https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-long-work-art-it (accessed 27 July 2018).

[149] I.e., in addition to the museum's other panoptic features, like the ever-present guards, the cameras, the wide open, quiet spaces, etc.

[150] Suggested further reading on publicly monitored space, see, for example, Bennett, *The birth of the museum*.

[151] H.K.Nielsen, 'Totalizing Aesthetics? Aesthetic Theory and the Aestheticization of Everyday Life', *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, no. 17 (32), 2005, p. 72.

CHAPTER 3:
ANALYSIS OF THE EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

The film *The Square* is set around a contemporary art museum and it examines different dimensions of today's art field. Following the narrative,[152] we witness several scenes in the museum that all together outline the image of the contemporary art circle. Any piece of satire is necessarily directed from real life. In this case, Östlund conducted anthropological research. Beside the fact that the storyline features many scenes that closely mirror events from the director's life and stories that Östlund's friends shared with him,[153] as part of his research, he visited 20 contemporary art museums in different countries[154] and met with key figures in the Swedish art field to get insights into today's art scene.[155] For example, he met with Daniel Birnbaum, director of Stockholm's Moderna Museet. I consider Östlund's approach as phenomenologically-grounded. In same parts of my analysis I will draw to Östlund's experience considering him as a person who visited art shares his reflection through the shape of film. This analysis does not aim to investigate Östlund's intentions, but it is my interpretation of the collection of images depicting audience interaction with contemporary art.

What is art for a layman?

In the opening scene, the American journalist Ann and Christian sit in the white gallery space with heaps of gravel on the floor and the sign 'You have nothing' in the background. During the interview, Ann asks a question that puzzles Christian. She inquires if he can explain in layman's language a highly theorized statement published on the museum's website. The quotation concerns the shift from non-site to site, from non-exhibition to exhibition:

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[152] The following discussion implies that the reader is familiar with the film's storyline or has read Prologue in this paper.
[153] S.Roxborough, 'How "The Square" Used a Half-Naked Ape-Man to Pull Off the Film's Most "Intense and Unexpected" Scene', *The Hollywood Reporter*, 14 November 2017 https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/how-square-used-a-naked-ape-man-pull-films-intense-unexpected-scene-1054658 (accessed 21 July 2018).
[154] J.Heiser, 'Ruben Östlund: "The Square Becomes What We Make Out Of It"', *Frieze*, 2 March 2018, https://frieze.com/article/ruben-ostlund-square-becomes-what-we-make-out-it (accessed 21 July 2018).
[155] 'Listen: Screen Life/Real Life', *Frieze Talks* [audio recording], Frieze, https://frieze.com/fair-programme/listen-screen-lifereal-life (accessed 21 July 2018).

> …explores that dynamics of the 'exhibitable,' and the construction of publicness in the spirit of Robert Smithson's Site/Non-Site. From non-site to site, from non-exhibition to exhibition, what is the topos of Exhibition: Non-Exhibition in the moments of 'mega exhibition?'[156]

The text Ann read is a direct quote of Östlund's colleague who teaches at the Fine Arts Department in the University of Gothenburg.[157] The scene reflects the fact that many people are challenged to make sense of artspeak and to understand the idea behind the sophisticated vocabulary as well as its contradictory and ambiguous descriptions. As was discussed above, this is a common style of describing art. The scene demonstrates how art jargon alienates members of the audience who cannot grasp any meaning. Beside the fact that the language impacts audience reception and makes art more challenging for non-professionals, it creates other issues.

First, this jargonization creates a distinction between laypeople and experts. This calls into question 'art for everyone' as a concept, as well as the function of art institutions if we look at it through Carol Duncan's eyes, for example. Another problem appears in the form of art as a form of communication, especially in art's ability to convey a 'readable' statement and artistic value. Finally, I follow the argument elaborated by Rule and Levine in their research *International Art English*, in which they state that artspeak 'allowed some writers to sound more authoritative than others.'[158] This authority is relevant as cultural capital, referring back to Bourdieu. This speech significantly attributes elitism makes artspeak one of the entrance requirements into the elite. The role of language could be defined through a metaphor, 'I know the passwords, I speak your language, now will you please open the door?' as Mariam Ghani outlines it.[159] Getting access into this group, a person joins the network of decision- and opinion-makers that choose what is culturally valid. Hence, the opening scene, in a certain sense, sets up the entrance requirements to the X-Royal museum for those who would like to be part of the 'cultured' world.[160]

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[156] *The Square*, dir. Ruben Östlund, Sweden, Germany, France, Denmark, Plattform Produktion AB, Essential Films, Parisienne, Coproduction Office, 2017 [digital].
[157] Unfortunately, I have not found any interviews, in which Östlund mentions the actual name of his colleague.
[158] Rule and Levine, 'International Art English'.
[159] Ghani, 'The Islands of Evasion'.
[160] I use 'cultured' as the form of word that add an additional ironic implication to what I describe as a group of opinion-makers in contemporary art field. I also choose this collocation in order to avoid drawing parallels with Arthur Danto and George Dickie's definitions of the term 'artworld'. I kindly borrow this form of word from Joseph Braverman who mentions it in the interview with Ruben Östlund: J.Braverman, 'Director Ruben Östlund on His Fascinating Foreign Language Nominated Film 'The Square'', *The Awards Circuit*, 24 February, 2018 http://www.awardscircuit.com/2018/02/24/interview-director-ruben-ostlund-fascinating-foreign-language-nominated-film-square/ (accessed 27 July 2018).

Figure 5. *The Square*: opening scene. Courtesy: A-One Films

However, as we can see in this scene, a respected representative of this cultured world, Christian, can barely clarify for Anne the meaning of the artistic statement that supposes to be a fairly simple explanation. After the pause, he gives a loose definition, 'If you place an object in a museum, does that make this object a piece of art? […] if we took your bag and placed it here, would that make it art?'[161] On the one hand, the character appeals to Marcel Duchamp's theory of the readymade when everyday objects become artworks in a new context created by the artist as a statement (see Chapter 2). In my interpretation, I also see another aspect that comes as an irony when Christian speaks about the definition of art and the role of art institutions in this process. The sign behind his shoulders says, 'You have nothing' and acts as a visual continuation of what he left unspoken. Through the framework set up by Danto, the piles of gravel can be considered as part of the hidden message, as follows: in order to be legitimated as an artwork, the object needs to gain artistic value through the reassignation of meaning to pieces of the ordinary world. This is true in the case of piles of gravel or of a lady's handbag. However, in this context, I see the heaps of gravel as a reference to Danto's explanation of art,[162] in which he also refers to a gravel pile, pointing out:

[161] *The Square*, dir. Ruben Östlund.
[162] However, I have not find any references or mentions of Danto in Östlund's interviews.

> a man who carved pebbles out of stones and carefully constructed a work called *Gravel Pile* might invoke the labor theory of value to account for the price he demands; but the question is, What makes it art?[163]

These piles of dust are visible in the frame when Christian leaves his own question — what makes anything art? — without an answer. His open question problematizes all encounters with art that happen later in the film. Hence, questioning the role of art institutions in the definition of art, Christian leaves the door open and makes it a starting point for Östlund's film. Continually through the rest of the film, the relationship between the audience and the object on display is called into question.[164] Do they come to see art because it is placed in the museum? Or, rather, do they come to the museum to see if something that is placed there is art? The opening scene sets up a critical lens through which issues in contemporary art are revealed.

Art as ruling power

The next scene introduces the central piece of art in this story: a performative artwork, 'The Square,' that looks like a four-by-four meter outline on the ground. It supposes to promote responsible behaviour in the space inside the square being a zone of altruism and kindness. Anyone can go there when this person is looking for anonymous help or support, helping, in theory, to reduce social distance. Just after this, we see an equestrian statue of XIX-century monarch Karl XIV Johan removed from the center of the square by a crane. The statue is removed from the front of the museum's entrance in order to make room for the conceptual artwork, and the statue falls down onto a pedestal, cutting off the head of the king. As in the previous scene, this episode also bears some hidden meanings contributing to the complex image of the modern art institution that has started to form in the first scene.

[163] Danto, 'The Artworld', p. 580.
[164] Heiser, 'The Square Becomes What We Make Out Of It'.

Figure 6. *The Square*: dismantling of the statue of XIX-century monarch Karl XIV Johan. Courtesy: A-One Films

The film depicts a reality by which Sweden has abolished monarchy and turned into a republic. The gesture of chopping off the head of the first family member of the House of Bernadotte – the actual ruling house of Sweden – can be seen as the idea that today the monarchy should make way to democratic values. However, I would argue that it is productive to look at the scene in a broader context. The act of the beheading also can be considered as a comment on the royal legitimacy of the Bernadottes Dynasty at large. Here I refer to the fact that the present royal dynasty of Sweden has its origins in the consequences of the French Revolution. The previous ruling dynasty, the House of Holstein-Gottorp, was deposed,[165] and the Marshal of France, Jean Baptiste Bernadotte was proclaimed Crown Prince of Sweden, becoming the first monarch of the Bernadottes Dynasty. This scene in the film can be viewed as a critique of the political decision to choose the person contributing to the abolition of the French monarchy and invite him to strengthen the position of the Swedish monarchy on the throne rather than to establish a new social order. The French Revolution as the foundation of the present ruling family reveals the controversial nature of the Swedish political principles and beliefs. Hence, placing 'The Square' in the exact spot, which for

[165] After the assassination of Gustav III and violent overthrow of his son, Gustav IV Adolf, when the throne passed to Charles XIII, a childless 61 years old monarch, it was apparent that he is the last member of the current ruling dynasty, the House of Holstein-Gottorp. Thus, the Swedish branch of monarchs ended up, and the French marshal Jean Baptiste Bernadotte was elected as successor becoming the first monarch of the Bernadottes Dynasty, the present ruling family. For more information see: *Swedish Royal Court* [website] https://www.kungahuset.se/royalcourt/monarchytheroyalcourt/themonarchyinsweden.4.396160511584257f2180005799.html (accessed 27 July 2018).

centuries was dedicated to represent the power of the monarchy, Östlund brings into discussion the value of equal rights and obligations, both as altruism and social structure.

The scene depicted in the film has real origins, reflecting the initiative of Östlund and his colleague Kalle Boman in Gothenburg. Concerned about the way monuments should be represented today, the authors suggested moving the statue of King Karl IX from its original place next to the statue of his son, King Gustav II Adolf. This gesture supposes to visualise that the representation of history does not take into account the role of women.[166] Thus, Östlund and Boman look at the problem of power and social structure through the gender lens, aiming to illustrate that there are no public statues of female members of ruling dynasties. As in the film, the authors proposed to replace the statue of King Karl IX – the founder of Gothenburg – by the performative installation, 'The Square,' which would promote responsible behaviour. That is why, in my understanding, the same concept can be traced in the film's scene, when the monarch's statue is replaced by an installation that was created by a female artist, Lola Arias, and promoted equality and responsible behaviour.

Repurposing of royal palaces

This scene also can be commented through Carol Duncan's perspective.[167] The fall of the monarchy and the transformation of the Royal Palace into a public art museum bear a relationship to people seeing it as constitutive of equal access to property that for centuries belonged to the monarchs. Through visual experience of art, the castle—a place where everyone can come see artworks—gives the audience a sense of ownership. Thus, several centuries ago, the first monarch of the Bernadottes Dynasty, King Karl XIV Johan, turned some royal palaces into public art museums.[168] This helped to bring legitimacy to the new

[166] Heiser, 'The Square Becomes What We Make Out Of It'.
[167] The role of public art museums in legitimization and representations of power has been investigated by other scholars too, for example: Bennett, The birth of the museum; A.McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre. Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994 or J.Collins, *Papacy and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Rome: Pius VI and the Arts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.
[168] Karl XIV Johan established the world's first National Portrait Gallery in the former Gripsholm Castle and attempted turn Rosendal Palace into an art gallery (never-realised). However, by that moment, Konglig Museum, the Royal Museum has already functioned and became the first Swedish public art museum founded in 1792. See more in P.Widén, 'Dynastic Histories. Art Museums in the Service of Charles XIV', in M.Alm and B.I.Johansson (ed.), *Scripts of Kingship: Essays on Bernadotte and Dynastic Formation in an Age of Revolution*, Uppsala, Swedish Science Press, 2008, pp. 79-96.

ruling family, following the examples of the Louvre that, as we know from Duncan's study, became the prototype for a national museum. However, if the Louvre removed all visual marks of royalty and visualized republican values after the French Revolution, the Swedish monarchy rather chose to 'inscribe oneself in the line of succession in the context of a national portrait gallery,' publicly legitimating his position on the throne.[169] As Östlund says, the concept of the X-Royal museum for *The Square* was developed based on the example of the Louvre, which inspired Östlund's depiction of a royal palace turned into a public art museum, further elaborating the idea of transformation in Sweden.[170] In this context, a new scenario is offered, cutting off the monarchy in fictionalized Sweden, and showing the art museum not only as a place of equal access to property that was elite and exclusive, but also as a place that establishes equal rights and obligations since there is no longer formal privilege. With another reference to the Louvre, the X-Royal museum obtains a glass rectangle on the top of its Baroque building, dropping a broad reference to I.M. Pei's iconic Louvre Pyramid.[171]

Figure 7. *The Square*: The X-Royal museum of modern and contemporary art. Courtesy: A-One Films

[169] Widén, 'Dynastic Histories. Art Museums in the Service of Charles XIV', p. 80.
[170] The direct reference appears in S. Klebanov, 'Ruben Östlund. A masterpiece or an art-shit?' Kinoart, no. 4, 2017, http://kinoart.ru/archive/2017/04/ruben-estlund-iskusstvo-ili-art-dermo (accessed 3 March 2018); suggested further reading: J.O.Andersson, 'Regissören nobbad av hovet: "Vem tror kungen att han är?"', Aftonbladet, 22 April 2016 https://www.aftonbladet.se/nojesbladet/film/a/BJmrBE/regissoren-nobbad-av-hovet-vem-tror-kungen-att-han-ar (accessed 3 March 2018).
[171] Koresky, 'Any questions?', p. 32.

According to the storyline, the old royal palace is repurposed for the museum of contemporary art. The museum's exterior appears as a Baroque façade and contrasts with the white-walled minimalist exterior that accommodates highly conceptual artworks. A few visitors try to find meaning in displayed art and quiet guards monitor exhibition rooms. If Duncan asserts that monumental lavish palaces amaze and dazzle the public, creating a pleasurable anticipation of art treasure, I see the museum in the film as effectively cutting off this connection and creating a provocative space of experience. My reading of the X-Royal museum as a model of the art museum, in a certain sense, is as a trap that attracts visitors by the splendid façade and then leaves them in a desolate, isolating space where 'all impediments except "art" were removed,' as Brian O'Doherty describes it.[172] His account of the modern art gallery and the ideology that it produces helps to inform many scholars' critical lens for examining the experience of modern and contemporary art. According to O'Doherty, the white cube—as a physical sterilized environment with rare objects—impedes comprehension and often causes a negative audience response; in this sense, social exclusion is both the method and the outcome.[173] Thus, the X-Royal's model of the art museum can be read as a critique of the visitor experience's spatial dichotomy between the exterior and interior.

However, aware of the controversial nature of audience experiences of contemporary art, Östlund gives visitors a chance for the honest choice. The museum is carefully marked off, and visitors see two signs, as follows: 'castle' leads to the historical part of the palace and 'art exhibition' directs to the art museum. One of the scenes depicts how three tourists enter into the space that resembles a palace and immediately got informed by the invigilator that they are on the way to the art exhibition and the castle that they are supposed to visit is in another building. Coming as tourists exploring the history of a country, the visitors look for the right setting to perform their identity as foreign guests. Analyzing this scene in relation to Falk's study on identity-related qualities of the museum visit, the scene challenges the notion that visitors tend to consider the art museum an important destination for the sake of box-checking or having a good time.[174]

This 'mismatch' between exterior and interior – spatial dichotomy – can cause the gap between 'expectation' and 'fact' that constitutes barriers to audience engagement. However,

[172] B.O'Doherty, *Inside the white cube: the ideology of the gallery space*, Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1999, p. 87.
[173] O'Doherty, *Inside the white cube*, p. 75.
[174] Falk, *Identity and the museum visitor experience*.

this is not an assumption based on a fictional image of the museum that appears only in the film. Museum discourses affect visitor experience and manifest in contradictions, as in the exterior and interior. This aspect of the film is well-reflected in reality. Take, for instance, Kunsthal Charlottenborg in Copenhagen. The Baroque building accommodates the contemporary art gallery Kunsthal Charlottenborg, as well as the historical Charlottenborg Palace, exactly as in the film. It is located in the heart of the city's neighborhood that is the epicenter of cultural life and is a magnet for tourists. This affects experiences of those who explore the city center as a historical site or source of entertainment.[175]

Figure 8. Kunsthal Charlottenborg's Baroque façade and Kunsthal Charlottenborg's interior, Ahmet Öğüt's exhibition 'No Protest Lost.' Source: Kunsthal Charlottenborg

Interior as a narrative

Now, I step back into the museum to pay attention to how it produces certain practices and to analyze how these practices construct visitor experience. As Duncan argues, an art museum is a place with a special quality of time and space. It shapes visitors' experience in a programmed way. Architectural details and arrangements of objects turn an art museum into a performance field, setting up cues, prescribing routes, and forming the kind of narrative 'that relates to the history or meaning of the site.'[176] A sequence of spaces requires 'reading' symbolic cues and following 'a structured narrative through the interior and stopping at prescribed points.'[177] Thus, visitors respond by performing rituals and acting in a particular manner. For the audience, ritual experience provides transformation, or confirmation, of their

[175] The further analysis of this example is beyond of the scope of this research.
[176] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.12.
[177] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.12.

identity and social status. The film shows the museum carefully marked off by signage, navigating the audience around the museum. Indeed, the descriptions on the walls, the labels, and the wayfinding system encourage the mode of detachment from everyday life as they shape the image of the museum as a place that provides uniquely enlightening experience.

'Piles of dirt' in 1960's and now. Is contemporary art conventional?

When it comes to the experience of artworks on display, as pointed out above, the film, from the beginning, problematizes what is art. Contemporary art frequently appears in conventional forms that once pushed the limits of artistic forms and provoked the audience's thoughts. However, according to Östlund's perspective, these formats are no longer able to convey artists' messages as they did before. This issue relates closely with fast-paced changes in the contemporary world that raise new social concerns and new ways of reflecting on them. The audience for these art pieces experiences difficulties grasping the meaning because artists neglect to interact with their immediate surroundings. Instead, they revert to conventional formats. This conclusion comes as a result of Östlund's research that he did while working on *The Square*'s script. He visited 20 museums of modern and contemporary art in different countries, saying that he met good examples of contemporary artworks, but a significant amount of art on display look alike. Östlund sums up, 'You know: it is something in neon on the wall and then there is a pile of gravel or a couple of mirrors or something like that.'[178] Thus, the pieces of art on display at The X-Royal museum come to the film as close relatives to those from Östlund's real-life experience.

In the opening scene, we see on display the installation called 'Mirrors and Piles of Gravel' consisting of the piles of gravel and the neon sign 'You Have Nothing,' created by an American artist named Julian. As Östlund clarifies in an interview, the idea for the installation came from a conversation with his friend who said that the only things that museums display are 'piles of dirt.'[179] Hence, this reference turned into the installation that appears in the film. Partly, it is a stage set that quite literally is 'piles of dirt' arranging in symmetrical rows. At

[178] S.Roxborough, 'Cannes: Palme d'Or Winner Ruben Ostlund on 'The Square' and Breaking Art House Conventions', *The Hollywood Reporter*, 31 May 2017 https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/cannes-palme-dor-winner-ruben-ostlund-square-breaking-art-house-conventions-1008896 (accessed 3 March 2018).
[179] M.Hoffman, 'Ruben Östlund and Terry Notary on the stunning climax of 'The Square,'' Film School Rejects, November 1, 2017 (accessed 23 March 2018).

the same time, the sign 'You Have Nothing' is an actual artwork of German artist Ruby Anemic. It could seem that realizing piles of gravel in the film simply brings someone's joke to the screen. However, this installation is a broader comment on audience engagement with contemporary art and its forms. I will examine in-depth.

The format that Östlund's friend defines as 'piles of dirt,' in fact, can be considered an artistic practice inspired by the land art in the 1960's. Robert Smithson was one of the most influential artists of his generation and a pioneer of land art. Smithson is interested in the viewer's experience of the space around art-objects. He explores containment and limits of exhibition by creating artworks that consist of disparate parts and that are located between the interior and exterior sites of the exhibition space. In his projects, the exterior site is often situated within landscapes in order to extend the audience's experience and to problematize the display of art in museums. Art critic Michael Fried explains that, unlike painting, for example, the interconnection of two distant geographic sites produces another kind of observation in which 'there is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it.'[180] Thus, Smithson's works led the viewer to question where the art object really resided and what is the role of a museum or a gallery.[181] However, as I discussed in Chapter 2, there are different reasons why the viewer cannot grasp the meaning of an artwork. Drawing on Danto's theory provides a way to think of the status of an artwork. The problem can be that the audience is not familiar with Smithson's approach or experiences difficulties in reading his original (complex and mutable) texts. Often, knowledgeable people who help to shape the meaning of displayed art do so in ways that can be challenging for laypeople to grasp. The challenge sometimes appears by means of presentation, such as when technologies of interpretation, layout, and other factors obfuscate the situation of the art. The average visitor might interpret Smithson's works, for instance, or works of art exploring Smithson's approach, as 'piles of dirt.'

[180] M. Fried, *Art and objecthood: essays and reviews*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 158.
[181] The detailed description and analysis of Smithson's approach can be found in J.T.Voorhies, *Beyond objecthood: the exhibition as a critical form since 1968*, Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England, The MIT Press, 2017.

Figure 9. *The Square*: the installation 'Mirrors and Piles of Gravel.' Courtesy: A-One Films

'Mirrors and Piles of Gravel': production of experience and knowledge

One issue with audience engagement appears in the movie scenes that show how some people interact with the installation 'Mirrors and Piles of Gravel.' In the first such scene, we witness a young man visiting the installation. He takes a rapid glance at the wall text about the installation and later gives the same rapid glimpse to the pattern of identical piles of gravel on the floor. In a second, he tries to take a cellphone photo, but the invigilator tells him that photos are forbidden. Right after this comment, the man leaves the room without further interaction with the artwork. In the next scene, the same young man hears dialogue behind a wall: two men discuss their unfamiliarity with some artist's oeuvre. Next, we see how these men peep into the room with the installation and, without even setting foot inside, they leave the exhibition hall. These episodes provoke relevant questions.

In the first scene with the young man, I question the production of knowledge or experience. I assume the main result of viewing the exhibition to be its value as a background for a photo to be shared on social media. Ostensibly, he might gain public acclaim and confirmation of his self-image as a cultured person—the so-called culturati. In this case, the production of experience is a production of social presence. Drawing on Bourdeiu's concept of cultural capital, this kind of social performance provides value and prestige. At the same time, this

behaviour shows that the image of learning and actual learning are distinguishable. Today, a museum visit does not imply that engagement with art will be a primary goal because other forms of museum activities have affected the process of contemplation and learning (as I discussed in Chapter 2). For example, it became reasonable to visit the museum, glance at the exhibition, and stay for lunch or shopping. However, to go back to the film scene, the attempted photo, supposed to be for personal use, transforms the experience of engagement with the art. Partly relying on Benjamin's theory of mechanically reproducible art, I argue that looking at art through a phone screen effaces some of the authentic connection between the viewer and the piece of art. Additionally, the practice of taking pictures of artworks can exemplify unengaged consumption. Further, this kind of act is a production of spectacle, in which a person immerses themselves in images and makes themselves into a kind of image, rather than obtaining knowledge by looking at art. In each case, the model of art experience makes a person present through images, but of course this is meant differently in one case than in the other.

In the second scene with the young man, I question what stops visitors getting into the room and exploring the installation. I suppose that the viewers are challenged by the form that art takes and by the message that this form conveys. The essential key to contemporary art is the force of context rather than content, or in the words of O'Doherty this is art, in which context becomes content.[182] This quality of contemporary art does not appear in concentrated form in more conventional museums, in which the goal of the universal survey communicates narratives using other artistic and museum techniques, (as pointed out in Chapter 2). Thus, the experience of visiting a contemporary art museum can provoke the feeling of bafflement rather than enlightening viewers if they are not familiar with this key aspect of contemporary art forms.

Don't throw, it's art!

Later in the film, we learn that the museum staff accidentally cleaned up some of Julian's "Mirrors and Piles of Gravel" installation. It certainly appears to be a slap in the face to high culture. However, similar situations have occurred in actual art institutions. For instance, in 2001, a cleaner threw away Damien Hirst's installation consisting of beer bottles, ashtrays,

[182] O'Doherty, *Inside the white cube*.

and coffee cups.[183] In 2014, an installation made from newspaper and cardboard was destroyed at the Sala Murat gallery (Italy).[184] In 1980, Joseph Beuys's piece of art appearing as dirty bath was scoured clean by a gallery worker.[185] This film scene, as well as real events, can lead some commenters to raise the question of negligence and a lack of expertise. At the same time, writer Alison Kinney shares her reflection on an instance when she broke a piece of art. She says, 'I realized […] I was a philistine. I had broken the pact that art-lovers make with artists, to *see* art as art.'[186] The ability to identify art is an expert mode of looking at objects, requiring specific characteristics in the eyes of the beholder including ways of recognizing what to leave invisible. For instance, in the accident that occurred at the Sala Murat gallery, the representative of the cleaning company explained in an interview that the cleaner who threw away newspapers and cardboards was 'just doing her job'.[187] This way of looking at newspapers and cardboards as unclean objects illustrates that the janitor's reason was to clean the space rather than to *see* art. This is why I suggest looking at art from another perspective, taking into account that different people come to art institutions with different reasons and not all of them aim to enter the museum in order to contemplate art.

Dictatorship of political correctness

Getting back to the film, another scene introduces us to the author of 'Mirrors and Piles of Gravel,' famous American artist Julian, who appears in the film wearing pyjamas and a suit coat (a subtle nod to Julian Schnabel).[188] The X-Royal museum hosts an artistic talk, discussing Julian's artistic practice and the idea behind the installation on display. He claims that his works have a strong focus on everyday objects that aspects of these objects might not be noticed in their original context; this allows him to explore 'human responses to art'[189] and the space of the art gallery. However, in spite of his claim, we saw that the audience was often

[183] C.Suddath, 'Don't Throw That Away', *Time*, 26 January 2010 http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1956922_1956921_1956916,00.html (accessed 23 March 2018).
[184] 'Cleaner throws out "rubbish" Sala Murat artwork', *BBC*, 20 February 2014 https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-26270260 (accessed 23 March 2018).
[185] Suddath, 'Don't Throw That Away'.
[186] A.Kinney, 'Philistine, or What Happens When You Break a Sculpture in a Gallery', *Hyperallergic*, 1 September 2014 https://hyperallergic.com/146223/philistine-or-what-happens-when-you-break-a-sculpture-in-a-gallery/ (accessed 23 March 2018).
[187] 'Cleaner throws out "rubbish" Sala Murat artwork', *BBC*.
[188] Boucher, 2017.
[189] *The Square*, dir. Ruben Östlund.

indifferent to his artistic gestures. As discussed, the audience is often not engaged with Julian's installation likely because it is challenging for visitors to 'solve the puzzle' and interpret the artwork. There are of course other aspects that shed light on audience behavior.

During Julian's Q&A, a visitor with Tourette's syndrome repeatedly interrupts the onstage discussion, shouting obscenities. First, the speakers and the audience perform as though nothing happens, but soon it becomes evident that everyone in the room struggles to decide how best to respond. Visitors look increasingly distracted but they try to perform according to political correctness and civility. The scene captures, on one hand, an individual who disrupts the common code of behavior by unconsciously yelling in the museum space. On the other hand, we observe a group of people who are torn between decorum and tolerance for a disabled person. In the words of Pedro Almodóvar, we witness 'the dictatorship of being politically correct.'[190] Informal constraints on behavior produce the way in which the audience engages art and the museum. My analysis of the previous scenes (and as we will see further on) illustrates this claim. The disciplining museum institution, in its functions of enlightening and of disseminating values of civilized society, stages and prescribes certain set of behavioural imperatives—a kind of 'museum behavior,' so to say. This is what Duncan defines as civilizing rituals, while Foucault, Bennett, and Hooper-Greenhill describe this as discipline and disciplinary technologies[191]. Looking more broadly, behavioral imperatives are part of the museum discourse that, as a complex mechanism, produces and shapes knowledge and subjecthoods (such as those of visitors, sponsors, artists, curators, and etc.) of consumption and performance. We see that only a person such as one suffering from a neuropsychiatric disorder, engaging in unconscious actions, does not follow prescribed behavioural imperatives. This scene reveals how an alternative social performance tests and puzzles the rest of the audience who were taught by the museum what it means to be a civilized person. Later in the film, this issue appears in another apparent form.

[190] A.Pham, 'Congratulations to Palme d'or winner Ruben Östlund!', *Nordisk Film & TV Fond*, 29 May 2017 http://www.nordiskfilmogtvfond.com/news/stories/congratulations-to-palme-dor-winner-ruben-oestlund (accessed 23 March 2018). Pedro Almodovar is the jury president of the 70th Cannes Film Festival (2017) where Ruben Östlund's film *The Square* wins Palme d'Or.

[191] It is important to note, I do not share Foucault's and Bennett's account with the extreme focus on disciplinary technologies that give very little attention to audience response and engagement. However, I acknowledge the fact that museums monitor and discipline visitor's behavior.

Civilizing rituals

It is important to note that architectural design and artwork displays produce civilizing rituals, to use Duncan's concept, only under special circumstances. This is because the museum confirms visitors' identities only when it functions as a public cultural institution. The audience is often aware that civilizing mechanisms are at work while the museum forms a public stage on which rituals are publicly performed. For instance, when The X-Royal museum is open to the public, a person who makes noise and interrupts the discussion is perceived as having crossed a line of decorum. However, when the museum holds a private party for the staff and special guests at the Castle, we see the same built space accepting other types of behavior. In this context, it does not serve as a public cultural space. Guests dance to loud music in the museum and later continue the party in the abandoned palace surrounded by the lavish royal Rococo interior. The space served cultural values of civilized life a few hours ago and turns into a dance floor for a private party, permitting other behavioral patterns in the same environment. Thus, as I argued above, the modern museum no longer implies that visitors come only for contemplation and engagement with art. For certain visitors, the museum is a means to 'read' cues inscribed in museums' narratives, providing a successful performance of spectatorship.[192] Frequently, the reason behind this performance is one's desire for public acclaim, which supplies the status of a cultured person, confirms self-image, and gives prestige in society. This aspect produces a gap between actual engagement with art, complete with one's grappling with the art's spiritual meaning, and the mere acted-out performance of engagement.

The scene depicting the press conference on the opening of 'The Square' reveals this disconnect even more apparently. We see Christian just before the introduction for the journalists. He is rehearsing the speech in front of a bathroom mirror, saying that the inspiration for 'The Square' is grounded in the concept of relational aesthetics[193,] which aims to explore how people relate to one another. At this point in the speech, Christian performs the act of going off-script, putting away his notecards and taking off his chic red-frame eyeglasses. This conveys the idea that 'The Square' has great importance to him, explaining why he will speak from the heart. The act of performing this ritual transforms him from a

[192] H.R.Leahy, *Museum bodies: The politics and practices of visiting and viewing*, Surrey, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012, p.7.
[193] The concept of relational aesthetics is developed by Nicolas Bourriaud. See more in N.Bourriaud, *Relational aesthetics*, trans. S.Pleasance, F.Woods and M.Copeland, 2002, Dijon, Presses du réel, 2002.

powerful art guru to 'one of us.' His act is supposed to deepen engagement with the audience in a more casual, relatable way and demonstrate that Christian is a trustworthy man, friendly to his audience of journalists. This way, Christian can use this transformation to show how 'The Square' is significant for social change. However, the responsible behavior and sympathy that the installation promotes are, in Christian's case, a completely staged and prescribed performance. He is 'a social chameleon who knows how to play his high-status part at the institution and to navigate the expectations of the sponsors, the visitors, the artists.'[194] The journalists are to consume a rally for the value of altruism, cooperation, and help for the needy. The idea is to communicate the good message further to the public. Instead, as Christian's 'from-the-heart' speech ends, we see the audience eagerly run to a lavish buffet.

As earlier pointed out, the scene of the press event reveals a difference between the experience of being engaged and the performance of being engaged. Something that looks like interest in art – from either the audience or the institution – can be married to ulterior motives. The scene as a whole resembles a spectacle at the vanity fair, where each knows how to play the role. Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, art institutions that originally were dedicated to connoisseurs and enthusiastic learners were turned into the site that shapes cultural imagination[195] rather than engaging the audience with art. If we examine this from a Foucauldian account[196], a main goal of the museum is to produce images and, through them, define subjects' roles as critics, curators, visitors, etc. Put in other words, museum discourse sets up social positions in a particular discursive frame. All together, as the scene in *The Square* depicts, bearers of different social positions are part of a total spectacle: they communicate through images that lead to the breakdown of dialogical exchange between members.

Another aspect of the above scene is the role of media. The scene problematizes who distribute information and how this knowledge is produced. Looking at this from Danto's perspective, as examined in Chapter 2, the interpretive nature of contemporary art makes artworks variant. Different meanings enable art criticism dedicated to explicating (largely through theory) interpretations of art. In this context, if Danto is concerned with *who* can

[194] 'The Square: Ruben Ostlund on directing and writing the Palme d'Or film', *The Upcoming*, 28 May 2017 https://www.theupcoming.co.uk/2017/05/28/the-square-ruben-ostlund-on-directing-and-writing-the-palme-dor-film/ (accessed 23 March 2018).
[195] Hetherington, 'Foucault, the museum and the diagram', p. 460.
[196] Rose, *Visual methodology,* p.182.

interpret works of art, I rather doubt *how* they interpret and assign meanings. I argue that partly the answer to my question is depicted in the scene. However, further on the plot unfolds this aspect more clearly.

Look at me! I have something to show you

One of the key subplots in film is the preparation to the opening of 'The Square.' The museum is interested in widespread media coverage of the X-Royal's next blockbuster. They hire two media advisers. One of the scenes shows the meeting between the museum's administrative staff and the hired marketers, as the marketers pitch their marketing concept for the upcoming show opening. A member of the museum's administrative staff states that the team is interested in generating attention around altruism and humanistic values, which 'The Square' represents, ending with, 'Our ambition level is high.'[197] The advisers explain that, in order to get attention, the museum should learn how the media landscape works and recognize the difference between art and marketing. They argue that 'The Square' raises important issues, but from the mass communication point of view, the idea behind the installation is not newsworthy. The original message will attract only 'culture vultures,' but if they connect 'The Square' to social trends—for example, to highly-shared topics on social media—the exhibition will stand out and cut through media clutter. In certain senses, this conversation sums up the content of a large amount of critical media studies (while the same could be said about literature on marketing). We see in this scene's discussion how media tools assign meaning and transform the original essence of things and ideas. This concept of the production of the spectacle, as discussed in Chapter 2, informs the scene containing the marketing conversation. 'The Square' becomes a marketed product helping us to see an important aspect in museum discourse, namely the production of the spectacle.

The marketers link the installation to popular topics that gain wide audience attention. They propose to stimulate affection by making a viral video of a blonde beggar girl, calling it a 'powerful image'[198] that leads people to share the content. Afterwards, clicks, likes, and visitor numbers will be indicators of success. However, these characteristics do not show audience engagement. Rather, they show audience response (or belief in) to the image, which

[197] *The Square*, dir. Ruben Östlund.
[198] *The Square*, dir. Ruben Östlund.

is created by marketing tools. Relevance of this marketing image might merely associate with the consumer's identity, adding to one's collection of identificatory images. To roughly outline the difference, engagement can be defined along the lines of 'This is what I do' and imagery in terms of 'This is what I want people to believe I do.' Both forms can lead a person to come to the museum, but they will inform different visit outcomes. The contrast will be more evident if we briefly look at one scene in the film. 'The Square' exhibition starts in front of two doors: 'I trust people' and 'I mistrust people.' It seems an easy choice for people who perform as responsible human beings. However, for visitors who choose 'I trust,' the next request in the room will be to leave belongings on the floor of the exhibition. Hence, this challenge illustrates how the image 'I act as a responsible human being' differs from the image 'I want others to believe I am a responsible human being.'[199]

Figure 10. *The Square*: The entrance to the exhibition 'The Square.' Courtesy: A-One Films

I want to stress a significant difference between Danto's idea of 'interpretation' and the idea of 'imagery' produced by the market. Danto's theoretical idea states that the legitimacy of an artwork centers on the object's embodied interpretation of a metaphor. Thus, the interaction between the metaphor and the object turns an ordinary object into a piece of art. In contrast, marketed imagery is that which distracts and which breaks down metaphor absorption in an artwork. As a result, Benjamin argues, the market bears on the audience to engage the image in order to obtain fulfillment, but, in reality, the image is empty of essence. This helps to

[199] *Magnolia Pictures: The Square Official Press Kit*.

explain why marketing experts commodify the museum and transform the palace of enlightenment into the fair of images. Based on this argument, production of imagery leads to barriers between the audience and the art.

While many reviews of *The Square* refer to the comedic aspect of various scenes, many of these moments reveal significant issues in the field of marketing. In the scene in which the marketing experts discuss the PR campaign, one of the museum officers suggests 'something like the Ice Bucket Challenge'; however, she is unable to explain the point of this activity, simply contending that it had 'viral success.'[200] This demonstrates that the museum is interested in numbers of visitors and clicks more than in understanding who will be these visitors, what audience this viral tool will activate, and what will be their reason for visiting. Here, I problematize not only the example of The X-Royal museum, but also a common practice of defining the audience as 'all generations.' To be clear, I do not claim that art is not for everyone. I rather suggest art institutions might take more careful consideration of the diversity of social groups and values. This could help to avoid situations like that which occurs in *The Square*. In the film, the marketing advisers come up with the idea to create a viral video of a blonde beggar girl entering 'The Square' and being blown apart. The video reaches 300 000 YouTube views within a few hours and leads to a huge scandal. While we might not normally expect such a blunder, it is not unreasonable to say that marketing is often insensitive.

Another area of concern lies in art institutions' interest in attracting a wide audience in order to justify funding. Indeed, a successful museum and its audience are of interest to patrons because the institution can convey the message that investment makes cultural outreach possible. As Duncan outlines, museums depend on wealthy sponsors, but no matter how much art institutions are oriented to serve the interests of the elite, they appear as inclusive public spaces to earn the trust of other social classes. The credible image allows museums to promote the interests of high-class groups.[201] Thus, what is now often called the democratization of culture is a strategy carefully, and asymmetrically, controlled by elite groups.[202] This aspect causes a dichotomy between public and private interests in art institutions. One of the key scenes in *The Square* depicts this structural issue raising questions

[200] *The Square*, dir. Ruben Östlund.
[201] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 1995, p.57.
[202] A.Gramsci, *Prison notebooks*, vol.1, trans. J. A.Buttigieg, and A. Callari, New York, Columbia Univ. Press, 1992.

on the role of the elite. Why is art so interesting to them? Is it art that is their interest? The following scene in my analysis is a broader commentary on audience engagement that demonstrates what contemporary art aims to be and how large the difference is between 'theory' and 'experience.'

Are we civilized enough?

The museum arranges a black-tie gala to treat its wealthy donors, collectors, and other influential figures in the art scene. The main entertainment for the art lovers is the performance by an artist, named Oleg, who portrays an ape. The audience is informed that they will be part of an art performance: 'Welcome to the jungle. Soon you will be confronted by a wild animal,' says the announcer, recommending that the guests remain still 'without moving a muscle.'[203] Playing a dominant ape, an alpha, Oleg enters the room examining the guests, moving from person-to-person, staring at them and sniffing them. At first, the crowd is amused, but soon, the ape-man becomes violent, jumping on tables, hooting, breaking glasses, and hitting people. He comes to the artist, Julian, who pretends that he pays no attention to the aggressive ape and tries to imitate Oleg's movements. Julian's response is unsuccessful and the ape-man chases the artist out of the dining room. After this accident, Christian asks the audience to have a round of applause for Oleg, as a polite attempt to finish the performance, but that makes Oleg scream in anger and he nails Christian back to the chair. The guests sit still with downcast looks. The ape-man jumps on a dining table, shifts his focus to a young, beautiful woman, and starts touching her hair and face. She cries for help, but no one in the room acts to rescue her. Oleg pushes her to the floor and starts sexually assaulting in front of everyone. Only then, some men interfere in the conflict, pulling the performer aside and beating him.

[203] *The Square*, dir. Ruben Östlund.

Figure 11. *The Square*: gala dinner. Courtesy: A-One Films

We see how those who proclaim themselves art admirers are bothered when the admiration of art is no longer observation from a distance – as standing in front of a painting, for example – but active participation that requires a response. They admire art as long as it does not cross the line of their comfort zone. Here, I will come back to questions posed above and answer them successively. Why is art interesting to them? Is it art that is their interest? I draw on Bourdieu: for the elite, art is a distinctive attribute that limits membership in the group. In this sense, art institutions are places that confirm and protect status and power, helping the elite to uphold social stratification. Hence, art is a symbolic element that legitimates power and social structure, maintaining gulfs between social groups. In this sense, the role of institutionalized art is to form cultural capital, namely, to provide a means of acknowledging a person's position in the social hierarchy by way of their cultural competence.[204]

At this point, I return to the discussion of the beginning of the film, when we witnessed the equestrian statue of a monarch taken down to make room for contemporary art. Throughout the current discussion, which unveils different levels in museum discourse, we can *look* at this key scene from another angle and *see* 'The Square' and the X-Royal. They are supposed to proclaim the power of art in society and the democratization of culture, conveying the superiority of a select group. In this sense, the museum, as a repository of philanthropic

[204] P.Bourdieu, 'The forms of capital', in J.Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1986, pp. 241-58.

narcissism[205], shapes the importance of the elite, offering them special treatment, such as exclusive events, presence in media, their names inscribed next to an artwork, etc. Partly, the transformation of the museum from the realm of learning to the entertainment complex serves the image and the position of the elite. Coming back to the analysis of the gala, Östlund subverts the notion of such an event. The event was supposed to confirm status and cultural capital, but this spectacle of power turns into an actual meeting between the elite and the performing artist, who pushes mere spectators into the field of interaction.

Looking at this scene as a broader commentary, I interpret it as an exemplar of my claim on the difference between 'seeming' and 'being.' I consider this to be one of the crucial barriers to audience engagement. Instead of immersing in the artistic context, the audience acts according to 'museum behavior.' Frequently – as we all are familiar with the rules of this game – this enactment is enough to confirm the identity of a civilized individual who values culture as an important sphere of social life. The museum stages a total spectacle that produces images along with available social positions, which individuals can take. As Debord says, this discourse produces 'a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.'[206] I argue that, in contemporary museums, the audience often comes to the museum to take part in this spectacle and, at the same time, the museum accepts and reinforces this spectacle. The museum offers beliefs that an individual can receive by performing the role of the visitor.

Finally, spectacle, as a mode of consumer culture, produces representations for individuals. The representations are taken up through life styles assigned by 'the passive position of the dreamer, spectator, consumer.'[207] The spectacular culture, which forces us to live through images, does not have 'the necessity of making a subject see,' as Crary argues, but it is rather interested in isolating individuals.[208] Indeed, the scene at the gala, —when everyone sits still and does not rescue a woman crying for help until the moment when Oleg starts sexually assaulting her—clearly reveals the contemporary secular culture and the decline of the community. It seems that Östlund ridicules self-congratulatory connoisseurs, for whom the museum is that same 'Square.' They believe that art is something pleasant, elegant, nicely wrapped, providing bourgeois security. However, I suggest that 'The Square' forms a critique

[205] Bishop, *Radical Museology*, p.61.
[206] G. Debord, *Society of the spectacle*, trans. K. Knabb, 2nd ed., London, Rebel Press, 1987, thesis 4.
[207] H. Foster, *Recodings: art, spectacle, cultural politics*, Port Townsend, Wash., Bay Press, 1985, p.82.
[208] J.Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1999, p.3.

and problematizes whether contemporary art is a tool for social change, especially if so many people experience difficulties engaging with art.

Art in a square

I here address certain historical shifts in artistic forms and audience engagement. I see the artwork 'The Square' as the artistic form that can interact with the audience differently, depending on the dimension of its display. Conceptually, 'The Square' is like a frame that activates different reactions and interactions that are historically and socially determined. The actual form of 'The Square' appears in the poster of the film *The Square*. I will transform and extend the meaning of this frame in order to develop my argumentation.

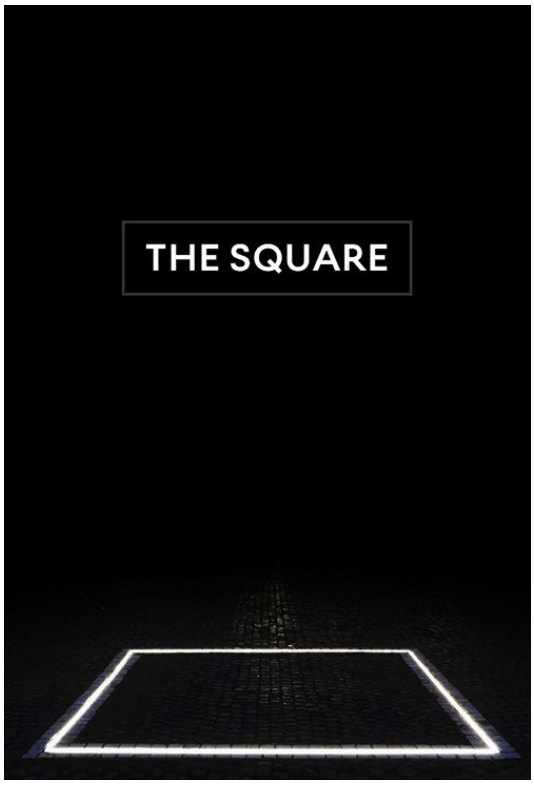

Figure 12. *The Square*: film's poster. Source: Kinopoisk.ru

I borrow the metaphor of a frame from O'Doherty who traces the transformation of artistic practices and modernist exhibition space.[209]

[209] O'Doherty, *Inside the white cube*.

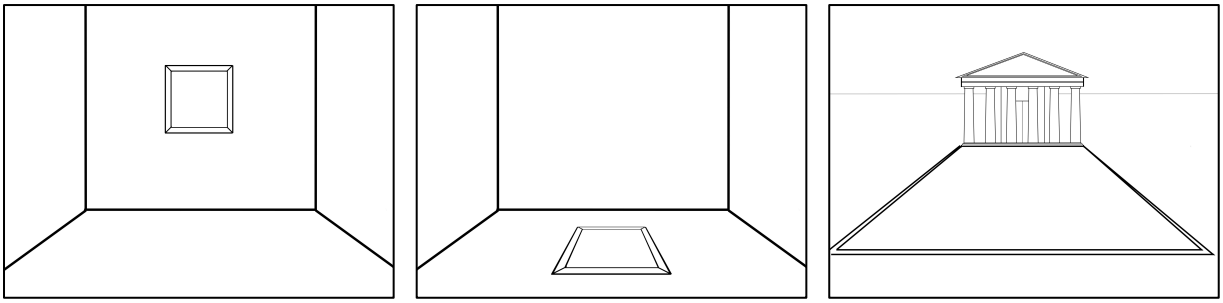

Figure 13. Transformation of artistic forms and art display. Source: author's concept

When the first public art museums emerged in XVIII-century Europe, earlier practices of displaying art implied the wall's autonomy. Pieces of art occupied the gallery's walls. First, pictures were hung in a salon style to cover the entire wall, quite often from the floor to the ceiling. Through the development of museum display, this installation model was transformed into a strategy to hang paintings in a single line and at eye level. Each painting had a frame to make neighbouring pictures isolated. As O'Doherty points out, the wall's autonomy defines the stability of the frame and the position where the viewer stands.

The birth of the avant-garde pushed the boundaries of the museum display and encouraged artists to explore new surfaces of exhibition space. Hence, the artwork stepped beyond the frame and turned the museum environment into the continuity of space where all surfaces of the gallery space – wall, floor and ceiling – were available for artistic expression. This development gave birth to the contemporary white cube.

O'Doherty's concept can be expanded upon by bringing investigation of artistic forms into relation with the context beyond the museum's walls. This reflection occurred to me when I posed the question why Ruben Östlund's film *The Square* does not have a Swedish original title. Indeed, in English, the word 'square' can have several meanings, among which I am particularly interested in the 'square' as (1) a geometrical figure and (2) a public space. At the same time, in Swedish, these two meanings do not fall under a single signifier; a four-sided figure is signified by 'rutan,' (also the official title of the artwork 'The Square' that was on display at the Vandalorum Museum in 2014) and the public space is 'torg.' I use a publication on an actual piece of art 'The Square' to illustrate this difference: 'Den ser oansenlig ut, *rutan*

[square in shape] på *torget* [open place] Flanaden i Värnamo.'[210] When it comes to the film, I consider the title as a tool that made it possible to convey a complex message.

In the film, we see the installation 'The Square' housed at the X-Royal museum. Visitors are supposed to come to the museum in order to learn how to behave responsibly in everyday life. However, as I discussed above, visitors' experience in the museum is frequently affected by barriers to audience engagement. Hence, between the museum walls, we see how wealthy sponsors donate money to buy the installation. At the presentation of 'The Square' during the press event, the idea of the installation and the importance of responsible behaviour receive warm reception. At the same, we see how, beyond the museum walls, Christian was robbed in the middle of *the square*. Thus, when art goes outside the museum's doors, the interaction with a piece of art is no longer determined by 'museum behavior.' For instance, would the piles of gravel or 'The Square' gain attention if placed in the realm of everyday life? As I showed above, the museum is a complex entity that produces discourse in order to make objects meaningful, regardless of whether the meaning relates to spiritual development or confirms identity and position within the system of social stratification. Placing a piece of art outside the museum's walls, an artist faces a great challenge from the contemporary secular society that values private individualism at the same time that it attributes altruism with an *image* rather than an *action*.

Bringing the concept of 'The Square' to the film, Östlund found an effective way to problematize the social role of art institutions, as well as to reflect on art as a tool of social change. The collection of images that appear in his film reveals significant issues that cause problems in the field of audience experience in contemporary art. In the film, the idea of 'The Square' failed to demonstrate that the audience should choose an *action* rather than an *image*. Does it mean that the same should happen with the idea of 'The Square' in real life? Of course it does not. As I stated in the beginning of my thesis, I believe that reflection is the foundation that allows us to identify key problems, to take them into consideration, and to solve them. Investigating barriers in audience engagement, I focused on issues that stop the average museum visitor from better understanding contemporary art. I call the object of my study 'barriers' because this term illustrates that something prevents movement. I believe

[210] Translation: 'The Square' on the marketplace Flanaden in Värnamo; S.Wennergren, 'Här är Rutan som vann Guldpalmen', *Sveriges Television,* 29 May 2017, https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/jonkoping/har-ar-rutan-som-vann-guldpalmen (accessed 19 July 2018).

being professionals with knowledge in visual culture, we can significantly contribute toward a qualitative step forward and engage more people who will look at contemporary art without barriers.

CONCLUSION

Mapping out the barriers

In this thesis, I aimed to identify barriers in audience engagement with contemporary art. Answering this question I presented my conceptual framework that maps out certain key aspects and explains the existence of barriers. Then, I conducted a discourse analysis in order to approach my topic from a practical perspective. It is not enough to sum up saying that at the core of concern over artistic gestures are 'art for art's sake' and art's political instrumentality. This is surely too simple, but this simplification lies near to the current condition of audience engagement with contemporary art. It could be described as the gap between 'imagery' and 'reality' or 'seeming' and 'being.' This barrier stops audiences from being involved and, de facto, encourages audiences to perform only superficial rituals as a form of interaction with artworks. To make it clear and to define the result of my study, I articulate that *The Square* is not a universal survey of the contemporary art scene. It is rather an illustration of some aspects of audience engagement with contemporary art. Using the film as my empirical material, I have analysed examples of some of these issues. Hence, my examination has shed light on some barriers in audience engagement with contemporary art. I believe, this thesis made a contribution to the field of visual studies, in which currently there is a lack of investigations of audience response to museum strategies of attracting visitors.

I have mapped out some problems with museums and audience engagement. They came from my personal experience and a form of phenomenological, embodied exploration the phenomenon of visitor experience and engagement with contemporary art. This has allowed me to think and re-think the steps in past, present, and possible future paradigms of art and museum cultures. Drawing on Foucauldian discourse analysis, I take the genealogical method of trying to determine origins for my interests and reflecting on them. Many of my broadest concerns have long been present, and I have patiently sat with and developed them into what they are now. In some cases, these required circuitous paths if not outright dead ends. In some sense, this methodological concern has been central to my project in general. One might say that, at least sometimes, the method is the message.

Based on the concepts in Chapter 2 and the analysis of the empirical material in Chapter 3, I have identified specific barriers that stop audience engagement. Even before the visit, the language can impact audience reception and make art more challenging for non-professionals setting up the entrance requirements. This calls into question 'art for everyone' as a concept, as well as the function of art institutions and their common practice of defining the audience as 'all generations.' At the next stage, the spatial dichotomy between the museum's exterior and interior can cause the gap between 'expectation' and 'fact' that constitutes barriers to audience engagement. Inside the museum, the descriptions on the walls, the labels, and the wayfinding system encourage the mode of detachment from everyday life and force visitors to perform particular rituals following the museum's prescribed narratives.

When it comes to contemporary art forms, for some visitors the challenge appears as a lack of specific knowledge in art theories to distinguish a piece of art from everyday objects. Other individuals can experience difficulties in grasping the meaning because artists revert to conventional formats. Another challenging aspect is that the ability to identify art requires specific characteristics in the eyes of the beholder including ways of recognizing what to leave invisible. Thus in the contemporary visitor culture, the production of knowledge or experience can be questioned because the image of learning and actual learning are distinguishable. Indeed, based on the analysis of the empirical material, I demonstrated that the aim of visiting museum could be public acclaim and confirmation of self-image as a cultured person. Therefore, the museum visit can contribute to the cultural capital, which provides some extent of prestige. Deep engagement with social media, which allows a visitor to inform others about his/her activities, causes the production of spectacle; as follows, a person immerses him-/herself in images and does not obtain knowledge by looking at art. The art museum forms a public stage on which civilizing rituals are publicly performed in order to confirm visitors' identities. The modern museum no longer implies that visitors come only for contemplation and engagement with art. The bearers of different social positions are part of a total spectacle and communicate through images. This shows the difference between the experience of being engaged and the performance of being engaged. The museum stages a total spectacle that produces images along with available social positions. The audience often comes to the museum to take part in this spectacle and, at the same time, the museum accepts and reinforces this spectacle. The museum offers beliefs that an individual can receive by performing the role of the visitor. Hence, I consider the difference between 'seeming' and 'being' as one of the crucial barriers to audience engagement.

The gap between 'seeming' and 'being' can lead to the result that we saw in *The Square*. These who proclaim themselves art admirers are bothered when the admiration of art is no longer observation from a distance but active participation that requires a response. As we witnessed in the film, the audience admires art as long as it does not cross the line of their comfort zone. Instead of immersing in the artistic context, the audience acts according to 'museum behavior.' If the museum has turned into a stage for a total spectacle, I question the role of art institutions and art as a tool for social change, especially the engagement with artistic forms beyond the museum's walls. Nevertheless, I do believe that the current problems in audience engagement can be solved, that is why, in my research, I use the term 'barriers,' which illustrates that something prevents movement. Examination of visitor experience can significantly contribute toward a qualitative step forward and engage more people who will look at contemporary art without barriers.

Reflection

As I stated in Introduction, the starting point of this thesis was the reflection on my current academic experience in visual studies and its comparison with my professional background in cultural management and audience development. Working on this topic, I aimed to improve my knowledge and sought answers using theoretical and methodological perspectives of visual culture. I believe that the abilities of critical and reflective thinking are the most valuable outcome that I have gained as a result of this academic journey. To make this connection clear, what ties my project together is a concern for subjectivity and for the constant back-and-forth relationship between socially constructed forms and the subjects who construct those forms.

This is all to say that my questions did not mostly come from fancy books written by Plato or Thomas More or Hegel or Derrida (although maybe Foucault, as it turns out). In all seriousness, this is, as is likely clear by now, an intensely personal project for me. I have toiled long hours over this project, lodging the academic equivalent of many pounds of clay beneath my cuticles. At the same time, this has been something of a labor of love. These questions have long lived and breathed in remote crevices in the corners of my brain, allowing me to develop strong convictions and a kind of critical-perspective-through-daily-experience

on the subject matter. At the same time, I am deeply grateful for the training that I have received and how it has enabled me to grapple with these problematics.

It is worth noting that, while I have at times referred to this project as a 'film analysis,' it is also something both different from and more than that. What I do not do is I do not closely analyze cinematographic aspects of *The Square*. I do not comment on what Östlund does well or does not do well. I do not contextualize the film or put it in relation with other films or with film theories. Instead, I use *The Square* as a kind of stand-in for problematic aspects of art and museum cultures. To be sure, Östlund certainly did make a beautiful, interesting, entertaining, and impactful film. Still, the film's appearance in this paper is basically utilitarian, albeit delightfully so.

In some way, this paper does what academics are told not to do. What I mean is that this paper is kind of a call to action, i.e. it serves a normative function. Certainly, most of the paper forms a critique, but I make no attempt to absolutely hide that I think that there is something worth doing in order to try to improve the situation. This aspect is somewhat offset by the fact that I necessarily focused on the problems rather than on trying to devise any positive scheme.

Throughout my work on this project, questions around our awareness and on the development of our subjectivities has been central to my work. It is easy to say that we should all try to be more aware and to seek knowledge, but it is also true that the barriers that I focus so much energy on are constituted by complicated sets of social and cultural forces that we could hardly will ourselves away from. Worse, and as Foucault might point out, we do it to ourselves, but necessarily so. There is no way for us to escape the inherited bodily practices and thought practices that our communities often require of us. It is not always obvious that even something as simple and personal as our way of looking out into the world is partly shaped by the culture in which we live.

Perhaps, the best response might lie in advocating for a different educational paradigm—one that shrugs off the yoke of institutional power and avoids the tendency for cultural forms to concentrate and re-concentrate private power and prestige.

This can lead to a comparative analysis of space: an analysis of territories, states, institutions, and their contingent mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, representation and non-representation. Such an analysis might not only determine what is shown and what is not shown, but also what must be eradicated in order for one spatial formation to take precedence over another. Would it give us any answer or clear understanding of how to improve it? I would claim that it would.

If we see on the screen (the film screen, the TV screen, the SmartPhone screen, and etc.) that something is broken when it comes to audience engagement with art, from outside the frame, we can provoke ourselves and others. *If it is weird for me, why do I still go there? What is more important in my life if I do not stop by to help? Will I stop by only when it is inside the gallery and I come to experience this art? If it motivates me to participate only within the gallery's walls, does this piece of art deliver its principle message? Am I ready for art that shapes my everyday experience, rather than once per year in the museum?* This is just to mention a few questions that could be a starting point in a journey that will change ways of seeing and experiencing contemporary art.

Film just shows something that was stated many times before, but the problem is still here, and this time, maybe it will bring the discussion to a new level when it is stated through a mainstream channel: cinema. At the same time, any film that shines a light on a problem also reproduces the problem, so it always makes sense to presuppose that there will yet be work left to do.

What I have tried to do was to comprehensively challenge understanding of the field of contemporary art and to be able to elaborate some points of view. However, as a scholar in visual studies, I demonstrate that my professional skills allow me to problematize aspects that relate to visual experience and analyze the role of visual communication in the contemporary art field (when it comes to shaping major issues of life). Based on all this, what kind of communication of (dis)communication creates this condition of audience engagement (where social relations are central)? What can be done?

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