

**Zeitschrift:** Bulletin suisse de linguistique appliquée / VALS-ASLA

**Herausgeber:** Vereinigung für Angewandte Linguistik in der Schweiz = Association suisse de linguistique appliquée

**Band:** - (2012)

**Heft:** 96: L'espace dans l'interaction sociale = Der Raum in der sozialen Interaktion = Lo spazio nell'interazione sociale = Space in social interaction

**Artikel:** Configuring standpoints : aligning perspectives in art exhibitions

**Autor:** Lehn, Dirk vom

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-978563>

#### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

#### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

#### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 08.02.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

# Configuring standpoints: Aligning perspectives in art exhibitions

**Dirk VOM LEHN**

Work, Interaction & Technology Research Centre, Department of Management  
King's College London, Franklin-Wilkins Building, 150 Stamford Street  
London SE1 9NH, United Kingdom  
dirk.vom\_lehn@kcl.ac.uk

Der Artikel untersucht, wie Teilnehmer ihre Ankunft vor Kunstwerken in Museen in der sozialen Interaktion organisieren. Die Analyse inspiriert Interaktionssequenzen dahingehend, wie Teilnehmer mit ihren Körpern Standpunkte vor Gemälden und Fotografien auf beobachtbare und nachvollziehbare Weise einnehmen. Es wird gezeigt, dass Besucher, die vor Kunstwerken ankommen, füreinander den Standpunkt und die Perspektive zum Objekt konfigurieren. Wo sie sich hinstellen und wie sie auf das Werk schauen, beeinflusst nicht nur was sie sehen, sondern auch wie andere Besucher sich zum Werk hin orientieren und es erfahren. Teilnehmer konfigurieren also füreinander ihre gemeinsame Orientierung zum Kunstwerk und Erfahrung desselben, indem sie ihre körperliche und visuelle Orientierung vor dem Objekt gestalten. Standpunkte, die Teilnehmer vor Ausstellungsstücken einnehmen, werden fortlaufend verändert, z.B. wenn sie einander anregen, bestimmte Aspekte eines Kunstwerkes zu betrachten und sie folglich ihre körperliche und visuelle Orientierung zum Objekt hin verändern und aufeinander abstimmen. Die Analyse basiert auf Videoaufnahmen, die in einer Reihe von Museen in Großbritannien gemacht wurden.

**Stichwörter:**

Interaktion, Reziprozität der Perspektiven, Architektur der Intersubjektivität, Raum, Ethnomethodologie, Videoanalyse

## 1. Introduction

In museums, the standpoint or viewpoint is the location where a viewer or spectator stands to look at and examine a work of art. By deploying exhibits in galleries, curators and exhibition designers try to configure where the viewer stands and views a piece because the chosen standpoint shapes how they see and experience it. They use theories of art perception and art history when identifying the location where they argue the "spectator" will or should stand to appreciate a piece. Thereby, they often ignore the context for which works of art have been originally designed (Shearman, 1992) and the interactional context in which museum visitors encounter, examine and experience the works (Heath & vom Lehn, 2004).

This interactional context in which people encounter and experience works of art in museums has been subject to a number of recent studies that use video-recording of conduct and interaction in museums and galleries. These studies suggest that museum visits are social occasions; people explore exhibitions with companions and in the presence of others (vom Lehn et al., 2001). In recent years, studies have begun to explore mobility and the organisation of

guided tours (Best, 2012; De Stefani, 2010) as well as the unguided exploration of museums (vom Lehn et al., 2001; vom Lehn, 2006). They argue that people accomplish the navigation of exhibitions in interaction and examine and make sense of exhibits in concert with each other (Heath & vom Lehn, 2004; Kesselheim, 2010a, 2010b). The concerted examination of exhibits requires visitors to adopt bodily configurations in front of exhibits where they stand and examine the features of paintings, photographs and sculptures.

In sociology, there is a long-standing interest in how in social situations people come to cooperate and are able to interact with each other. Studies often refer to the famous concept of the "definition of the situation" (Thomas, 2002/1923) or Mead's (1934) notion of "taking the role of the other" to provide an understanding of participants' ability to cooperate with each other. Such studies, that rely on the assumption that participants' interaction is based on a consensus that prefigures their actions and is stable for the duration of the situation, however, have been challenged by ethnomethodological and conversation analytic research that is interested in exploring the "architecture of intersubjectivity", i.e. the ways in which participants moment-by-moment methodically produce what Schutz (1967) has described as "reciprocity of perspectives": the establishing of a common system of references and the assumption of an interchangeability of standpoints.

This paper examines how in museums participants come to stand in particular locations at exhibits and how the arrival in these locations is influenced by other people's actions. In this sense, the paper begins to explicate the methods that participants deploy to establish standpoints at exhibits in interaction with others. The analysis therefore contributes to the long-standing sociological debates about the production of ecologies in which two or more participants momentarily align each other's actions and establish standpoints that they can assume, are interchangeable.

The paper is based on a large corpus of video-recording gathered over the course of the past ten years. The corpus includes fragments from art museums and galleries as well as from science centres and museums. Here, I will focus on fragments recorded in art exhibitions. Before I come to discuss the specific circumstances in which people socially organise the arrival at exhibits, I briefly discuss the intellectual background of the study and the methods and data analysed in the central part of the paper.

## 2. Background

The paper derives from developments in three different fields of research: long-standing debates on aesthetic perception, video-based research in museums, and the growing body of social scientific research on mobility in public places like museums.

In the psychology of perception and related disciplines like aesthetics, there is a long-standing interest in the relationship between works of art and "the spectator". Carrier (1986), for example, differentiates between approaches that define the work as independent from the spectator and those approaches that ascribe the spectator an important role in the work's interpretation (Arnheim, 1974; Elkins, 1996; Gombrich, 1960). These approaches conceive the spectator as adopting a particular standpoint with regard to the work of art when looking at, appreciating and experiencing it. They are rather theoretical debates about aesthetics and aesthetic experiences that neglect to consider the situation in which works of art are actually encountered, examined and experienced in the public galleries of exhibitions.

Recent video-based studies of people's exploration of museums have shifted the focus toward the specifics of the situation in which exhibits are looked at and experienced. These studies reveal that the experience of exhibits is fundamentally influenced and shaped by social interaction between people, companions and others who happen to be there at the same time (Heath & vom Lehn, 2004; vom Lehn et al., 2001). How people examine exhibits and how they experience and make sense of works of art and other kinds of exhibit, emerges in social interaction (Heath & vom Lehn, 2004; Kesselheim, 2010b). Whilst over the past few years a small body of research on interaction with and around exhibits has emerged that includes studies of conversations at exhibits (Kesselheim, 2010b; Kesselheim & Hausendorf, 2007), we know relatively little about the ways in which people interactionally organise their navigation of these spaces.

There is of course a long-standing tradition of studies in the behavioural sciences concerned with the navigation of museums. These studies identify features of the material and visible environment that provide people with stimuli for their behaviour in exhibitions (Melton, 1972; Robinson, 1928). They influence discussions about visitor behaviour to the present day and impact debates about the design and layout of exhibits and exhibitions (Patterson & Bitgood, 1987; Bitgood & Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Shettel, 1976). Aside from examining people's response to the material and visible environment, behavioural research also takes into consideration how people respond to the presence of others in exhibitions, thereby treating other people as a "social influence" (Bitgood, 1993). Despite the important contributions of the behavioural sciences to our understanding of visitor behaviour, their neglect of social aspects of museum visiting undermines our understanding of how people make sense of exhibits in museums. Whilst they are able to explain navigation paths and patterns by virtue of the "economy of movement" (Dukes & Bitgood, 2003), they ignore the social organisation of navigation patterns in public places such as museums.

In recent years, there has been a burgeoning interest in studies of interaction and mobility in public places. These studies draw on Goffman's (1963, 1971) research of behaviour in public places and related interactionist and ethnomethodological studies of pedestrian navigation of street-crossings and pavements (Marsh & Collett, 1981; Ryave & Schenkein, 1974). They include studies of the practices involved in driving in roundabouts (Laurier, *in press*), coordinating talk and driving inside cars (Mondada, 2012) and using maps in cars (Brown & Laurier, 2005), guided walks in the outdoors (Broth & Lundström, *in press*; Broth et al., 2009) and in museums (Best, 2012; De Stefani, 2010) as well as mobility in video games (Mondada, *in press*). The analysis provided by these studies points to the organisation of actions through which people 'on the move' orient to each other and to aspects of the environment.

In this context, I have recently scrutinised my body of video-recording gathered in museums, galleries and science centres for instances in which visitors depart from and arrive at exhibits. Most recently I have examined fragments of interaction where people withdraw from exhibits in concert with and without disturbing others' appreciation of the exhibits (vom Lehn, 2006, *in press*). The analysis has begun to explicate the sequential organisation of action through which people bodily and visually withdraw from one exhibit and turn to a next (*ibid.*). In other publications, together with Christian Heath I have also analysed people's navigation of museums more generally and how they configure each other's perspective at exhibits through verbal and bodily action (vom Lehn & Heath, 2006; vom Lehn & Heath, 2007). This previous research suggests that mobility in museums is accomplished in social interaction; where people go and where they come to stop emerges in the contingent and continually changing circumstances of the social situation in museums. In this paper, I will continue the analysis of mobility in museums and explore how people who have withdrawn from an exhibit orient to, approach and adopt standpoints at neighbouring exhibits.

### 3. Methods and data

The analysis uses video-recordings of visitors' exploration of museums as its principal data. The data have been collected in the National Gallery, the Courtauld Gallery and the Victoria and Albert Museum (all in London). The video-recordings feature individuals, pairs and couples, families and small groups, as well as larger groups and guided tours. Altogether, the body of data comprises about 700 hours of video-recordings which is augmented by field observation and informal interviews with visitors, curators and exhibition designers. For ethical reasons, visitors and personnel of the museums were informed about research going on in the galleries and of the collection of video-data in the exhibitions. They were given the opportunity to opt out of

participating in the research at any time; no visitors refused to participate in the research.

The analysis proceeds on a 'case by case' basis and involves the highly detailed examination of particular actions in order to explicate their sequential import for the ongoing situation. I scrutinise short sequences of interaction in great detail to reveal why a particular action has been produced in a particular moment and in a particular way; transcriptions of participants' talk and bodily action support the researcher's analysis. By comparing and contrasting instances with each other patterns of action emerge that allow me to make more general arguments about the methods and techniques people deploy to navigate exhibitions (Heath, Hindmarsh & Luff, 2010).

For the purpose of this paper, I have inspected the data corpus for instances where people arrive at and begin their examination of a work of art and where they shift orientation between exhibit features. I produced a collection of fragments that allow me to compare and contrast instances and identify reoccurring patterns in visitors' arrival at exhibits. The fragments discussed here provide particularly clear examples to reflect the more common themes that have emerged from the analysis of the data (Heath, Hindmarsh & Luff, 2010; vom Lehn & Heath, 2006).

#### **4. Approaching and arriving at exhibits**

Surveys of museum audiences as well as research on visitor behaviour suggest that people often visit museums in pairs and small groups, but rarely as individuals (Mori, 2001). They explore exhibitions with companions and, even when going to a museum on their own, other people are often already there (Leinhardt et al., 2002). Research on behaviour in public places (Goffman, 1963) suggests that the simultaneous presence of people in the same space creates an "ecology of participation" (Heath et al., 2002) where participants are aware of and sensitive to actions produced in perceptual range. When conducting their visit, people use each other's visual and bodily orientation to exhibits to organise their own actions. They explore museums as pair or in small groups and arrive at exhibits where they come to stand in side-by-side arrangements looking at the same artefact. Occasionally, they gesture to and talk about particular aspects of a piece, before moving on. What people look at and how they see it emerges in interaction at the exhibit-face (Heath & vom Lehn, 2004). And also, when and how they bring the examination of one exhibit to a close and move elsewhere in the museum is produced in interaction between the visitors looking at the same object and those being in the same locale (vom Lehn, Heath, & Hindmarsh, 2001). Little is known however of how people arrive and take standpoints at exhibits when they have withdrawn from one and move toward a next exhibit.



The first movement involves Mike who walks in front to noticeably turn his upper body followed by his left leg (LF) inward toward the painting (line 4; Ix). Mike's bodily movement to the painting occasions the second action that follows in immediate juxtaposition to the first; Cathy turns her upper body and lower limbs toward the painting and then walks toward it (line 5-6). By virtue of her bodily turn Cathy aligns with her companion's shift in orientation and proposal to turn to the neighbouring painting (Figure 1.1-1.2). A moment later, the pair slightly adjust their postures and visual orientation and then stand still next to each other, both looking to the painting (Figure 1.3).

The pair's approach of the painting emerges when one participant produces an action that proposes to stop and look at an exhibit, occasioning the co-participant to align with the proposal and come to stand next to the first. This co-alignment to a change in activity and shift in bodily and visual orientation allows both participants to view the exhibit while standing in a side-by-side arrangement. The two actions follow in immediate juxtaposition to each other, the proposal to stop at the exhibit being immediately followed by the alignment with the proposal. The first action, the proposal, projects a shift in activity, from walking to standing and looking at an exhibit; the second action displays an alignment with the proposal and the implied trajectory of action toward a next exhibit.

The analysis of fragment 2 further explicates the concerted approach of a next exhibit. A pair of visitors, Pavel and Anushka, slowly walk side-by-side along the gallery wall after having viewed one of the photographs on display in the museum. As the two participants move forward they look at each other and talk<sup>1</sup> (Figure 2.1.). They walk past a text-panel that informs its readers about aspects of the exhibition when Anushka swivels her head from facing her friend to the photograph hung to the left of the panel (line 1; X). Her turn of the head occasions Pavel to also shift orientation and look to the photograph. While Anushka who has been standing with the back to the piece still turns her head and body around, glancing at the object from the corner of her right eye, Pavel makes a step to the right (line 6) and moves his head from facing his companion to looking at the photograph (line 5). A moment later, they both look at the piece (Figure 2.2); Anushka makes one more step before bringing her movement to a hold, followed by Pavel who makes two small steps around his companion to come to stand to her left, looking at the piece. Both participants now face the painting and look at it; Anushka orients to the bottom of the piece and her friend to its top (Figure 2.3).

---

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the talk between the two participants is not audible on the recording.

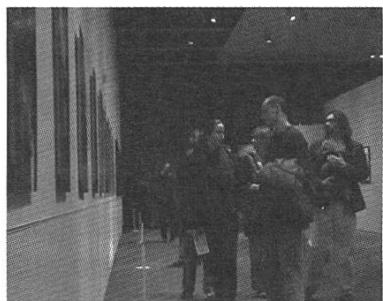
**Fragment 2**

Figure 2.1



Figure 2.2



Figure 2.3

0 \_\_\_\_\_ 1 sec \_\_\_\_\_ 2 sec

**Anushka**

1 <-Pavel XxxxxPxxxxxxxxx X↑ to top of P X↓ to bottom of P  
looks to Painting to top of P to bottom of P

**2 Posture-Pavel**

X\_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_  
3 LF X\_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_

**Pavel**

5 <-Anushka X\_\_\_\_\_  
6 RF X\_\_\_\_\_

**Index**

<-Pavel Anushka looks at Pavel  
<-Anushka Pavel looks at Anushka  
< P participant looks at Painting  
— 1/10 of a second

The concerted arrival at the work of art arises when the two participants who have been moving along the gallery wall shift their activity from walking to looking at an exhibit. Shifts in activity often are accompanied by "observable-and-reportable" and therefore "accountable" (Garfinkel, 1967) bodily movements. The analysis suggests that when accomplished in interaction with others, such shifts in activity involve a transformation of the bodily configuration and changes in the participants' orientation. Anushka and Pavel bodily and visually turn to the photograph and participate in a simultaneous looking at the same piece by adopting a side-by-side arrangement that faces the photograph. They may look at different aspects of the same work of art, and when Anushka's eyes drop they actually inspect different exhibit features, but through their bodily and visual orientation they display that they are looking

at the same piece and in principle are available to collaboratively examine the same exhibit feature.

The participants' co-aligning to the exhibit is comprised of a proposal to look to an exhibit. The proposal invites a co-participant to also turn and look at the proposed piece. It implies a change in activity and an abandoning of another possible trajectory of action, i.e. the onward movement through the gallery. This change is facilitated and supported by the design of the first action that often involves the holding of the head still with the eyes clearly directed to that next exhibit; it embodies an already ongoing involvement and appreciation of the next piece while the participant still adopts a standpoint in front of it. The change in activity is completed by virtue of the co-participant's alignment with the proposal, that is equally embodied in the way he approaches the next piece, also with his eyes on the next piece.

In order to further develop the analysis of the sequential organisation of the approach of the exhibit it is worthwhile to briefly examine the actions that prefigure the proposal. Fragment 3 (same as fragment 1) shows both participants standing side-by-side in front of a painting when Cathy turns her head to the left and looks across to the neighbouring exhibit (Figure 3.1). Her shift in visual orientation is followed by a change in the orientation of her feet as she turns her right foot from being directed to the painting in front to pointing to the left. After a mini-pause during which Cathy produces an utterance, unfortunately inaudible on the recordings, Mike turns his head and upper body to the left, and begins his departure from the current exhibit to approach the neighbouring one. As both participants walk along the wall both their eyes are already oriented to the next piece that a moment later they will stop at and examine.

### Fragment 3



Figure 3.1



Figure 3.2

If Cathy's utterance occasions an onward movement to the neighbouring exhibit it only adds to the argument made here that the departure from a

previous exhibit often prefigures the approach of a next one. By virtue of a glance and maybe a bodily turn a participant proposes to withdraw from a work of art and move to a next, an action a co-participant often aligns with through her/his bodily and visual conduct (vom Lehn, *in press*). In a similar way, in fragment 4 (same as fragment 2) the pair stands side-by-side while discussing the photograph in front when Anushka turns her head and upper body to the left. She then begins to move forward while her companion still stands in the same position looking at and listening to her. As Anushka makes one step forward going past Pavel, while still looking and talking to him, he also begins to move to the left. A moment later, Anushka swivels her head around and the pair begin their approach of the next photograph (Fragment 4).

#### Fragment 4

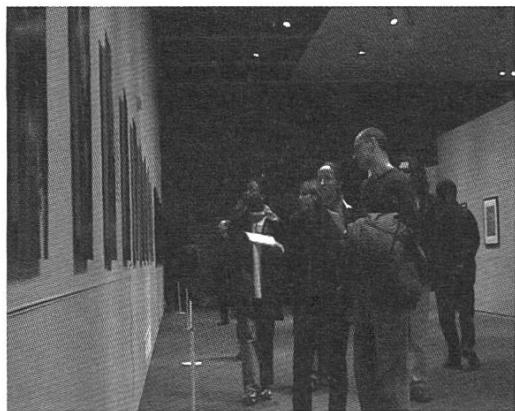


Figure 4.1



Figure 4.2

Approaching and arriving at next exhibits is accomplished in interaction between visitors. As they move through the gallery from one exhibit to a next, visitors remain sensitive to each other's conduct and orientation and attend to proposals to approach a work of art. The approach of this next exhibit is often tied into the departure from the previous exhibit. When visitors bring their examination of a painting to a close, they shift their visual and bodily orientation to a possible next exhibit. They may or may not approach and examine this piece but its constitution as a "candidate exhibit" is important as it provides the participants with a possible trajectory for their actions. Whilst the initial glance to a candidate exhibit often prefigures the departure, it is the subsequent actions that prepare the participants for the approach of a next exhibit or to move elsewhere in the museum. By keeping the eyes directed at the candidate exhibit and looking to the piece while walking along the gallery wall, participants display an involvement with the work of art, even before they have arrived there. The design of the display of involvement, while still walking, encourages co-participants to orient to that particular piece and align with the approach of it.

We therefore begin to see how participants sequentially organise their approach to and arriving at a next exhibit. The approach is tightly organised and comprised of a two part sequence of action, a proposal that suggests to stop and look at an exhibit and an alignment with the proposal. The proposal to stop involves an extension of the display of involvement that visitors put on already while walking along the gallery wall, by shifting the bodily and visual orientation to the piece. The shift in orientation is coupled with the display of involvement with the piece, and thus encourages co-participants to align with the proposal, to also approach the piece and to adopt a standpoint next to their companion. The visitors establish a side-by-side arrangement at the 'next exhibit' and together look at the piece.

## 5. Configuring standpoints

In our body of data the co-participant, if only briefly, aligns with the participant in her/his approach of an exhibit. We were unable to find a fragment where a co-participant rejected a proposal and moved past an exhibit their companion stopped and looked at. We however have a few fragments in our body of data where after a brief stay with an exhibit a participant, even though hesitatingly, moves on to a next exhibit while the co-participant remains with the piece somewhat longer (vom Lehn, *in press*). In these cases, visitors separate, if only briefly, when exploring a museum. Whilst one or two members of a group continue their examination of an exhibit, a third moves slowly ahead and begins to look at a piece nearby. The participant who moves without his/her companion rarely moves out of sight but stays in the locale that the companions can easily catch up to join them a few moments later and view the next exhibit together.

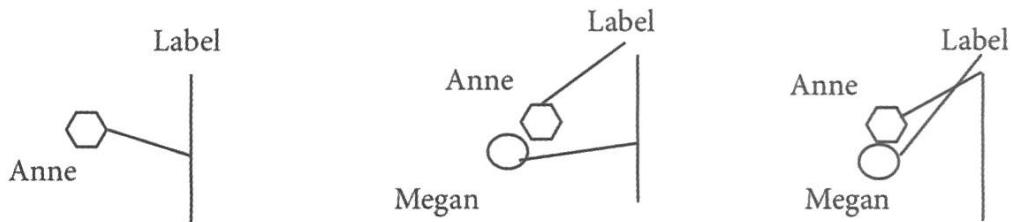
Consider the following fragment 5 in which Anne and Megan arrive at a painting. Anne arrives before Megan and by virtue of her visual orientation, her way of looking and posture displays an involvement with the piece; as Anne approaches the piece she glances up and looks to the top right of the exhibit. On Megan's arrival behind her, Anne turns her head markedly to the left and looks from the painting to the label attached to the wall. Her head movement from the top right of the piece to the label attached to the wall on the left of the painting occasions Megan to adopt a standpoint next to her friend where she also can read the label. Megan comes to stand in a slight angle to Anne and then makes a small step forward, followed by a noticeable shift of the posture forward, closer to the label. Both participants now, if only momentarily, stand side-by-side, visually oriented to the label. From this position, they can read the label as well as glance to the painting while remaining sensitive to each other's orientation.

**Fragment 5**

Figure 5.1

Figure 5.2

Figure 5.3



Megan adopts her standpoint at the exhibit by attending to Anne's display of involvement with the piece. Anne first looks to the top of the piece and displays a shift in orientation to the label when her friend arrives. Megan not only comes to stand next to her friend but also displays her alignment with Anne by adopting a standpoint embodied by her posture, head direction and way of looking that noticeably attends to her friend's involvement with the label. Standing to the right of her friend, Megan is further away from the label than Anne and leans carefully and slowly forward to the left to come a bit closer to the piece and, unavoidably, also closer to her friend. By virtue of the design of her actions, Megan displays sensitivity to Anne's reading and avoids disturbing her. Standing close to each other in a side-by-side configuration allows the participants to remain aware of and attend to even slight shifts in each other's orientation to the exhibit.

The analysis suggests that on approaching a co-participant who already examines an exhibit, participants often attend to and align with the co-participant's orientation. The standpoint adopted by the participant arriving first at an exhibit shapes the standpoint of those arriving later. As second arriving participants walk towards their co-participant they monitor and attend to their orientation by standing where they do not disturb but carefully align their visual orientation with them. They take on postures that embody an alignment with their companion(s) and then look and examine the exhibit with them. Whilst in fragment 5, Anne, who arrived at the painting first, occasions Megan to stand next to her and read the label by displaying her involvement and reading of the label, in many other cases the first arriving visitor invites those arriving later to stand next to them. Consider fragment 6 that begins when three ladies explore

an art exhibition where a large number of paintings are on display, including Manet's work entitled 'Bar at the Folies-Bergère'. Having examined various paintings in the gallery, Monica withdraws from the piece her two friends look at and arrives at Manet's painting (Figure 6.1). As she comes to stand in front of the large canvas one of her friends, Nina, also moves on and approaches Monica at the 'Bar at the Folies-Bergère' (Figure 6.2).

**Fragment 6a**



Figure 6.1

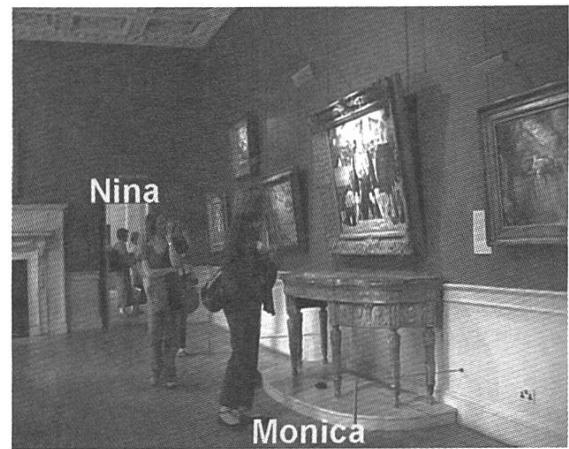


Figure 6.2

Just when Monica is about to place her right foot next to her left to face the exhibit, she lifts the left foot from the floor again and turns it backwards to the right. This foot movement is accompanied by a bodily turn backward to left. It occurs as Nina, who walks along the gallery wall looking to the exhibits on her left, arrives near her friend. Monica's turn opens up the space in front of the large canvas inviting Nina to step into the space that becomes available in front of the painting. Nina accepts the invitation by swinging her right foot around, coming to stand to Monica's left (Figure 6.3-6.4).

**Fragment 6b**

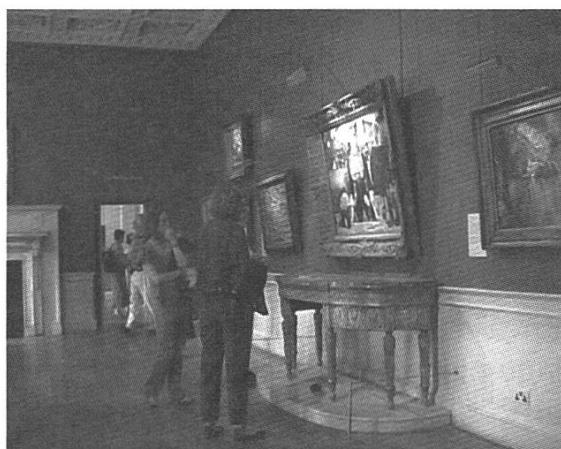


Figure 6.3

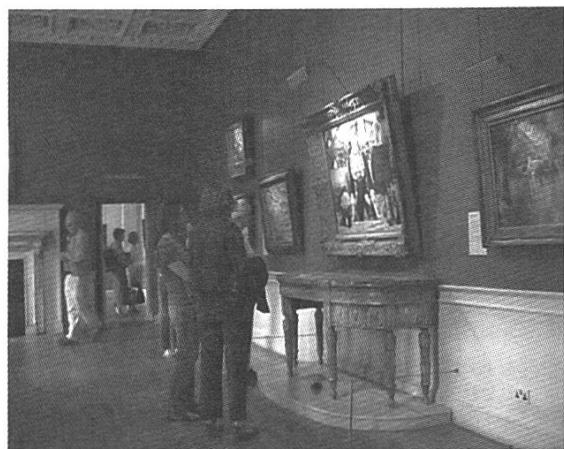


Figure 6.4

Nina

Monica

5 < P \_\_\_\_\_  
6 LF \_\_\_\_\_ x  
7 RF \_\_\_\_\_ x  
Left foot backwards  
(Monica places her right foot and then moves her left foot backward)

## Index

P Painting  
< P looks at Painting  
RF Right Foot  
LF Left Foot  
— 2/10 of a second  
X onset/offset of change in activity, movement  
x turning of body, head, or moving of foot

The production of standpoints in front of the large canvas is carefully crafted by the two participants. As Nina approaches Monica her steps forward are closely organised with adjustments in Monica's feet and body position. Nina's approach occasions Monica to step backward with her left foot (line 5) after having positioned her right foot on the ground pointing to the piece (line 6). She moves her left foot backward to the right opening up space to her left that encourages Nina to step into the position next to her friend (line 3-4). While the participants foster a situation where they both can stand next to each other and view the piece in concert with another they both look at the piece. Nina adjusts her position by making two small steps, left and then right (line 3-4), before she mouths with an embellished lip movement, "OH MY GOD" (line 1), thus marking her arrival at the famous work of art.

The analysis suggests that when participants arrive at an exhibit one after the other, they produce bodily actions that foster an environment in which both can adopt a standpoint at the piece that allows both to look at and examine it in interaction with each other. On their arrival at an exhibit, they place their bodies with regard to the painting and their co-participant, inviting later arriving companions to join in the examination of the piece or taking a standpoint where they can see the piece without disturbing the participant who arrived here a few moments earlier. The participant who has arrived first at the

painting provides the co-participant with space inviting her/him to jointly inspect the piece. By virtue of the way in which the participant places her/his body in front of the work of art and displays a particular way of looking at it, influences how co-participants design their approach and their adopting of a standpoint at the exhibit. Those arriving late carefully accomplish the placing of their bodies to align their standpoint and way of looking with that of the participant who is already there. In fragment 6, the participants' bodily configuration in front of the painting reflects the shape of the furniture and pedestal underneath the piece; Monica and Nina have arranged their bodies in a semi-circle that allows them to look at the piece while orienting and talking to each other. In fragment 5, Megan and Anne stand side-by-side and look at the label, a configuration that allows them to organise possible shifts in orientation to the work of art with each other.

By adopting a standpoint at an exhibit, i.e. by virtue of taking a particular bodily and visual orientation to an exhibit, participants encourage companions to join and view the piece with them. Co-participants often treat the adoption of a standpoint at an exhibit as an invitation or proposal by aligning with it and adopting a standpoint next to their companion. The proposal can be enhanced by actions that the participant produces as s/he notices the arrival of co-participants; s/he slightly changes her/his standpoint to invite the co-participant to join or exchange glances with her/him and then shifts orientation back to the exhibit displaying that the invitation is to co-view the exhibit and not to engage in face-to-face interaction.

As people stand and look at an exhibit, they display their orientation to and state of involvement with the material and visual environment, allowing others to assess and align their orientation with them. The possibility to assess a participant's level of involvement by virtue of her/his posture and her/his way of looking is important for participants' trajectory of action. It allows them to glean information about co-participants' level of involvement and use the information as resources for the production of their own actions through which they align with their co-participant. The standpoint participants adopt at exhibits is therefore configured by the ways in which co-participants orient to the piece. And visitors ongoingly negotiate their standpoints by virtue of slight bodily movements and shifts in orientation.

## 6. Transforming standpoints

Once people have come to stand at an exhibit they begin to read labels and other information and examining its features. As the participants engage with the piece they stand in a side-by-side arrangement and simultaneously, but often independently, look at different aspects of the same work of art. Recent research suggests that when encountering and examining works of art people constitute exhibit features, render them visible in particular ways and create

experiences for each other by virtue of talk and bodily actions. These verbal and visible actions often facilitate, if only momentarily, the co-viewing of an exhibit. In some cases, the co-viewing of an exhibit requires a shift in standpoints. In fragment 7, Jo and Paula read a label associated with a large painting when Paula shifts orientation and turns to the work of art. A few moments later, both participants have turned to and examine the painting.

#### Fragment 7a

decides



Figure 7.1



Figure 7.2



Figure 7.3

P: she may be the one he eventually

The fragment begins when both participants stand by the exhibit, lean forward and read the label. After a few moments, Paula draws Jo's attention to the figure in the painting, "she may be the one he eventually decides". While she produces the utterance, Paula gestures with her open left hand first to the side and then near Jo's face (Figure 7.2). In the course of her utterance, the gestures with the left hand become increasingly animated (Figure 7.3). The design of the utterance, the minute pause after having said "decides" and the repair, "to move on she gets sent off" occasion Jo to turn from the label to the painting (Figure 7.4). By virtue of the design of her actions Paula attends to Jo's change in orientation. She completes her utterance and transforms the gesture that encourages her friend to withdraw from the label, displaying that now she orients to Paula's actions. Paula then moves her hand up and flips it backward animating the utterance of "sent off" (Figure 7.5).

#### Fragment 7b

P: to move on she gets sent off



Figure 7.4



Figure 7.5

When participants adopt standpoints at an exhibit, they display their state of involvement with the object by virtue of their bodily and visual orientation. A shift in standpoints therefore may involve noticeable effort, including actions to influence the standpoints of co-participants. Such changes are occasioned by talk and bodily action, such as gestures and shifts in bodily and visual orientation that display that a participant has brought to a close the involvement with an object, that s/he is ready to become involved with another object, and that s/he wishes co-participants to also shift orientation to the other object; an action that can display a readiness to look from a label to a painting as well as a readiness to withdraw from an exhibit and move elsewhere.

In fragment 7, the involvement with the current object is noticeably brought to a close when Paula lifts her forward leaning body up and orients to the left where the painting is. She has brought the reading of the label to a close and is ready to become involved with the painting the text in the label is associated with. Rather than just looking and examining the piece, Paula produces talk and gestures that encourage her friend to align with her orientation to and involvement with the work of art; her gesture crosses her friend's line of sight and interferes with Jo's reading of the label.

Participants often produce actions that occasion a co-participant to leave an exhibit or shift orientation when the co-participant displays readiness to move on (vom Lehn, *in press*). The timing of such actions ensures that the co-participant's experience and appreciation of the object is not disturbed. In fragment 7, Paula's gesture initially meets Jo's resistance to change her orientation from the label to the work of art. The increasing embellishment of the gesture progressively encourages Jo to shift orientation while Paula extends her utterance with a short pause and repair that allow Jo to bring the reading of the label to a close and turn to the painting. Whilst Jo initially does not attend to her friend's utterance and remains markedly oriented to the label, she turns to the painting when Paula, through the design of the gesture and utterance, upgrade the encouragement to shift orientation to the painting.

Standpoints that participants adopt at works of art are momentary embodiments of their orientation to a piece. Their visual orientation ongoingly changes as the eyes meander across the canvas. Whilst research has been conducted to track people's visual examination of paintings and impact on neurological processes (Ramachandran & Hirstein. 1999), few studies scrutinise how people align their looking at an object (Goodwin, 2000; Nishizaka, 2000). The analysis suggests that whilst some minor shifts in orientation can be organised by making them visible through head movements, larger shifts in orientation may require a transformation of standpoints to allow participants to continue their co-viewing and co-examination of a piece. This transformation may involve talk and gesture to occasion another to give up a current and adopt a new standpoint.

## 7. Discussion

Theories of art perception often are concerned with the individual spectator and their looking and experience of works of art. They ignore that in public museums people encounter and examine exhibits in the presence of others. They interact and cooperate in the viewing of exhibits, create experiences of objects for each other and attend to the actions of people they are not with, who happen to be in the same space (Heath & vom Lehn, 2004). Having looked at a piece together for a while, participants organise their withdrawal and jointly move on to another exhibition area. The departure from the exhibit is neatly organised and displays that the participants pay deference to each other's ongoing state of involvement with the piece (vom Lehn, *in press*).

This paper examines how visitors come to arrive and take standpoints at exhibits in concert with each other. It suggests that when arriving at a painting, visitors produce side-by-side arrangements where they can look at the piece and, at the same time, from the corner of the eye, monitor each other's orientation and state of involvement with the exhibit. The analysis explores different ways in which participants, on their arrival at an exhibit, produce side-by-side arrangements.

By standing in front of a painting, adopting a particular posture and way of looking, participants display their level of involvement with an exhibit. The visible bodily comportment at exhibits serves others as a resource to organise their actions, for example, when aligning their standpoint with their companions. It allows them to identify an appropriate location next to their companions, where they can also look at the piece. Their bodily alignment with the companion displays that they are together and co-view the piece with each other.

When introducing the concept of "reciprocity of perspectives", Schutz (1967) differentiates the "system of relevances" that participants bring to bear and the "standpoint" they adopt in a given situation. Intersubjectivity is produced when participants align their system of relevances and standpoints and create a situation that allows them to assume that, in principle, they are interchangeable. Whilst research often focuses on people's (intellectual) orientation to situations, i.e. "systems of relevances", it rarely examines how people constitute standpoints where they physically are when participating in situations and interacting with others<sup>2</sup>. This paper addresses this lack of research by explicating different ways in which participants organise their arrival and adoption of standpoints at exhibits. It suggests that the involvement with a piece often begins while participants still stand at a neighbouring

---

<sup>2</sup> With regard to face-to-face interaction, Kendon (1990) provides the well-known analysis of bodily 'formations'.

exhibit. They glance to and display an interest in the exhibit that foreshadows their approach of it. As they walk toward the work of art, they may increase their display of involvement with it by virtue of their bodily comportment. They have their eyes fixed on the piece and progressively turn to stand in front of it. Their approach of the exhibit encourages companions to align with them and also move toward the object. The organisation of actions through which participants coordinate their approach of next exhibits is similar to those forms of organisation produced by groups and guided tours (Best, 2012; Broth & Lundström, *in press*; De Stefani, 2010); a participant produces actions through which co-participants are encouraged to adopt particular standpoints at and with regard to an exhibit.

The analysis implies that when participants adopt standpoints at exhibits, they prepare the grounds, the possibility at least, for a concerted examination of the work of art. They stand where they can display as well as 'show and tell', where they orient and make particular exhibit features relevant to each other. When later in their interaction they create and configure an experience of an exhibit for each other, the organisation of their actions is based on their bodily arrangement at the piece. The co-viewing and co-examination of the piece emerge from their standpoints at the exhibit. These standpoints can be transformed but such transformations require considerable interaction effort to encourage co-participants to shift their bodily and visual orientation elsewhere.

Whilst theories of art perception and museum visiting often conceive the experience of exhibits as an individual and cognitive accomplishment, the analysis suggests that where people come to stand, look at and experience works of art arises in interaction with others. As they approach an exhibit, they consider and orient to other people's action and state of involvement in the museum. The actions through which people organise their approach of exhibits render visible the 'togetherness' of visitors (cf. Goffman, 1971; Ryave & Schenkein, 1974). By adopting standpoints close to each other and in ways that become intelligible as actions that have occurred in alignment with each other, visitors reveal who they are with and that they explore the museum with them. These 'aligned' actions become particularly visible when one participant approaches an exhibit and displays involvement with it. Such displays of approach and involvement encourage companions to align their trajectory of action and also look at this piece. If such an alignment is not forthcoming encouragements to orient to an exhibit are produced in an embellished way, for example by talking to the co-participant or, as in fragment 7, by gesturing in front of their eyes. Whilst our data corpus contains fragments where people resist an immediate alignment we have no instance in our collection where a companion rejects the proposal or invitation to co-view an exhibit or exhibit feature.

Aside from the paper's import for discussions about the experience of works of art in museums the analysis particularly contributes to recent debates about mobility and interaction in museums and other public places (McIlvenny, Broth & Haddington, 2009; Laurier, in press; Mondada, 2012). The current paper adds to this burgeoning body of research by beginning to explore the emergence of side-by-side arrangements that people produce when they look at and examine objects together. The analysis suggests that side-by-side arrangements differ in the way in which the bodies come to stand next to each other and bodily and visually oriented to aspects of the material and visual environment. Such arrangements are often swiftly transformed when participants occasioned by even slight changes in co-participants' posture or way of looking at the piece in front shift their orientation to specific exhibit features and elsewhere in the gallery.

The paper contributes to discussions about the organisation of bodily and visual conduct that have been introduced in the context of the deployment of multimodal research approaches in sociology and cognate disciplines (Mondada & Schmitt, 2010). Whilst conversation analysis is primarily concerned with the sequential organisation of talk (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2007) the scrutiny of the organisation of participants' approach of exhibits suggests that talk is rarely deployed, and if it is used, plays a relatively small role when people adopt standpoints at exhibits. Instead participants deploy a sequential organisation of bodily action when arriving at exhibits and fostering an environment in which they can co-view works of art. This paper, I hope, has made a small contribution to understanding the sequentiality of the organisation underlying bodily action in general and mobility in public places in particular.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arnheim, R. (1974). *Art and visual perception: A psychology of the creative eye. The new version.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Best, K. (2012). Making museum tours better: Understanding what a guided tour really is and what a tour guide really does. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 27/1, 35-52.

Bitgood, S. (1993). Social influences on the visitor museum experience. *Visitor Behavior*, 8/3, 4-5.

Broth, Matthias & Lundström, F. (in press). A walk on the pier. Establishing relevant places in a guided, introductory walk. In: P. Haddington, L. Mondada & M. Nevile (eds.), *Interaction and mobility. Language and the body in motion*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Brown, B. & Laurier, E. (2005). Maps and car journeys: An ethno-methodological approach. *Cartographica*, 4, 17-33.

Carrier, D. (1986). Art and its spectators. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 45/1, 5-17.

De Stefani, E. (2010). Reference as an interactively and multimodally accomplished practice. Organizing spatial reorientation in guided tours. In: M. Pettorino, A. Giannini, I. Chiari & F. Dovetto (eds.), *Spoken communication* (pp. 137-170). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Dukes, S. & Bitgood, S. (2003). Not another step! Economy of movement and pedestrian choice point behavior in shopping malls. *Environment and Behavior*, 38/3, 394-405.

Elkins, J. (1996). *The object stares back. On the nature of seeing*. San Diego/New York/London: Harcourt Brace & Company.

Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Behavior in public places. Notes on the social organization of gatherings*. New York/London: The Free Press.

Goffman, E. (1971). *Relations in public. Microstudies of the social order*. New York: Basic Books.

Gombrich, E. H. (1960). *Art and illusion*. New York: Pantheon.

Goodwin, C. (2000). Practices of seeing: Visual Analysis. An ethnomethodological approach. In: T. Van Leeuwen & C. Jewitt (eds.), *Handbook of visual analysis* (pp. 157-182). London: Sage.

Heath, C. & vom Lehn, D. (2004). Configuring reception: (Dis-)Regarding the "spectator" in museums and galleries. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 21/6, 43-65.

Heath, C., Hindmarsh, J. & Luff, P. (2010). *Video in qualitative research*. London: Sage.

Heath, C., Luff, P., Cleverly, J. & vom Lehn, D. (2002). Crafting participation: designing ecologies, configuring experience. *Visual Communication*, 1/1, 9-33.

Kendon, A. (1990). Spatial organization in social encounters: the F-formation system. In: A., Kendon, (ed.), *Conducting interaction: pattern of behavior in focused encounters* (pp. 209-237). Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kesselheim, W. (2010a). Wechselspiele von "Text" und "Kontext" in multimodaler Kommunikation. In: P. Klotz, P. R. Portmann-Tselikas & G. Weidacher (eds.), *Kontexte und Texte. Soziokulturelle Konstellationen literalen Handelns* (pp. 327-343). Tübingen: Narr.

Kesselheim, W. (2010b). Wissenskommunikation multimodal: Wie Museumsbesucher sich über eine Museumsvitrine verständigen. *Fachsprache*, 3-4, 122-144.

Kesselheim, W. & Hausendorf, H. (2007). Die Multimodalität der Ausstellungskommunikation. In: R. Schmitt (ed.), *Koordination: Analysen zur multimodalen Interaktion* (pp. 339-376). Tübingen: Narr.

Laurier, E. (in press). The unexpected richness of the roundabout. In: P. Haddington, L. Mondada & M. Nevile (eds.), *Interaction and mobility. Language and the body in motion*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Leinhardt, G., Crowley, K. & Knutson, K. (2002). *Learning conversations in museums*. Mahwah NJ: LEA.

Marsh, P. & Collett, P. (1981). Patterns of public behavior: Collision avoidance on a pedestrian crossing. In: A. Kendon (ed.), *Non-verbal communication interaction and gesture* (pp. 199-217). The Hague: Mouton de Gruyter.

McIlvenny, P., Broth, M. & Haddington, P. (2009). Communicating place, space and mobility. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 10, 1879-1886.

Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Melton, A. W. (1972). Visitor behavior in museums: Some early research in environmental design. *Human Factors*, 14/5, 393-403.

Mondada, L. (2012). Talking and driving in the car: Multiactivity in the car. *Semiotica*, 191, 223-256.

Mondada, L. (in press). Coordinating mobile action in real time: the timed organization of directives in video games. In: P. Haddington, L. Mondada & M. Nevile (eds.), *Interaction and mobility. Language and the body in motion*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Mondada, L. & Schmitt, R. (eds.) (2010). *Situationseröffnungen: Zur multimodalen Herstellung fokussierter Interaktion*. Tübingen: Narr.

Mori (2001). *Visitors to museums & galleries in the UK*. London: re:source.

Nishizaka, A. (2000). Seeing what one sees: Perception, emotion, and activity. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 7/1, 105-123.

Patterson, D. & Bitgood, S. (1987). Principles of orientation and circulation. *Visitor Behavior*, 1/4, 4.

Ramachandran, V. S. & Hirstein, W. (1999). The science of art: A neurological theory of aesthetic experience. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 6/6-7, 15-51.

Robinson, E. S. (1928). *The behavior of the museum visitor*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian.

Ryave, A. L. & Schenkein, J. N. (1974). Notes on the art of walking. In: R. Turner (ed.), *Ethnomethodology* (pp. 265-274). Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Sacks, H. (1992). *Lectures on conversation*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Schegloff, E. (2007). *Sequence organization in interaction. A primer in conversation analysis. Volume 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schutz, A. (1967). *Collected papers I. The problem of social reality*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Shearman, J. (1992). *Only connect... Art and the spectator in the Italian Renaissance: The A.W. Mellon Lectures in Fine Arts, 1988*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Shettel, H. (1976). *An evaluation of visitor response to "Man in his Environment"*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian.

Thomas, W. (2002/1923). The definition of the situation. In: N. Rousseau (ed.), *Self, symbols, and society: Classic readings in social psychology* (pp. 103-115). Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

vom Lehn, D. (2006). Die Kunst der Kunstbetrachtung: Aspekte einer Pragmatischen Ästhetik in Kunstausstellungen. *Soziale Welt*, 57/1, 83-100.

vom Lehn, D. (in press). Withdrawing from exhibits: The interactional organisation of museum visits. In: P. Haddington, L. Mondada & M. Nevile (eds.), *Interaction and Mobility. Language and the Body in Motion*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

vom Lehn, D. & Heath, C. (2006). Discovering exhibits: Video-based studies of interaction in museums and science centres. In: H. Knoblauch, B. Schnettler, J. Raab & H. G. Soeffner (eds.), *Video-Analysis: Methodology and methods* (pp. 101-114). Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang.

vom Lehn, D. & Heath, C. (2007). Perspektiven der Kunst - Kunst der Perspektiven. In: H. Hausendorf (ed.), *Vor dem Kunstwerk. Interdisziplinäre Aspekte des Sprechens und Schreibens über Kunst*. (pp. 147-170) München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag.

vom Lehn, D., Heath, C. & Hindmarsh, J. (2001). Exhibiting interaction: Conduct and collaboration in museums and galleries. *Symbolic Interaction*, 24/2, 189-216.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my colleagues Christian Heath, Paul Luff and Jon Hindmarsh at the Work, Interaction & Technology Research Centre, King's College London, for their contributions to the analysis of the data that form the basis for this paper. I also would like to thank the museum management of the Courtauld Galleries and the National Gallery (both in London) for providing me with access to their exhibitions and the many visitors that kindly agreed to participate in the research. The research was funded by the AHRC grant RG/AN19805/AON17441.