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Audience Engagement: Why Ideology Became Business

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FOREWORD

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Research undertaken by the foundation Art Institutions of the 21st Century highlights an important transition taking place in the area of audience engagement, which has now become instrumental in taking institutions towards a new economic model. In the 20th Century, audience engagement was part of the mission of institutions, while today it has become a major source of income, turning it from an ideology into a business strategy.

As European governments face a variety of challenges to generate growth in the current global economy, the erstwhile model of the public museum is unfortunately no longer seen as being sustainable. One could even argue that the concept of the publicly-funded museum was a utopian European concept of the last century. This radical change from ideology to business when thinking about audiences as one of the 'survival tools' for institutions is creating a significant divide between leading institutions with compelling 'brand names' such as Tate or Pompidou, and smaller, more vulnerable regional institutions.

Institutions will have to transform themselves and think very differently: they will still need to apply for funding, but rather than pitching for the entire amount to public organisations and funding bodies, they'll also have to find alternatives to get closer to the private sector and to local, national and international corporations. One of the keys to this is audience engagement, which - when done successfully - allows access to sponsorship and funding from both the public and the private sectors.

The resulting report attempts to demonstrate the importance of audience engagement in the present, and to outline the factors that are at play in accelerating important changes. Much of the literature on the subject produced to date is framed by *how* institutions should engage with audiences. Though we acknowledge the evolvement of new approaches to audience engagement, our report focuses instead on *why* successful institutions have shifted most of their resources to focus on developing and growing their audiences and examine some of the impact this has had on the role of curators and the way shows are now presented.

This report wouldn't have been possible without the lead of the Foundation's Director Nicolas de Oliveira. From the outset, our trustees Tanya Tikhnenko and Shezad Dawood gave their valuable and unsparing support. Our very special thanks goes to the foundation's Advisory Board who shared their expert knowledge and generously gave their time through extensive feedback on the text.

Sébastien Montabonel
Chair of Trustees

INTRODUCTION

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[1a] Jill Sterrett, email comments, February 2018.

In the second decade of 21st Century the contemporary visual art sector is undergoing a significant transition in the institutions that have hitherto governed its operation. Public institutions such as major museums and galleries have experienced the shrinking of state funding since the 2007/8 economic crisis, while private collections and institutions have begun to compete for a growing slice of the audience. Factored into this equation is the influence of a mature market in contemporary art whose commercial reach now extends well beyond its traditional territory and attracts larger numbers of visitors.

Today audience engagement – the relationship between real or potential visitors and an organisation – has come to represent a testing ground for the performance of institutions as never before. ‘Putting shape to—articulating—who the intended real and/or perceived public is for any given organization is key to any measure of success devised’^{1a}, writes Jill Sterrett, Director of Collections and Conservation at SFMoMA. Derived chiefly from marketing it is a tool that can be used to measure interest. Yet the metrics applied to marketing may not apply in the same way to culture since its ‘products’ are value-added and historically difficult to ascertain according to a simple set of rules. This crucial and complex subject, which exemplifies the new challenges and opportunities experienced by arts organisations, forms the subject of this report.

A more congested offering of exhibitions coupled to the ubiquity of social and digital media has rendered audiences much more selective; their presence is sought more actively than ever, since, in an over-saturated world of information, attention is an important commodity. Museums and galleries

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are therefore under increasing pressure to present ever-more attractive programmes, along with devising ingenious ways of supporting these via emerging digital strategies that ensure new levels of uptake and participation. We ask whether this diverse offer is likely to endure and expand or if exhibitions will conform more to already successful models and succumb to what might be termed a monoculture.

These marked shifts in art’s eco-system can be interpreted as a power struggle between different public and private interests, the loosening grip of the institutions on agreed narratives, or as a beneficial widening of participation and agency, depending on one’s point of view. The term ‘publically-minded’ is much in evidence in institutional discourse today, and provides the certainty that the viewer, or indeed the customer, is a central pivot in these transitions. Indeed, it would appear that the power of museology, art history and its institutions to steer both the cultural agenda and its interpretation now passes to the viewers who vote with their feet and the tap of their index fingers. This signals a transition from a time-honoured institutional model based on historically validated aesthetic values to one largely driven by popular appeal. It demonstrates the power of visitor engagement as a tool to drive the curatorial agenda.

But we must ask if this new engagement is being driven *by* or *for* the audience, if it empowers individuals’ agency or if it remains lodged in our institutions, or has instead been bartered away to the commercial sector. Is the perceived transition from a spectator to a participant and to a consumer significant, and if so, what does it reveal about the role of our institutions in a market economy? Will we see a future in which public engagement

is conflated with popularity, where mass events such as blockbuster exhibitions edge out qualitative relationships between institution and audience?

Further, in a digital age we should not overlook that audiences tend to consolidate their own existing knowledge, whereby the visitor experience begins and ends well outside the confines of the gallery.¹ Arguably art museums 'need to create emotional experiences' since 'memory has an emotional stamp, [and] is associative to prior emotions'. This continuous readjustment of the visitor's memory through the creation of new experiences testifies to the depth of engagement, and it is a factor that is much more developed in musical performances and especially sporting events.² Engagement is enhanced where audiences are tasked with sharing or generating content, rather than simply receiving it, where the generation of meaning takes an active, rather than a passive form.

Certain traditional models of spectatorship and contemplation of aesthetic beauty – which require stasis and quietude – persist, but are being gradually superseded by more participatory forms of artistic engagement. Today's contemplation is filtered through the viewer's personal experience, an embodiment that is witnessed by the success of immersive artworks in public places and major museums.

Meanwhile, the drive to bring art into the everyday, to aestheticise common experiences, and to gloss over the boundaries between art and life have all combined to exert a powerful force of societal change; institutions have been at once instigators, catalysts, and recipients of these deep alterations. The role of existing public institutions, along with the competitive input of newly formed private organi-

sations, will, we believe, be crucial in making these transitions effective. Public Museums and galleries have an important and long-standing role to play in new and expanded forms of audience engagement, while private collections and foundations are making significant inroads into the public realm. It remains to be seen if their audience relationship is as deep or significant as that of their public counterparts.

The commercial sector – through its most salient agents such as galleries, the ever-expanding artfair circuit, and even the auction houses – now has a much greater interest and investment in public engagement where once their audience was typified by a small coterie of wealthy private clients and purchasing public institutions. This sector understands the importance of visibility as it seeks to generate interest in exclusive objects by engaging the interest of the general public. The market for luxury goods is underpinned by the 'aura' of the works themselves, but also by the glow of enterprise attached to every one of its events. Indeed global artfairs use technology quite effectively through good data mining and management – artfairs capture data through their membership and VIP card systems which are reactive to feedback loops generated by clients. Such organisations treat their card holders as prospective and actual clients rather than as passers-by enjoying an experience. Commerce is of course a proven means of testing and responding to the needs of the audience since it comes with the commitment of a purchase. Gallerists know their viewers and select strategically to meet their demands and taste requirements. The same detail of information is not harvested by museums and public galleries through admission tickets – in Britain, for

[1] John H.Falk, *The Wiring of the Medium May Be New But the Users' Wiring Is Old*, International Conference of Audience Research: The Connected Audience, Jewish Museum, 2014, op.cit.

[2] Lynne Conner, *Audience Engagement and the Role of Arts Talk in the Digital Era*, Springer, 2013, p.4.

instance – where admission remains largely free. Instead, museums rely on membership schemes that gather useful data but are unable to capture the dynamic movement of general audiences that do not subscribe to them. A single purchase generates more evidence than many undocumented visits, and while the intention is not to reverse admission policy, perhaps public institutions need to develop more productive tools to give them a greater understanding of their audiences. In this way audience engagement might be a means of deepening visitors' experience, but also to strengthen the bond to the institution that becomes more aware of their needs.

The report begins by outlining the context of audience engagement in its initial chapter. It examines the gradual erosion of public space in the 21st century, along with its impact on art institutions and underlines the importance of strategic curatorial practice to ensure autonomy and quality in the face of quantitative analysis. Moreover, it argues that it is instrumental for institutions to adapt to the transition taking place from stable forms of institutional activity to more audience responsive practices. Chapter two looks at attendance trends to consider international exhibitions that attract the largest audiences and questions the growing culture of so-called blockbuster exhibitions, while the ensuing chapter explores the expansion of museums, galleries and artfairs beyond their traditional confines. Accordingly, it presents an expanding culture of international art tourism driven by audiences seeking new ways of engaging with urban centres through cutting edge contemporary art. The closing chapter scrutinizes the recent effects of digital culture on audience interaction with institutions. It contends that the opportunities

afforded by communication technologies ought not to result in mere marketing exercises, but should be employed to widen access and participation.

Finally, the role of learning and education in museums, galleries and artschools is an essential aspect of audience engagement and these areas are often seen as directly linked, but it has been largely omitted here, as it will form the subject of a subsequent report. Similarly, the report does not specify the many particular initiatives that set examples of good practice by curators, learning staff, or artists in regard to audience engagement. In this case, good and indeed bad practice can be seen as the outcomes of – or reactions to larger forces operating on the artworld. It is perhaps at this more structural level that perceived evolutions can be seen as revolutionary or momentous. At Art Institutions of the 21st Century we are committed to gather such knowledge that allows us to examine the major transitions and faultlines of art's ecosystem in our time.

[3] <http://museumlondon.ca/about/our-history>.

[4] <https://www.moma.org/about/>

[5] http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/wesp/wesp_archive/2007wespupdate.pdf

[6] http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/doha/documents/WESP_2009_prerelease.pdf

[7] <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Arts%20Council%20England%20annual%20review%202007.pdf>

[8] <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/feb/17/arts-and-culture-systematically-removed-from-uk-education-system>

The traditional art museum's 'activities are driven by a mandate to collect, preserve, exhibit and interpret the visual arts'³. The museum of the 21st century, by contrast, is guided by a more reception-focused approach, rather than one concerned chiefly with objects.

*At The Museum of Modern Art and MoMA PS1, we celebrate creativity, openness, tolerance, and generosity. We aim to be inclusive places—both onsite and online—where diverse cultural, artistic, social, and political positions are welcome. We're committed to sharing the most thought provoking modern and contemporary art, and hope you will join us in exploring the art, ideas, and issues of our time.*⁴

The above description broadly outlines the desired relationship between a major metropolitan museum and its audience. It argues that the museum has a public duty towards people, not only to the preservation of important heritage. The statement refers clearly to the *quality* of the visitors' experience, but it is one that is ultimately guided by *quantity* when we apply it to the new models of institutions following the economic downturn in 2007/2008. Prior to the banking crisis of that period public funding for the arts was much more stable due to the preceding worldwide economic growth which peaked at 4% in 2006⁵ and then dramatically slowed to 1% by 2009⁶.

European institutions were exposed to the financial downturn differently from their American counterparts; this is especially so since the tax system in the US allows for generous deductions resulting in substantive philanthropic donations made by individuals to support the arts. European institutions are based on a model of pub-

lic funding which is gradually moving towards corporate sponsorship, along with other sources of private support, while American museums are generally beholden to individual philanthropists. Today, public funders and corporations are especially susceptible to proven audience engagement since the political arguments for non-statutory public spending rely heavily on the benefit for the greatest number of citizens, an argument that is extended to the commercial sector that needs to attract the greatest number of consumers, whilst justifying investment to shareholders. As a result, audience attendance is more crucial under the incoming model in Europe than in America; this is because the clearly commercial attitude of institutions in the USA is already long-established and because it relies to a greater extent on convincing wealthy individuals to part with a proportion of their otherwise taxable income.

In the UK in 2006, as Arts Council England celebrated its 60th birthday, chairman Sir Christopher Frayling's report stated that 'the arts and culture of England are the healthiest they have ever been', whilst heralding 'a 73 per cent increase in funding over the last 10 years'⁷. This so-called 'golden age' was progressively curtailed following the events of 2007/8. According to the Guardian's arts correspondent Mark Brown 'one of the biggest problems for the arts is national and local funding cuts, with Arts Council England cut by 32% and local government by 40% between 2010 and 2015.'⁸ It is not hard to see the impact that the reduction in funding would have on the arts in general, and on the audience experience in particular.

Every spending review of public funding – such as the one conducted by ACE every four years

– has winners and losers. The loss of the National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status by Arnolfini, was reported in 2017 with a purported reduction in income of £750,000. The chairman of ACE, Sir Nicholas Serota argues that the funder ‘can’t go on staunching losses in that way’⁹, pointing to a potentially obsolete model of regional arts organisation. By contrast, the Whitstable Biennale in Kent, a festival of performance, film and sound, was newly signed up to the roster of NPOs in the same year; it is a more recent organisation that has lower outgoings and fixed building costs and that provides an engaged programme of mobile, innovative displays throughout the city, while contributing substantially to the local economy. These instances point to the ever-increasing importance of attracting and sustaining visitors in today’s art economy.

As a result, present audience engagement in museums and galleries is expressed quantitatively through visitor numbers and can be seen as means of gauging a sustainable (or indeed precarious) business model. This stands in stark contrast to the model established throughout Europe in the second half of the 20th century, according to which arts funding was governed by generous state subsidies without the same reliance on audience numbers. Predicated upon notions of civilisation and education, culture was *validated* by the perceived quality of the exhibitions, collections, and individual works, as well as by the reputation of its institutions and connoisseurship of its staff. This earlier model may be seen as rather outmoded, patrician, and overly hierarchical, but the wholesale financial commitment of public monies to its cause seems like a lost utopian state today.

Contrariwise, it is argua-

ble that the established mandate of these institutions to collect and showcase thought-provoking art is currently under severe financial and political pressure and visitors are turned from recipients of knowledge into instruments to lobby funding agencies and politicians. In this climate, footfall wins out over the depth of experience.

This in turn impacts on the direction of exhibitions, public programmes and events where challenging or difficult content may be superseded by popular activities. The question of the ‘public good’ may be factored into the decisions, as museums and galleries have to negotiate the increasingly fine line between positive popular engagement and the public’s desire for easy entertainment and spectacle. The resulting blueprint – while not exactly ‘bread and circuses’ as coined by the Roman poet Juvenal – is not difficult to visualise in a consumer culture driven by immediate gratification and rampant commercialisation. Blockbuster exhibitions that foster tweets and instagram posts cater for the needs of a networked audience concerned with celebrity and visibility, and their continuing growth can lead to a mono-culture whose displays orbit the great artistic brands, to the detriment of a more engaged and discursive culture.

From this perspective the argument for a cohesive curatorial strategy is stronger than ever as it places demonstrable content on a par with an engaged spectator. It has been widely argued that a reevaluation of the viewer’s position has been underway in recent years, moving the individual from a peripheral position of an observer, to that of a participant and interactor.

Modernity has increasingly ‘demanded that individuals define and

[9] <https://www.ft.com/content/56f832d8-5b3e-11e7-b553-e2df1b0c3220>

[10] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture*, MIT Press, Camb.Mass., 1999, p.2.

[11] Michael Bhaskar, *Curation: The Power of Selection in a World of Excess*, Piatkus, London, 2016, p.6.

[12] https://www.afterall.org/online/exhibition-histories-talks_hou-hanru-video-online#.WIZBpK2cb-Y

*shape themselves in terms of a capacity for “paying attention”, that is for a disengagement from a broader field of attraction, whether visual or auditory, for the sake of isolating or focusing on a reduced number of stimuli.*¹⁰

The recent period saw a strong emphasis on curation in all aspects of our lives ‘because it was one answer to a new set of problems’¹¹, namely the surfeit of *everything*, and the need to find clear ways of framing this abundance through concepts and narratives. In the visual arts curating has long exceeded its remit of museological classification, but it remains a useful indicator of *quality* – a means of benchmarking. What has been curated has been selected from a wider field and allows for it to be seen in a new context. Curating thus reengages with the past and extends its reach into the future.

Moreover, a strongly curated programme can be seen as an expression of autonomy by the museum or gallery. Here, autonomy should not be seen as a means of an organization setting itself apart from the public, but rather from the forces that may curtail its striving for quality. The diversity of an exhibition programme is not an admission of eclecticism or weakness, but rather a statement about the complexity of contemporary art, and of the needs of different audiences. Curator Hou Hanru stresses the importance of curating as a tool for agency and independence, arguing that the lack of public funding erodes the curator’s freedom but also comes to define the institutions and their purpose.¹² In point of fact, the requirement for curators to combine the expected curatorial tasks of selecting, facilitating and displaying with the ability to fundraise from individuals and

corporate sponsors would appear to undermine the very autonomy Hanru extolls. Fundraising then becomes one specific means of framing every aspect of the programme, presenting a hitherto unknown level of compromise for exhibition-makers. The other is occasioned by the burgeoning costs and expectations of scale for exhibitions attractive to visitors that can only be borne by the commercial gallery sector engaged in introducing artists from their stables into the ‘validated’ museum sector. Accordingly, the structural benefits of curatorial practice are under pressure from every direction.

In the 21st Century we are drawn to binary interpretations: On the one hand distillation, curation, and systematization are classifying forms of close ‘attention’ developed for rationalization and problem solving, whilst deep absorption, daydreaming, and play are much broader, embodied states of perception. This is the distinction drawn by the exhibition, as it critically considers art through and beyond visibility, highlighting artists’ works – regardless of material form or medium - that fully engage the sensorium of the audience, and which employ infinitely mutable perception techniques to facilitate embodied experience in which the audience is able to ‘internalize’ information through sensation and ‘externalize’ through different forms of participation in authorship. Here, the exhibition seeks to meld the special sphere of the artwork with the visitor’s perception of their own everyday experience.

Exhibitions and artworks that seek to engage the audience’s perceptive apparatus have become increasingly common since the millennium as installation art, performance, and sound have moved from marginal positions into the

mainstream; indeed, many of these works in museums and galleries show a commitment to technological development and engineering such as Random International's *Rain Room* (2012) seen at Barbican, London, LACMA, Los Angeles, and the Yuz Museum, Shanghai, Tomás Saraceno's *In Orbit* (2013) at K21, Düsseldorf, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's *Pulse Room* (2006), held in the collection of MoMA, New York, or Tarek Atoui's *The Reverse Collection* (2014/16) at Dahlem Museum, Berlin and Tate Modern, London. In each case, the work is predicated on the participation of the viewer, without whom it would not exist. These works and many others like them show the commitment by institutions to the visitors' experience, which is on a par with the elements or objects in the exhibition. Here, curation is a means of organizing embodiment instead of things. In this way, these can be seen as curated events as both the stage and the meaning are shared and generated equally by the artist and the viewer.

There is a premium placed on the curatorial vision and cohesiveness of museums and galleries; the programme, after all, forms the conceptual bedrock of its 'brand', which is visible to the general public and supposedly engenders a loyal audience following. This has been the case at several institutions that have hired notable figureheads to provide visibility, as well as business acumen. Artistic director Hans Ulrich Obrist offers the former, while chief executive Yana Peel, formerly of Intelligence Squared, affords the latter. The creative output and the business aspects have been clearly divided and given equal weighting through this double appointment. The Serpentine Gallery claims to raise six times the public funding it receives, and their ACE grant cov-

ers a relatively minimal 17% of their annual operating income¹³ and is arguably one of Britain's new models of a successful and highly visible public/private partnership.

Obrist's creative drive, along with his ability to bring others into play, and the consistent social/media exposure have undoubtedly brought him to the top of the profession. At Serpentine, the annual commissions of the pavilions by highly respected architects, which in turn host Obrist's *Marathon Series* that attract and engage large audiences underline the event-driven culture of this contemporary institution, in line with other public galleries based on the Kunsthalle model that do not have their own collections. Moreover, they stress the importance of the curatorial programme both within and beyond the institution. It is clear that Serpentine's success does not rely on its exhibitions alone, but on the ability to expand its brand catchment beyond its walls into the public sphere, and its directors have arguably been remunerated significantly above the national average as an outcome of the proven audience engagement. Enhanced visibility, in other words, pays financial and reputational dividends for the organization and for its figureheads.

Oftentimes the head of an organization is not its creative leader, but rather a policy-maker or political head, while curators today are also freighted with the responsibility of fundraising and keeping an eye on business opportunities, when they are not best equipped to do so. That said, in a precarious economic climate the Development departments' power has been increasing due to their business expansion and fundraising activities. Their importance is more keenly felt when quasi-statutory public subsidies decrease, and the onus falls on

[13] <http://www.serpentinegalleries.org/support/art-culture-funding>

[14] <https://www.artbasel.com/partners>

an institution to garner extra funding through individual philanthropy or corporate sponsorship. Indeed if once the financial subsidy came largely from the state, today's institutional budgets are clearly weighted towards income from the private sector. Accordingly, while those departments and individuals clearly set out to serve their respective institutions, it is not difficult to see that they are instrumental in progressively guiding their very policies as they are holding the purse strings. In a world governed by financial budget-lines, audience engagement expressed through visitor numbers is an essential tool to demonstrate demand. Such customer demand can, in turn, be employed to present opportunities for visibility to potential sponsors. In other words, it is in the interest of individual philanthropists as well as corporate sponsors to display their reputations and brands most prominently to the greatest number of people.

Modern and Contemporary art are closely associated with fashionable culture and wealth and are rendered attractive by the apparent contradiction of popularity and exclusivity. This trend is not lost on the most visible global market places, namely the artfairs, who have actively enlisted high quality sponsors and partners who share their vision. UBS, the 'Global Lead Partner' of Art Basel 'has a long and substantial record of engagement in contemporary art and holds one of the world's most distinguished corporate art collections'¹⁴, while Frieze London boasts Deutsche Bank as its main sponsor. The brands of the fairs and the banks sit comfortably alongside one another, their logos widely distributed and displayed to the public. Moreover, the actual business of an artfair is generally concluded in the first 2-3 days, leaving the remain-

ing time – usually the long weekend – for the general public, who has been prevented from attending up to that point, to join the proceedings and to enjoy the packed halls. This strategy foregrounds the sales aspect for the select few, and turns a series of business transactions into an exhibition visited by vast audiences thus boosting the fair's relevance and prestige.

In point of fact, it is arguable that the desire to engage audiences is a major driver for the *business* of art to be considered a legitimate form of display through its fair circuit which seeks parity with established institutions. For some observers artfairs are mentioned in the same breath as biennales; though each departs from a distinct premise – the commercial versus the curatorial – artfairs are increasing their curatorial pedigree and audience engagement, while biennales are progressively becoming commercial showcases.

It begs the question of how standards are upheld. In an epoch of accountability, benchmarking and competitive metrics the means of ascertaining a standard of quality seems uncertain. Perhaps this is due to the crises experienced by our institutions in the 21st century. In some ways the necessary institutional critique leveled at museums and galleries in the latter part of the past century has fatally damaged their foundations and resulted a lack of belief in a clear mandate or direction. The rigours of art history expressed through connoisseurship and scholarship gave way to curatorial methodologies and experiments, which are lately being challenged by market forces. Moreover, the withdrawal of public funding signals a lack of political trust in such institutions in the face of the vast sums generated by the culture industries. If their authority is

in question, audiences will likely be affirmed in the demand for them to become purveyors of spectacle and entertainment, rather than places of knowledge, learning and participation. Audience engagement ought to be seen as an opportunity to forge a relationship of trust between institutions and visitors where commercial activities have an essential part to play, instead of using it as market research to assert the survival of the fittest.

[15] [Ahttps://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arendt/#CitPubSph](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arendt/#CitPubSph)

[16] <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2013/arts-council-england-announces-funding-cuts-2014/>

The discussion around audience engagement is rooted in questions about complex notions of art's function, participation in democratic activities of which culture is one, the role of public and private institutions, and, not least what constitutes a public. According to philosopher Hannah Arendt, the public realm or *common world*, is a shared place - beyond the individual - ' of human artifacts, institutions and settings...[that offers]...a relatively stable and durable context for our activities.¹⁵ But, she points out, this public realm must contain shared values, rather than being an accumulation of the desires of individuals. One might say therefore, that public institutions such as art museums are keepers of public values, and places in which individuals can collectively intervene through speech and actions, termed *spaces of appearance*. In other words, our institutions uphold collective mores whilst providing a backdrop the social and ethical standards essential to all public understanding.

The topic of the public realm and its functions raises important questions today, since what is fundamentally shared is increasingly difficult to ascertain. Instead, we must make certain assumptions to tackle urgent questions concerning the relationship between today's different art institutions and their public. Framed in this way, should today's audience engagement be driven by spectacular mass culture, or by a shared repository of values? At present, the argument around easily accessed popular content appears to be in the ascendancy - perhaps because it mimics the culture of consumption at large, or simply because its alternative is so hard to fathom. Contemporary art's complexity is no easy sell to an often unconvinced general public, and yet we might take heart from

the fact that audiences continue to flock to exhibitions and events, though as we shall see, such apparent success must be carefully qualified.

Visitor numbers in art museums and galleries have steadily increased over recent decades, and the new Millennium saw another ramping up of figures, demonstrating art's appeal and an appetite to engage with art. This, despite ongoing cuts in the arts in Britain, for instance, where funding is consolidated in the National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) and the Major Partner Museums, at the stated expense of strategic investments 'to support the wider development of arts organisations and audiences across the country'¹⁶, according to the Arts Council England's chief executive Alan Davey. And though its funding to the regions saw a proportional increase from 49% (2008-12) to 52% (2015-18) the latter period also proposed a cutting of 13 NPOs outside the capital. It suggests a policy of rewarding already successful organisations at the expense of broader audience engagement; this story, driven by scale and location, is mirrored on a much larger international stage. While major world capitals and other centres are seeing a general increase in uptake, the same is much harder to sustain for the regions, who have - in many cases - witnessed a degree of decline. Factored into this discussion is the question of whether digital culture presents a hindrance to attendance, or if it can be engaged as a significant support. Moreover, as the immersive and virtual dimensions expand, the term of engagement may be measured rather differently in the future. The waning of the shared public context described by Arendt in the second half of the 20th century has today retreated to the point where it is dominated by

personalized choices, where the world seemingly orbits around the individual.

*The visitors' understanding of their museum...experience is invariably self-referential and provides coherence and meaning to the experience.*¹⁷

Art museums are progressively becoming popular leisure destinations driven by visitor experience. These experiences termed 'affordances' by John H.Falk 'are then matched up with the public's identity related needs and desires...creating a positive, dialogic feedback loop.' The argument centres on personal interest and agency while 'nationality, religion, gender or political affiliation did not seem to be the primary motivations behind most people's visits to art museums'¹⁸

The degree to which museums provide the following needs today appears an essential key to the understanding of their motivations: exploration, facilitation, experience seeking, professional and hobby support, and leisure-time rejuvenation.

Current ideas of individual, relational and collective identities, argues Bernd Simon, are both cognitive and interactional¹⁹ - they are constantly negotiated through new experiences and through social interaction. Art exhibitions, in and beyond institutions as well as online, support and augment the shifting self-perceptions of the audience, underscoring the quality of experience where meaningful social exchange takes place.

Attendance figures for exhibitions remain a primary indicator of audience engagement, and though these are not synonymous with quality, they certainly indicate the popularity of particular institutions, displays and artists. In a

digital age these equations are further complicated by online hits that largely outstrip actual visits. But in an effort to broaden their appeal, as well as to acknowledge the growing remit of visual art, institutions have expanded their activities well beyond exhibitions and collections to include public programmes, new commissions of works, symposia, performances, talks, publishing, outreach activities and learning programmes - to say nothing of the vast expansion of business interests including merchandising or food consumption. In parallel, their development departments have grown, redrawing budgets, establishing partnerships and seeking ever-new opportunities to raise income. Given such an expanded field of engagement ambitions, it is unsurprising that there is an actual price to pay, along with a perceived shift in power relations, from those that produce 'content' - the various curatorial departments - to those that manage the purse-strings. Of course this shift is demonstrated by the selection of exhibitions that reflect the pressure to generate growth in attendance figures.

According to the Art Newspaper's annual survey, visitor numbers in 2016 for art museum exhibitions remained strong. Predictably Impressionists and Modern masters - namely Renoir at National Art Centre, Tokyo (667,897), Frida Kahlo at Instituto Tomie Ohtake São Paulo (592,894), and Picasso at Metropolitan Museum of Art (851,385) - scored highly in the attendance ratings, while Australian artist Patricia Piccinini at Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, Brasilia (329,446) and in Rio de Janeiro (444,425) demonstrated strong attendance in a Latin American setting whilst showing evidence of an appetite for Contemporary art.

The Museum of Art São

[17] https://slks.dk/fileadmin/user_upload/dokumenter/KS/institutioner/museer/Indsat-somraader/Brugerundersoegelse/Artikler/John_Falk_Understanding_museum_visitors_motivations_and_learning.pdf

[18] https://slks.dk/fileadmin/user_upload/dokumenter/KS/institutioner/museer/Indsat-somraader/Brugerundersoegelse/Artikler/John_Falk_Understanding_museum_visitors_motivations_and_learning.pdf

[19] Simon, B.: Identity in modern society: A social psychological perspective, 2004, Oxford, UK: Blackwell, op.cit.

[20] <https://www.aaaa.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy-pdfs/DM9DDB-LosersFree-Pass-Silver.pdf>

[21] <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/projects/the-floating-piers?view=info>

[22] <http://olafureliasson.net/versailles/>

[23] According to the Art Newspaper the 'Big Ticket' category covers events that cannot be properly compared to regular museums exhibitions. These include shows where the ticket covers entry to other attractions, such as the palace and gardens of Versailles; displays staged in a museum's main lobby, such as Tate Modern's Turbine Hall; as well as biennials and festivals.

[24] <http://presse.chateauversailles.fr/exhibitions/exhibitions-at-the-palace/olafur-eliasson-at-the-palace-of-versailles-in-2016/>

Paulo (MASP) rehung its collections in late 2015 under the title *Acervo em Transformação (Collection in Transition)* reinstating Lina Bo Bardi's celebrated *cavaletes de cristal (crystal easels)* designed in 1968. The resulting display presented visitors with a maze of 'floating' works inviting them to construct their own route through art history. Under the stewardship of Adriano Pedrosa, MASP has become one of the most audience-inclusive institutions in Latin America, whilst maintaining strong attendance. A marketing campaign devised by MASP during the FIFA world cup drew football fans from participating countries, as they were knocked out of the competition, to the museum with free admission - the so-called *Loser's Pass*. The campaign, which was awarded a *Promo Silver Lion* at the Cannes Festival in 2015, raised over 2 million USD and increased overall visitor figures by 15 percent.²⁰ It demonstrates that when opportunities are matched by a savvy strategy, museums can benefit substantially.

In the same survey the highest visitor figures in 2016 were achieved by a work not associated with an actual art institution or museum, namely Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Floating Piers* on Lake Iseo, Italy. The installation, using 3 kilometres of fabric to connect an island to the shore, allowed the audience to walk on water. It took place over only 16 days and was seen by a staggering 1.2 million viewers. Christo stated:

*Like all our projects, The Floating Piers was absolutely free and open to the public. There were no tickets, no openings, no reservations and no owners. The Floating Piers were an extension of the street and belonged to everyone.*²¹

Accordingly, Christo and Jeanne-Claude's work is not associated with

an actual art institution or museum, nor is it located in a metropolitan centre. It is free, as the artist offsets the cost through sales of the work's documentation. It proves the point that a regional event, provided it does not attempt to replicate existing provision in the centre, can compete by offering an innovative alternative strategy of audience engagement.

It also marks a more general trend in exhibitions that set out to include audiences through immersive, live, and participatory works. This represents an important addition to the obvious popularity of exhibitions by Modern masters held at art museums, and underlines the durability of temporary and ephemeral displays characterised by *embodiment*. The exhibition *Installations: On a large Scale* at Musée National des Beaux-Arts, Québec inaugurated their new extension designed by celebrated architects OMA and drew 168,439 visitors in 2016. Installation art is seen as an attractive draw to audiences everywhere due to its spectacular qualities, but also because of its ability to *engage* the visitor by making him/her central to the experience. Artist Olafur Eliasson 'invites visitors to take control of the authorship of their experience instead of simply consuming and being dazzled by the grandeur. It asks them to exercise their senses...²² His commissioned intervention *Versailles* at the eponymous Château - curated by Alfred Pacquement - drew 2,857,601 visitors between June and October 2016 on a 'Big Ticket'²³; he considers '*art to be a co-producer of reality, of our sense of now*²⁴, proposing that we operate in a number of mutable realities, in preference to a single fixed one. In this way, art's remit in the 21st Century is not simply an escape into fantasy, but the acknowledgement

of multiple, simultaneous layers of experience.

This effort to change the public's perception of an institution by can also be witnessed in the Whitney Museum of American Art's *Open Plan*, an experimental five-part exhibition in the Museum's Renzo Piano-designed new home. The show occupied the fifth floor as an open gallery, the largest column-free museum exhibition space in New York, with striking city views to the east and west towards the Hudson River. Five artists, performers, musicians and filmmakers were invited to present interventions in response to the space. These lasted from a few days to just over two weeks and were witnessed by 240,000 visitors. The exhibition series was clearly devised to address the architectural qualities of the building, whilst providing an immersive visitor experience without determining visitor flow. Indeed, the Whitney has notched up five of the ten most-visited exhibitions in New York, challenging the established duopoly of MoMA and the Met. Further, it shows that due to the breadth of available programmes and exhibitions, institutions actively compete with one another to attract the attention of audiences. As demonstrated by the visitor figures discussed here, museums and galleries submit to a ranking measured in footfall, a blunt yet compelling methodology as far as public funders, private donors, advertisers and major corporate sponsors are concerned.

Meanwhile, during the extensive refurbishment of London's Southbank, the Hayward Gallery hosted a major pop-up exhibition, co-produced with the Vinyl Factory at the Store, a Brutalist former office building. *The Infinite Mix* (2016) featured commissioned installations by leading artists working between

image and sound, also releasing a number of Vinyl records of the works. According to critic Ben Luke *The Infinite Mix* 'is a contender for the show of the year'.²⁵ Extremely popular with audiences, the exhibition supported the brand of the temporarily homeless Hayward Gallery by aligning it with an exhibition and a fashionable, emerging organisation focused on a younger trend-conscious audience to shift perceptions before its reopening in 2018.

The most well-attended paid New York exhibition per day (6,777 visitors) was *Artist's Choice: Jérôme Bel/MoMA Dance Company*, the first choreographer to engage specifically with the organisation, Bel shifted his focus from the artworks in the collection to MoMA's staff, and their stewardship of the collection. Further, the artist examined the relationship that Museum employees had to particular artworks, to the institution in general, and even to dance. Held over a few days only, the exhibition squarely addressed the question of engagement through the number of visitors, whilst also underlining the importance of professional museum and gallery staff as a key segment of the audience. To put it differently, artists, art students, and all those working in the visual arts sector are not only producers and carers, but also make up a significant and vocal audience element.

An example of the impact a highly popular exhibition can have in transforming an institution's outlook was given by Yayoi Kusama's major display at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C. in 2017 which garnered 475,000 visitors, the most in the institution's history. Director Melissa Chiu asserts:

I can't tell you how transformative the Kusama show has been for this

[25] <https://www.standard.co.uk/goingout/arts/the-infinite-mix-review-this-incendiary-mix-of-sound-and-vision-is-a-contender-for-show-of-the-year-a3337576.html>

[26] <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/yayoi-kusama-hirshhorn-museum-959951>

[27] <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/thanks-to-kusama-the-hirshhorn-welcomes-its-one-millionth-visitor-this-year-1133168>

[28] <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/yayoi-kusama-infinity-mirrors-broad-1106675>

[29] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-37907055>

[30] <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/tan-2016-museum-report-911219>

*museum...both by building our reputation as a national voice for contemporary art, and the infrastructure piece—it allowed us to build up things we hadn't needed to before, but always wanted to do.*²⁶

Membership increased from around 150 to 10,000 virtually overnight, driven by demand for tickets; membership is a positive form of audience engagement as it denotes a longer-term commitment of an individual's attention to the institution. The exhibition was a 'tipping point' for audience figures, a combination of 'social media [that] has really allowed for the exponential sharing of that show, which has had a big impact', along with the contracting of 120 new visitor staff and hospitality facilities.²⁷ The Hirshhorn's example demonstrates how the massive success of a single exhibition can revitalise an institution's finances, brush up its image and support significant other parts of the ensuing programme.

At the Broad in Los Angeles, the first survey of Kusama sold out 90,000 tickets in a matter of hours, where viewers were restricted to only 30 seconds in each of the kaleidoscopic *Infinity Mirror Rooms*, in order to accommodate crowds.²⁸ The support of a dedicated worldwide audience ensures the popularity of the artist's every show. Audience engagement here changes from the more established exhibition attendance and is typified by the membership of a wide 'fan-base', similar to that of a film or pop star. As a result, art institutions can align themselves with the coveted 'brand' of such highly recognisable artists. Fans or supporters are good consumers of their icon's outputs as they are notoriously devoted. The popularity of exhibitions at the V&A Museum by the iconic, late fashion designer Alexander

McQueen entitled *Savage Beauty* in 2015, or the display of items from the archive of David Bowie in 2013, offer further credence to the argument. The latter exhibition, augmented with material from the V&A and other organisations, has toured to several destinations worldwide and attracted 1.5 million visitors.²⁹ Pop culture, regardless of its guise sells, perhaps because its meaning is not esoteric and its messages are meant to be shared. Its images are the subject of millions of 'tweets' and 'likes' since accessibility and ubiquity are hard-wired into the DNA.

At the same time, private museum attendance has risen; for example Mexican telecommunications billionaire Carlos Slim's Museo Soumaya in Mexico City topped the world's private museums, attracting 2.2 million visitors. Bernard Arnault's Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris attracted 1.2 million visitors, while Eli and Edythe Broad's Art museum tallied 753,000 visitors.³⁰ There are some important distinctions to be made however, given the chasm in quality between these organisations. Vuitton and the Broads have established themselves as serious players in the museum sector, while Slim has not. Museo Soumaya faces a shopping centre across a busy plaza and its displays function as a quasi extension of the commercial activities. Perhaps this example serves as a reminder that such inflated viewership, comprising casual footfall, is not akin to attendance that has a financial, cultural or emotional investment in their visit - in short, the very qualities that describe audience engagement.

Nevertheless, audience engagement does not stop at the exhibition or event, but penetrates into every area of the organization, beginning with its digital presence

(see chapter 4), taking in the retail experience, and finally the hospitality in the form of bars, restaurants and members' rooms. At the V&A, Carmoady Groarke converted the sky-lit gallery that served as staff offices on the top floor of the Aston Webb building, into a vast new members' room overlooking the new Sackler courtyard. Similarly, Zaha Hadid's new restaurant at the Serpentine transformed an otherwise prosaic former munitions building as the gallery expanded its footprint in Kensington Gardens. The construction of new architectural exhibition spaces has a long tradition in the West, and, more recently, we have seen a new generation of buildings springing up in the Middle East and South-East Asia in particular, as argued in a previous report³¹. In the artworld, well-designed and substantial new buildings certainly generate welcome publicity and attract audiences, but extensions to existing dwellings of established museums and galleries are equally important in the sharp competition for audience loyalty. Indeed, any amenity beyond the actual exhibition provided by a venue can help to support its popular appeal, and it is the inclusion of these ancillary spaces that create opportunities for visitor engagement through retail and relaxation, which can make all the difference between success and failure. Museums and galleries could therefore become environments where retail and culture coexist under the same roof, with a critical degree of spatial separation between commerce and culture. Institutions compete with one another on local, national and international levels, but to imagine that this is only on a strict cultural level would be to miss out on essential commercial opportunities, since today's audiences also double up as customers.

This phenomenon of melding art and commerce is especially patent in countries less indebted to the tradition of modern and contemporary art, namely the Middle East and the Far East. In some ways they are less encumbered by the aesthetic and moral values of the art system, but therefore benefit less from the qualitative benchmarks laid down by respected public bodies. These new institutions in the Lebanon, Indonesia, and China, where public funding for the visual arts does not exist, tend to build on the popular appeal of exhibits, retail opportunities, and property development. The lack of a museological history or mission that might compare with the experience in the West impacts on the quality of audience reception. Here, the state has little involvement, ceding the field of contemporary art to private entrepreneurs whose dedication to public-mindedness is not a major priority.

According to architect Rem Koolhaas of OMA 'what we see in China's plan is a series of "starter-kit" metropoli...that can stabilize population movement for entire regions of the country'³², in an effort to prevent a wholesale migration from the regions to existing centres. In order to do so Chinese developers have been clustering new districts and cities around new museums in the hope that cultural provision proves attractive to buyers and investors. Given that these newly established neo-institutions lack dedicated audiences, the benefit of a tested cultural infrastructure, or significant collections, it is not surprising to see that many of them are not sustainable in the longer term. The promise of visitor attendance may be a convenient tool to sell real estate, but this is not to be confused with audience engagement that relies on deeper and

[31] see Nicolas de Oliveira (ed.), *Privately Funded and Publically Minded: Institutions in Transition*, Alaska, London, 2017.

[32] https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/12/china-future_n_4782170.html

lasting relationship with culture.

A different approach might be seen at The Design Society, a 'cultural hub' designed by Fumihiko Maki in Shenzhen, China, that opened to the public in late 2017. Featuring an innovative collaboration with its 'founding partner' the V&A, the new gallery programme foregrounds collaboration with industry and strong educational partnerships with local communities, schools and other organisations. The partnership benefits from the museum's brand, which is attractive to audiences, whilst its dedicated V&A gallery hosts talks, workshops, events and exhibitions to cement audience engagement and loyalty.

Audience loyalty is notoriously hard to build and sustain but it may be possible to borrow aspects of a popular institution's reputation through franchising. This ready-made 'aura' is currently being explored by established national organisations such as the Pompidou, with planned branches in Brussels and in Shanghai, or the Louvre in Abu Dhabi, all of which generate significant income for the parent organization, as well as spreading their brand into new markets. These new franchise outposts have access – for a fee – to the centrally-held collections which guarantee quality through notable works. Famously, the Louvre Abu Dhabi will display the world's most expensive painting *Salvator Mundi* by Leonardo da Vinci that was bought in late 2017 by that country's department for culture and tourism. The original model underpinning museum culture relied on a strong collection to ensure the ranking of an institution, while the updated blueprint builds upon the most attractive temporary in-house exhibitions to attract visitors. Louvre Abu Dhabi attempts to follow both maxims at once – access to a major collection, and

the presence of a stellar loan item. The combination of the purchase of a piece of world heritage and the newly completed Louvre Abu Dhabi by Pritzker prize winning architect Jean Nouvel is surely an excellent marketing coup likely to enhance the country's art tourism.

A further example of strategically maximizing every aspect of popular appeal through franchising can be found in Fotografiska, a privately-run Swedish organization. It operates under the strapline 'no ordinary museum' and describes itself as an 'international meeting place where everything revolves around photography'. Its Stockholm base is shortly being complemented by major new venues in New York and London. Instead of basing itself on a museum blueprint, it marries the revolving exhibition ethos of a Kunsthalle with a lifestyle entity; the buildings boast popular staple shows by David Bailey, Herb Ritts, Annie Leibowitz, alongside social spaces such as an 'avant-garde restaurant' and 'a buzzing bar scene' and a 'learning academy' related to photography. Its audience figures are astounding for a city such as Stockholm, and it remains to be seen if the expectations leveled at the new ventures in London and New York will stack up. By setting the threshold of engagement very low through populist displays of fashion and design photography and by foregrounding the social and interactive aspects of their venture which chimes well with an Instagram generation, Fotografiska is a museum dedicated to photography which serves up a meagre artistic fare that adds little to the urgent debate on lens-based media. Judging by official visitor figures this 'culture-light' approach is highly successful in attracting audiences but does it truly engage them? Moreover, the use of term

'Museum of Photography' and its location in the 'Whitechapel Building' in London are somewhat misleading to visitors searching for the Whitechapel Gallery further up the road, or the Photographers' Gallery elsewhere, London's oldest photographic institution.

In a market-driven economy, visitor numbers tend to dominate the discussion around the health of institutions. Though audience engagement ought to take in both quantitative and qualitative information, the drive for numbers tends to outweigh the insistence on good practice. And there is indeed a good deal of the latter, especially concerning work undertaken by institutions to engage with young people, a clear sector of necessary growth when taking into account statistics on ageing gallery-goers. Art's creative and financial sustainability is due to several factors, but it stands to reason that it must build on grass-root support from an early age.

Blockbuster exhibitions bring in much needed revenue, and these spectacles vary from contemporary immersive displays to exhibitions of Modern masters, and a continuing interest in famous painters and sculptors from the Renaissance onwards.

Fame and visibility continue to exert their gravitational pull in the selection of exhibitions in the 21st century, and boards of institutions and curators are lobbying major commercial galleries for increasingly expensive exhibitions. Indeed, such is the expense of these public exhibitions that only a handful of these galleries can compete. This race to the top sees leading museums aligned with major galleries who in turn pay for exhibitions by their own stellar artists, leading to an endless procession of luxury commodities. For obvious reasons

such a high-worth and top-branded approach is also attractive to key corporate sponsors who see their values reflected.

It would appear antithetical, but expensive shows – when driven by the triumvirate of highly visible names – museum, gallery, and artist – are more realistic propositions today in a climate of diminishing public funding, a form of support established precisely to buttress programme quality and audience access, regardless of location or primacy. Accordingly, the absence of public funding leads to a greater degree of risk aversion by institutions that find it easier to justify and finance already established names or 'artistic brands'. Furthermore, the power of the market and the commercial galleries is such that only the most bankable individuals will find a route to major solo exhibitions in institutions, potentially leading to a procession of the same types of displays throughout the museums of the world. James Bradburne, the recently appointed director of Milan's Pinacoteca di Brera, goes so far as to say that blockbuster shows function like a 'drug because without them a museum won't be able to survive, but that betrays the very nature of our stewardship'.^{32a}

Once the success of a museum might have been largely due to the scale and quality of its collection. As audience engagement becomes an ever-more central consideration, this factor alone cannot guarantee sustained visitor figures. While it is true that the permanent presence of artworks of the greatest cultural value – da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, Rembrandt's *Nightwatch*, Picasso's *Guernica*, or Klimt's *The Kiss*, to name a few – ensure that the museums that hold them enjoy a level of constant attention, today the major exhibitions have become

[32a] <https://www.ft.com/content/dc3e411c-f20b-11e7-bb7d-c3edfe974e9f#myft:my-news:grid>

the main instruments of persuasion. As we move from the collection to the exhibition, we witness a migration of attention from permanence to temporality, and indeed, from stable cultural values enshrined in the institution to the mutability of the market.

[33] <http://artlead.net/content/journal/our-highlights-from-skulptur-projekte-munster-2/>

[34] <http://www.wn.de/Muenster/2851961-Skulptur-Projekte-Muenster-2017-650.000-Besucher-werden-erwartet>

[35] https://www.lwl.org/westfalen-region-al-download/PDF/111n_Skulptur_Projekte.pdf

When André Malraux wrote his book *Musée Imaginaire – Museum without Walls* in 1967, he pioneered the idea of a vast world collection of artworks old and new, to be made available in a photographic format – effectively presaging the spread of visual information on the internet many decades later. Audiences would be able to engage with works of art regardless of location and budget, since reproductions would make them readily available. Arguably the digital strategies pursued by museums and collections worldwide today can be traced back to Malraux's ever-expanding vision of display. Today, every visual art organization has a digital strategy to display its presence and to communicate with audiences online.

But, in addition, Malraux's ideas in the late 1960s also coincided with a more general breaking down of the ideological and physical boundaries – the *walls* – of the museums initiated by seminal curators such as Pontus Hultén, Willem Sandberg and Lucy Lippard, among others. Their efforts were directed at challenging the way in which institutions collected works and produced exhibitions, while Minimal and Conceptual artists were engaged in producing works that actively sought to expand spatial boundaries. Installation art, performance art and land art were all emerging genres which saw art spill out from its traditional institutions into the everyday. And while these new avant-garde forms were once baffling to non-specialist art audiences, they began to address issues of inclusion for the public at large who might not have attended museums or exhibitions, a perception that continues well into the 21st century.

In parallel, new ways of communicating with audiences came about through curator-

al initiatives that moved from the museums into towns, cities and the countryside. Seminal publically-funded exhibitions such as *Skulptur Projekte Münster* (1977-), initiated by Klaus Bussmann and Kasper König in Germany, *Chambres d'amis* (1986) by Jan Hoet in the Belgian City of Ghent or Mary Jane Jacob's *Places with a Past* (1991), Charleston USA. Initially received with an element of hostility – 'citizens felt messed around'³³ by the exhibitions, but *Skulptur Projekte* went on to become a successful format repeated every ten years. Pierre Huyghe's *After ALife Ahead* was one of the highlights of the 2017 edition and saw the artist transform a closed down ice rink into an eco-system complete with archaeological layers, peacocks, and beehives, while augmented reality shapes could be downloaded via an app. The projected visitor numbers for 2017 - featuring some 35 major projects in the city – were above 650,000 (up from 550,000) and a budget of €7.7 million, an increase of €1.5 million. Co-curator Britta Peters described the event as 'a testing ground for the discussion of questions of artistic and societal concerns'³⁴ – highlighting the close link between art practice and social consciousness. Apart from the cultural impact, the local economy showed a strong increase of visitor spending on transport, hotels and restaurants over the different editions, including a significant growth in the proportion of national and international art tourism.³⁵

Today, art tourism has become an important business – and indeed a measure of the continued audience engagement, turning destinations into major attractions. In point of fact the visual arts have become significant players in the field of global hospitality contributing to local economies through spending

on hotel rooms, transport, restaurants and shops, whilst also heating up property markets. Though it has been demonstrated that the main art museums in capital cities continue to draw in a lion's share of both local and foreign visitors³⁶, less populous towns and more remote locations have equally benefited from this increase.³⁷

The central motif of temporary art in the city may appear as a novel form of audience engagement, but it is not a new departure as such, whereas the shift from a small, specialist art audience in the past to a much broader visitor uptake today does break new ground as far as audience engagement is concerned.

The first *Nuit Blanche*³⁸ took place in 2002 in Paris under the direction of curator Jean Blaise with an initial audience of 500,000 visitors; these hybrid art events lasting only a single Autumn night - neither strictly speaking gallery exhibitions or displays of public works – address a multitude of contentions about art's accessibility denoted by the ubiquity of the *White Cube*³⁹. The current mayor of the city Anne Hidalgo describes the 2017 project thus:

*The night is the territory of all possibilities. Each year in Paris, art freely takes over one of those nights.*⁴⁰

The artistic direction of each edition of *Nuit Blanche* is entrusted to a different curator or artworld personality, giving a different vision and direction to the different iterations in the series, whilst boasting a roster of some 3,000 artists to-date⁴¹. Other cities have also taken up the model including Belo Horizonte, Lima, Melbourne, Singapore, and Kyoto, to name a few.

Nuit Blanche Toronto, Canada, run since 2006, boasts regular

viewer numbers of over 1 million per event, according to an Ipsos Reid survey, with non-local figures repeatedly reaching 200,000, while generating a regular economic impact for the city of over \$40 million.⁴² The staggering audience numbers for such a brief period allied to their significant commercial impact demonstrate a demand for large-scale events with strong 'live' and 'immersive' qualities exemplified by installations, projections, sound performances and the like.

Following in the footsteps was the first edition of *Artnight* – a free contemporary arts festival taking place on one night of the year in mid-summer - that opened in London in July 2016 with a series of commissioned, site-specific works across the city curated by the ICA and Kathy Noble. The following year, the main institutional partner was Whitechapel Gallery and the now augmented number of exhibitions were relocated to the City of London and the East End. Its visitor figures, up from the inaugural edition the previous year, reached 75,000, divided between the curated programme and the associate events, while the online audience added an impressive 225,000 via a live stream.⁴³

While *Nuit Blanche* is strongly associated with the city, and thus the public purse, *Art Night* distinguishes itself as it is based on a privately funded model; its income is derived almost in its entirety from sponsors and private donors.

Exploring a somewhat more specialist audience sector, *Performa*, a live art biennale launched in New York in 2005, orchestrated by Rose Lee Goldberg has seen significant growth since its inception. Its expenses have risen from \$675,000 at the start, to \$2.5 million for its most recent edition, a substantial sum for a large-

[36] see Chapter 1 in this report for further details.

[37] See *Privately funded and Publically minded Institutions in Transition Report*, N.de Oliveira (ed), Alaska Press, 2017.

[38] *Nuit Blanche* is an French idiomatic expression meaning staying 'up-all-night'.

[39] The term is largely used to denote the gallery display system and is associated with Brian O'Doherty's seminal book *Inside the White Cube: the Ideology of the Gallery Space*.

[40] Anne Hidalgo, quoted in <https://www.paris.fr/nuitblanche15ans>

[41] <https://www.paris.fr/nuitblanche15ans>

[42] <https://nbto.com/about/event-history.html>

[43] Art Night, Evaluation Report, Data Collection and Analysis by Paper Planes Agency, 2017.

[44] <http://old.theartnewspaper.com/news/news/performa-s-ten-year-balancing-act/>

[45] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, Routledge, London, 2008, op.cit.

[46] Volunteer statements, Rachel Cooke 'We look at the City with new Eyes', *The Guardian*, Culture Magazine, 19 November 2017.

[47] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/663128/The_Mendoza_Review_an_independent_review_of_museums_in_England.pdf

ly free event; notwithstanding, it barely draws public or city funding which registers at only 2% of the total, while individuals make up 28%, foundations 21%, fundraising, touring, and commissions 39%, and foreign agencies add 10% of the overall income.⁴⁴ A significant number of new commissions are sponsored by the artists' galleries, a trend becoming more common for museum exhibitions and events that would be unfeasible without the support of representing commercial entities. *Performa* demonstrates a public interest in the notion of the *live* event, a distinction originating in the 1930s with the advent of recording technologies. It raises the question of why live events continue to endure and grow in popular appeal despite their existence in a highly mediatized culture.⁴⁵

The new Millennium saw an expansion of engagement in the visual arts beyond the confines of the traditional institutions through Biennales, Triennales, and annual Culture City initiatives. In 2017 Hull became UK City of Culture, an event that has transformed the visibility, and the immediate economic outlook of the city. The rather prosaic perceptions of change can mask a pronounced upturn in economic fortunes: it has brought more money into the city...and that has changed it. People used to get off the ferry [from Rotterdam] and go straight to York. Now they'll stop here for the night, and have a look around'⁴⁶ A lasting legacy is not certain yet, but a change in the outlook of the population and an altered apprehension of the place by visitors are useful initial steps.

The argument for cultural tourism is also made by Neil Mendoza in his report which argues that 'museums also drive tourism. Museums are the most popular destinations for domestic holidaymak-

ers within Great Britain and 48% of international holidaymakers visit a museum.' He points to a study undertaken by Turner Contemporary and Canterbury Christ Church University which details Social Return on Investment made – that is, how much social value is delivered for the public investment – and It found that '48% of visitors came to Margate especially to visit the gallery, equating to 960,000 visits to the town and Net Additional visitor-related expenditure of £7.8m supporting 101 full-time equivalent jobs across Kent.'⁴⁷

It remains an important consideration for regionally-based organisations to attract wider audiences from the country and foreign tourists. To do so they must, however, tailor their offer, since they will not be able to present the same exhibitions as major museums in capital cities due to cost, the interest of sponsors, and even insurance cover. Accordingly, in order to thrive, regional organisations might consider specialisation in activities that make them stand out, rather than attempting to compete on an unequal playing field with the centre.

Today there are a growing number of remotely located organisations that trade on their uniqueness, and that make a virtue out of their location. Therefore, if the organisation and its event are well presented and networked, location does not necessarily constitute a bar to attendance. Salient examples of such private enterprise include Stiftung Insel Hombroich in Neuss, Germany, a series of buildings set in the bucolic landscape and holding the private collection of Karl-Heirich Müller, and Inhotim, a complex of buildings and pavilions based in Minas Gerais, Brazil that display the collection of Bernardo Paz which also includes botanical gardens and hotels, among other attractions.

The initiative to draw audiences away from major metropolitan centres towards the countryside has also found favour in Britain. Following the establishment of Hauser & Wirth's centre in Somerset, it has been joined by other organisations moving (part of) their activities to the same location, such as the David Roberts Art Foundation (DRAF), previously based in London. DRAF's programme of activities has been directed at specialist art audiences and young people, featuring a commitment to commissioning performance, hosting residencies and discursive exhibitions. Having reached 100,000 visitors in ten years of their existence, the foundation now plans to divide its time between collaborative projects in the capital and its sculpture garden to be built in Charlton Musgrove, Somerset. Collection curator Olivia Leahy argues for audience engagement to be driven by quality, rather than by quantity, and proposing an approach typified by 'sincerity'.

These privately funded organisations adopt a publically-minded stance usually associated with the public sector, though their stable income makes them less vulnerable to the fortunes of public funding. Sustainable or increasing audience figures, supported by qualitative engagement evidence are essential in justifying funding from the public purse in an ever-more competitive environment.

Certain innovative organisations have consistently led the enquiry about art's purpose and its reception by audiences. When organisations and artists share content by presenting audiences with the means and tools to contest the work's interpretation the quality of engagement is raised. An emancipated spectator is more demanding, but also infinitely more

faithful to art's cause. The creative sector is therefore not solely cast as a producer, but increasingly as a partisan audience, further eroding the line between who provides and who receives. While smaller organisations, often located in the not-for-profit sector, may nurture close ties to their audiences, the numbers of their core participants are often statistically quite small; the quality of intimate engagement here is closely linked with the scale of the institutions and their audiences. In the absence of either private benefactors or the desire to diversify into more commercial activities, they might argue that the quality of their engaged programming and close work with the community makes them rely strongly on public subsidy.

This perspective, favoured by organisations such as Grizedale arts, the Wysing Art Centre, and the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA), located in the Lake District, Cambridgeshire, and North Yorkshire respectively. It promotes an approach to art that fosters close ties with its audiences, producers and supporters, rather than relying outright visitor numbers. Grizedale seeks to overturn the 'romantic and individualist frameworks that have dominated thinking of the last 200 years of art history'.⁴⁸ By stressing the importance of 'use' in art the organisation sees itself as a 'model for a new kind of art institution'⁴⁹ in which audience engagement is the productive cornerstone. Alistair Hudson, former curator at Grizedale and outgoing director of MIMA, outlines the mission 'to reconnect art with its social function and promote art as a tool for changing the world around us. With this vision, we see ourselves as a "useful" museum. We wish to have an influence on society, taking a leading role in addressing current issues within politics,

[48] <https://www.grizedale.org/about/>

[49] <https://www.grizedale.org/about/>

[50] <http://www.visitmima.com/?home=true>

[51] <http://www.gazettelive.co.uk/news/moves-boost-visitor-numbers-mima-4279610>

[52] <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/galleries-cost-up-to-16344-a-visitor-2360505.html>

[53] <http://emphosproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/MIMA-revised-low.pdf>

[54] <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/do-museums-need-to-be-more-socially-engaged/>

[55] <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/do-museums-need-to-be-more-socially-engaged/>

economics and culture'⁵⁰. Visitor uptake of just above 100,000 in the year 2012/13 was deemed disappointing and below target by Kate Brindley, then director,⁵¹ especially when compared to the 158,000 visits in 2007/8 against a doubling of its Arts Council funding to £533,000 by 2015.⁵² Against a backdrop of lowered audience figures Hudson stresses the nature of audience engagement by designating 'art as a tool for social change'⁵³; rather than being designated as a museum or gallery he posits that 'an institute has for me a deeper resonance, which encompasses, predates, and goes beyond these functions, as a place of education and an instigator of production that operates within the communities it serves.'⁵⁴

In a similar vein, in the US, for the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MIA), 'the question is not whether we should be socially engaged in our work – a commitment to community has long been at the core of our mission – but how to carry forward that commitment, when the community and its expectations are rapidly changing.'⁵⁵

What is becoming abundantly clear, however, is that audience engagement is a major driver in causing institutions to change; to some, this means readjusting their communication with real and potential visitors through social media and websites, while for others it represents a call to actively diversify their programmes. Equally, as we have seen, new organisations that occupy actual time and architectural space in a different manner to traditional collecting institutions continue to thrive, and it is perhaps the often temporary nature and relative inaccessibility that plays well with today's audiences.

Accordingly, we find that entirely commercial organisations such as artfairs – in particular the

larger brands such as Art Basel/Miami/Hong Kong, or Frieze have developed into significant purveyors of exhibitions and content, rather than addressing only the business end. Equally, the major galleries with branches across the world pride themselves on making museum-grade shows and provide other public amenities such as hospitality areas, bookshops and reading rooms that are designed to both attract and engage audiences, in sharp contrast to their visitor outreach in the past. Inclusiveness is not only good PR but helps to generate demand and enthusiasm in the general viewing public, which in turn engenders an appetite for purchasing on the part of the specialist collectors. These developments are also reflected in the case of artfairs that, in line with their institutional counterparts, museums and biennales, also employ curators to develop ambitious programmes. Equally their staff now boasts audience engagement and learning specialists that further blur the distinctions between the fairs and their non-commercial opposites.

The ambition of museum-grade exhibitions and interventions at the major fairs have become commonplace sights witnessed by large audiences. Lars Jan's *Slow-Moving Luminaries* (2017) a commission for Art Basel Miami sponsored by Audemars Piguet presented a two-storey pavilion which merged digital projected footage with views of the Miami beachfront and its architecture beyond. The previous year at Art Basel Unlimited Hans Op de Beeck's vast installation *The Collector's House* depicted a cavernous drawing room – complete with a library and an indoor pond – to display the collection of a fictional individual. In the same edition, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's Zoom Pavilion was an interactive

installation using face-recognition algorithms to detect the presence of visitors and replay the footage on vast projection walls.

The choice of these works is not accidental; they are made by celebrated artists, practically a given in a commercial environment, but more to the point, their interactive content chimes with audiences, and this is especially so since they all fictionalise the setting of the fair, placing the audience at the centre of an engaging narrative. Artfairs may sell works to the few, but are progressively selling dreams to the many.

In 2016 Art Basel, Miami and Hong Kong editions totalled nearly a quarter of a million visitors over their brief 5-day duration, while Frieze London alone regularly attracts over 100,000 visitors over the same period, making the artfairs major players in the exhibition stakes. When we consider that their main purpose is to sell art to an expanding but nevertheless rather small coterie of private collectors and public institutions, the presence of such large audiences suggests there is a wider desire to engage by the public. This interest has been assiduously kindled by the fairs by laying on special exhibitions, curated content, a plethora of public talks, as well as expanding their outdoor activities. Art Basel's website comments:

*Art Basel Cities expands Art Basel's engagement in the artworld from staging art fairs to working with cities to develop cultural events with international resonance. Art Basel Cities engages with selected partner cities to develop vibrant and intellectually rigorous bespoke programs and offers the artworld new opportunities to engage with cultural scenes across the world.*⁵⁶

Art Basel's ambition echoes Hans Ulrich Obrist and Hou Hanru's seminal and monumental exhibition *Cities on the Move* (1997-2000) conceived at the end of the 20th century, which toured Europe and the USA. Its central concern, derived from the ideas of celebrated architect Rem Koolhaas, focused on the diverse understanding of cities in the East and West, and became one of the first exhibitions 'to grapple with the impact of globalisation and hyper-urbanisation.'⁵⁷ The concept evolved subtly with each iteration but the artworks and objects changed entirely, as did the means of production, which were radically adapted to the given situation in each city. In many ways Obrist's arguments for this exhibition echo Art Basel's statement almost 20 years later. In an interview he argues for the confluence of the city and the fair:

*I think the artfair is very much a form of urbanism. I think something really happens to the cities when such a fair happens. The city becomes an exhibition; it's amazing.*⁵⁸

Perhaps this expanded perception of an urban destination today brings together architecture, economic development, art business, social interaction and audience engagement in combinations hitherto unexplored. In the drive to expand the market and the visibility of art, artfairs are employing audience engagement as an essential driver of their ambition to be recognised as global cultural producers.

[56] <https://www.artbasel.com>

[57] <http://www.formerwest.org/ResearchLibrary/Citiesonthemove>

[58] <http://observer.com/2013/05/marathon-man-on-the-run-with-hans-ulrich-obrist-the-worlds-greatest-curator/>

[59] Michael Bhaskar, *Curation: The Power of Selection in a World of Excess*, Piatkus, London, 2016, op.cit.

[60] "A new DOR opens: How the J. Paul Getty Museum is reimagining digital collection information management." *MW2015: Museums and the Web 2015*. Published February 15, 2015. Consulted December 12, 2017. <http://mw2015.museumsandtheweb.com/paper/a-new-dor-opens-how-the-j-paul-getty-museum-is-reimagining-digital-collection-information-management/>

[61] <http://mw2015.museumsandtheweb.com/paper/a-new-dor-opens-how-the-j-paul-getty-museum-is-reimagining-digital-collection-information-management/>

[62] http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/07/arts/design/the-metropolitan-museums-new-web-site.html?_r=2

[63] http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/07/arts/design/the-metropolitan-museums-new-web-site.html?_r=2

[64] <https://www.moma.org/slideshows/56/13>

Michael Bhaskar argues that the challenge for the 21st Century lies with the management of information since we are overwhelmed with stimulus, largely driven by the internet and other media⁵⁹. He advocates the employment of 'curation' as a tool of selecting, refining and distilling content to ensure a quality of experience for the user, whilst maintaining the provision of 'care' (*curare*, the original museological interpretation of the term) for cultural producers. Presently this marks a distinction from the past and has become a concern for most art institutions who seek to maintain their existing audiences and to attract new visitors. This requirement for online audience engagement seeks to render access to exhibition programmes easier, whilst adding new artistic digital content and devising opportunities for commercial activities through advertising and sales. In other words the digital challenge to the collection and programming also offers new funding opportunities in the longer run. But in order to be able to take advantage of this expansion of audiences a clear digital strategy for every aspect of an organisation must be devised.

With this in mind, the J. Paul Getty Museum established the *Digital Object Repository (DOR)*⁶⁰, a project devised to research, design and develop an entirely new open-source collection information infrastructure for managing, authoring, and delivering collection information and related data to its downstream applications. Daniel Sissman, Senior Software engineer wrote: 'We realized that we needed a system that could support our growing digital ambitions and potentially anticipate many future needs as well.'⁶¹ The aim was to rationalise staff input, offer a platform accessible to multiple platforms and to improve customer access.

The concern with what aspects of the content of an institution – collections, programmes, exhibitions, lectures should be remotely available, and to whom, continues to raise questions around communication strategy and transparency. Here, a balance needs to be struck between the imperative for online marketing and the desire to attract actual visitors to physical events held on site.

Some observers asked if museums had finally met their match in the Web. 'Why look at things behind glass, when you can zoom in on them, examine them and turn them around in virtual space?'⁶² Would the image replace the object, and would the Web supersede the museum?

Edward Rothstein argues that MoMA's strategy conveys 'a sense of excitement and variety; you move the cursor, and the screen comes alive. The mosaic of images is self-consciously eclectic; figures in photographs are blurred in movement. The site provides an atmospheric allusion to the museum's dynamic ambitions.'⁶³ The museum extended the immersive quality of its website to other contact points by commissioning artist James Ferraro to compose *Saint Prius* (2014) as hold music for their phone system, originally presented as part of the new compositions for his solo exhibition. For the artist hotel lounge playlists, elevator music, and ringtones 'have become psychological and architectural components of the space of commerce and daily life.'⁶⁴

Meanwhile, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art such calculated immersion is absent, their web-presence taking care not to disturb the hierarchy of original and representation. 'The images do not replace the objects; they are pointers to them. The site ultimately de-

fers to the place by creating a close association with it.⁶⁵ As Museums continue the discussion around the challenges of virtual representation, we might consider the even more delicate ethical questions posed by the virtual *repatriation* of objects that have been prised from their original sites or owners. Here, the 'virtual surrogate' is not merely an expression of financial or cultural value, but a locus of socio-political contestation.⁶⁶

While the rapid expansion of digital tools and content has augmented the remit and collections of institutions, it is equally being heralded as a means of engaging audiences through new marketing tools. With this in mind, organisations are employing new staff to manage their online communication, let alone any new digital content. Social media, with its constant demand for feeds and content, has become a key discussion and promotion tool that far exceeds the reach of traditional press coverage. While positive reviews of an exhibition in daily papers or the dedicated art press by critics represent an important nod of professional esteem, motivating specialist audiences, it does not appeal to the wider public. It is therefore essential that today's blogs, vlogs, tweets and instagram postings shift the emphasis of judgment from the professional expert to the audience at large, and it is the online traffic generated by the commentators of an event that largely dictates its success at the ticket office.

It follows that current investment in digital strategies by arts organisations to streamline operations and to maintain and reach new audiences has become a requirement for receiving funding by Arts Council England (ACE) in the first place. Its policy states:

*A strong digital policy and plan can help you to deliver better value from our public investment in arts and culture... can help improve how your organisation works and your organisation's resilience and sustainability.*⁶⁷

A series of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely) targets should be linked to the 'overall business aims'. ACE is especially keen to encourage its funded organisations to engage audiences digitally, perhaps because therein lie hitherto untapped opportunities and numbers by examining digital habits of users, as well as their 'profile information...[concerning] characteristics such as age, gender, location and socio-economic status'.⁶⁸

ACE provides links to a number of organisations that undertake market research in the area of audience development, and who develop tools and studies on its behalf. Since attendance has become indexically linked to the receipt of public funding, it is unsurprising that ACE is making significant efforts to underline the importance of audiences to its NPOs and new applicants. However, the tools borrowed from market research and employed by its affiliates may not always capture audience demographics accurately. For instance *Audience Spectrum*, the segmentation tool for market research developed for ACE by the *Audience Agency* seeks to 'develop products and communications that anticipate their [audiences'] needs'.⁶⁹ The subdivision of the audience into ten new segments with titles such as 'Metroculturals', 'Dormitory Dependables', 'Facebook Families', 'Up our Street' or 'Heydays', comes across at best as a little naïve, at worst somewhat insulting. Of course this is hardly the intention

[65] http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/07/arts/design/the-metropolitan-museums-new-web-site.html?_r=2

[66] <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/comment/01042016-digital>

[67] http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Digital_Policy_Plan_guidelines.pdf

[68] http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Digital_Policy_Plan_guidelines.pdf

[69] <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/participating-and-attending/culture-based-segmentation>

[70] Richard Rumelt, *Good Strategy Bad Strategy: The Difference and why it Matters*, Profile Books, 2012, op.cit.

[71] <https://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2014/oct/06/audience-engagement-arts-heritage-traps>

[72] [http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Funding%20Arts%20and%20Culture%20in%20a%20time%20of%20Austerity%20\(Adrian%20Harvey\).pdf](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Funding%20Arts%20and%20Culture%20in%20a%20time%20of%20Austerity%20(Adrian%20Harvey).pdf)

[73] *Strategy 3.0: What is Digital Strategy Now Forum, Museums and the Web*, Conference, Cleveland, 2017, hosted by Rob Stein (American Alliance of Museums)

but it goes to show that the tools employed to capture new demographics may themselves turn out to be rather blunt instruments.

Of course all art institutions look for sustainability and a degree of growth in its attendance, but the difficulty lies in the trade-off between the core values and the potential gains. James McQuaid, visitor experience consultant and Clore Fellow, adds that organisations must take care not to conflate transactions with lasting audience engagement:

When an organisation is looking for growth in existing or new audiences, it often dances around the elephant in the room. It might look at brand, marketing, tone of voice; it might devise a campaign or set up a project designed to appeal to new audiences. The elephant in the room in this case is the actual culture and core activity of an organisation: how does it speak for you and to the audiences? How integrated and congruent does it feel? Will your audiences see themselves in your people and your messages?'

The integrity of the core values and their strategic application and communication is essential, a sentiment echoed by strategy expert Richard Rumelt who proposes that good strategy relies on a plan of action designed upon a unique set of attributes or conditions which he calls kernels. It is essential that there be coordination across all areas, instead of multiple or contradictory actions.⁷⁰ One might apply these metrics to the need to maintain the kernel of the organisation and to communicate accordingly. After all, art institutions have a remit to minister to their particular audiences. *By focusing inwards and talking to our audiences as consumers, we might end up on the road to no-*

*where – or at best, banality. Analysing how people behave at our sites is essential, but should not be considered without knowing what our audiences and non-audiences are up to beyond our thresholds.*⁷¹

The gathering of knowledge beyond visitors' digital behaviour might seem excessive, but it represents the desire to make culture an everyday experience, rather than something extraordinary, in the same way that the use of digital media has become normalised. It represents a useful toolkit to communicate, rather than the solution to content-based problems.

These recent demands of course add significant costs to the already straightened budgets of museums, and it appears most likely that regional, medium sized, and small organisations will struggle the most in implementing these recent demands, as they have no spare capacity. Adrian Harvey contends that 'smaller galleries and museums are less likely to have been able to raise additional donations and commercial revenues than the major institutions - it is these smaller organisations that are at the sharp end of the cuts.'⁷² Indeed it is the very organisations that are struggling for numbers who might benefit by implementing new digital strategies, and who are at times too cash poor to implement them in the first place.

Nevertheless, while online presence continues to expand, institutions do not always find the transition easy. At an American digital forum for Museums⁷³ co-host Rob Stein argued:

So right now, institutional strategies necessarily need to have a separate section for digital. We still need to demonstrate the value of digital to our organizations (management, curators, marketing, and yes, even

education). In fact, the injection of digital into the language of strategy is subversive because the word “strategy” is traditional museum language, whereas digital is not the traditional way of doing museum work. The main challenge that our group identified was that in order to achieve digital literacy across the organization, cultural change is required, and that culture is dictated by museum leadership.⁷⁴

Referring to Managers in the arts in the American contexts Chad Weindard states: “Not understanding digital is like saying you don’t understand budgeting. It’s not an option anymore.”⁷⁵

Managers may indeed reset their targets with integrated digital strategies in mind; however, whilst there may be a need to enhance an institution’s visibility through branding, to put out better messages to potential and real audiences, they need to be aware that such actions often reflect the needs of institutions, rather than those of audiences. What is desirable for an institution - expediting, rationalizing, or economizing – may not automatically chime with the priorities of audiences. ‘We must measure success by combining both sets of needs’⁷⁶, argues Falk.

Ideas of participation are important in order to respect the desires of audiences, since in the present museums are no longer places of instruction or a dominant education but of learning and sharing.

Participation in a dialogue requires us to engage in choices, to make distinctions and hierarchies – if we valued everything equally there would be no distinction, and indeed no means of judging. It is for this reason that sensory scientist Joanne Hort, underlines the need for consumers to move beyond

‘liking’⁷⁷ and to further engage by discriminating between choices. Social media platforms have developed rapid forms of personal digital evaluation in the form of ‘likes’, emojis and so on. These allow for rapid judgments without the entanglement of critically apportioning value; we can therefore ‘like’ many things, and this action becomes a simple form of maintaining links and contacts. When there is no choice, the attention we give to things remains essentially fleeting.

By contrast, for a number of years now, the promise of Virtual Reality has foreseen new depths of immersive engagement, sending ripples of speculation through the arts and culture industries. On a global scale, museums are not using the full potential of interactivity and visibility with the community. While some of the most popular institutions are visited by audiences of several million visitors every year this correlates poorly to the potential of an overall population of 7 billion people. VR has the potential to connect with every single person, especially those who are located outside the major metropolitan centres where most museums are situated.

A series of platforms and projects have already attempted to merge digital and VR technologies with art and culture: Google Arts & Culture’s *Museum Views* functions as a web-based information tool that enables visitors to navigate the interiors of institutions through a series of elective tours; *Boulevard* brings museum collections to the viewers through VR technology for an educational purpose; *VR Museum of Fine Art* is a virtual museum designed to include masterpieces from around the world in one space; *EUseum*, commissioned by the Europeana Foundation, aims to bring together all museum exhibitions in

[74] <http://labs.aam-us.org/blog/museums-and-digital-strategy-today/>

[75] <http://labs.aam-us.org/blog/museums-and-digital-strategy-today/>

[76] “The Wiring of the Medium May Be New But the Users’ Wiring Is Old” (2014, Jewish Museum – ‘International Conference of Audience Research: The connected Audience’)

[77] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257390264_Beyond_liking_Comparing_the_measurement_of_emotional_response_using_EsSense_Profile_and_consumer_defined_check-all-that-apply_methodologies

[78] <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-daily-telegraph/20171120/282166471481108>

a single app, whilst *Mocove Arts* website promises an exploration ‘of the top 1000 paintings from human art history in virtual space’, its virtual taster tour featuring the briefest of glimpses of Botticellis, Cézannes and van Goghs, accompanied by the strands of tasteful classical music. Here art is reduced to a line of masterpieces effortlessly navigated and ticked off in the manner of a to-do list. There is also the *Virtual International Fine Art Fair* (VIAF) initiative hosted by *Posterus360* and according to the website features the ‘exclusive locations Moon and Mars, with a total exhibition space of 12.000 square meters and up to 130 booths’. Once virtuality sought to provide access to actual locations or artifacts too remote or fragile, but this example goes so far as to imagine the location on another planet, providing a solution to a problem that does not exist, since both sales and audience figures of artfairs show a strong desire for attendance and sales.

Perhaps the breadth of the provision, from extensions of useful tools already in place for other industries, to rather unwieldy and cranky propositions, underlines the uncertainty felt by art institutions about how aspects of technology may be best matched to their holdings and activities, and the developing cultural potential of VR in particular.

An example of this may be seen in the recent retrospective of Amedeo Modigliani’s at Tate in 2017, which is accompanied by a VR recreation of the artist’s studio. Curator Nancy Ireson, who worked alongside Hilary Knight, Tate’s head of digital content, on the VR experience observes:

You feel that tension...the practicalities of trying to produce art while you’re coughing, drinking, living in

*a mess. We think of artists in their garret and it can be quite a romantic idea. This takes the romance away completely. It’s very levelling.*⁷⁸

VR addresses the question of audience engagement in a rather partial manner. At times the perceived impenetrability of modern and contemporary art can be seen as a barrier to engagement, and the ability to transport the audience to the supposed place of creation – the artist’s studio – may be seen as a means of generating empathy and thus understanding. In the above example, the institution traces the work back to the studio conditions and the artist’s personal biography, a rather retrogressive, if popularising step.

The attempt to historicise art practice – to augment the sense of engagement by ‘being there’ may be considered a means of popularising artforms that are not easy to understand, but they tend to flatten and trivialise the content. The parallel virtual narrative, a function previously offered by rented gallery audioguides, moves centre stage by being integrated within the actual fabric of the exhibition itself.

Studio recreations are not new by any means, and notable examples include Edoardo Paolozzi at the Scottish Gallery of Modern Art Edinburgh, Francis Bacon at Dublin City Art Gallery, or Constantin Brancusi at Centre Pompidou, Paris. These are largely populated by artefacts and works of the artists, with other elements added to recreate the *atmosphere*. The remodelling of a studio as a pure representation using digital tools, however, is a relatively new departure, since no original artefacts are employed. Ireson suggests that the space is ‘imagined...but it’s a reliable imagining.’ The intervention of VR renders material facts – easels, brushes, furniture- into images that

are held together by the narrative or fiction of the studio.

In many ways the employment of VR in the art museums of today serves as an introduction of the spectacle but also as a means of adding to- or completing the artworks on view, extending their life-world or contextualizing them. VR and AR are perhaps best employed to enhance what is already present, augmenting the presence of subtexts and deepening attention, as in the case of the ultra high resolution gigapixel images of Google Arts and Culture's *We Wear Culture* initiative, which allowed the closest scrutiny of garments from the V&A, a feat impossible to undertake with the naked eye. Such technologies serve to complement collections, whilst the experience of the exhibition and the museum beyond remains an essential draw for audiences.

'The thing that none of us should want to do is just create VR versions of our museums,' argues Chris Michaels, digital director of London's National Gallery. 'So much of going to a museum is about being there with other people; about being in the presence of a particular artwork.'⁷⁹

It remains to be seen what role in engaging audiences VR will play in the near-future, and this is likely to be driven by a requirement to augment visitor numbers, allow access to exhibitions that are otherwise inaccessible due to remoteness or lack of audience capacity, and finally by the demonstrable ability to generate actual income. Meanwhile, the more prosaic aspects of online engagement in the form of social media will continue to play an important part in the life of art institutions, especially since culture, entertainment and sport are inexorably grouped together by government agencies and commercial enterprise. Every form of

remote access to a physical location or building, a body of objects, or groups of people, can be said to promote learning, identity formation and agency for audiences. So to an extent, it plays a role in leveling the distinctions and inequalities between the centre and the regions – in short, it can help in democratising the experience of art. Technology remains – for the moment - unable, however, to replicate the quality of experience of a real artefact or a live event, since the former relies on cognitive patterns yet to be fully replicated, while the latter requires the embodiment of complex atmospheric conditions, along with the living presence of others. To belabour an equine metaphor, the extensions of technology can certainly take us to water, but they cannot make us drink. And perhaps that is a good thing.

[79] <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-daily-telegraph/20171120/282166471481108>

CONCLUSION

[80] [http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Funding%20Arts%20and%20Culture%20in%20a%20time%20of%20Austerity%20\(Adrian%20Harvey\).pdf](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Funding%20Arts%20and%20Culture%20in%20a%20time%20of%20Austerity%20(Adrian%20Harvey).pdf)

We have examined the salient areas of audience engagement that show significant areas of impact on art's culture and economy in the recent past, and which are likely to continue influencing the relationship between spectators and institutions.

The diminishing of public funding experienced most sharply since the economic downturn in 2007/8 continues to play a significant part in how visual art is financed; moreover, as public institutions continue to gradually move towards co-funding by the private sector, programming is likely to be affected. Museums and galleries have always cut their cloth according to what is financially feasible, and have been able to spread the income generated by well-attended exhibitions to support less popular parts of the programme. After all, cultural institutions have a mandate to inform and educate the public, not only to please and entertain. They remain, along with wider public funding, the guarantors of the common realm, by setting standards of quality and acting as a corrective weight to the market. The assertion that quality is a more apt measure of cultural importance than sheer quantity remains very much a live topic. We often use the term publically-minded to describe places and actions that benefit audiences, and such benefits are always synonymous with quality. These values ought to be enshrined in the core principles of art's institutions and rendered visible by their strategic identities, inflected throughout their different departments, and finally displayed through the programme. But today, these values are under increasing pressure, due partly to the obvious erosion of public funding, as well as because of the financial power of commercial organisations invested in the visual arts. Further, the decline of qualitative principles

leads to the application of metrics based on quantity. The survival of institutions is then largely due to the understanding of the transition taking place, and the degree to which measures are implemented to ensure its adoption. While necessary savings might be achieved in the short-term, one wonders about the longer-term consequences of such cuts.

Local government has borne the brunt of public spending cuts since the 2008 financial crash, and especially since the 2010 Spending Review. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, there was a 20 per cent reduction in spending by local authorities in England between 2009/10 and 2014/15. Taking into account population growth, spending per person has reduced by 23 per cent.⁸⁰

The cuts are also passed on via the DCMS to ACE and it stands to reason that politicians are likely to lobby government in line with statistics, whereby support in a shrinking economy will be generally given to those providers of culture that can evidence demand through visitor numbers. As cash-strapped Councils in England have tried to protect spending on key services such as social care this has meant that other services such as culture have seen large reductions. Though it is evident that cultural institutions must adapt to the times and be receptive to new business models that allow them to stay relevant and become self-sustaining, the proportional withdrawal of public support based on insufficient engagement can have severe consequences. Currently there are threats to the future existence of several public galleries, especially those in the regions such as the Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne, the New Art

Gallery, Walsall, or Firstsite, in Colchester. Though audience figures in the visual arts act as basic markers of visitor engagement, they are notoriously flexible, especially for free exhibitions that are not monitored by ticketing systems. Comparatively low attendance – when judged against competitors– suggest that cuts to the income from the public purse come first to those organisations. Lack of audience engagement is, after all, a yardstick to gauge not only the demonstrable needs of visitors, but also to assess the sustainability of the enterprise as a whole. Policy advisor John Kieffer assesses the visual arts' value system 'where public funding is in danger of becoming a proxy for public engagement, audiences replace people and tickets replace relationships' adding that 'we are all marketeers now'.⁸¹

More surprising perhaps is the potential impact of scarce public funding on major museums and galleries in urban centres. For these organisations, lack of attendance does not constitute a significant issue. Metropolitan audiences – both locals and visitors such as tourists – have a panoply of choices which they exercise by attending multiple events and exhibitions. Indeed, many curators and gallery personnel talk openly about the abundance of visual art provision and visitors in world capitals, against the struggle for audiences elsewhere.

Rather more alarming is the assertion that the visual arts may be driven by a 'spectacularly wonky economic model where public investment benefits a handful of artists and a lot of hedge-fund managers.'⁸² The interests of a coterie of powerful commercial galleries might be factored into the previous statement, since it is their financial support for their artists' exhibitions that strongly supports metropolitan

museums. To put it another way, commercial galleries absorb the costs incurred by their artists when mounting major public shows; private enterprise is paying for exhibitions in highly visible public places that the public purse is progressively unable to afford. This trend is increasing proportionally with the withdrawal of public financial support in Europe, while in American museums, which operate to a different funding model, a third of solo exhibitions are by artists represented by the five most influential galleries. This development should not be confused with the long-standing tradition of philanthropy, in which donors endow museums and other public institutions in return for a relatively modest mention of their name. Commercial galleries invest in these exhibitions, causing the value of the works to rise due to the prominence and prestige accorded by the museum. The long-awaited opening exhibition of the Hayward Gallery in 2018, (part of London's Southbank complex) following a major refurbishment, is of the celebrated photographer Andreas Gursky; simultaneously, White Cube, his representing gallery is mounting an exhibition at its Bermondsey space in South London. The level of investment by the gallery in the Hayward exhibition is not public knowledge, but is bound to be substantial.

As a result museums run the risk of becoming glorified showrooms for the spectacular displays of a limited selection of artists represented by these galleries. This institutional lack of autonomy, where an external, commercially interested agent pays the bills, arguably threatens to compromise curatorial agency and the very civic principles and transparency that supposedly governs the public realm.

Major exhibitions by fa-

[81] John Kieffer, *Funny Business*, in *The New Economy of Art*, DACS and Artquest, Gilaine Tawadros and Russell Martin eds., London, 2014, p.109.

[82] John Kieffer, *ibid*, p.109.

mous artists engage audiences, as we have seen in the previous chapters, a reality that can lead to a continuing procession of so-called blockbuster exhibitions. These were once limited to the most celebrated Modern movements ranging from Impressionism and Cubism, to Expressionism and Pop Art. In more recent years their ranks have been joined by crowd-pleasing solo exhibitions by famous Contemporary artists, bankrolled mostly by their galleries, along with generous corporate sponsorship – the latter being essentially tied to hyper-audience-engagement.

In an age of mass attendance of art events which pits the success of major centres against the declining periphery, the management of large audiences becomes an important task. As we have seen in several numerically successful examples, the viewers' experience can be severely curtailed. If exhibition visits are downgraded to the level of 'crowd control', whereby audience engagement deteriorates into mere *attendance*, the power of culture will be severely diminished.

In some respects technology can support and minimise viewer experience by calculating circulation in exhibitions, whilst managing demand. Equally, it can provide access to institutions remotely if actual attendance proves difficult. Nevertheless, digital engagement should not be seen as a substitute, nor is it helpful to present a binary opposition between virtual and real presence. Instead, these different forms of potentially deep engagement can be seen as complementary parts of an overall experience.

If the museums once acted as a 'gold-standard' for quality collections and exhibitions, the landscape of acquisitions and displays is shifting due to the intercession of major commercial players. As a

consequence, audiences cease to be the final recipients of the work; their task is to engage and enjoy, providing a backdrop of popular interest against which commercial interests take centre stage. If the public good – denoted by the knowledge created by engagement – ceases to be the *telos* of the museum, the cultural consequences are momentous and ought to be the subject of further debate.

Commercial endeavor is an essential and indivisible aspect of the art eco-system, and the intention here is not to denigrate the role played by enterprise per se, but to be clear about the potential pitfalls when power becomes concentrated in a reduced number of operators, who in turn exert undue influence on public cultural provision, resulting in a lack of competition and leading to a potential monoculture. After all, audiences expect museums to enshrine certain *democratic* values of stewardship, accountability, and – not least – diversity. Thus one may consider institutions to be inherently political since they reflect and uphold societal aspirations and ideals supposedly based on transparency, equality, opportunity, and justice. Audience engagement is then not an administrative tool to be deployed by the institutions, but a means of participatory emancipation for the public. In this way, engagement proposes that publically-minded institutions are made by the people and for the people.

It is evident that contemporary art has never been seen by more people, and general audience statistics show gradual increases and sometimes spectacular hikes, and while the traditional demographics dominated by class and income are still present there are encouraging signs that young audiences in particular are showing a marked uptake in attendance. This

is partly due to the efforts of institutions, as well as to the inclusive and fashionable cachet of contemporary art. Art – through its embracing of new forms and experiences - allows us to be part of a collective momentum, something that typifies our most popular leisure pursuits.

Perhaps the visual arts might then borrow something of the passionate interaction found in sport, as argued by Laura Conner. It is not necessarily the passions aroused on the terraces that might be replicated by gallery-going – for that would be unrealistic – but rather the engaged use of language by the specialist media and by sports-fans online and in social gatherings. There are indeed stirrings of change in the artworld as the voices of artists, curators and audiences are raised in discussions, panels, talking marathons, and even organisations dedicated to art's voices⁸³. Audience engagement requires complex interactions and attention, but also the ability to be heard and to hear more than an echo in return.

[83] Voices in Contemporary Art, <http://www.voca.network>

THE FOUNDATION

Art Institutions of the 21st Century seeks to support and promote the importance of institutions specialising in the making, displaying, collecting and dissemination of contemporary art and culture, both locally and internationally. By the term 'institutions', we refer to cultural agents which are both instigators of change and recipients of transformation. In particular, we focus on those organisations trusted with the preservation and enhancement of culture at large, such as public and private museums, public and private galleries, archives, not-for-profit project spaces, artists' studios and estates, art education organisations, biennials, art fairs and festivals.

Our mission is to promote dialogue and knowledge exchange between the public and private art sectors, by organising projects, publications, events and educational activities, and supporting initiatives that are beneficial to the progress of art institutions. These undertakings aim to benefit art professionals in the development of their skills, whilst improving the access of the general public to important institutions. The foundation develops extensive areas of research to nurture the production of knowledge, leading to enhanced understanding and collaboration between the diverse areas of the art field.

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