Engaging the audience vs. audience engagement with art

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Abstract:
The conceptual separation of audience engagement from audience development and division of audience engagement into acts involving the audience by art institutions and the audience members' experience of actual engagement is advantageous for audience studies and the art practice.

Keywords: Audience development; audience engagement; audience studies; art impact; art engagement

Introduction: the problem with audience-art engagement studies

Although rationalised approaches to understanding audiences and their experiences of art emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, our understanding of the audiences' experience of engagement with the artworks is still limited. The art engagement is of interest to many academic fields – cultural studies, media studies, communication studies, museum studies, theatre studies, musicology, economics, behavioural economics, sociology and psychology. That is both the blessing and the curse. While the diversity of approaches to the subject of engagement may be advantageous, paired with the lack of conceptual clarity, it may be the significant cause of confusion in audience engagement studies. The rising practice of using concepts, theories, and methods across disciplines is one of the features of modern science (Klein, 1999 in Repko & Szostak, 2017, p. 35; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). The context, however, in academic research of audience art engagement is an important variable. Still, many scholars "borrow" concepts "quite eclectically, without taking into consideration the fact that they may be based on various basic implicit assumptions" (Höijer, 2008, p. 275). Widespread conceptual ambiguity of audience-related vocabulary is part of the problem with audience studies (Kawashima 2000, p. 10; Walmsley, 2019, pp. 8–9). The word engagement was considered, for example, a synonym of attendance (e.g. McCarthy and

Jinnett, 2001), participation (e.g. Brown, Novak-Leonard & Gilbride, 2009, p. 15), or explanation of audience development (Maitland, 2000, p. 5; Jancovich, 2015, p. 9). Conceptual ambiguity is also visible in Ben Walmsley's recent article reviewing the existing empirical and theoretical work in audience studies, which demonstrates not just variety but also a scale of conceptual vagueness of engagement-related vocabulary (Walmsley, 2021). The myriad of complex definitions of audience development and audience engagement swinging between marketing tools, management aims and policy priorities, individual relevance and social responsibility, democratisation and economic sustainability, cause confusion in the arts practice, cultural policies, and academic discussions. This essay, drawing on material from my doctoral research and thirty years of involvement in the arts sector, proposes an alternative exploration of audience engagement frameworks. It suggests the art audience studies acknowledging the difference between audience development and audience engagement and separation of audience engagement into a/ facilitation of audiences' involvement by the arts sector and b/ the audience experience of engagement. These distinctions offer conceptual clarity and support the growth of a human/audience-centred perspective in studies of audience engagement with art. Such clarification could prepare the ground for the development of not only an engagement paradigm for audience research postulated by Walmsley (Walmsley, 2021) but three distinct yet complementary directions in studies of audience engagement with art.

Decoding audience development in context

In the last twenty years, audience development undoubtedly stimulated discussions in the arts sector, cultural policy, and academia about the relationship of art institutions with their current and potential audiences. However, the lack of distinction between two similar concepts of audience development (mainly marketing oriented) and arts marketing to this day confuses cultural practitioners. Arts marketing (and marketing in general) has been considered in the cultural policy literature the instrument of managerialism, commercialisation and corporatisation of the arts. That is frequently articulated, for example in Steven Hadley's book (2021) about evolution of audience development interventions in the United Kingdom. In the UK, audience development became a phrase more acceptable for the arts sector due to the perceived lack of economic aims attributed to marketing (Hadley 2021, p. 224). As explained later in the essay, audience development definitions embrace different areas of art institutions' work "marketing, commissioning, programming, education, customer care and distribution" (Arts Council England, 2010, p. 3). However, audience development until now predominantly relies on marketing and the ways it is applied.

The literature review suggests that 'audience development' as a strategic (marketing and managerial) concept was conceived in the arts' marketing and public relations practice in the United States in the 1950s. The phrase was used to describe the activities aiming to broaden audience groups for film and theatre. The film industry, for example, used the term

in relation to building relationships between movie theatres and students via collaboration with universities at the end of the 1950s (Chamberlin, 1960). The aim of audience development to expand the base of the clients is visible in Morison and Fliehr in *In Search of an Audience: How an Audience Was Found for the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre* (1968). The first book describing audience development purposefully omitted artistic quality and programme selection decisions, even though authors understood their influence on attendance. Their job as public-relations and audience development directors "was only to educate an audience to appreciation of [existing artistic] policy" (Morison and Fliehr, 1968). At the same time, since 1962, Alvin H. Reiss distributed an Arts Management newsletter (printed in 1970 as an *Arts Management Handbook*) that included audience development examples of how to attract, measure and analyse spectators. Reiss also advocated for establishing a role of an arts-and-society researcher, someone combining knowledge of fine arts and social science to influence social change (Reiss, 1970, pp. 165-167). Those actions were part of a broader phenomenon, including the birth of the American not-for-profit theatre movement outside of New York, expanding the traditional marketing methodology used by commercial Broadway theatres to build an audience for other repertoires. Two approaches to audience development within the arts sector accompanied audience development theory and actions from the beginning: first, building/expanding the audience (or market) for the arts, and second, advocating for social change. The programming issues and audience experience of works of art visible in earlier audience art experience studies lost their importance.

Currently, arts organisations conduct audience development actions for different reasons (Maitland, 2000; Wadeson, 2003, p. 72; Brown, Novak-Leonard & Gilbride, 2009). Individual approaches insert several layers of objectives in the audience development understanding:

- those of artists – for example, to ensure the audience has an understanding and appreciation of their artistic aims;
- education departments – focusing on the individual development and advancement of the audience knowledge about the art form; and
- marketers – aiming to change the purchase attitudes of both existing audiences and non-attenders (Maitland, 2000, p. 5).

Hayes adds to this list each practitioner's personal philosophies and government cultural policy objectives (Hayes, 2003, p. 1)*. The audience-centric approach of the entire organisation (as opposed to putting audience development responsibility solely on marketing or audience development specialist's desk) is frequently advocated for (Wlazeł *et al.*, 2011; Torreggiani & Pfrommer, 2015, p. 4*; Walmsley, 2019, p. 233), but rarely implemented. In the parallel, and often incompatible, goals (McCarthy & Jinnett, 2001, p. 10), audiences are often the least important concern amongst shifting organisational priorities (Young, 2017).

In recent decades, policy area has had the biggest influence on the understanding of audience development. In Australia, audience development mostly focusing on increasing

audience participation has been the primary objective of arts organisations since 1994, when the cultural policy statement *Creative Nation* was released (Rentschler *et al.*, 2001, p.119). In the UK, the demand motivated audience development was introduced to the policy with the election of a Labour government in May 1997 (Hayes, 2003). The first description of audience development there was included in *A guide to audience development* (1997) written by Heather Maitland and commissioned by the Arts Council England. Maitland noted there that "[a]rtists, education workers and marketers share a belief that audience development is a planned process which enhances and broadens specific individuals' experiences of the arts" (Maitland, 2000, p. 5). Maitland, a marketing professional familiar with up-to-date marketing concepts, included in the book arts marketing ideas and the British art sector's audience development practices, which she had collected since 1995. That means that audience development was not conceived by the British "cultural management elite" (Hadley, 2021, p. 224). Its appearance in the UK was, possibly, as one of the informants in Hadley's book indicated (Hadley, 2021, p. 120), the effect of knowledge transfer, so professionalisation (by learning) of the British culture sector. Arts professionals first reoriented their work towards the audience and then reoriented the policy focus of the subsidised art.[1] Functioning audience development ideas were incorporated into the cultural policy, and after revisions, returned to the arts sector in the grant schemes. However, varying political and funding circumstances on different continents have created distinct conditions for arts organisations to operate within. Transferring audience development know-how between continents, countries, or even organisations without acknowledging the difference in understandings and context of specific audience development practices might have contributed to the confusion surrounding the concept. Audience development should not be considered "always deeply ideological" (Hadley, 2021, p. 5), at least not in the policy interpretation of ideology. It can be ideological or principled but can also be, especially in the absence of detailed cultural policies or different funding frameworks, dependent on other managerial priorities. Still, in cultural policy conversations, audiences have usually been treated as segments of the market.

The most frequently cited audience development definition of Arts Council England (ACE), describes audience development as an

> activity which is undertaken specifically to meet the needs of existing and potential audiences, visitors and participants and to help arts organisations to develop ongoing relationships with audiences. It can include aspects of marketing, commissioning, programming, education, customer care and distribution. (Arts Council England, 2010, p. 3).

The grant provider's perspective in the UK is supported by The Audience Agency, which complements that audience development is

a planned, organisation-wide approach to extending the range and nature of relationships with the public, [and] it helps a cultural organisation to achieve its mission, balancing social purpose, financial sustainability and creative ambitions. (Torreggiani & Pfrommer, 2015, p. 4).

Those audience development definitions reflect the funding bodies' expressed objectives, i.e. that public subsidies have to be spent in the most socially, financially and artistically effective way (Gray in Belfiore, 2012, p. 104). The development of strategies that can successfully tackle such diverse expectations and objectives proves to be a challenge for the art sector. Moreover, a management specialist could easily claim that those widely-used audience development definitions do not refer directly to audiences but represent a classical organisational development model. Hence, an interdisciplinary, continuous and systematic process of implementing effective change inside an organisation encompassing corporate culture, management and operational systems, resource management, product and services, and markets (Flamholtz & Randle 2009, p. 3). Such a managerial approach replaced the earlier Arts Council of England's mission of "sustaining and expanding existing or regular audiences or visitors, creating new attenders and participants, and enhancing their enjoyment, understanding, skills and confidence across the art forms" (Rogers, 1998). As there is no clarity about the audience development in (not only) funding guidelines it is not surprising that the vast majority of applicants to the Arts Council funds in the UK define audience participation (and development) as a process of informing the public about the arts offer through marketing and distribution (Jancovich, 2015, p. 9). Whilst this informing approach is insufficient for expanding audiences even from the marketing theories' point of view. As functional ambiguity, be it an inherent structural feature or deliberate choice, is widespread in cultural policy in general (Gray, 2015, p. 78), it might also contribute to the ambiguity of the audience development approaches. This ambiguity gave arts organizations flexibility in their audience development programmes which, from their perspectives, might be welcomed. However, such flexibility might have contributed to the failure of long-term changes of art attendance patterns. Also, demands from funding bodies and governments drive art projects' evaluation mostly towards summative, quantitative and economic modes that might serve external purposes and be subject to different political agendas (Matarasso, 1996; Holden, 2004; Candy, 2014; Jancovich, 2015). Cultural policy's audience development definitions are quite generic. Nevertheless, they encourage cultural organisations to reflect on all aspects of their work with the audiences.

There are, however, voices that the concept of audience development was compromised due to its "fundamental ethical problem" caused by producing change (developing people) without the informed consent of those involved (Matarasso, 1996, pp. 5, 24). Development is the process in which someone or something grows or changes and becomes more advanced, so it may, especially in conjunction with the word audience, presuppose the presence of a developer (art institution or artist) and a 'developee' (an audience member); someone who knows better (the one 'in power') and someone who is

assumed *not* to know. This causes some understandable opposition: *"*The basic premise of audience development, or access, or community outreach, or whatever we want to call it, is patronising and corrupt. It is predicated on the assumption that the public has got it wrong" (Dave O'Donnell cited in Baker, 2000, p. 6). Some cultural professionals develop their work so that self-guided or voluntarily pursued personal development in art perception and interests is possible. Others advocate for a form of positive nudging as „some changes in the choice architecture could make [people's] lives go better (as judged by their own preferences, not those of some bureaucrat)" (Thaler, 2008, p. 10). Still, ethical concerns endure as ambiguity and the (tacit) patronising nature of the audience development phrase are not easy to discharge.

Academia is on the margin of professional-policies milieu as scholars are, for the most part, interested in *why* and "how audiences interpret what they have seen" (Freshwater, 2009, p. 30). A synthesis of academics' positions on audience development reveals the variety of perspectives, which often blend development and engagement. Hayes recognises the audience development as "concerned with changing the structure and composition of audiences to achieve democratic participation in the arts" (Hayes, 2003, p. 1); Blackwell and Scaife underline diverse approaches to understanding and expanding the cultural sector's user base (Lang et al., 2006, p. 61); Walmsley is seeing the role of audience development as *"*not only to attracting new and existing audience members, but also to enhancing their experience and interpretive capabilities" (Walmsley, 2016, p. 70); Kawashima: "as being concerned with broadening the audience base in both quantitative and qualitative terms and enriching the experience of customers" (Kawashima, 2000, p.4); Holden, Walmsley, Radbourne, Johanson, Glow & White (and many others) which rather than measuring attendance in order to demonstrate the success or failure of the productions, recommend organisations reflection on the depth and quality of audience engagement (Radbourne et al., 2013, p.5); and Freshwater (as many others) encourages "meaningful forms of audience participation and engagement, learning to trust audiences, giving them a sense of ownership, or the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to the work's development" (Freshwater, 2009, p. 75). Jancovich suggests considering audience development not as a promotional activity but as building demand through "collaboration and empowerment" (Jancovich, 2015, p. 9). However, few academics directly tackle the challenges that arts organisations meet in their attempts to design and implement increasing attendance or engagement strategies (McCarthy and Jinnett, 2001, p. 18). Blending development and engagement in academic research contributes to the confusion making the relationship between cultural professionals, policymakers, and academia predominantly dysfunctional.

Differentiating audience engagement from audience development

The change of focus in the marketing from audience development to audience engagement since the rise of relationship marketing in the 1980s (Rentschler *et al.*, 2001, p. 123) and experience economy in the late 1990s (Pine and Gilmore, 1998) has not led to a clearly defined difference between the two concepts. The views on audience development and the views on audience engagement both bringing together marketing, education and artistic programming, the former "to broadening the base of audiences and visitors" (Brown & Ratzkin, 2011, p. 13); and the latter to expand the impact (ibid., p. 2) and "enrich lives" (Arts Council England, 2010, p. 3) demonstrate little difference in both concepts. The distinction between audience development concerned with *the reach* and audience engagement concerned with individual *impact* was largely omitted. The interpretation of audience engagement as "a mission driven commitment to increasing the impact of the artistic experience" (Brown, 2017) places audience engagement within the scope of many audience development definitions and actions as a "deepening strategy for helping people make sense of the art" (ibid.). That drives both audience engagement and audience development towards audience education. Brown specifically treats audience engagement as a substitute for "enrichment programming" or "adult education" (ibid.)[2]. Association with educational issues might be risky for the engagement as steering the concept towards ethical concerns of audience development. In general, establishing a clear difference between both concepts appears advantageous both for academia and the arts. Audience development and audience engagement require individual attention.

In America, The Community Partnerships for Cultural Participation Initiative of the Lila Wallace–Reader's Digest Fund (currently part of the Wallace Foundation) since the mid-1990s has been helping art, culture, and other organisations "in their communities to broaden, deepen, and diversify participation" (Walker *et al.*, 1999). The phrase "to broaden, deepen, and diversify" is repeatedly used in many audience development definitions (e.g. McCarthy & Jinnett, 2001, p.14; Bollo *et al*., 2017). But in the times when audience development is considered inadequate (Wadeson, 2003; Lynch, 2011; Stevenson *et al.*, 2015; Brown, 2017) distributing that triple mission between audience development and audience engagement might offer modification of focus and conceptual clarity. The audience development phrase from its conceptualisation in the late 1950s described the activities aiming to broaden and diversify audience groups (Chamberlin, 1960; Morison and Fliehr, 1968; Reiss, 1970). In line with that understanding and the views of other contemporary researchers and practitioners, audience development can aim to broaden and diversify an organisational audience base through expanding the reach and actions to persuade people, market development or penetration, program or other offer diversification. Audience engagement efforts can focus on deepening audiences' actual experiences of art. Audience development aiming for broadening the reach and diversifying audience groups can be enhanced by audience engagement concentrated on impact and raising interests in the art. Committed audience engagement (by arts organisations and the audience) is paramount for audience development if organisations intend to achieve long-term outcomes rather than a rapid (but usually short-lived) increase in tickets sales. The

distinction between audience development and audience engagement supports the usability of academic audience studies for the art sector and exposes studies of audience engagement.

The review of engagement concepts in context

The term 'audience engagement', in comparison to audience development, in principle, acknowledges the move from passivity to activity and from people treated as objects to being perceived as autonomous, sensitive, and constructing their own experiences as subjects. However, there is little agreement on what engagement is (Calder, Isaac & Malthouse, 2013, p. 1; Brown, 2017a; Walmsley, 2019) both in academia and the arts. Operational and psychologically driven interpretations might be recognised, while some researchers try to create a cohesive construct.

The art sector focuses on the operational representation of the engagement. Many arts organisations consider even a simple act of attendance and the length or frequency of attendance a satisfactory sign of audience engagement. While academics, to the contrary, suggest that "for many audience members, attending an arts event may never become an arts experience because engagement does not occur, either during an event or afterwards" (Conner, 2013, p. 37). That is because, for many academics, engagement signifies some emotional or affective relationship between an audience member and an arts event and/or arts organisation (Conner, 2013, p. 2; Walmsley, 2019). This relationship can be built by providing interpretive assistance in lectures, open rehearsals, docent tours and online forums (Brown & Ratzkin, 2011, pp. 2, 18); and audiences' active participation in meaning-making events, for example, through participation in pre- and post-event art talks (Conner, 2013). Such activities are also often treated as audience engagement actions. Those understandings indicate the role of arts institutions in the facilitation of art engagement processes. However, the audience encounters with at least some forms of art (e.g. dance), are affective rather than interpretative (Reason, 2016, p. 84), and the lack of understanding might be unnecessary for enjoyment (Kawashima, 2000a, p. 70). Therefore, the intellectual form of meaning-making, also facilitated by arts organisations, may have a role but is not a prerequisite for the quality of engagement with art. Considering attendance and participation in art and its supporting events as engagement drives its exploration in the art sector towards quantitative considerations.

On the other hand, engagement is explored from an audience's perspective (which is the mission of my research). It is perceived as a complex, rich and multi-dimensional phenomenon taking place on many levels: physical, social, intellectual, emotional, sensual and spiritual (Walmsley & Franks, 2011, p. 5). In the Attention Value Model developed in museum studies, engagement is assumed to be the third level of attention after captivation and focus (Bitgood, 2010). This level is considered the most difficult to attain as it involves deep processing of content and sensory, intellectual, or affective immersion (ibid.). Engagement can be understood as an active process of "audiencing" e.g. "of producing, through lived experience, of their [audiences'] own sense of their social identities and social

relations, and of the pleasures that this process gave them" (Fiske, 1992, p. 353) or "the work of the spectator (…) acts of attention, of affect, of meaning-making, of memory, of community" (Reason & Lindelof, 2016, p. 17). Tepper suggests treating 'engaging' as a verb, which acknowledges "that citizens actively connect to art — discovering new meanings, appropriating it for their own purposes, creatively combining different styles and genres, offering their own critique, and, importantly, making and producing art themselves" (Tepper, 2008, p. 363). Marketing scholars Calder, Isaac and Malthouse underline the experiential nature of engagement that differentiates it from involvement and loyalty (Calder, Isaac & Malthouse, 2013, p. 4). In their view, "engagement (…) arises from experiencing a product in pursuit of a larger personal goal (…) [and] reflects the qualitative experience of what consuming the product means for the person" (ibid., p. 1). Experimental psychologists studying engagement with art appreciate the dual aspects of engagement – one relating to the richness of the experience and another visible in the degree of mental processing that creates that experience (Richardson *et al.*, 2020, p. 6). In the same direction goes O'Brien and Toms in the field of Human Computer Interaction. Building on Csíkszentmihályi's Flow Theory and Dewey's Philosophy of Experience the researchers define engagement as a "quality of user experience with technology that is characterised by challenge, aesthetic and sensory appeal, feedback, novelty, interactivity, perceived control and time, awareness, motivation, interest, and affect" (O'Brien & Toms, 2008, p. 960; O'Brien, 2016a, p. 1). Those understandings suggest that personal, social, artistic, and situational contexts of the experience are important factors forming audience experience of engagement.

Ben Walmsley and Alan Brown – key experts in audience engagement in the arts (the first working in academia and the latter in applied research) try to bond organisational and personal perspectives. Currently, Walmsley (2019) considers engagement as part of a (circular) process leading to spiritual and aesthetic enrichment rather than an end goal. It seems that by describing engagement as "a series of psychological and psychobiological processes that emancipate and empower audiences and generate deep connections by enabling audiences to become an invaluable part of the art-making process" (Walmsley, 2019, p. 231) the author tries to connect the personal aspects (cognitive science perspective and aesthetics) with organisational drives (relational marketing and cultural democracy). Walmsley's formulation suitably underlines the dynamic mental and bodily processes but excludes many possible and legitimate audience motivations to engage with the arts. Those might include not only spiritual and aesthetic enrichment, but also, for instance, learning, building social relations, "collaboration and connectivity, civic participation, knowledge transfer, or health behaviour change" (O'Brien & Cairns, 2016, p. xiii); intellectual stimulation, emotional resonance, and social bonding (Brown & Novak-Leonard, 2013, pp. 226–227); the audience's wish "to relax and escape", "be emotionally moved" and "to discover something new" (Brown & Ratzkin, 2012, p. 3).

The second complex understanding is visible in the Audience Involvement Spectrum included in the report of Brown and colleagues (Brown, Novak-Leonard & Gilbride, 2011, p.

15). The Spectrum aimed to provide "a simple depiction of five overlapping stages of involvement" (ibid., p. 6) and describe various forms of arts participation in which people play an expressive role. The authors treat art engagement as the synonym of arts participation (ibid., p. 5), which suggests that the participatory part but not the receptive part of the Spectrum (which authors added for context), should be treated as describing engagement. At the same time, the authors also recognise emotional and intellectual engagement as part of the art experience. The report uses participation, involvement, and engagement as synonyms and lacks a focused or differentiated understanding of the engagement.

Both Walmsley's definition of engagement and the Audience Involvement Spectrum demonstrate a conceptual challenge with the notion of co-creation. Their explanations of co-creation embrace either: 1) audiences' physical involvement in art production (like in Brown *et al.* Spectrum); or 2) audiences' mental processes, which make people "an invaluable part of the art-making process" (like in Walmsley's formulation). This difference might potentially be explained by the researchers' distinct background, Brown's pragmatic, and Walmsley's academic interpretivist perspective. Still, selecting a model of co-creation beneficial for the audience and the institution while being in harmony with the artist and artwork and an institution brand is a challenge. If not only audiences were treated as emancipated, sovereign subjects (Ranciere, 2009), but also artists, audience members' engagement would not mean audiences co-create art (Brown, Novak-Leonard & Gilbride, 2011; Walmsley, 2019, p. 231), but create their own experience of the artwork.

Although organisational and personal perspectives on acts of engagement are interrelated, in the art engagement studies mixing engagement with facilitation of involvement unnecessarily complicates the discussion. Looking at the above-quoted characterisations of engagement with art, the division of audience engagement into acts of engaging with the audience or engaging the audience (so facilitation of audiences' involvement by the arts sector), and the audience members' experience of engagement during the art event seems logical. Both phenomena coincide; however, the relations between the facilitation and processes of engagement are not (yet) sufficiently delineated and explored.

Facilitation of engagement

Facilitation of engagement (or engagements) may have different aims and motivations as the intentions of artists, educators, management, and marketing departments, as I already demonstrated, do not overlap. The agreement between marketing, educational and programming departments (postulated by most audience development specialists) about *who* should propose and *how* to co-create experiences with the audiences to create value for all the parties concerned is rare. Nevertheless, facilitation of engagement could be done, to add to previously provided examples, by directing art experiences for deeper engagement, co-creation and participatory art, involving people in the programming, funding and production decisions, various types of dialogue e.g. social media interaction,

educational and meaning-making activities, volunteering or creative partnerships with other sectors (education, health, etc.). Facilitation could support audiences' participation and involvement in different parts of the experience strengthening the organisational relationship with (existing or newly attained) audiences. However, although still advocated, the development of long-term relationships between institutions and audiences is now more difficult due to the arts' statistics indicating that diversity of the arts attendance, instead of loyalty, is (currently) the trend (Sharrock, 2016). One could also argue that building a relationship between institutions and audiences is another tricky and vague concept, which would be unnecessary if organisations were empathetic towards the audiences. Design of involvement actions benefits from a multi-layered understanding of different factors that influence people's involvement not only during the transactional, pre-, and post-experience phases but also personal engagement during artistic endeavours (Berleant, 1991).

Audience experience of engagement

When audience development or engagement are treated as a marketing problem, the academic audience research from other fields such as, for example, interaction design, psychology, or neuroscience remains unnoticed. Cognitive insights strongly support the theories of active spectatorship and collapse the notion of "passive audiences" and disconnected observation (McConachie, 2008). According to neuroscience the brain of the perceiver is the real architect of the experience (Gallese *et al.*, 2004, p. 396; Johnson, 2007, p. 388; Barrett, 2016, p. 3) and a prediction machine that tries at the same time to deal with the past, present and the future (e.g. Friston *et al.*, 2009; Clark, 2013; Barrett and Simmons, 2015; Thornton, 2017). The predictive processing theory, gaining broad recognition among neuroscientists, explains that our brain is "constantly attempting to match incoming sensory inputs with top-down expectations or predictions" (Clark, 2013, p.1). The environment constantly triggers a reaction in the brain influencing physiological, bodily responses as cognition nowadays considers the body as playing a crucial role in perceptual processes (Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1991, 2016; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Shapiro, 2004, p. 225). Humans engage with the outer and inner world permanently. It suggests that we also continuously engage while we experience art. The predictive processing framework "depicts perception, cognition, and action as profoundly unified and, in important respects, continuous" (Clark, 2013, p.7). As far as our mental activity is concerned, although various types of mental processes are conceptualised, two types – immediate and reflective processing – are broadly recognised (e.g., Sloman, 1996; Öhman in Lang *et al.*, 1997; Smith and DeCoster, 2000; Wheatley and Wegner, 2001; Kahneman, 2011; Evans and Stanovich, 2013). Our thoughts and actions are routinely guided by intuitive fast thinking rather than slow logical reasoning (Kahneman, 2011). The immediate processes do not involve conscious thinking and are quick, automatic, intuitive, and affective. While reflective processes are slow, deliberative, cognitive, and emotional. Even if those two types are largely acknowledged there is a strong consensus that a combination of automatic and

controlled mental mechanisms may be the case (Bargh, 1994; Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Kahneman, 2011, pp. 24–25; Melnikoff & Bargh, 2018). All mental processes, automatic and reflective, support our engagement or can lead to temporary or permanent disengagement. If we consider people as permanently mentally and bodily active, then disengagement during an art experience could mean that the engagement continues but has shifted from art to other, outer or inner, issues or changed its intensity (Dobrynin in Dormashev, 2010, p.297).

Humanities' primarily qualitative methods contribute to the understanding of the processes of engagement. But they only tell us part of the story consciously constructed by the audience, while "most of what we do and think and feel is not under our conscious control" (Eagleman, 2011). Studies of audience experience of engagement lack a methodological approach to empirically study complexity and dynamics of engagement and analyse human mind and body in the moment of an art experience. But modern and constantly advancing biometric devices used in cognitive psychology experiments and film and media studies support the continuous and real-time exploration of audience engagement during an art experience. They provide an opportunity for increased objectivity in studies of audience experience of engagement with art.

Conclusion

The conceptual separation of audience engagement from audience development and division of audience engagement into acts involving the audience by art institutions and the audience members' experience of actual engagement is advantageous for audience studies and the art practice. It could help to reduce a conceptual ambiguity of audience-related vocabulary, bring focus to art-related audience studies, and solve some of the challenges related to audiences, organisations, and artists' relationships with each other.

The aims *to reach* and *to impact* could form a base for separate but complementary directions in arts-related audience engagement studies giving clear aims to the dispersed field. Audience development and the *reach* related theories and studies of *who and who not* could primarily stay connected, as Walmsley suggests (Walmsley, 2019, p. 227), to sociology and cultural policy studies, while *how to find and convince them* could be mainly covered by the fields of marketing and behavioural economics. Art-related *impact* of engagement, the *how and why* of the engagement processes, could be associated more with audience studies based on psychology and neuroscience, pedagogy, and humanities studies of an art experience. That can be observed in academia but is not clearly articulated due to unsatisfactory distinction, or even interchangeable use, of development and engagement. Moreover, separating studies of audience engagement during the artwork experience from studies exploring facilitation of entire involvement opens avenues to revising the relations between the facilitation of involvement and audiences' impressions of their engagement.

The clarification of the concepts can increase the use of academic studies of audience engagement in the arts and stimulate arts professionals to explore and better facilitate audience experiences with art. The separation of concepts offers the arts sector clarification of the roles of different organisational departments in audience development

strategies and the facilitation of audience engagement processes in art-related (not just marketing or sales-related) parts of the whole experience. The focus on the impact of the experience of engagement may encourage artists to get involved in the facilitation of those processes in different parts of the experience without compromising their creative ambitions and the quality of the artistic creation. It also underlines audiences' autonomy and their right to acknowledge and freely develop, or not, their art engagement processes.

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Notes:

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[1] NB. The same happened in Poland, when I and Impact Foundation introduced audience development to training for cultural managers, and then it was picked up by cultural policy.

[2] While in his earlier *Audience Involvement Spectrum* (Brown, Novak-Leonard & Gilbride, 2011, p.15), presented later in this essay, Brown considered audience engagement the synonym of arts participation. That is a perfect reminder that establishing one universal understanding of the concept acceptable across time is rather difficult.