

From Art Introspection to Selfie Co-creation: Looking for Clues from O’Doherty’s “Inside the White Cube” to Improve Evaluation and Design in the Attention-Experience Economy

ANITA KOCSIS

Swinburne University, Australia
akocsis@swin.edu.au

SARAH KENDERDINE

EPFL, Switzerland
sarah.kenderdine@epfl.ch

LINUS TAN

Swinburne University, Australia
linustan@swin.edu.au

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ABSTRACT

This practice-based research is a visitor experience engagement framework applied in cultural institutions. We revisit O’Doherty’s (1999) Inside the White Cube as a lens to the attention-experience economy. The White Cube precedes digital technology and 24/7 contemporaneous experiences. What principles derived from the ‘White Cube’ inform contemporary experience consumption? How are designers to consider stakeholder experiences in cultural institutions? We employ contextual analysis and experience researcher introspection including people, place, objects, rules, relationships, and blocking mapped with ‘White Cube’ ideology. We document a table informed by white cube themes for the future visitor engagement framework for cultural institutions.

Introduction

Cultural institutions such as galleries, libraries, and museums are in the business of experience. The on and off-site activities, include events, exhibitions, interventions, workshops, performances, installations, games, prototyping, and happenings. Offerings for visitors range from collective to highly curated and one-off experiences. Such experiences are also important to cultural institutions and their community, which comprises artists, designers, curators, visitors, and managers. In this article, experience is defined as the qualitative dimension of the individual person examined through the lens of phenomenology (Dewey, 2005; Merleau-Ponty, 1965). We further experience in this paper as embodied perception acknowledging that consciousness is not “pure”, and a body that “lives” in a world (Bullock, Stallybrass, Trombley & Eadie, 1977, p. 264). Experience therefore by visitors, participants, users, creators, and stakeholders filter meaning through indissoluble objectivity and subjectivity (Crotty, 2020). Cultural institutions, the context in this study, include both modernist and post museums and diverse hybrids thereof (Hooper-Greenhill, 2020). Cultural institution experiences contribute to the experience economy (Pine, 1999). The term experience economy, as in experiences that drive economic growth, refers to the evolution of economic value from commodifying the design and selling of goods to services, to the commodification of experiences and more recently transformations (B. J. Pine & Gilmore, 2011; B. J. Pine & Korn, 2011, p. 245). Transformations in the evolving economy include the design and production of intangibles, which are typically innovations in digitization and technological experiences (Kallenden Oudsten, 2016). The shift from tangible goods to intangible services has recently been usurped by ephemeral, emotional experience narratives as envisaged by Jensen’s (1999) *The Dream Society*. Such “cultural pluralism” (Message, 2006, p. 206) blurs the boundaries between the physical and digital space.

Despite the ambiguity and complexity of experiences, industries engage in the design of experiences ranging in goods and services defined as experience sectors. Companies capitalize on experiences pushing products, services, and systems (Hoch, 2002). Experience consumption has seen a plethora of businesses ranging from examining consumption behaviors to making memorable products reminiscent of the experience. The value of experiences, as described by the experience

economy (Pine, 1999) and in the research and design of experiences, have increased exponentially over the past two decades—from 10,009 (2000–2010) to 39,162 (2010–2018)—as reported in experience research (Roto, Bragge, Lu & Pacauskas, 2021).

Experience research traverses a broad range of disciplines including fields, such as developmental and educational psychology, human-computer interaction, cognitive neuroscience, obstetrics and gynecology, artificial intelligence, computer graphics and computer-aided design, tourism, leisure and hospitality, creative industries, and cultural institutions. As part of the transformation of the experience economy, intangible, engaging, personalized, co-performative experiences have emerged to form what is known as the attention-experience economy (Franck, 2019; Mondloch, 2022). Technology, social media, sensorial design, interactive and co-performance are examples of contemporaneous engagement across multiple mediums. Engagement and interaction are both content and delivery mechanisms in the consumption, influence, and production of experiences. Competition for producers and consumers of experiences is not easily delineated across the private market, public sector, and civil society (Sundbo, 2009) in the attention-experience economy.

Synonymous with the rise of the attention-experience economy is, for example, what mainstream media commonly recognizes as the era of social media and the internet influencer (Hyun, Thavisay & Lee, 2022). Mondloch (2022) provokes us to consider the current 24/7 immersive attention and consumption of experiences in life and in art exhibitions that drive the attention-experience economy. The ramifications of the disproportionate and individual labor costs for production and consumption are yet to be fully understood. For example, little to no production costs in harvesting co-created content by participants for producers let alone the value of the distorted simulacra of the infinitely reproduced image experience is not a transparent cost benefit analysis for artists and participants.

We reinterrogated O’Doherty’s *Inside the White Cube* to repurpose its themes with respect to the attention-experience economy. We acknowledge Hein’s (H. Hein, 1991; H. S. Hein, 2000) concerns that the primacy of the experience and the “zeal-to-appeal” (Mastai, 2007, p. 10) in the attention-experience economy may get blurred for cultural institutions in the tension between mission and market (Mastai, 2007), and the discord between

introspection and interaction in the increasing appetite for visitor participation (Simon, 2010). We interrogated O’Doherty’s text not to continue the analysis of the museum and the exhibition as a metaphorical text (Mastai, 2007, p. 2) but to look for clues as we map themes pertaining to the art/artist, art/visitor, visitor/space, and visitor/place (Macdonald, 2011; Macleod, Hanks & Hale, 2012). We consider experience innovations situated in cultural institutions including but not limited to the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museum (GLAM) sector. Museology, with respect to “synthesizing experience” still today is a task for the museum (H. S. Hein, 2000, p.84) with respect to experience informed by the International Council of Museums’ (ICOM) definition in 2019, in the first line reads as “[m]useums are democratizing inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures” (Folga-Januszewska, 2020, p. 43). Further to the ICOM mission statement relevant to this article is how they create value, innovate, and adapt to the new digital emerging environment (Simone, Cerquetti & La Sala, 2021) referred to as the artistic laboratory track as explained below.

In the call for innovation, we investigated Sundbo’s (2009) taxonomy of primary experience sectors and identified two main experience sectors: the primary, which is the act of producing experiences, and the secondary, which use experiences as an add on to enhance the business or brand. The sectors include artistic interest driven, technology-driven, market opportunity-driven, collective interest group driven, and task driven. Within this taxonomy is another layer and argument for six innovation tracks, which is a need for a specific source of innovation in the efforts for experience innovation. The tracks listed are: 1) technical laboratory, 2) artistic laboratory, 3) intrapreneurship, 4) entrepreneurship, 5) public network, and 6) storytelling (Sundbo,

2009, p. 449). With respect to the artistic laboratory track, what are the potential innovations yet to be developed in engagement experiences in cultural institutions? What innovations could be developed that move beyond the current technological push and what clues have we missed in interpreting content and context in O’Doherty’s text?

O’Doherty’s proposition that context is content as “space now is not just where things happen, things make space happen” (O’Doherty, 1999, p. 39) is timely to reinterpret through the lens of the attention-experience economy with reference to primary experience evaluation. Reinvestigating and reinterpreting O’Doherty’s text may offer points for disruption beyond the genres we have designed and consumed given the demands of the attention-experience economy. What innovations are elusive and or faded such as the experience of the “dangerous art” of the 1960s and 1970s? In comparison, consumption of Disneyfication (Kalin, 2016), and blockbuster exhibitions in museums offer the “total experience” (Frey, 1998, p. 119). What can we learn from images, documents, artists, and texts in the cube as creators of new genres in the era of technological push and demands of the attention-experience economy? The following section rationalizes the approach to reinterrogate and re-interpret *Inside the White Cube* to inform engagement experiences research and design in cultural institutions.

Background methodology

This investigation is an evolving experiment to understand visitor/participant engagement as an active agent in cultural institution practices. The experiment is the development of an experimental engagement science, informed by the Experience Engagement framework (see Figure 1) that combines visitor experience research, user-centered

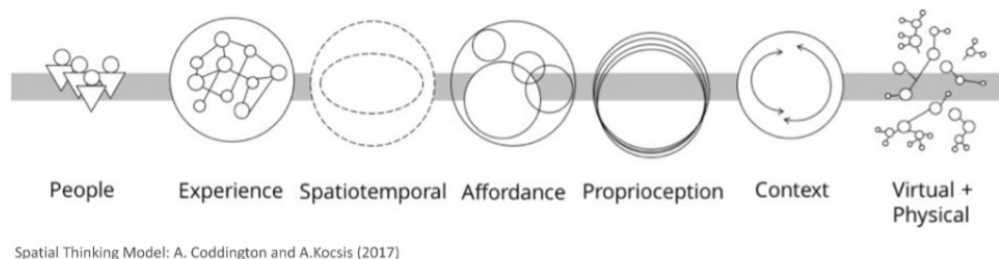


Figure 1. Experience engagement evaluation framework.

design, and novel real-time data visualization. There are six variables informing the framework: people, experience, spatiotemporal, affordance, proprioception, context, and virtual/physical. These variables serve as a checklist to consider in the development of visitor research and product development for cultural institutions. The authors evaluated diverse cultural experiences for heterogeneous data co designed with practitioners. The design and research synthesize experience design (Shedroff, 2000; 2001), experience driven design (Hekkert, Mostert & Stomppf, 2003), and designed engagement experience (Kocsis & Kenderdine, 2015; Zhang, Liu, Li & Tan, 2021). Further analysis includes designing for experiences (Blythe & Monk, 2018; Rossman & Duerden, 2019) in participatory cultural institutions (H. S. Hein, 2000; Macdonald, 2011; Simon, 2010).

The research prototype is an iterative experiment (Koskinen & Frens, 2017) that included eight Swiss museum partners and a further sixteen Swiss partners in 2021. The project known as Muse recruits experiences for visitors and museum staff with digital tactile interfaces, visual iconography, and real-time visualization of aggregated data facilitated by bespoke questionnaires for responsive analysis. Outputs include reports, data repositories and strategy workshops. We show examples of the experience engagement framework in Figure 2 below.

Research methods

This current investigation looks for clues in O’Doherty’s seminal work *Inside the White Cube* with respect to the current attention-experience economy themes to improve the visitor engagement framework (Figure 1). We employed content analysis of O’Doherty’s text informed by researcher introspection (Xue & Desmet, 2019), and applied the visitor engagement framework in multiple institutions and exhibitions. Our content analysis (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017; Neuendorf, 2017) of O’Doherty’s text considered symbols, images, and artworks to determine textual meaning informed by the attention-experience economy. We communicate core themes as a table (see Table 1) acknowledging influence by “social factors and epistemological outlook” and fix or shift variables that influence the “input and outputs” (Glanville, 1999, p. 82). Interpretation of O’Doherty’s text with respect to engagement experience themes infers “another coder would code differently” (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017, p. 9). The inclusion of variables that are six elements known as ‘Experiencescape’ (Rossman & Duerden, 2019, p. 60) are loci for the themes in the ‘White Cube’ text mapped with ‘attention- experience economy’ themes. The elements in the Experiencescape table are listed as:

- People: all people that create and design experiences. Individual and co experience are factored.

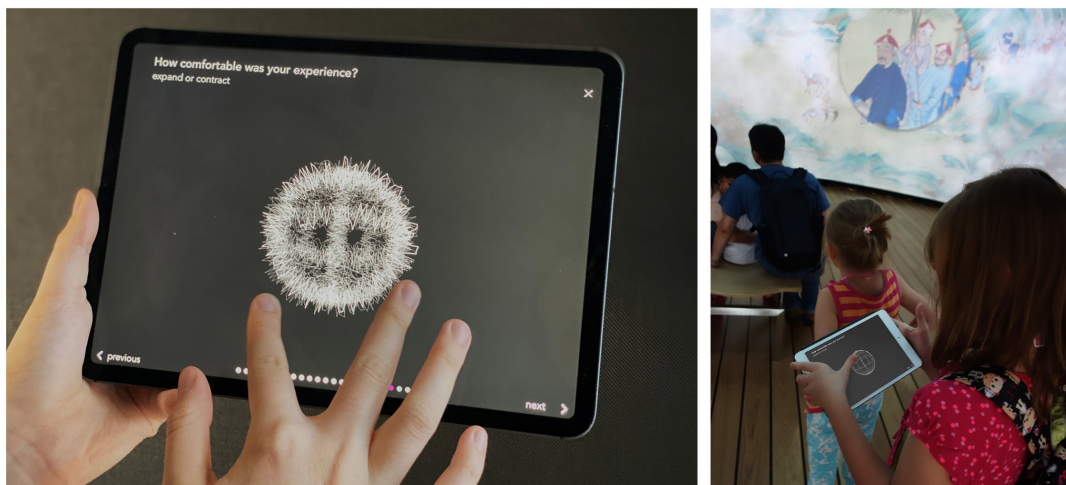


Figure 2. Example of the Experience Evaluation Framework

- Place: raw materials for situated and structured experiences such as space and time.
- Objects: real, virtual affordance of the experience-physical, social, psychological.
- Rules: context, codified, social, cultural situated expectations of the experience.
- Relationships: passive and active, individual, collective, co-created before, during and after activity.
- Blocking: experience design, interaction, location setting, flow, movement, audio, senses, and choreography.

Provocation

As McEvelley's (1986) Introduction to *The White Cube* defends, "what the highly controlled context of the modernist gallery does to the art object, what it does to the viewing subject, and, in a crucial moment for modernism, how the context devours the object, becoming it" (O'Doherty, 1999, p. 7). The question of context underpins the issues today re-interpreted as individual, co-created, and self-driven experiences. The pre-, during, and post-experience (Dewey, 2005; Hassenzahl, 2018) form an array of experiences in cultural institutions. Experience of a cultural institution may start online, with others and or one person. Post the experience may include a static document.

As context becomes the content in socially mediated experiences, participatory or otherwise, such experiences feed a cycle of the commodification of the experience increased by experience participation. O'Doherty (1999) tells us to wise up to any common or accepted forms of adoption such as the once salon style of the exhibit in the 1830s and to question hierarchies of genre and exhibition design taxonomy.

As people are the raw materials for situated and structured experiences their narrative of experiences of place and space in either physical and online exhibitions are journeys at unknown and uncontrolled points in time. Experiences and associated visitor paths may be "examined as a hypertext – bobbing, weaving, and webbing from sensation to question, from perception to discovery, among various nodes of information and experience" (Mastai, 2007, p. 2). O'Doherty

implores generations to question the matrix of styles, activities and quasi movements and associated fashions in their narrative. The high flow rewards (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; 2013) in selfie posting performative co-creation is fun yet where are the experiences that may include boredom, and discomfort? The comfort of the selfie ritual while a dynamic act may result in a passive response to the work.

Place is a source of O'Doherty's ideology as both social media space, physically curated spaces and interconnected real and virtual places. Spaces may be segregated and are in-between or liminal experiences "a kind of non-space, ultraspace, or ideal space where the surrounding matrix of space-time is symbolically annulled" (O'Doherty, 1999, p. 7). O'Doherty's aim for a neutral space as an "ultra-space" (O'Doherty, 1999, p. 7) does not negate the issues of the time but rather utilizes the material/ physical space as point of perceptual provocation that is discontinuous and customizable.

As we accept machine learning and generative AI what is the experience of generative digitalization effects common in production (Franck, 2019, p. 18)? How do we ensure that the support system-galleries, museums, collectors, even magazines are still sites for radical propositions for the cube? Irrespective of material, digital or otherwise, is the cube a site to test social and cultural influence? O'Doherty implores us to use the tools of academizing and historicizing art and visitor engagement to reflect and shift autonomies of power, politics, technology, and market forces. Engagement with the cube as an object is a site of art and design discourse for all and such a value system not to be confused with other value measures such as the banking sector.

Today cultural institutions have moved beyond the rules, "as in churches, one does not speak in a normal voice; one does not laugh, eat, drink, lie down, or sleep; one does not get ill, go mad, sing, dance, or make love" (O'Doherty, 1999, p. 7). When we extend the church metaphor, does the convergence of media and digitalization dull another layer of technologized constructs as we lead phone first into an exhibition? The pact to engage criticality by O'Doherty includes all stakeholders of cultural institutions as designers, artists, and visitors with the responsibility to consider the social, cultural, and political experience.

The relationships that build on spectacle attention experiences are not new in contemporary

The Six Elements of the Experiencescapes (Rossman & Duerden, 2019, p. 60)	Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space (O'Doherty, 1999)	Clues/core themes (O'Doherty, 1999, pp. 109-113)	Experience Economy Attention-experience economy
People Micro and macro experiences	Artist, Visitor, Curator, Buyer, Critics, Writers, Manager, Politician	Question-the context of matrix of styles, activities and quasi movements, fashions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artist, manager, participant, user, influencer, celebrity, curator, producer, designer, • All People are the purpose of the content. • Competition for attention. (Franck, 2019) • Status experiences
Place Place, Time, Real, Virtual	Neutral, Space as container of focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ultraspace material/physical • Point for perceptual provocation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dematerialisation and virtualisation production (cyclic and 24/7) • Convergent mediums and media (material/ Physical/temporal) • Experience strategies (Before, during, after) • Distribution= 1:1 1:tens/ hundreds, thousands.
Objects Physical, social, psychological	Context as content- ie; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • art=content=product • space/place= art • art=space/place • institutional control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art once made for illusion now made from illusion p. 109 maker has little control of content as its reception is a determinant. • Art is a cottage industry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multifaceted • Artefacts and products less delineation • Social artefacts • Designated Selfie spaces, insta rooms, • "phone reliant" (Mondloch, 2022, p. 8) • User -generated interpretation/hybrid images
Rules Context, codified, social expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomy from power, politics and market forces. • Politics of perception are key to the production and presentation of art. • The gallery space-the cube is a site for discourse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economies of a field are subverted value system becomes confused. • Caution of academecising, historicising art and visitor experiences likened to banking sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People pay with their attention • Attention invested vs experiences collected asymmetrical. • Edutainment, tourism • Democratisation/disruption of the institution.
Relationships Interaction, influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art / audience relationship testing and mirror of sociopolitical context. • Elevation of visitor to understand purpose/ position in the art cube. • Art-original 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art/visitor/participant responsibility to not be subsumed by the "comedies of ideology and the object" • Connoisseurship and consumption transposed meanings intended in art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualised, personalised, "special" experiences, • Social cultural credit= attributed to experiences by me recorded by others. • Artists, participants, influencers • "Art-themed" • Participatory= shared experiences
Blocking Setting- ie flow, movement choreography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space and site a single container suitable for manipulation. • "things make space happen". (p.39) • Art made for a time (reproduction not easily translate experience) • Outside/inside – art • Low -Fi • Authentic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cult of originality has a place and visitor awareness with respect to sources important. • Museums have developed a type of museum art of mass viewing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinct sites of experience for mass media distribution. • Directed experiences • Spectacular, circus, • High tech, • Presentation/ presentism.

Figure 3. Table informing O'Doherty content analysis.

art-themed exhibitions. An established history of blockbuster panoramas, world fairs, and expos are spectacles that encouraged mass audiences. Today a subtle difference that O’Doherty argues, with exception to intent and rigor, is with the word “themed” in conflict with artist/visitor agency and expertise. For example, artist themed exhibitions such as the Van Gogh blockbuster projections of images sell 4.5 million tickets per annum, approximately \$250 million in revenue and ancillary \$30 million in gift shop revenue (Mondloch, 2022). Revenue derived from the performative attention experiences in the Van Gogh exhibition via social media may relegate the art in the background superimposing the theme in the foreground.

Exhibition sites utilize blocking for maximum experience flow resulting in a finale at the gift shop reframed through O’Doherty’s ideology may reflect the exhibition design intent as parody driven by the value of engagement experiences.

Further to O’Doherty’s point on “context as content” (O’Doherty, 1999, p. 65) are the enhancements via the spectacle of technology: lights, immersive video, and sensorial affectations. Owning up to digital, distorted seductions affecting proprioception and other senses in a space refers to the artist for visitor intention. Such giddy delights remix in a copy and paste method, which may be argued as equally radical as Duchamp’s reoriented floor to the ceiling in *200 Bags of Coal* at the International Exhibition of Surrealism in 1938 in New York (O’Doherty, 1999). To tilt the galley and expectations of an exhibition on another axis is just one example. Exploring O’Doherty’s terminology we re-interpret a digitalized cube and interrogate through Duchamp’s exemplars of the societal status quo relevant to today. Quiet and or mono introspection matched against the attention-experience oriented digital cube requires us to examine the object and the objectives for cultural institutions as O’Doherty reminds us that in the 1930s art was made for illusion and today made from illusion (O’Doherty, 1999). The distinction between made for and made from illusion points to analogies in investigating designing for and designing an experience is contingent on context and content and the inverse. The artist today from O’Doherty’s perspective may have less control of content as its originality and intention may no longer be a determinant. We are encouraged to consider the ramifications of the provisions of art and design in cultural institutions and warned of experiences converted to a cottage industry.

As the production and revenue of attention turnover increase (Franck, 2019) and demand for experience supply increase, what other self-activated de-materialization of the attention experience economy can we infer? O’Doherty references hanging a work as a form of editorialization and as such provokes that the rules within the cube such as hanging a work, projection, installation, and performance can do more than “behaving itself” (O’Doherty, 1999, p. 26). Reflection by editorialization questions the blocking techniques in experience design to extend signaling beyond just the illusion of engagement with the art, artefact, and/or institution. Clarifying the why as to the construction of the cube in any form may also in turn require reflection by designers, curators, and artists on the purpose of engagement.

Engagement as a form of attention capital is a status that cultural institutions are reckoning with. How do cultural institutions manage engagement and position despite their cultural cache in the competition for visitors and broader community engagement? Today such analysis refers to tourism, sports, and cultural institutions. Interpreting O’Doherty that in subscribing to the economy of attention the longer game is the “newest realisations of today become the classical insights of yesterday” (O’Doherty, 1999, p. 12). We need to consider attention turnover in multiple media formats for artists, designers, and stakeholders of cultural institutions. O’Doherty pushes the ideology of the cube for us to consider the flip side of the “constants” of tradition and analysis of innovations. Innovations driving “different kinds of income” in art and life in need of “immanent transformation” (Franck, 2019, p. 15).

Conclusion

The motivation of this research is to look through the lens of O’Doherty’s ideology referencing *Inside the White Cube* to look back and accept the challenges of the liminal space–place dilemma in understanding and designing for engagement experiences in an era of digital acceleration. The experience evaluation framework used in practice is a research prototype and grounds this investigation. As such the framework informed by people, experience, spatio-temporal, affordance, proprioception, context, and virtual/physical is co-created by engagement experiences and therefore not a static reference. The content analysis to extract themes of O’Doherty text was informed by variables of an ‘experiencescape’, People, Place, Objects, Rules,

Relationships and Blocking (Rossman & Duerden, 2019). We include a table as the raw material for further development of the research prototype and offer O'Doherty's themes with respect to the attention-experience economy. Our researcher introspection reinforces that the human, the visitor in the research is part of community of practice. Designing for and evaluating cultural institutions implies responsibility for the voice of the visitor.

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Endnotes

1 (<https://muse-rust.vercel.app/en/muses> ; <https://epfl-pavilions.ch/partners/muse>)