

Academic Collaborations with Community Museums

A Method for Incorporating Contemporary Visual Art
and Art Education in Arts Administration

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1. Introduction

In New York City community museums were established in ethnically diverse neighborhoods during the late 1960s.¹ These new institutions were a result of civic challenges to centralized government in municipal, state and Federal offices. Government responded with a policy known as decentralization, which placed the control over monetary resources with local, nonprofit organizations (PODAIR 2002). Museums were one such nonprofit to receive decentralized funding. Although each institution founded during this period is distinct, all adopted a cultural strategy to lessen the authority of mainstream, or Caucasian influence, especially practices that rejected outright creative production by people of color and women. In American universities, community-based museums are studied in anthropology, sociology, and art history; they are far less examined in the arts management/arts administration field because art administration/management has adopted business school methods (accounting, marketing, leadership) where cultural pluralism is absent from the curriculum.²

This article is a summary report about a two-year academic collaboration with the *Bronx Museum of the Arts*, that included the course *Contemporary Art and Community Museums* offered as an elective to New York University graduate students in the Visual Art Administration Program from the fall of 2011 through the spring 2013.

- 1 The subject of government decentralization, multi-ethnic neighborhoods, and the formation of new museums in the United States are too numerous to account for in this short report (KARP/MULLEN KREAMER/LAVINE 1996).
- 2 In the United States, arts administration programs are most often situated within schools of practical study; art administration and arts management are not a discipline within sociology, nor are they situated within the humanities where cultural pluralism is a core concern. There is as yet no analytical history of U.S. art administration programs that would address the context for why these programs were developed as non-academic, practical programs with a business emphasis (DeVEREAUX 2009).

The course abandoned management literature in favor of humanities-based texts in art history, history, cultural theory, and art education. The curriculum tested how humanities-based understanding of art with practical application of marketing research strategies formed a richer pedagogical strategy for incorporating a multi-ethnic dialogue into arts administration. In omitting management literature, students had a framework in which to challenge assumptions about American business-based methods and devise strategies for engaging local audiences specific to the South Bronx, where the museum is located. This report will demonstrate that the humanities, not management literature, offers the necessary theoretical, aesthetic and historical framework for the study of community museum practices, literature appropriate to the study of culture and communities. The report provides context for the partnership with the *Bronx Museum*, the core theories explored, and student research within the syllabus designed by the author. The conclusion offers thoughts about how cultural pluralism can be better incorporated into cultural management pedagogy.

2. Background

The Bronx, a borough of New York City,³ challenged management presumptions about cultural audiences as upper-middle class and elite.⁴ The *Bronx Museum* serves a local audience of African, African American, Caribbean, Central American and Asian descent. Caucasian audience members are largely educators, arts professionals, and artists (some of whom have moved to the South Bronx as part of cultural districting, urban planning efforts) (RACHLEFF BURTT 2011). The *Bronx Museum's* artistic mission is to showcase the work of artists whose heritage is Hispanic, African, and Asian, and their mission embraces cultural diversity, "The Bronx Museum of the Arts is a contemporary art museum that connects diverse audiences to the urban experience through its permanent collection, special exhibitions, and education

- 3 New York City is comprised of five boroughs: Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, The Bronx, and Staten Island. Until 1898 all were separate municipalities. For a concise history of New York City and its consolidation in 1898 see François Weil (2004).
- 4 For a typical marketing discussion where socio-economic and ethnic differences are absent see Neil and Mark Kolter (2004). Another influential text on building arts audiences that is also socio-economic and race-blind, see Kevin F. McCarthy and Kimberly Jinnett (2001). For an excellent analysis of art museum elitism, see Carol Duncan (1995).

programs,” the mission reads. The programming is also connected to ethnic difference, “reflecting the borough’s dynamic communities, the Museum is the crossroad where artists, local residents, national and international visitors meet.”⁵

To better understand the Bronx and those who regularly take part in cultural activities in the Bronx, the author worked with the *Bronx Museum’s* education staff in 2010, two years before the course was developed, to design a cultural interest evaluation, which was completed in 2011. The evaluation was designed to measure interest and attitudes via marketing methodology, and approximately 800 Bronx residents participated.⁶ The findings suggested that the cultural audience were predominately artists and educators, across all ethnic groups. The findings also suggested potential for growing a Bronx audience among parents and among public school teachers; however, the programs would need to meet the needs of the target audience. For parents, this would mean art classes for youth, and for teachers, this would mean aligning exhibitions with the units (or subject area, such as the American Civil Rights Movement) taught in public schools.

The Bronx itself is 42.03 square miles (67.641 kilometers) and is densely populated, with 9,999.9 people per square mile⁷ (1.6 kilometers) and a total of 1,385,108 residents. Using demographic categories from

- 5 The mission is noted on the *Bronx Museum’s* website, see: <<http://www.bronxmuseum.org/information.html>> (accessed June 22, 2013).
- 6 The 43-question, six-part survey was made available using Bronx cultural organization mailing lists, in English and Spanish via an online link via Survey Monkey, and in a printed form. Two parts of the survey were optional: a series of questions for individuals who had visited the *Bronx Museum of the Arts* and a series of questions for parents or caregivers of school-age children. The survey did not evaluate the quality of existing programming at any Bronx cultural organization; rather, questions regarded the level of interest (from making to observing) in six disciplines: music, theater, dance, literature, visual arts, and media arts. Demographic data was sought via questions on age, gender, race, occupation, and Bronx residency, among other subjects. A series of questions asked participants to indicate their preferred media outlets. An estimated 15,000 had the opportunity to participate; 779 people completed the English-language survey and 39 completed the Spanish-language survey, for a total of 818 respondents, a 6.8 % response rate. 79.1 % of the respondents claimed Bronx residency. The survey yielded four key findings: 1) there is greater interest in partaking in Bronx-based cultural activities by African American and Puerto Rican residents in comparison to Caucasians; 2) visual arts, music, and dance are highly valued in the Bronx; 3) passive activities are preferable to hands-on participatory programming overall; 4) promotion of Bronx cultural activities is perceived as lackluster (RACHLEFF BURTT 2011).
- 7 All the demographic data throughout the report is taken from the U.S. Census Bureau’s online data spreadsheets, filtered by New York State, Bronx County. See <<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36/36005.html>>.

the U.S. 2010 census, the Bronx reflects great ethnic and racial diversity; overall, the Bronx population is 10.9 % White Persons/Not Hispanic, 36.5 % Black, and 53.5 % Hispanic or Latino origin. Nearly a third, or 31 %, are foreign born. The median household income in the borough is \$ 32,888, and 28.3 % of the residents live at or below the poverty level. For comparison, in New York State, only 14 % of the residents live at or below the poverty level, and the median income is \$ 54,554.

The Bronx has a sizable youth population: 27.9 % are between the ages of 5 and 17, and 8 % are under five years old. Historically, the South Bronx,⁸ where the bulk of the survey activity took place because this is the area where the *Bronx Museum* is located, has been occupied by rental property. Not surprisingly, the home ownership rate is only 21.65 % of the total population, significantly lower than the 55.7 % ownership rate in New York State. Even with the 2008 mortgage crisis in the United States, which was due in part to predatory lending practices in low income communities (LORD 2005), the Bronx demographic data suggests there was minimal rental conversion or new housing to own throughout the 2000s. More research needs to be done, however demographic data shows that where there is a larger proportion of home ownership, such as the Riverdale section in the Northern Bronx, the median income rises, and with that rise, increased businesses/amenities exist.⁹

The evaluation was not a random sampling of Bronx residents; those surveyed either received an email link sent from a Bronx art organization's mailing list or an individual participated at a cultural event in the Bronx where NYU graduate students disseminated the evaluation. For that reason, the demographic results do not match Bronx demographics overall. The participants, 79.1 % of whom lived in the Bronx, were largely working full time, employed in arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations (29.3 %) or in education, training, and library occupations (27.9 %; the occupation categories come from the U.S. Department of Labor). The ages were predominately 26-45 (45.1 %) and 46-65 (36.5 %), and 68.7 % were female.

8 The South Bronx is a geographic area in the lower western half of the borough that includes Mott Haven, Melrose, Morrisania-Clairemont, Hunts Point-Crotona Park East, Tremont, University Heights, and Lower Fordham, among others (GONZALEZ 2004: 109-129).

9 Riverdale is the best-known wealthy enclave in the Bronx, and is a regular topic in real estate articles. For a typical overview from the home ownership and amenities perspective, see Jeff Vandam (2006). Also see Evelyn Gonzalez (2004).

Educationally, 37.9 % of the respondents had a graduate or professional degree, 25.9 % had a bachelor's degree, and 5.6 % had an associate's degree. Thus, nearly two thirds of the respondents had higher education degrees, which is not reflective of the Bronx as a whole, where only 17.6 % of the residents have a bachelor's degree, according to the most recent census data. Put another way, the Bronx survey captured the cultural attitudes of the 17.6 % of residents with higher education backgrounds.

The results indicated more than 50 % (majority) of the respondents had an interest and commitment to art appreciation and art production, and a majority of the participants believed there was a gap in such services by the *Bronx Museum*.¹⁰ These findings underscored the need for better training in designing programming based upon local and expert input, and stronger communication practices with local residents. The survey findings helped shape the course design and the assigned readings. Cultural diversity, an area of deep importance to the evaluation participants, would form the core subject across humanities-based readings. The next section discusses some of the theories and methods explored in the academic partnership courses with the *Bronx Museum*.

3. Motivations for Designing a Museum-Community Course at New York University

To better understand my motivation in designing a course in partnership with the *Bronx Museum*, some background information is helpful. I arrived in New York City in 1986, at the height of American multiculturalism debates, to work as a curator in an alternative gallery devoted to work by women and artists of color (RACHLEFF 2012). I

10 Seven questions were posed: how did visitors learn about the museum, likely visitation based upon recurring themes in the museum's programming; likely visitation at recurring adult programming; rationale for museum visits in general based upon John Falk's research; potential for sequential art classes for adults, potential for drop-in classes for adults; areas of interest for classes; and open ended questions eliciting reactions to the museum overall. Key findings included lack of awareness about the museum's mission to present contemporary artists of multi-ethnic background; strong interest in multi-ethnic/ethnic heritage subjects; great interest in the history of the Bronx (including hip hop); improved museum-school opportunities; more effective promotion locally; great interest in classes for children/youth; need for better communication with the Bronx visual artist community (RACHLEFF BURTT 2011).

felt I was part of a seismic cultural and aesthetic shift, especially as the subject matter often drew from an artist's personal experiences mediated through their cultural heritage. Art shifted away from banality (the deadpan of postminimal and conceptual art) to an activist stance seeking transformation of mainstream culture. My later career in New York State's arts council (1999-2007) concentrated on supporting multicultural projects. The goal was to offer funding for projects that featured under-recognized art, and a complementary goal was to increase local public participation. These experiences were foundational to my thinking about the role of art in American society.

When I joined the visual arts administration faculty at New York University in 2008, the curriculum was (and remains) premised upon business and bureaucratic management training, and I discovered the approach leaves out discussions of race, class, and ethnicity. Rather than attempting to overhaul the entire program (which would not have succeeded), I concentrated on my own course load. How can ethnicity, class, and gender become vital factors in arts management discussions?

The partnership with the *Bronx Museum of the Arts* grew in response to that question, because any program offered by the Museum would necessarily involve a consideration of cultural pluralism. My core partner throughout the process was the art educator and head of the Museum's programs and education, Sergio Bessa. The course would act doubly: student research would be beneficial to the *Bronx Museum* while the course design provided a humanities-based approach to arts management that would necessarily involve a study of multiethnic cultural production in cultural theory, and culturally critical studies in art education, art museums/art history, and museum education.

4. Academic Theories: Cultural Production, Social Class, and Ethnicity

A few theories proved crucial to our thinking about culturally diverse museum-audience relationships and about arts management more broadly. Cornel West, an American philosopher and religious scholar, has been one of the most important contributors to defining cultural pluralism as cultural production. His 1990 essay, *The New Cultural Politics of Difference*, argues that there is a disruption in cultural production, and it is centered on assertions of difference. West writes,

What makes [new cultural production] novel – along with the cultural politics they produce – is how and what constitutes difference, the weight and gravity it is given in representation, and the way in which highlighting issues like extermination, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, nation, nature, region, at their historical moment acknowledges some decision making and disruption from previous forms of cultural critique. (WEST 1994: 1)

West posits that creative responses to current circumstances are distinct from the actions of the civil rights period. There is a lack of a binary discourse (i.e., white vs. black); rather, cultural production is premised upon hybrid positions that acknowledge the roots of European (Anglo) thought and reject its elitism, racism, etc. The hybrid stance has the possibility to overhaul the art world via new value structures, values that are oppositional to market (capitalist) interests, and at the same time to acknowledge how all cultural production is reliant on the market. This hybrid position is not revolutionary (there is no overturning systems); instead, cultural production must use the system to readjust, to realign with its beneficiaries.

Writing from an anthropologist perspective, and influenced by cultural geographer David Harvey's (2007) essays on the neoliberal economy or the restoration of class exploitation, Arlene Davila's examination of el Barrio on Manhattan's far Upper East Side defines Caribbean, especially Puerto Rican, identity and the challenges posed by what she terms a Latinization, or the effacement of difference among all Spanish-speaking cultures, which is a hegemonic process. A focal point for Davila's theory of Latinization is the community museum, *El Museo del Barrio*, and its transformation from a Puerto Rican visual art education center and museum to a Latin American institution. She defines this shift as part of a disavowal of Caribbean cultural production and switch to the more marketable Latin American banner, especially Mexican, Venezuelan, Brazilian, and Argentine art, all steeped in European tradition. Davila argues,

The 'Latinization' of this formerly Puerto Rican institution soon appeared to me to be more closely connected to larger dynamics – ranging from the marketing of Latin American art to the representation of an emerging 'Latino/Latina identity' – than to specific developments in the neighborhood itself. (DAVILA 1999: 181)

The change reflects the growing influence of the art market and by extension, art collectors, over local determination. As funding declines, organizations like El Museo must find new, creative ways of supporting their programs, and wealthy collectors of Latin American art are one resource.

But locally, the switch in cultural mandate has led to deep fissures in the community, especially because neighborhood residents have not benefited economically from this Latinization. If anything, the shift has disempowered Puerto Rican residents of *el Barrio*, turning them away from their museum. At the same time, Latinization did not quell social prejudices in American society. Indeed, *el Barrio*'s Spanish-speaking citizens continue to be marginalized as Anglo Americans arrive in the neighborhood through urban redevelopment projects. These tensions remain unresolved, and will continue as long as the interests of *El Museo* align with the art market and Anglo American elite values, and not with the values of local residents. Davila's Latinization theory helps contextualize the changes in community museums as American government support declines and new revenue sources come increasingly from the wealthy elite.

Another useful frame comes from sociology, where theories about cultural participation and the social role of museums have postulated that art and artists are part of a complex network that involves institutions and audiences. For example, recent essays by Pascal Gielen help to situate what is meant by 'local' in a schema that does not necessarily present the international art market and globalization of contemporary cultural expression as negative. Further, Gielen is especially interested in artists and their role as interlocutors in public venues or in museums. Although Gielen does not discuss race or ethnicity, his concept of "local" is relational to the concerns in theories of difference.

In Gielen's essay *Museum Chronotopics*, he divides museums into concepts of time ("chrono," which means time) and place ("topics," which refers to mapping – it comes from Bakhtin's theories about the novel and perceptions of space/time, which are treated as symmetrical and interdependent). Gielen's (2009) schema is defined as cultural attitudes that can be grouped into three categories: local, global, and glocal. Gielen defines these as follows. Local Time is a linear construct, similar to a timeline. A linear approach in museums is the installation of collections as chronology, periodizing, where the view of the past is a fixed construct. The viewer is passive, and the institution is authoritative about cultural value. Global Time is the opposite of local. Universality regarding art's sociocultural import, coupled with conviction about specific artists/art movements, determines the discourse. Here, powerful interests attached to economics and social capital is affirmed. Local efforts are not conceived as culturally significant; they are marginal to the more significant trends supported by market interests.

Gielen's final category, Glocal Time, is multifaceted, a hybrid of the local and global. The glocal is reflexive; the institution occupies a position that is collaborative in meaning-making. Moreover, the glocal does not discount either local or global trends; rather, it situates cultural production in a broader conversation that recognizes international influences. In this way, conceptions of the past are not fixed, and they are also not co-opted by what the art market sanctions.

There exist many experienced pasts and that access to a specific past depends on the instruments of disclosure that are used to enable it. [... The museum] staging of the past is put forward as one of the possible stagings. It shows a picture of itself and is thereby reflexive. In other words, the gap between a historical event and the way it is currently presented is dramatized. (GIELEN 2009: 101f.)

It is in Glocal Time that we have the most complex cultural production. Following postmodernist theories, Gielen identifies the use of irony, parody, and travesty as an aesthetic strategy deployed by artists. These techniques weaken notions of an absolute past. He writes, "In the dialogue, a world, a discourse, a culture or history is made relative, 'less privileged' and at the same time more unstable." (GIELEN 2009: 103)

Another essay by Gielen, *Mapping Community Art*, turns the discussion from institutions to artists interacting under the auspices of art organizations. Here Gielen posits that all art production is social; the arts run along an axis from Auto-Relational (serves the artist's identity) to Allo-Relational (serves another, with an emphasis on social relation aspects rather than aesthetics). Gielen further complicates his axis with four other quadrants, in which art is consumed in two ways: digestive (meaning consumptive) and subversive (meaning disturbing). His grid flows on one axis as Digestive Auto-Relational Art (community input – via dialogue – shapes the artist's project) to Digestive Allo-Relational Art (art as social benefit, part of social work, and the artist is collaborator, not sole author). Perpendicular to the Digestive approach is the Subversive, specifically, Subversive Auto-Relational Art (radical challenging of social convention) to Subversive Allo-Relational Art (art's participation with social rights and political movements) (GIELEN 2011: 20-26). The point here is that Gielen helps us to see community art practices on a more complex spectrum, and importantly, in areas where the activity is related to avant-garde production (serving the artist) and practices that are socially-oriented (benefitting the community), rather than in the framework typically offered by art historians, which sanctifies avant art practices embraced by art critics, institutions, and collectors. Indeed, Gielen repoliticizes all forms of community

practices by situating community art as part of the disillusionment with globalism's neoliberal agenda, yet remaining mindful that community-based work will always be limited due to the economy scale. He cautions that in a neoliberal economic system where class divisions have become more stratified as the role of the state declines,

Community art becomes a cheaper form of social work, especially as it is usually offered on a project basis, whereas social services, including local schools and hospitals, call for a more serious, structural investment. It is very doubtful whether one can effectively tackle serious issues, such as social deprivation and disintegration, with temporary projects and similarly temporary responsibilities. (GIELEN 2011: 30)

Gielen's argument recalls Cornel West's hybridity when he writes that art is most effective when it resists the "uniform, homogenizing, calculating logic" of the market, and that community art is most powerful when the process is situated within dialogue amid "the confrontation of many singular and dissonant forms of imaginative power." (GIELEN 2011: 33) Gielen's theory leaves out the authority of the institution and artist – their *professionalism* over the public. And here we can turn to art history for more guidance on how the relationship between art organizations and the public is premised on an unequal exchange. Art historians such as Carol Duncan have resituated the founding of American museums in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries away from civic achievement toward a 'civilizing ritual' space. Museums were no longer unquestionable vestiges of a social good; instead, they came to occupy an ideological realm that proffers Protestant values of refinement with connoisseurship.

The museum model conceives the public art museum as a ritual that makes visible the ideals of a republican state, frames the 'public' it claims to serve, and dramatizes the unity of the nation. (DUNCAN 1995a: 49)

American museums then appeared to be democratic spaces even as they simultaneously secured class distinction through what was collected, how it was displayed, and when it was open to the public (during the 1960s, free evening hours and expanded weekend hours were secured by direct action/artist strikes; museums had an extremely limited working-class public).

America is a country of heightened polarities, which probably accounts for the resurgence of interest in the dialogue theories of Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin and Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in the field of museum studies and museum (art) education. Imported from Bakhtin is 'dialogism', or open-ended outcomes arising

from conversation, which is informed by cultural practices (ROMNEY n. d.: 4f.). This means there are more than two perspectives (so the discourse is not dialectical). Moreover, there is no synthesis; instead, there is change, which is not fixed, but systematic and relational (or, put another way, our beliefs are influenced by exchanges with others). From Paulo Freire, whose theories drew from his work as a teacher, comes ‘Intergroup’ Theory, in which social roles are conceived as equal:

the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with students, who in turn while being taught, also teach. They all become responsible for a process in which all grow. (ROMNEY N.d.: 7)

Freirian methods integrate multiple perspectives, use metaphors that encourage self-examination of beliefs, and recognize that all participants are both individuals and members of communities. This means that everyone is part of the power/privilege/oppression dynamic within their own families and communities; the mediators in the dialogue (teachers) function as catalysts.

5. From Theory to Practice: An Academic Partnership

How are community-based art museums in ethnically diverse neighborhoods different from the general art museum? Urban planners Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Carl Grodach (2004) addressed this question in their study of culturally specific museums in Los Angeles, California. They suggested the following generalizations about community-based museums: all ‘inform’ and ‘educate’ a larger public about specific cultures, all develop awareness about matters of ethnic heritage and history, and all ‘interpret’ and ‘translate’ ethnic heritage to outsiders. Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach (2004: 59) describe five roles of culturally specific museums: 1) advocate of a particular culture; 2) interpreter of a particular cultural heritage; 3) zone of contact between the culture featured and outsiders; 4) keeper of ethnic traditions; and 5) site of contest (challenge the status quo of mainstream perception).

Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach’s findings suggest that despite these museums’ founding as part of liberation movements, their cultural outlook is as conservative as that of mainstream institutions – preserving specific points of view, especially those that do not question the essence of ethnic authenticity. And this conservative perspective favors community self-definition over avant-garde (conceptual) expression.

The tension became acute in the late 1990s, when multiethnic artists involved in the aesthetic avant-garde rejected unproblematic assertions of cultural identity in favor of postethnic, culturally fluid strategies.

Davila, Gielen, and Freire provide a very important framework in which to understand the issues involved with the Bronx Museum of the Arts, in part because the institution does not fit neatly into Loukaitou-Sideris's definition of a community museum. Like *El Museo*, it transitioned from a community-centric outlook to more broadly embrace art world issues and trends (an artist avant-garde) and is cognizant of the validation that comes from participating in the international art market (international fairs, etc.).¹¹ The *Bronx Museum* operates as an 'Auto-Relational' global institution in terms of its avant-garde programming, and as "Allo-Relational" in terms of its education philosophy (which follows the Freirian educational paradigm via Augusto Boal's theater of the oppressed, a method in which the audience become participants in theatrical events, and in so doing, become aware of their own subjectivity; the goal is to raise consciousness in order to foster the betterment of social conditions). At the heart of the enterprise are exercises to break down class barriers, as well as other socially constructed prejudices that result in discrimination. Neither strategy – In its orthodoxy – takes the full view of the local community and its needs, sensibilities, and interests.

Since its founding, the *Bronx Museum's* most renowned projects have investigated the borough's legacy as the site of innovations in hip hop culture, especially collaborations among young graffiti artists and visual artists from the Lower East Side (mainly) during the 1970s, and included significant exhibitions on Latin American art (Davila's Latinization might have begun with the 1988 exhibition, *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States 1920-1970*) (CANCEL 1988). The museum has also shown survey projects of mid-career living artists of ethnically diverse backgrounds, and was host to a major exhibition of contemporary Brazilian art.

From the late 1970s and through the 1980s the Bronx Museum was directed by Luis Cancel, an artist and activist who grew up in the Bronx, and who sought to distinguish the museum as an incubator for emerging professionals and for emerging artists of color. Following

11 In 2012, the *Bronx Museum* was selected as the organizer of the 55th International Art Exhibition in Venice, and they selected Sarah Sze, a leading American artist, to represent the U.S. Pavilion. <www.bronxmuseum.org/files/venice_bxma.pdf> (Accessed March 22, 2013).

Cancel's tenure, the museum underwent nearly a decade of leadership changes until 2006 and the hiring of the current director, Holly Block; the administrative structure and the local ties, especially in education, that had been developed under Cancel slowly evaporated.

An expansion of the museum's facility, completed in 2006, resulted in a new wing, which houses an education center, space for an outdoor sculpture garden, a new entrance, and additional gallery exhibition space. The new wing also increased the operation budget. The museum's chief benefactor is New York City's Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA). However, the city's largesse came to an abrupt halt with the steep decline in revenue following the onset of the American economic crisis in 2008. The museum had to shoulder the increased costs for its new, larger facility with a budget reduced by more than 30 percent since 2009, from nearly \$ 5 million per year to a projected \$ 3 million.¹² Such cuts have had a draconian impact on programming. Shorter public hours, staff layoffs, and reductions in school-based services have further weakened the museum's community ties; currently, annual attendance is a modest 40,000 visitors in a borough of 1.4 million residents.¹³

Conversations with current and former staff indicate a desire to be seen as a serious cultural arbiter within New York City's contemporary art scene—the Global mode posited by Gielen. The underlying assumption of the Global is that a local focus diminishes artistic quality and isolates the museum from the international art market, where reputation and resources (critical, monetary) are centered.

“When viewers select a work of art that closely matches their viewing abilities, they enhance the likelihood for a successful viewing experience,” posited educator Richard Lachapelle (2003: 126), affirming the greater emphasis on exchange in gallery discussion programs generally. Facilitating ease and enjoyment is, rhetorically, the primary objective of museums. Educators and visitor services staff have traditionally sought to ensure that connections with art begin with subjects that are known and appealing to the audience.

However, the *Bronx Museum's* education program concentrates almost exclusively on three programs that serve a tiny percentage of Bronx residents: the Teen Council (15 students per year, and not necessarily from the Bronx); the school partnership program (currently

12 For information on the *Bronx Museum's* finances, go to the website: <<http://www.guidestar.org/>> (accessed July 7, 2013).

13 *Bronx Museum* education staff, interview by author, New York, June 22, 2010 (KEEGAN/KLEIMAN 2006).

4 schools out of a pool of more than 100 in the borough collaborate with the museum); and general group visit tours, which offer esoteric tours using Boalian movement exercises and, following the physical experience, art making in 1.5 to 2-hour blocks of time.¹⁴ Each public school has its own distinct culture and methods set by the principal, which is why most museum education departments have one person working solely on teacher-administrator relationships. Expertise with teachers and administrators enables the entire museum education staff to understand the various needs of the schools and ensure the museum's program relevance. The *Bronx Museum* has one person who books tours, but that individual is not empowered to gather data regarding the needs of the schools or trained in museum education methodology, limiting their ability to suggest changes to the current practice. Volumes of museum education literature over the past thirty years suggest that museums must provide services that are actually desired by the local residents (FORTNEY/SHEPPARD 2010).

I began the academic partnership centered on the education department, the area in the greatest need of research, evaluation, and revision. Under Sergio Bessa, director of programs which includes education, the museum moved from object-based, visual literacy methods common to art museums (close looking with contextual information provided by an educator to facilitate group analysis) to a more experimental approach, the Boalian, theater of the oppressed, physical, trust-building exercises.¹⁵ This change was due in no small part to Bessa's experience of the tremendous poverty in the South Bronx, a social stratification not unlike the impoverished conditions Augusto Boal found in Brazil and sought to ameliorate through creative action. In addition to Bessa, two administrators untrained in education pedagogy (beyond on-the-job training) served as advisors to the NYU students, and three per-diem teaching artists – trained in Boalian methods by a theater expert – also provided feedback on the research and ideas pioneered during the first year and a half (fall 2011; fall, spring 2012).

14 For information on the Bronx Museum's school and youth programs, visit: <<http://www.bronxmuseum.org/education.html>> (accessed July 7, 2013).

15 The two most common theories-methods in American art museum education are Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and Abigail Housen and Phil Yenawine's Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). Freire and cultural theory are rarely utilized in American art museum education methods. An excellent overview of museum education training is David Ebitz (2008).

Bessa requested that in addition to studying the museum's education programming, my course develop an art exhibition that would address the community's interest in local subject matter. He also requested that in devising the exhibition, we utilize the museum's permanent collection, which comprises mainly contemporary art, particularly works on paper that date from the early 1990s, and determine what objects might lend themselves to an exhibit whose theme would resonate with the local residents. We called the eventual project the *Bronx Lab* as a means of conveying that it was an experiment. We also decided the exhibition would have strong curricular ties to the public schools.

Further conversations with museum staff indicated the museum's lack of knowledge regarding the needs of Bronx public schools. The two administrators in the education department wanted to better understand what teachers needed and wanted, and from those needs, determine how the museum could modify, strengthen, and solidify their school group visit program. This broad challenge – assess the current education programs; assess Bronx public school needs vis-à-vis museum visits; organize an art exhibition – coupled with the university's 15-week semester system meant that the academic partnership would proceed in a trifurcated manner: the “Bronx Lab” exhibition concept; unraveling the mystery of Bronx public school teachers; and the needs of NYU students who expect a beginning, middle, and end to a course within a 3.5-month period, a time frame entirely unrelated to the museum's work. After preliminary research indicated a methodological disconnect between Boalian methods and public school literacy skill-building goals, I decided to have students observe, but not amend, the *Bronx Museum's* education pedagogy until I could better understand the underlying value of Boalian methods and how to better design visual literacy experiences that respected those values. Our pedagogical efforts would also incorporate cultural understanding of the artwork to be included in the *Bronx Lab* exhibition (on a theme then yet to be developed) and public school teacher literacy goals.

During the first semester, fall 2011, we studied the *Bronx Museum's* art collection to familiarize ourselves with the scope, issues, and themes that might work with the *Bronx Lab* concept. We accomplished this by interviewing a former collection curator who was active during the 1990s when the majority of the collection was acquired by the Museum. We also reviewed the collection database, and by meeting with Bessa two times as part of the course. The final project that term was students' designed gallery discussion that highlighted an artwork in the collection

presented to *Bronx Museum* education staff, outside museum education experts, and Bessa. Our goal was twofold: to test the effectiveness of visual literacy methods with contemporary art, and to determine the willingness of the *Bronx Museum* to readopt visual literacy as the method in the *Bronx Lab* project. Students cited context-based learning in the literature of John Falk and Lynn Dierking, and object-based analysis methods favored by Rika Burnham and Elliott Kai-Kee. Both Falk and Dierking and Burnham and Kai-Kee offered methods for incorporating visual literacy methods, which better situated an interpretive discussion as part of the context of an artwork. Additionally, focusing on visual cues within a work of art uses critical thinking skills, skills that correlate to literacy (EBITZ 2008; FALK/DIERKING 1992; BURNHAM/KAI-KEE 2011).

For example, the NYU students based discussions on artworks that offered complex discussions about ethnicity in America, particularly Byron Kim's *Prescriptives Portrait, Sharon Kim* (1992), an oval painting of a flesh tone made entirely of the Prescriptives cosmetics brand. Also selected was Glenn Ligon's *Untitled* (1992), an oil stick drawing, black stenciled onto white background, that repeated the text, "I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp, white background," from Zora Neale Hurston's 1928 essay, *How It Feels to Be Colored Me*. Both of these works confronted racial biases and yet were also ambiguous, without a final determination about racial identity. The ambiguity meant that the works could be discussed in multiple contexts, including the history of the American civil rights movement, a subject studied in elementary, middle, and high school.

The students gave two oral presentations of the artwork they selected, first to guest critics not affiliated with the *Bronx Museum*, but active in visual art-cultural diversity. The second presentation was to the Museum staff (noted above) and other guest critics. The students's artwork discussions – designed to approximate an actual museum tour – focused on developing questions (prompts) incorporating actual racial definitions used by different countries, as a comparison to the United States and as a means of showing that racial ambiguity is present not only in artistic expression but also in society. Embracing the subjectivity involved in dialogues on race helped them understand how such subjectivities define cultures. Even though the *Bronx Museum* declined to shift their method to visual literacy, and thus would ultimately not utilize their research, the students' discussion plans were still given to the museum at the end of the semester.

The spring 2012 semester (with many of the same students) concentrated solely on the public school curriculum, as that element required more sustained focus. I elected to further the research of visual literacy practices, despite the museum's disinterest, because a preponderance of literature, especially Kim Fortney and Beverly Shepard's recent book, *An Alliance of the Spirit: Museums and Schools* – indicated this method was most promising for museum-school relationships. This decision naturally caused tension between NYU and the *Bronx Museum*; however, we did not advocate the removal of Boalian-based methods. Rather, the Boalian-based methods are best in voluntary programming such as family and after-school programs. Our *Bronx Lab* would offer an exhibition proposal that was aligned public school learning goals *and* with contemporary art museum exhibition practices. The museum will decide whether to produce the project as researched, or in a form the staff deems suitable. The benefit for NYU art administration students (and other students enrolled in the course from outside the program) was the opportunity to align practices – contemporary art and public school learning goals – that initially appear to have very little overlap, and determine a method for greater use by the public school community in the Bronx.

In fall 2012, the course no longer embraced the Boalian method or the teaching art method deployed by the *Bronx Museum*. Instead, the goal shifted toward teacher needs and privileged student research findings regarding effective school-museum relationships. By seeking out robust examples of more successful New York-based community museums' public school programming and further studying visual literacy models, we would ultimately premise the *Bronx Lab* exhibition upon effective methods with public school teachers, the core audience for the eventual exhibit.

One other important development in the research also occurred in spring 2012, New York State's recent adoption of new federal education standards, called the Common Core. Devised under President Obama's Education Secretary, Arne Duncan, it privileges critical thinking skills and has more academically rigorous goals than the previous standards.¹⁶

16 The Common Core standards also codify the way the American public school system holds teachers accountable for student learning, a paradigm switch away from administrators. This began under President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind policy (2000-2008), which made extensive testing a permanent part of public school education, along with the expansion of 'charter' schools, public schools that are not government-run but NGOs, making them unaccountable to teacher unions and union require-

The new Common Core provided a marvelous opportunity to test visual literacy methods and to design programs that would align directly with the new learning criteria of the city's public school system.

In spring 2012 the seminar class of 9 was divided into two teams. One student team met with four Bronx public school teachers for one in-depth interview about the changes to their curriculum under the new Common Core, and how museum visits might support their curricular goals. A second team investigated four Bronx-based arts organizations whose education programs historically aligned with the public school curriculum,¹⁷ and two community-based museums with strong ties to the public school system, *El Museo del Barrio* and the *Studio Museum in Harlem*. By the end of the semester, students were to 1) determine a topic that would be of greatest value to the public school community and be supported by artwork in the *Bronx Museum's* collection, and 2) develop a pre-museum visit, museum visit, and post-museum visit pedagogy that would embrace standards (learning goals) outlined in the Common Core documents.

Students' research (especially that of one student, Yoi Tanaka Gaylor, who continued the teacher research in an independent study in fall 2012 and spring 2013) determined that America's multiracial (heterogeneous) society was the theme with the greatest potential to bridge teacher needs and the *Bronx Museum's* collection strength. Cultural pluralism as an overarching topic, which could include immigration, would fit into both Social Studies and English Language Arts standards. Because our research was anecdotal, not statistically valid, there is no proof that our finding was valid. Nonetheless, I made the decision to develop an exhibition proposal and complementary programs based upon cultural pluralism because when reviewing the Common Core guidelines, cultural pluralism is a strong, overarching theme.¹⁸ However, contemporary art was considered a barrier:

Part of the difficulty in getting teachers to schedule museum visits is their unfamiliarity with or the perceived inaccessibility of contemporary art and their fear of not understanding it, [...]. As [one Bronx educator] described, 'you wouldn't

ments. For more information on the Common Core standards, see: Arne Duncan and Joan Richardson (2009). For New York State's adoption of the standards, see: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/common_core_standards/> (accessed March 2013).

17 The Bronx organizations were: *Bronx River Art Center*, *Casita Maria*, *DreamYard Projects*, and *Wave Hill*.

18 See New York City's specially created website for the new Common Core online at: <<http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/CommonCoreLibrary/About/NYSStandards/default.htm>> (accessed July 7, 2013).

bring your class to see something you couldn't explain.' Temporary exhibitions only increase the feeling of uncertainty and unease, as shows rotate often. Teachers feel comfortable going to museums like the Museum of Natural History because they always know what to expect and it is easier for them to explain and interpret for their students. (GAYLOR 2012)

Gaylor's finding affirms the analysis of other educators in the field, and also supports the thesis of a book project recently produced by the education staff of The New Museum in New York City (CAHAN/KOCUR 2011).

The museum elected not to wait for the longer process I had initiated to mount a *Bronx Lab* exhibition, and in the fall of 2012 the *Bronx Museum* education staff organized "Style Wars," which grew out of their holdings of graffiti art, including pieces by Tim Rollins and Rigoberto Torres, two artists with ties to the Bronx neighborhood during the late 1970s and early 1980s, at the height of the graffiti movement. The decision to focus on graffiti was not drawn from student research; the theme was a decision made by museum staff acting alone. We were asked to focus our fall 2012 semester on evaluating *Style Wars*, which was a detour from my initial goal to focus solely on an exhibition proposal based upon teacher research; however, more time to study the *Bronx Museum's* teaching artists would prove invaluable to better understanding the visual literacy vs. Boalian/teaching art method tension in the partnership and offer us one more opportunity to advocate for visual literacy-based approach when working with public schools.

In addition to the evaluation of the exhibit, student research included the development of teacher materials to help generate interest from public schools. The challenge we faced was twofold: the pressure of the new Common Core meant that only museums that could demonstrate a pedagogy rich in critical thinking skills would be compelling; and second, graffiti is considered a quality-of-life crime in New York City, so public school teachers are loathe to consider its merits as art.

Nonetheless, we conducted historical research on the rise of graffiti art to find important connection points with public schools. We elected to acknowledge the city's position on graffiti as a starting point. Students developed curricular units for in-school experiences that focused on the history of graffiti in the Bronx, recent clashes in the press between defenders of graffiti as an art form and those who saw it as vandalism, and architectural survey kits for public school children to record and track graffiti in their own neighborhoods. We made recommendations to the *Bronx Museum* educators regarding the artworks that would make the most obvious connection to the legacy of graffiti and to the issues

about graffiti today. Instigating a debate among teachers and students, and also *Bronx Museum* staff, about graffiti and graffiti as art reinforced the critical thinking criteria aligned with the Common Core. Although further editing and refining are needed, the curriculum plans developed by the fall 2012 students formed a program that would engage local history and class debates. Challenges in the *Bronx Museum* staffing have delayed the curriculum units being edited, then disseminated by the museum. Funding is needed to hire a museum educator to complete the work of the graduate students.

This final semester of the partnership, spring 2013, concentrated on a full exhibition proposal for the *Bronx Lab* exhibit, *Journeys for Visibility*. Eleven artworks, of which seven are in the permanent collection, were selected, and all explore the theme of ethnicity from African, African-American, Puerto Rican, and Asian American perspectives. The introductory panel developed by the students reads as follows:

Journeys for Visibility: The Bronx is a destination for the journeys of many peoples. The experience of immigration, does not end with arrival, but rather unfolds over time in a complex environment of political, social, economic, and emotional magnitude. The journey for visibility, for acceptance into the dominant culture, is complicated. On the one hand, there is an urge to assimilate seamlessly with the mainstream. On the other there is an urge to validate one's particular heritage by incorporating it into the mainstream.

This tension between inclusion and exclusion is the subject of *Journeys For Visibility*. We invite visitors to explore how artists of diverse cultural backgrounds defined cultural heritage through storytelling. The artwork in *Journeys for Visibility* shows how ethnicity is fluid, shaped by experiences in the United States and by the memories and traditions of our cultural origins.

Nearly all the artwork in the exhibit is from the *Bronx Museum's* collection, and most date from the 1980s and 1990s, a moment when the subject of cultural diversity was especially potent. Viewers will see artworks that span the past 20 years by artists Charlie Ahearn, Tomie Arai, Albert Chong, Papo Colo, Rico Gatson, Byron Kim, Glenn Ligon, Juan Sanchez, Tim Rollins + K.O.S, and Lynne Yamamoto. These artists share an approach that is similar; they isolate a critical issue that places them in tension with mainstream ideas. While each artist's creative method is different, they all lead us to the same question: how is culture produced, evaluated, and by whom?

All the artists in this exhibition explore the meaning of Diaspora, the process of people moving from an established homeland to settle elsewhere, because of oppression or war, or because of greater economic opportunity. The artwork in *Journeys for Visibility* shows there are many Diasporas; Diaspora is an enduring a social condition. Migrating from one place to another is the start of continuous emotional, intellectual, and cultural transformation. *Journeys for Visibility* explores the back-and-forth travels that artists (and individuals) from

communities of color continuously make between dominant and alternative values within an ethnically and culturally diverse America.¹⁹

The introductory panel – which is in essence the thesis of the exhibit – demonstrates key humanities-based concerns, and makes those concerns relatable to the multi-ethnic audience of the Bronx. The theories about cultural pluralism and the strategies of contemporary artists are explained, and the explanation forms the framework for not only drop-in visitors, but also public school teachers whose curriculum incorporates immigration journeys. The introductory panel also provides an interpretive position about the artwork – that cultural difference from a mainstream is both personal and social. This argument allows visitors to look for, react to, and debate how such tensions are embedded in the artwork.

Students also provided a computer-based design for the exhibit and developed four complementary programs: two Common Core-based museum programs, a summer school intensive program for middle and high school students, a weekend public tour program, and a summer program targeting area Bronx college art students. As this article is completed, Yoi Tanaka Gaylor and I are working on revisions to the program based upon critical feedback from museum and art education experts. The final proposal, along with a budget and fundraising plan, will be sent to the *Bronx Museum* in July 2013.

6. Conclusion

This mode of teaching arts management as a dialogue begins with not only an art organization partner but also the community to be served. As I have shown, the effort to embrace both the institution and the community is not without tension. However, theories about community-based art practices are steeped in understanding the issues, concerns, and needs of local residents. Through such scrutiny, our own biases and tastes must become part of a conversation, not determine the conversation. The process runs along Gielen's 'Allo' axis, where the artist, educator, or administrator is but one voice in a complex network of ideas about society and about culture. What is learned in this

19 The *Journeys for Visibility* exhibition statement was written by Jamie Denburg, Andrea De Pascual and Ngoc-Tran Vu, with additional input from Stephanie Browne, Amy Gouge, Aleta Lee, Lynnette Miranda, Bonnie K. Norlander, and Tanaisha Semidey, May, 2013.

conversation is far richer and more rewarding than simply following a singular method.

For faculty, such an academic partnership poses a challenge in teaching: no semester is the same, and faculty must continually research and mine student research for direction, including unanticipated changes of direction. Students build upon the work of previous classes, which is also unusual, and this fosters sharing rather than closure at the end of the semester. Student work is more broadly conceived, part of a service, and part of an ongoing cultural study where boundaries keep shifting and changing.

The humanities are better aligned with the concerns of cultural production because cultural production is part of humanistic disciplines. Students in American art management/administration programs at the master level are at a disadvantage from their museum studies, curatorial studies and art education/museum education colleagues: they are not systematically learning about the cultural debates that shape community-relationships, school-museum relationships, and artists' challenges to mainstream culture. Art market studies, corporate marketing, leadership skills, are all important because they are part of the context of art, but these skills are empty without a meaningful study in the academic disciplines more commonly associated with the arts. Arts administration must balance managerial studies with a critical approach to the core art disciplines.

As Gielen reveals in his studies, starting with research on local values –and ethnic difference – is the best way to begin to understand communities and cultures. From this stronger understanding, students connect their traditional management studies (what works, what is not relevant), their own cultural interests, and the interests of the local community. Our partner has the right to adopt, adapt, or reject our research. This sometimes frustrating process is also part of the way art is produced today, and it is important for students to recognize that though their efforts might not always be embraced, this should not dissuade them from their cultural goals. By extending arts management into the cultural dynamic of a heterogeneous community, one can begin to foster methods that are “glocal” – not compromising on aesthetic excellence, understanding more about what is valued among differing social groups, and knowing that those values are not fixed.

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