

ARTICULATING EQUITY: DEVELOPING AN ORGANIZATIONAL
DESIGN PROCESS FOR NONPROFIT ARTS ORGANIZATIONS THAT
DISMANTLES PRIVILEGE AND BIAS

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Major paper submitted to the faculty of Goucher College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Arts

Administration

2017

Abstract

Title of Thesis: ARTICULATING EQUITY: DEVELOPING AN ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN PROCESS FOR NONPROFIT ARTS ORGANIZATIONS THAT DISMANTLES PRIVILEGE AND BIAS

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Degree and Year: Master of Arts in Arts Administration, 2017

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The fast-changing societal makeup of America urges the leaders of arts organizations with homogenous audiences to cultivate enduring relationships with diverse publics to ensure institutional resilience and relevance. Research confirms that applications of architectural, digital, and graphic design either project an organization's equitable values to its community or reinforce perceptions of bias. Leaders in the field of design and in the field of audience development share compatible and overlapping frameworks that support holistic, cost-effective, and responsible approaches for arts organizations to build public value across a spectrum of stakeholders.

Since the passage of the nondiscriminatory Civil Rights Act of 1964, designers have been active participants in regulating societal inclusion and exclusion in public spaces.

Fortunately, leaders in human-centric design have developed methods of evaluation and stakeholder engagement that are readily available for arts administrators to use in order to identify and dismantle real and perceived barriers to attendance and participation. Whereas design regulates individual and social behavior, so too may a designer's process enable arts administrators to build enduring and meaningful relationships with diverse publics, achieve sustainable outcomes, and better adapt to societal changes in real time. Regardless of a leader's intent, design is a powerful and determinant factor in those areas.

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This paper is dedicated to my mother for her boundless encouragement, and to my
MAAAverick cohort for sharing their brilliance and humor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A thousand thanks to Terence McFarland for his thoughtful and insightful support throughout this process. It has been a joy and a privilege to work with you.

I would like to thank Greg Lucas for his generosity of time, energy, and spirit. I would also like to thank Alisha Brice for providing guidance and specificity to what is an emerging and complex field of study.

Thank you, Ramona Baker. The day that I received your phone call and learned that I had been accepted to this program was the start of a fabulous adventure. Special thanks to Margie Reese, whose work in advancing cultural equity at Americans for the Arts and beyond continues to inspire me to do what I can with what I have. And to Libby Chiu, who has expanded my horizons. I am humbled and honored to be among your students.

Thank you to those who were supportive of my work and participated in interviews: Dr. Greg Lehne, Kate Tallent, Mallory Pierce. My heartfelt thanks to Patty Crowe and Devra Thomas for sending additional encouragement and resources.

Thank you to Brittany Andrew, Shirley Barkai, Kendra Chong, Heather Conboy, Lisa Farber, Nikki Lekhy, Suzy Robertson, and Robin Talbot. I will treasure our time together in this program, and am so glad that it brought us together.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	CULTURAL EQUITY AS A DESIGN CHALLENGE	1
Chapter I	CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM AND RESEARCH SURROUNDING THE PERSONAL IMPACT OF DESIGN	8
Chapter II	A CROSS-SECTOR EXAMINATION OF DESIGN AND ITS APPLICATIONS	21
Chapter III	EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITIES OF HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN IN THE NONPROFIT ARTS SECTOR	27
Works Cited		37

Introduction

CULTURAL EQUITY AS A DESIGN CHALLENGE

“Buildings speak- and on topics which can readily be discerned. They speak of democracy or aristocracy, openness or arrogance, welcome or threat, a sympathy for the future or a hankering for the past.”

– Alain de Botton

“Civilization is a shared project.”

– Charles Montgomery

Nonprofit arts organizations throughout the United States are faced with an urgent call to diversify their audience and donor pools in order to achieve long-term sustainability and relevance. America is more racially and ethnically diverse than it has ever been in its history; by 2055, experts predict that there will not be a single racial or ethnic majority (Cohn and Caumont). Many large-scale and established arts organizations have acknowledged a diversifying nation with the development of niche community outreach programs, such as limited engagement presentations or workshops led by artists of color, but continue to operate in spaces that were built during the museum building boom of the early twentieth century, a time when segregation and discrimination were perfectly legal. In order to sustain and expand upon its relationships with diverse publics, serious aesthetic and contextual considerations must be taken into account to ensure that an arts organization does not reinforce perceived or realized bias toward a privileged population.

This paper will explore the intersections of cultural equity with design thinking and the ways in which it, along with the aesthetics of architecture, website design, collateral marketing, have a regulating effect on user experience and perception. The field of architecture includes the built forms that an arts organization inhabits, as well as the

additional décor, furniture, spatial arrangements, lighting, and general flow of a space. Web design references the various digital platforms an audience member may use to process transactions, as well as the creative methods that web designers employ to promote greater support for and curiosity about an organization. Collateral marketing, for the purpose of this paper, will include printed and sometimes distributable advertising materials, such as flyers, postcards, mailers, signage, billboards, playbills, and branded merchandise. By no means do these three areas represent the full spectrum of design; emerging forms, including augmented and virtual reality, are likely to become more popular amongst community arts organizations when cost barriers are mitigated and opportunities for program enrichment arise.

Though these specific areas within the field of design offer a promising framework for arts administrators to articulate their work, identity, and specific desires to engage the public, it is equally important to understand the past use of design to exclude or to discourage participation and attendance among segments of the population.

Concerns regarding institutional bias with regards to race, class, gender, and disability are confounded by the divergent patterns of arts participation nationwide. Consecutive studies conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts in 2008 and 2012 suggest that non-white US adults visit art museums or galleries at less than half the rate of white US adults, despite marginal differences between age and gender demographic comparisons. Likewise, non-white US adults attended both musical and non-musical plays at half the rate of white US adults, despite little variation among age and gender demographic comparisons (*How A Nation* 16). This study does not compare attendance among racial groups for classical music, opera, and ballet performances, though it is

significant to note that rates of arts participation and attendance in the areas of attending a Jazz or Latin music concert or going to see a movie in a theatre are remarkably similar when comparing racial demographics. This phenomenon refutes the notion that arts participation and attendance at-large is determined by one's race, but affirms that particular forms of art are codified as more relevant, inviting, or accessible to some racial groups over others. It is therefore possible that an arts organization which values diversity and offers programming that would attract a wider audience may be unable to convert individuals into audience members and visitors due to extraneous factors including past discrimination, the perceived or real bias of comparable organizations, or a lack of historical engagement with diverse publics.

This paper will highlight historical examples of deliberate exclusion of racial, gender, and class groups through use of three primary areas of design in order to contextualize the ways in which current applications of design may reinforce bias and inequity amongst arts participants, audiences, and the larger public. Further examples of arts organizations who have aimed to better understand and dismantle perceptual and real barriers to diverse audiences reveal that design is a suitable tool for refreshing relationships with marginalized groups. Regardless of an organization's actual intent or progressive programming, design which is discriminatory in effect undermines an arts organization's efforts to build communal trust among diverse publics. As US demographics rapidly shift, arts organizations which appeal to homogenous, majority-white audiences and visitors will lose relevancy if disproportionate attendance and participation among racial groups is not resolved. Joel Kotkin of *Smithsonian Magazine* emphasizes this point:

The United States of 2050 will look differently from that of today: whites will no longer be in the majority. The U.S. minority population, currently 30 percent, is expected to exceed 50 percent before 2050. No other advanced, populous country will see such diversity. In fact, most of America's net population growth will be among its minorities, as well as in a growing mixed-race population. Latino and Asian populations are expected to nearly triple, and the children of immigrants will become more prominent. Today in the United States, 25 percent of children under age 5 are Hispanic; by 2050, that percentage will be almost 40 percent.

(Kotkin)

This forecast rapid diversification of America indicates a market shift that disfavors arts organizations with homogenous, majority-white audiences. Therefore, the cultivation of relationships with diverse audiences and visitors coupled with the positive perception of an arts organization among non-white publics are not only moral objectives but critical business imperatives that will shape an organization's relevancy and overall sustainability within the first half of the twenty-first century.

To this end, contemporary criticism of the concepts of threshold fear, discriminatory design, and hostile architecture will be re-examined. As architectural scholar Elaine Heumann Gurian notes, recognition of the term "threshold fear" was once limited to the field of psychology but is now recognized by architects and designers as either a physical or pragmatic barrier that causes anxiety for those unfamiliar with a space to enter or experience it (Gurian). Architects and urban planners recognize discriminatory design for its ability to trigger threshold fear amongst segments of the public, with whom the space was not intended to be shared. Nonprofit arts organizations

operate with a legal requirement to serve all publics, and arts organizations with homogenous, majority-white audiences must therefore seek to eliminate design elements which trigger threshold fear for individuals who identify as a member of a class, gender, or racial group that is uncommon amongst the existing audience. Hostile architecture is a recognized field of industrial architectural design that deliberately seeks to cause emotional discomfort or physical pain for individuals who encounter it (Gurian). Oft-cited examples of hostile architecture include shallow park benches with multiple arm rests, spiked ledges surrounding a building, or single-occupancy seating: all designed to prevent loiterers from sleeping on these surfaces (Groeger). In this sense, those three design choices resolve the design challenge framed by the designer and respective funder without consideration for the circumstances that lead to one sleeping on a park bench.

Contemporary research suggests that human-centered design is an approach suitable for organizations which aim to broaden access and excite participation amongst its diverse publics. Award-winning design firm IDEO defines human-centered design as “a creative approach to problem solving that starts with people and ends with innovative solutions that are tailor made to suit their needs” (Lanoue). Simple indicators of human-centered design for an arts organization that values cultural equity may include proportionate audience and donor representation, goodwill and a positive reputation amongst communities of color, and an increased exploration of its digital spaces beyond its transactional thresholds. In this context, the adoption of a human-centered design process would include extensive observation of its larger public as it encounters the organization’s digital and actual spaces. The gathering of observational research may develop a coherent, equitable, and intentional method of engaging traditionally

marginalized individuals. This approach is promising for arts organizations to develop communal trust and diminish perceptual barriers to participation and attendance, leading to long-term relevancy and market growth.

The process of becoming a more culturally equitable arts organization requires its leaders to examine the impulses that guide their strategic thinking. While the dismantling of implicit bias may be daunting to any arts organization, the process of design thinking is encouraging.

Thomas Lockwood, president of Design Management Institute and publisher of the organization's *Design Management Review*, defines design thinking as...

essentially a human-centered innovation process that emphasizes observation, collaboration, fast learning, visualization of ideas, rapid concept prototyping, and concurrent business analysis, which ultimately influences innovation and business strategy [...] The term *design thinking* is generally referred to as applying a designer's sensibilities and methods to problem solving, no matter what the problem is. It is not a substitute for professional design or the art and craft of designing, but rather a methodology for innovation and enablement. (Lockwood xi)

In this context, arts managers have the capability to address longstanding cultural inequity in the nonprofit arts sector as an organizational design challenge. By employing a design-centered process, arts managers may counter internal apprehensions and control costs by prototyping, measuring, and scaling new methods of program delivery that will meet quantitative goals of audience conversion and participation rates. Similarly, through ongoing stakeholder engagement, arts managers will be equipped with the means to

gather qualitative data that evaluates communal trust and public values alignment. A designer's sensibility and process supports current dialogue in the nonprofit arts sector that seeks to diversify audiences, leadership, and representation, and offers an ideal framework for ongoing relationship-building with the larger public despite changes in societal makeup.

Chapter I

CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM AND RESEARCH SURROUNDING THE PERSONAL IMPACT OF DESIGN

Emerging forms of market research that have been developed with a designer's sensitivity entertain complexity and contradictions amongst sample groups and offer arts administrators the valid data necessary to support incremental and adaptive decision-making with regards to their organization's aesthetic as a tool for diverse audience development. Contemporary research confirms the sensory and pre-rational significance of design in individual cognition and contextualization (Lehne) and suggests that popular forms of evaluation used by arts organizations, such as the collection of surveys distributed to an audience, can be better leveraged to understand emotional responses and experience contextualization (Ratzkin et al). Such a process has the potential to be remarkably insightful when it is not dismissive of outlier data in favor of overarching trends within a sample, particularly when outlier data represents the perspectives of individuals who identify outside of an otherwise homogenous, majority-white sample. Therefore, researching the impact of unique societal groups must be regarded as a thorough and ongoing process, with empathy for the perspectives of diverse publics.

Analytical thinking that is solely supported by reliable data regarding participation or attendance patterns presents a significant challenge to the arts administrator seeking to build a more equitable organization. Such information reflects insular and consistent trends among existing supporters, but does not consider or

acknowledge shifts in the market or larger changes in the world at large. Roger Martin, dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, suggests that new forms of strategic thinking are necessary for innovation:

A business that is over-weighted toward reliability will erect organizational structures, processes, and norms that drive out the pursuit of valid answers to new questions. It fails to balance its pursuit of reliability with the pursuit of validity, leaving it ill-positioned to solve mysteries and move knowledge along the funnel. Such organizations inevitably come to see maintenance of the status quo as an end in itself, short-circuiting their ability to design and redesign themselves continuously. This wouldn't be such a big problem if the world never changed; in those circumstances, continuing to replicate the success model would make lots of sense. However, as we all know, the world is continuously changing, and with every change, crucial new mysteries spring up that reliable systems simply won't address or even acknowledge. By implicitly or explicitly focusing on reliability only, organizations deny themselves the immense value that can be unleashed by balancing reliability and validity in a design-thinking organization and expose themselves to the risk of being outflanked by a new entrant. The business that fails to balance reliability and validity will find itself flat-footed when rivals advance knowledge through the funnel. (Martin 43- 44)

Indeed, Martin might argue that an organization which incorporates a designer's sensibility in addressing barriers to equitable participation and attendance would be better suited to embrace an open feedback loop with an aim to do away with a discriminatory or unwelcoming status quo. Furthermore, an organization that is aware of fluid community

dynamics will gather continuous feedback to support ongoing prototyping in the design of its digital spaces, collateral marketing outputs, and in its built environments.

Neurologists and designers are in agreement that architecture, web, and graphic design elements contain personal meanings not limited to an idea simply conveyed through text. Humans are sensory beings who first gather information through the senses: not only to avoid threats and meet their corporeal needs, but also to identify what is pleasing or repugnant. Humans regularly make pre-conscious judgments based on the sensory experiences of an object, place, or person before logic, intellect, or further consideration has been established (Lehne). Design writer Virginia Postrel connects this pre-conscious, pre-rational impulse to the psychological theories of semiotic association and visual rhetoric:

Aesthetics shows rather than tells, delights rather than instructs. The effects are immediate, perceptual, and emotional. They are not cognitive, although we may analyze them after the fact. [...] Whatever information aesthetics conveys is prearticulate- the connotation of the color and shapes of letters, not the meanings of the words they form. Aesthetics conjures meaning in a subliminal, associational way. (6)

Leaders in the field of advertisement support Postrel's premise, as demonstrated by an ever-growing use of visual rhetoric and the diminished presence of text in driving sales throughout the twenty-first century. Visual rhetoric, as defined by Stanford University, is "a form of communication that uses images to create meaning or to construct an argument" ("What is Visual Rhetoric?"). Graphic and web design critic Alex Bulat further articulates

Visual rhetoric touches on the visual elements and affects overall impression of the document. Visual elements in the text can activate their own semantic representations - they create semantic links in the text blocks, they give a wider explanation of what is presented in the text or present the meaning that is separate from what the text is about. Visual rhetoric can also affect the tone of the document referring to the author's voice and credibility. (Bulat)

Architect and theorist Farshid Moussavi contrasts visual rhetoric with signification, "the *process* whereby an artifact conveys a message [...] significance evolves through interaction and therefore varies from person to person, and from one context to another" (Moussavi et al. 37). In understanding this contrast, one is able to appreciate that an intended message can be supported by visual rhetoric and yet that same message can cause significantly different reactions among diverse publics.

Buildings made for any purpose transmit a spectrum of significance to every audience member or visitor, regardless of the practical purpose of the building itself.

Moussavi notes:

This cluster of affects (sic) presents individuals not with a message or a set of facts, but with a series of disparate, sometimes even paradoxical affects which they need to make sense of: to learn how to move through the building, to learn how to engage in activities and events inside it. Inevitably, those affects are joined in a virtual connection with other observations of the vicinity, or experiences of other contexts arising from the individual's own circumstances, including the physiology of their mind, their cultural background, their education. (Moussavi 38)

Moussavi and Bulat imply that the myriad design elements of an organization activate subjective and complex significance with each encountering individual, and arts administrators would be well-advised to adopt a holistic consideration of the aesthetics of their organization. Signification cannot be controlled, and visual rhetoric employed in collateral marketing, web design, and architecture can be undermined by fringe elements. Therefore, it is entirely possible that the leadership and staff of an organization might sincerely commit to equitable access to its programs and still articulate discriminatory visual rhetoric that undermines their commitment through its digital interface, its facilities, and its distributed materials.

Traditional research methods may lead an arts administrator to investigate the significance of each individual design element. Such a process would be costly and time-consuming while failing to recognize the significance of the subjective perceived relationships between each design element. Therein, an arts administrator could create a wicked problem, one that is regarded as extraordinarily difficult to solve as a result of contradictory or volatile elements that change over time in an unpredictable manner. Moussavi supports this conclusion and declares that

The effect of a given cluster of [design] affects on individuals cannot be precisely determined by architects. However, by being selective about what affects they generate in a particular context of daily life, architects can disrupt the conventions by which people commonly apprehend built forms, and invite them to use their bodies in new ways as they engage in a process of knowing how. (42)

Psychologists and designers agree this wicked problem is unnecessary and counterproductive. Since the cultural associations of any particular design element do not

belong exclusively to an arts organization in and of itself, an arts administrator seeking to better use design as a tool for achieving a larger goal such as cultural equity should explore common design elements of organizations, companies, groups, retailers, or other influencers appearing to succeed in achieving that larger goal. This exercise in identifying aesthetic inspiration can lead to deeper conversations surrounding the organization's culture and values, resulting in more informed and authentic design outputs in the future. Such a process, supported with accessible programming, an aesthetic alignment with equitable influencers, and a declared commitment to cultural equity will position an arts organization to articulate the value of its mission to the larger public, build communal trust, and cultivate new, diverse audiences.

Design experts support the premise that humans recognize brand identity, no matter how deliberate the planning and delivery of an organization's design materials may be. Angus Hyland writes, "All organizations, groups, and institutions have an identity – just like people. It is made up of 'who you are', 'what you do', and 'how you do it'. Successful visual identities employ design to reflect the first two and help govern the behavior of the third" (King and Hyland 10). Under this lens, it becomes clear that arts organizations do not have the option to take exception to the principles of branding: the public is already taking sensory cues to form opinions about the people, projects, and purpose of an organization. Taken one step further, the conclusions drawn by an individual's response to an organization's branding lead one to determine if they are invited or welcome to attend or participate in that organization's work.

Though interpretations of branding are subject to personal experience and semantic representations, David Haigh, CEO of Brand Finance, describes three primary functions of a brand:

1. Navigation: Brands help consumers choose from a bewildering array of choices.
2. Reassurance: Brands communicate the intrinsic quality of the product or service and reassure customers that they have made the right choice.
3. Engagement: Brands use distinctive imagery, language, and associations to encourage customers to identify with the brand. (Wheeler 24)

If it is true that understanding and evaluating an organization's brand identity is a process that individuals inevitably entertain, it is important that arts administrators understand how the public associates its brand, how their organization is compared to its contemporaries, how the public perceives the quality and value of the organization's work, and who within the larger public identifies with or feels excluded by the organization's brand.

Fortunately, the widely-accepted frameworks for diverse audience development and design thinking contain significant overlapping structures. Marc Stickdorn, Thomas Lockwood, and IDEO are widely regarded as leaders in the field of design thinking and proponents of the establishment of an ongoing feedback loop that begins with extensive research and observation, which produces information that leads to prototypes, which are revised based on stakeholder analysis, and are then distributed at a scale that is appropriate for its intended publics. Donna Walker-Kuhne, who has been cited by the Arts & Business Council as "the nation's foremost expert on the development of

audiences for our growing multicultural population”, similarly calls for research that precedes stakeholder engagement, analysis of those efforts, and ongoing commitment to those targeted public segments (Walker-Kuhne).

Donna Walker-Kuhne’s core principles for diverse audience development are supported in the five essential principles of a design-centered service delivery process, as outlined by Marc Stickdorn, a service design lecturer and consultant at the Management Center Innsbruck in Austria:

1. User Centred (sic): Services should be experienced through the customer’s eyes.
2. Co-Creative: All stakeholders should be included in the service design process.
3. Sequencing: The service should be visualized as a sequence of interrelated actions.
4. Evidencing: Intangible services should be visualized in terms of physical artefacts.
5. Holistic: The entire environment of a service should be considered.

(Stickdorn and Schneider)

The human-centered design cycle, as outlined by IDEO, consists of six phases: observation, ideation, rapid prototyping, user feedback, iteration, implementation. Where it is acknowledged that population and social change is ongoing, unpredictable, and responsive to myriad factors, a terminative process appears problematic and an inadequate framework for assessing an organization’s ability to develop and sustain relationships with diverse audiences. When evaluations occur infrequently or only when

an organization is undergoing a significant capital renovation or rebranding process, additional effort is required to understand population and societal changes. The inherent value of evaluations which are terminative or based on historical data diminishes as the assessed community diversifies.

Ongoing evaluation of an organization's programming and aesthetics do not need to be time-consuming or costly, and may entertain greater qualitative feedback without the constraints of a capital budget or the timelines imposed by a designer. In 2010, Theatre Bay Area launched an assessment of eighteen diverse theatres in the US as a model to collect and compare such data that would evaluate the intrinsic impacts of their productions on audiences. Through ongoing evaluation, these theatres were able to graph the characterizations that audiences would attach to particular productions and to the organization at large. Illustrative results of surveys distributed to multiple venues highlighted divergent reactions to the same production, further demonstrating the need to regard and engage each individual on unique terms (Ratzkin et al).

The challenge of attaining relevancy through the lenses of cultural equity and diverse audience development have captured the attention of arts leaders. Museum consultant and leading author on this topic Nina Simon offers cold comfort:

People define for themselves what they value, and thus what they deem relevant. But that doesn't mean relevance is a pure trait, fixed within each person's identity. You can make something relevant to anyone. [...] Our differences are like individual keys crowding our key rings. They open certain doors and not others. We start with the keys we were given, by our parents, teachers, and peers. They are partly internally defined and partly determined by societal norms. These

norms define what doors we see as appealing, or open to us, as we navigate potential experiences. This doesn't mean we can't transcend these categories and acquire new keys. We can and we do, every day. But we choose to carry the keys given to us, even if they're not the ones we have chosen. (Simon 54-55)

Amongst scholars in the fields of urban planning, there is consensus that architectural decisions often favor some groups over others and that design, particularly architecture, is often used to exclude members of racial, class, or gender identities deemed undesirable (Lange). Leading architects most often cite local culture and geography as major influences for their designs (*Museum Design*), but pure intellectual autonomy seems unlikely given the widespread dissemination of information, similar educational trajectories, and shared understandings of how a built form is supposed to contain, allow, or appear. It is more appropriate to suggest that local culture and geography are influential and informative to an architect in the same way that the nature of a project and culture of an organization are influential and informative to a web designer, creative director, or a marketing director. Organizational leaders would be apt to acknowledge the influence of other designers, and be prepared to cite the work of designers whose style complements and appears to articulate the equitable values of their organization. Similarly, organizational leaders should remain cognizant that the history of designing buildings, websites, and collateral marketing elements will inform a designer's process: a theatre or concert hall has a prescribed form, the websites of arts organizations have similar sitemaps, and distributable advertisements such as flyers and postcards have standard sizes and materials. Any new attempts to frame social challenges such as inequitable access or threshold fear as a design challenge must consider this sharing of

contemporary design aesthetics and the historical context of such applications. The wicked problem of managing semiotic associations can therefore be mitigated or avoided by an arts administrator who declares cultural equity as a design value and cites the work of other designers who employ a style reflective of the overlapping values of the organization and its publics.

The architectural style and form of any building regulates the social patterns of all visitors, participants, and passersby, and the exterior design of a building articulates signals of welcoming or discouragement to potential visitors (Schindler). American styles of architecture have developed and expanded in the last century. The enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is often not included in conversations that trace this evolution, but its effect on public participation in the arts and society at-large cannot be overstated. This legislation was pivotal not only for advancing cultural equity in the United States; it included provisions that outlaw segregation and discrimination in public accommodations and facilities.

Title II of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 specifically names theatres among those sites which are barred from discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin (“The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission”). There have been significant court challenges to this law, most notably *Heart of Atlanta Motel Inc. v. United States*, in which the Supreme Court ruled that under the Commerce Clause of the Constitution, the US Congress could use its powers to force private business owners to abide by federal civil rights legislation. In spite of the passage of enforceable, federal anti-discrimination laws, segregated arts facilities were not

required to update their aesthetics to reflect a value for inclusivity or extend an invitation to people of color, nor were they required to relocate to a new building.

Arts facilities which might have undergone significant changes in their leadership, programs, and declared values may still be remembered by older Americans today as a segregated or hostile space. Therefore, in order for an arts organization to articulate its value for cultural equity, it must seriously consider the aesthetics and history it has inherited from its earliest years. For that same organization, an aesthetic redefinition can be a useful tool to demonstrate a departure from a discriminatory past while encouraging curiosity and extending an invitation for new visitors to explore its facilities.

One should be cautious, however, in asking an individual to design something which would affect themselves: social anthropologist and architectural critic William Whyte explains:

What attracts other people most, it would appear, is other people. If I belabor the point, it is because many urban spaces are designed as though the opposite were true, and that what people liked best were the places they stay away from. People often do talk along such lines; this is why their responses to questionnaires can be so misleading. How many people would say they like to sit in the middle of a crowd? Instead, they speak of getting away from it all, and use terms like “escape,” “oasis,” “retreat.” What people *do*, however, reveals a different priority.

(Whyte 19)

If it is true that relevancy is subjective to each stakeholder, a lack of cultural diversity among aesthetic decision-makers seriously undermines an arts organization’s ability to overcome implicit bias in using design to build diverse audiences. Standard

practice among design firms and independent designers includes a limited interaction with executive leadership and specific staff, such as a Marketing or Communications Director. If an arts organization employs a homogenous staff and does not gather and thoughtfully consider external stakeholder feedback, one can therefore expect that the design outputs of that organization will reflect the preferences and implicit biases of this group. By framing disparity in attendance and participation among racial or class groups as a design challenge, an arts administrator is better equipped to activate a designer's process to dismantle the perceptual and real barriers that caused such disparity.

Chapter II

A CROSS-SECTOR EXAMINATION OF DESIGN AND ITS APPLICATIONS

Design has become a key tool for customer engagement and retention in public-facing sectors such as retail, travel, and food service industries. Architectural, digital, and collateral marketing design is utilized beyond its essential purposes of housing merchandise or converting web traffic into sales; advanced design allows brands to excite interest, visitation, and transactions by both diverse and niche audience segments. Arts administrators would do well to consider the use of design in other sectors, as the implications and possibilities of design are not restricted to any sector.

Architectural tools are used deliberately to articulate signals of welcoming or exclusion. The famous rift between Jane Jacobs and Robert Moses during the 1950s and 1960s best exemplifies the ideological conflict leading to the gradual desegregation of America's urban centers. Moses, an urban planner, famously built many of New York City's parkways that divided vibrant neighborhoods. Moses is perhaps best-known for his construction of two hundred and four bridges on Long Island that were too low for buses to clear; critic Langdon Winner argues that this was a thinly-veiled attempt to use design as a tool to legally segregate Long Island from New York City (Winner). Jacobs, by contrast, challenged urban planners to cultivate community vitality by encouraging mixed-use facilities, shorter blocks with many intersections to increase pedestrian encounters, a greater network of sidewalks to prevent crime and assimilate children into society, and public parks as important communal gathering spaces. These organic,

human-centered design values marked a significant departure from the rationalist and modernist planning ideologies prevalent in the first half of the twentieth century, and continue to inform contemporary urban planning.

Jacobs' legacy extends beyond the realm of urban planning, and offers an encouraging philosophical framework to those who would establish systems that lead to organic relationship building. Arts administrators may glean existing successful strategies to improve engagement and commercial success from human-centered applications in retail settings. In addition to offering affordable versions of the products made by high-end designers, Target utilizes shorter display racks, colorful displays, and a common store plan that encourages customers to consider and indulge in purchasing new products, no matter their original intentions upon entering the store. Target stands in stark contrast to its largest competitor Wal-Mart, which prioritizes low price points, competitive price-matching and discounts, and holiday layaway options. Target's objective to drive user exploration and cultivate a larger taste for its products is best exemplified in placing a Starbucks near the entry of each store. Target stores feature a racetrack design: "one main aisle circles the store, with additional aisles running through the center and perimeters, allowing for more space to display product." Nancy Devine, Senior Group Manager of Store Planning & Design, credits the racetrack design of each Target store as a significant tool to boost user exploration: "while department stores are typically laid out as a collection of shops, many of which have distinctly different décor and may even be enclosed with walls, Target features a more open layout with broad sightlines for easy navigation" ("Then & Now").

Luxury fashion brands, by contrast, regularly seek to attract wealthy customers through codified merchandising principles that also deter theft. The exclusive-yet-traditional nature of luxury branding is a tactic to ensure that visitors will correctly judge their ability to afford the merchandise within a space, thereby discouraging visitors without the means to purchase their products from spending more time in the store than is necessary. One can reasonably suggest that such branding has established or implied a value for transactions over community relationship-building. Contemporary marketing and diverse audience development for arts organizations, in contrast, suggest that long-term relationship building is crucial to establishing communal trust and growing earned and contributed income. Where human-centered design encourages exploration, relationships, and positive sensory experiences, traditional interface design seeks to produce transactions at the most efficient rate possible. Therefore, the model of a traditional user interface that aims to convert free visitors into admitted patrons may be poorly suited for engaging those individuals who experience threshold fear prior to entering an arts facility.

While formal arts institutions often find it difficult to mitigate threshold fear and boost visitor comfort to the extent that individuals may feel encouraged and entitled to explore an arts facility, success may be found in contemporary airport design. Increased security protocols following the attacks of September 11, 2001 have increased fear about privacy and body autonomy, and compound existing stress surrounding the high-paced, high-pressure airport environment. Mike Davies, founding partner of airport design firm Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners, advocates for human-centered design that accounts for different passengers requiring different levels of customs and immigration checks.

Echoing Stickdorn, Davies says that preparation and prior investigation are crucial to a successful prototyping phase and “an effective way of eliminating unknowns, and cost escalation is partly from unknowns” (Lo). In order to achieve dominance of market share, however, a company or organization must first excel in improving brand loyalty, expanding its existing base of users, and cultivating a positive image of the brand to those who are not already customers.

Aside from achieving greater financial sustainability and market share, capital improvements must further consider the human needs of every potential visitor. Even when the metrics used to evaluate attendance and participation suggest that an organization is successful in engaging diverse publics, all arts organizations have the opportunity and the challenge to develop a more human-centered built facility. Restrooms, a common feature of nearly every arts facility, are a typical undervalued asset to an arts organization’s commitment to equity. Media critic Soraya Chemaly shared the following in a recent *Time* editorial:

After counting the women, I tweeted, “Dear @britishmuseum there are FIFTY women and girls standing in line for the loo while the men’s room has zero line #everydaysexism.” Immediately, people responded with the suggestion that women use the men’s room. But even more responses were defensive, along the lines of “How on god’s green earth did you arrive at the conclusion that this was sexist?” Let me count the ways. Women need to use bathrooms more often and for longer periods of time because: we sit to urinate (urinals effectively double the space in men’s rooms), we menstruate, we are responsible for reproducing the species (which makes us pee more), we continue to have greater responsibility for

children (who have to use bathrooms with us), and we breastfeed (frequently in grotty bathroom stalls). Additionally, women tend to wear more binding and cumbersome clothes, whereas men's clothing provides significantly speedier access. But in a classic example of the difference between surface "equality" and genuine equity, many public restrooms continue to be facilities that are equal in physical space, while favoring men's bodies, experiences, and needs. (Chemaly)

Chemaly also describes the historical absence or miniscule capacity of restrooms as a significant example of discriminatory design, particularly in the United States House of Representatives - where women did not get a restroom near the Speaker's Lobby until 2011, though the men's restroom had a fireplace, shoeshine stand, and piped in floor proceedings onto a television. Scholar Judith Plaskow further notes that Yale Medical School and Harvard Law School both claimed that because their facilities did not include restrooms for women, it would be impossible to admit them as students (Chemaly).

The problems caused by inadequate or discriminatory restroom design are compounded for trans-identified and gender non-conforming individuals, for whom restrooms may be non-inclusive, discriminatory, or lead to threatening interactions. Further challenges exist for individuals who require the use of a walker or wheelchair. Parents accompanying small children and individuals assisting another individual in a public restroom similarly stand to benefit from greater consideration in the planning of built facilities.

Interventions in the planning of restrooms may represent an opportunity for arts managers and architects alike to advance accessible, equitable, and human-centered design. Extending such values to the entire architectural process stands to benefit all

visitors to an arts facility, as accessible design reduces the physical tax of continuing to explore a space, thereby providing additional opportunities to encourage visitors to act upon their impulse to explore a space and form new social connections that build positive associations with the arts organization itself.

Chapter III

EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITIES OF HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN IN THE NONPROFIT ARTS SECTOR

In spite of the obvious challenges of dismantling discriminatory design and diminishing threshold fear, arts administrators should be encouraged by the work of organizations which have enacted aesthetic and programmatic changes that advanced cultural equity and diverse audience development without disrupting organizational solvency. Though design has successfully reinforced the value and public relevance of arts organizations, scholars agree that this improvement is not caused by design in and of itself; programs must be relevant and made accessible to their publics.

This is not to suggest that classical forms cannot find relevancy with new and diverse audiences. New World Symphony in Miami employs nightclub aesthetics and a casual atmosphere in order to draw a young and diverse audience representative of its publics to classical music performances. The organization recently celebrated the success of its educational program, which produced its one thousandth alumni in 2016 (“New World Symphony”).

Web design presents a more direct opportunity for arts managers to engage a majority of visitors and participants who seek to better understand an organization or an event prior to attending. Digital spaces are an important point-of-entry for first-time audience members. Increasingly, arts organizations are sharing information on digital platforms that set expectations for first-time visitors in order to diminish threshold fear. Where a potential visitor might wonder if there is an enforced dress code for a space, a

website could provide explicit confirmation, or simply provide photographs of guests at other events, thereby displaying not only who is attending, but how one might choose to dress in order to feel a part of such a group. Often, social media platforms provide such contextual information. Furthermore, digital design which employs a visual rhetoric that supports an organization's commitment to the values of its publics, such as the inclusion of photographs of artists/audiences of color or the use of fonts easily rendered on handheld devices and tablets, are capable of reaching individuals at the pre-rational, sensory level of cognition that allows for relationship cultivation in the future.

Websites convey the values of an organization much like built architectural forms: it is immediately clear whether an organization is interested in cultivating a mutually-beneficial relationship with its publics, as demonstrated by its prevalence of opportunities for user exploration, social connection, or transactional behavior. Therein lies an opportunity for administrators and designers to collaborate in order to address the very human challenge of societal inequities: design allows an organization to transform isolated patterns of behavior, such as wandering the halls of a museum, into engaged, valuable, and participatory experiences within its facility.

The New York Philharmonic achieves this by providing information that is contextual: "What is classical music? What is a symphony? Will I recognize the music?"; preparatory: "Do I need to know the music before I attend a performance? What should I wear? Can I bring my cellular phone or camera?"; and that explain the customs of attending a performance at their facility "When do I applaud? What is your policy on bringing young children?" ("How to Prepare"). Given the expanding use of handheld digital devices to purchase tickets and seek information about events prior to attending,

responsive leaders of arts organizations may include information that sets truthful expectations of the visitor experience in order to diminish threshold fear and allow first-time visitors to prepare themselves to attend. Such context can be reinforced and interpreted by incorporating a heavier visual balance on an organization's website and social media platforms; the inclusion of images or videos of audience members in social settings can provide additional visual rhetoric in support of an organization's ability to deliver on its mission and deeper values. Where stairs in a built space incur a form of transaction in which a visitor must expend an increased amount of physical energy to extend a visit to other floors of a building, large text blocks on a screen require additional cognitive processes that images do not. Where it has been established that aesthetics affect pre-rational and sensory functions, it is possible for an arts organization to convey visual rhetoric using imagery and design. Text is non-essential for this purpose.

The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) has similarly adopted a universal design standard and invested significant resources into the rebranding of the museum itself. The BMA's history of inclusion is complex: the BMA did not exhibit African American art until 1939, a full twenty-five years after its founding. Its most recent capital renovation and rebranding mark a full pivot towards embracing all of Baltimore's publics. These changes are further strengthened by its programming choices and expanded accessibility. Christine Anagnos, executive director of the Association of Art Museum Directors, does not attribute this success to aesthetics alone. "Not only is Baltimore's museum known nationally and internationally for its collection, but it's also known for its outreach to the community. [Former Director] Doreen [Bolger] is a very civic-minded museum director. When the museum went free, that was a game-changer" (McCauley).

The original BMA facility, designed by John Russell Pope, features a street-facing façade that is made in the classical Roman Temple architectural style, and its historic entrance sits two dozen steps above ground level and underneath six towering Ionic columns. The classical style stands in sharp contrast to the surrounding working-class neighborhoods of Charles Village, Hampden, and Remington, neighborhoods more commonly known for their abundance of rowhomes faced with formstone, a material that imitates stone texture and is described by infamous Baltimore film director John Waters as “the polyester of brick”.

Today, the historic entrance is closed and its columns are dwarfed by large, colorful banners to advertise current programs. Often, those banners feature the word *FREE* in a large sans serif font to highlight the museum’s free admission to all visitors. The BMA’s new entrance features a sleek glass exterior at the ground level, complete with a roundabout for cars to transport visitors and dips in its curbs for those in wheelchairs. The BMA now includes dedicated wings for African and Asian artists, boasts a diverse international and multicultural Contemporary art collection, and regularly employs nightclub aesthetics for bi-monthly Art After Hours events.

The BMA now welcomes a younger, more diverse audience in part because its brand articulates the museum’s new status as an exciting, welcoming, and intellectual gathering space. This brand identity is consistently articulated through the building’s interior and exterior, through a sleek web design and its social media channels, and is further reinforced through collateral marketing materials.

These advances are made possible by the deliberate inclusion of women, people of color, trans-identified and gender non-conforming individuals, and individuals of

various levels of ability in the design process, but this disconnect occurs in other aspects of design other than architecture. Kate Tallent, Principal and Creative Director of the notable design firm KTD Creative, expressed that with rare exceptions, graphic designers gather information about a target audience from one individual positioned in executive leadership, marketing or communications. This narrow source of information restricts the designer's ability to produce meaningful digital and collateral materials that entice a broadly diverse public. Tallent also highlights the necessity of consistent branding, made possible by using collaborative designers who share a common understanding of the branding of the organization and the publics they will be targeting (Tallent).

Collateral marketing, by extension, often serves as the first encountered design that aims to establish enthusiasm and support for an organization or an event. These advertising materials provide subtle cues that can extend an invitation to attend, participate, or otherwise engage in transactions with a particular organization. Tallent expressed that Dance Place in Washington, DC deliberately began using more images of Black and Latinx program participants in all of their collateral marketing elements in order to successfully boost local participation in and communal support for its programs.

In the areas of architecture, web design, and collateral marketing, arts organizations face increasingly significant challenges to engage new audiences without the added challenge of developing a shared culture of equity through design tools and processes. Arts managers are further challenged to develop a brand that creates valuable connections with the public. The complex mixture of rising incomes, decreasing prices, cheaper materials and labor to produce new objects, and growing interest in design and aesthetics has led to a sophistication of taste. Designer Karim Rashid suggests this

sophistication is to be expected: “design is being democratized [...] our entire physical landscape has improved, and that makes people more critical as an audience” (Postrel 58). With an overabundance of traditional advertisements that are best described as visual pollution, humans must constantly sort sensory information by what is important or relevant and what may be ignored.

Digital spaces are ripe for experimentation and prototyping materials which might advance an organization’s commitment to equity. Digital reach and user exploration are immediately measurable, websites are adaptable to change without significant costs, and social media platforms are capable of targeted user segmentation. A/B testing and other evaluative processes are freely available on email marketing platforms. Websites and social media platforms, in addition to providing contextual information, allow a user to investigate an organization, its people, and its programs on the user’s terms, causing them to build their own conclusions and judgments regarding an organization’s stated values. The successful implementation of a localized digital strategy is incumbent upon an organization’s capacity to understand its publics. Brian Gillespie, Director of Strategic Design at Molecular, remarks:

Customer research is fundamental to all user-centered design, and therefore is a critical aspect of localization. When your design goal is a single Web site within a single market, the extent of your research is certainly manageable. Field studies, interviews, surveys, and other tools can be channeled into customer segments and a set of user and customer personas developed to drive design decisions. Because there are likely to be many service options at your disposal, knowing whether your largest segment is likely to adopt a new innovative tool is critical to

managing your investments and achieving the return on your design investment.
(Lockwood 212)

Gillespie's encouragement of gathering quantitative and qualitative data to attain a greater understanding of the publics an organization seeks to serve is one that an arts administrator, eager to advance cultural equity within their organization, should share with their peers. The internal benefits of reconsidering an organization's branding principles to reflect its values include greater aesthetic resilience, clarity by way of an expanded and continuous feedback loop, improved organizational visibility among new segments, and consistent branding in every design output.

Tools that measure signification in the fields of graphic, digital, and web design have been shared by marketing professionals for decades. Communication Arts conducts periodic evaluations of particular design elements such as font to determine how the public is affected by them. In its most recent survey, 82% of respondents felt that a hypothetical orchestra whose name appears in a serif font had more skilled musicians than the hypothetical orchestra whose name appears in a sans serif font (Hyndman). As culture changes, so too will the way particular design elements affect individual perceptions. Therefore, designers must remain abreast of developments and support the open feedback circuit established by the ongoing cultural equity process of an organization by providing periodic evaluations to organizational leadership on occasion.

As is the case of the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), MoMA, and several other large arts organizations, strategic and consistent branding increases public recognition of an organization without traditional branding elements, including a logo. MoMA serves diverse local, national, and international visitors, including scholars and

young children, and employs an in-house design team that produces all branding materials, advertisements, and graphics for more than forty exhibitions each year. Alina Wheeler highlights interactive design as an important tool for MoMA:

A carefully designed balance between control and creativity makes it possible to adhere to the identity standards while achieving specific marketing objectives [...]

Visitors of all ages and nationalities had the opportunity to draw and express themselves in one of the greatest museums in the world. *I went to MoMA and...* is an interactive campaign that resulted in personal and emotional messages.

(Wheeler 38)

Arts organizations of all kinds benefit from clearly defined style rules which empower individuals at every level of the organization to communicate common organizational values. Style guides vary in specificity and individual freedom. Style guides for designers are particularly useful for an organization that is rebuilding a damaged relationship with the public; a recognizable aesthetic allows the projects and values of the organization to communicate public value where a logo or attached name might undermine such attempts to an unreceptive public.

The process of evaluating and defining the aesthetic qualities and public perceptions of an organization will also identify gaps that indicate areas of implicit bias. By identifying instances of internal bias, the executive leadership of an organization is thereby informed and capable of taking steps to counteract such bias through intentional stakeholder engagement and ongoing evaluation.

Mallory Pierce, Director of Marketing and Communications at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, has stated that:

Diversifying our audience is our number one goal as an organization. Gender, race, and ethnic diversity are important in aligning our materials with our mission and values for social justice and cultural equity. We have complete buy-in from our executive leadership and board of directors, and have a cultural equity committee on our board. (Pierce)

Once an organization has established its core values and branding principles, measurable and actionable equitable outcomes must be set. Aesthetic and intrinsic impact is currently measured by designers, marketers, and arts professionals in numerous ways. A/B testing of design elements among culturally diverse sample groups allow for an organization to select or segment the delivery of its design. Radar charts allow an organization to set measurable goals for the aesthetic qualities of its design or its programs, thereby mapping growth and public perception while identifying gaps between public and internal perception. Focus groups provide a counterbalance to other methods of evaluation that have prescribed prompts, allowing for spontaneous conversations to lead to new discoveries. Arts organizations eager to identify the semiotic associations with their brand or their work may find success with word clouds, which present organizations with one-word descriptors supplied by stakeholders in response to a particular prompt.

Contrasting multiple forms of stakeholder feedback--including but not limited to public attendance and transactional histories allow an arts organization to gather a more robust understanding of what the public declares is effective. Marc Gobé asserts that

The almost-exclusive reliance on a narrow and limited form of research focus groups as the major outlet for communication is failing to engage consumers in a

more sensorial and surprising way. This type of research has had a role to play in fostering commodity products while reassuring marketing staff. Research that asks consumers to select innovation or judge design is a sure path toward the abandonment of the most promising ideas. We all know that Absolut Vodka and Red Bull were dismal failures in focus group research. (Lockwood 116)

This distrust of verbalized public desire is perhaps best exemplified by contemporary consumer patterns; the expressed desires of a consumer are often inconsistent with consumer behavior. For example, although all consumer segments value low prices, consumer spending on everyday products continue to rise (Postrel). Therefore, it is advisable that an arts organization include behavioral and transactional measures to evaluate progress towards its larger equitable outcomes.

The development of an articulate, equitable design strategy is itself an exercise in refining the mission and makeup of an organization. Through design-specific metrics, an organization is capable of measuring the articulation of its mission and its capacity to build communal trust among diverse publics. The holistic and ongoing implementation of design thinking allows an organization to evaluate its efforts to dismantle threshold fear and counteract the historical racist, classist, ableist, and sexist exclusionary barriers to participation it may have inherited. In so doing, the arts organization is equipped to begin cultivating new, committed, and authentic relationships with a diverse public that will ensure future sustainability and relevancy.

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