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AAD 601: Research Methods  
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2/8/11

### ***Literature Review Assignment***

With my current research question: *How can new genre public art be used by arts organizations as a tool for civic engagement?* I've approached the literature review by examining texts written on both new genre public art and civic engagement.

"New Genre Public Art" is defined by Suzanne Lacy (1995) as "visual art that uses both traditional and nontraditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives" (p.19). Unlike more traditional forms of public art, new genre public art is based on engagement. Since the sixties the term "new genre" has been used to define art that strays away from traditional media using experimentation in form and content (Lacy, 1995, p.20). New genre art includes disciplines such as installation, conceptual art, and performance art. "Attacking boundaries, new genre public artists draw on ideas from vanguard forms, but they add a developed sensibility about audience, social strategy, and effectiveness that is unique to visual art as we know it today" (Lacy, 1995, p.20). Grant Kester (1995) also identifies this new public art as redefining the role of the artist into a form of social collaborator. He suggests that the term may be more accurately called "the new community art" as the interaction between the artist and communities are at its the core. Kester states its emergence is evident in the shifting set of priorities in literature, conferences, exhibitions, commissions, and granting institutions towards community-based projects. For the sake of my research I will define new genre public art is any art form that defies traditional media with the intent of social change.

New genre public art is not new. The use of the term to label an emergent genre of public art allows us to frame these trends in context (Jacob, 1995 p.52). New genre public was

born from several art historical movements starting in the late 50s during the time of Happenings, where the art world structure of galleries and museums were challenged and where artists began using pop culture as subject, blurring the lines between “high-art” and “low-art.” Allan Kaprow describes this era as a time where artists “appropriated the real environment and not the studio, garbage and not fine paints and marble. They incorporated technologies that hadn’t been used in art. They incorporated behavior, the weather, ecology, and political issues. In short, the dialogue moved from knowing more and more about what art was to wondering about what life was”(Lacy, 1995 p.25-26). Social activism in art began rearing its head during the Vietnam War, as a result of artists becoming inspired by political activists (Lacy 1995 p.26). A fascination with popular culture continued into the 70s with artists such as Chris Burden, Ant Farm, Lowell Darling, Leslie Labowitz, and Suzanne Lacy conducting “media break-ins” which were performances aired through television broadcast interrupting the dominant media paradigm (Lacy, 1995 p26). This was also a time where art was being produced collaboratively and/or anonymously with attention to process. Time-based art emerged as well as art that was assessed by the quality of experience and interpretation of its audience (Jacob, 1995, p.52). This era also saw the emergence of a new sense of racial and gender identity emerging in art which became even more dominant in the 80s as issues such as AIDS, immigration, abortion, sexual harassment, and gender violence were at the forefront of the political sphere. These were the issues at the heart of new genre public artist’s work (Lacy, 1995, p.29). During the 80s art museums and galleries were also moving to alternative spaces beyond their walls as they saw the potential for creating meaningful contexts for art in public spaces (Jacob 1995, p.53). Jacob argues, that these exhibitions, while in public view, rarely were directed to engage non-art audiences and were mostly exhibitions in public which would appeal to a popular breed of “art tourists”(1995, p.52). This separates this type of work from new genre public art, which is intended to engage the inhabitants of the specific place where it exists.

While new genre public art emerges within an art historical context from the past 50 years, when viewed in the greater context of community arts, it is rooted a much larger history of urban reform projects which Kester (1995) traces back to Victorian era reform, as well as

to New Deal art projects aimed at re-invigorating the economy during the depression. In fact, community arts practices have been present in cultures as far back as the cave paintings of Lascaux and present in many century-old traditions such as the Mexican Day of the Dead festivals (Green, 1992 p.81).

Through this history new genre public art has emerged as a tool to frame personal and political issues as a form of activism. It also works to reconnect culture and society recognizing that “art is made for audiences, not for institutions” (Jacob, 1995 p.53). It involves not only the voice of the artist, but also the voice of the community from whom the artist represents.

In what type of organizational framework can this new art flourish? The museum system that existed in the 70s & 80s and which is still very dominant today is a system, which attracts viewers as patrons and consumers (Jacob, 1995, p. 51). Mary Jane Jacob argues that, “the art museum may not be the most appropriate starting point for larger, new audiences for contemporary art. Instead, by departing from the institution, new meaningful ways to engage a wider audience for contemporary art can be greatly multiplied. Moreover, these non-art-world venues may be equally or more appropriate than museums as the setting for some of the most important artistic statements emerging from current mainstream thought” (1995, p.52). From Jacob’s perspective it is clear that the ideal place to engage wider audiences for art is in public.

For the most part, public art institutions are still following traditional models for public art. Patricia Phillips states, “Public art remains theoretically and practically marginalized. It is often ignored, occasionally enjoyed, and sometimes disputed” (1995, p.60). There are exceptions to this rule. Public art firms operating outside of the traditional city managed public art offices, such as Creative Time and Public Art Fund in New York city, dedicate themselves to creating socially charged, experimental, temporary public art projects (Phillips, 1989, p. 334). Contemporary Art institutes, such as The Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, while exploring broad curatorial themes that are not necessarily socially engaged, also have platforms, which support this type of work in their annual Time

Based Art Festival. Also, there are current trends within art museums such as the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, to redefine their role by implementing “community engagement” initiatives into their educational programming.

Civic engagement lies at the heart of new genre public art. Michael Delli Carpini defines civic engagement as “individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern”(Stern & Seifert, 2009, p. 8). Martha McCoy and Patrick Scully suggest that civic engagement “implies meaningful connections among citizens, issues, institutions, and the political system. It implies voice and agency, a feeling of power and effectiveness, with real opportunities to have a say. It implies active participation, with real opportunities to make a difference” (2002, p.118). Like new genre public art, Assaf, Korsas and Schaeffer-Bacon argue that arts-based civic dialogue is not new but part of a long history of community based practice and civically engaged culture work surrounding discourse on issues such as civil rights, war, AIDS, and globalization (2002, p.1).

McCoy & Scully argue that civic engagement is based on dialogue and that face-to-face communication is key to making and strengthening the relationships necessary for engagement (2002, p.118). They also state that in order for people to become engaged they need to feel that their participation is valued and will make a difference. Scully and McCoy outline that the most successful engagement processes will: provide multiple forms of communication, giving voice to all types of people; make listening as important as speaking; connect personal experience with public issues; build trust and create a foundation for working relationships; explore a range of views on an issue; encourage analysis and critical argument; help people develop judgment and create a common ground for action; provide a way for people to see themselves as actors and be actors; connect to government, policymaking, and governance; create ongoing processes, not isolated events (2002, p.120-128). Another critical element in engaging civic dialogue is bringing a large enough amount of people to the conversation to bring out real change in the community at-large (2002, p.128). How can the arts be used to this effect?

Art has the ability to spark dialogue in a literal sense, but it can also take form as an abstract and accessible way to express issues that may not be easy to discuss in a face-to-face situation. In 1999, Americans for the Arts conducted the Animating Democracy Initiative sponsored by the Ford Foundation resulting in a detailed report titled *The Artistic Imagination as a Force in Civic Dialogue* as well as several books published on the subject. The report opens by stressing the importance of civic dialogue to forming a democracy “animated by an informed public engaged in the issues affecting people’s daily lives” (1999, Schaffer-Bacon, Yuen, & Korza , p.1). The report also point out that there are concerns about there not being adequate opportunities for civic dialogue in a society that is divided by race, gender, and class (1999, Schaffer-Bacon et al., p.1). Within they make several conclusions about best practices for artists and cultural institutions to foster civic engagement. They reached these conclusions through participant interviews, surveys, and detailed case studies into the work of artists and programs of organizations.

The report identifies three methods in which art can engage civic issues: first, the topical approach, which comments on social issues; second, artists and institutions that engage communities in the arts as a tool for empowering them towards action and change; and lastly a mid-range which “consciously incorporates civic dialogue as part of an aesthetic strategy” which they refer to as “arts-based-civic dialogue.” The latter is the focus of the study (1999, Schaffer-Bacon et al., p.2).

*“Beyond the basic role of producer, presenter, or exhibitor, cultural institutions are playing a key part in this work as catalysts, conveners, or forums for civic dialogue. They are offering space as well as organizational and interpretive capacity, and they are building local relationships to encourage various publics to participate in the process. In exercising this civic role, cultural institutions are expanding opportunities for both democratic participation and aesthetic experience, engaging a broader, more diverse public in giving voice to critical issues of our time”* (1999, Schaffer-Bacon et al., p.2).

Civic engagement has entered the radar of cultural institutions largely due to a critical need for audience development (1999, Schaffer-Bacon et al., p.3). The Animating Democracy

initiative found two key methods to stimulate civic dialogue including educational augmentations such as, program notes, exhibition labeling, lectures, and discussions; and integrating dialogue activities in both the development and implementation of a project. Common practices key to achieving quality civic dialogue include creating a “safe” place; involving people in the art-making process; employing effective facilitation; utilizing frequent, varied, and sustained approaches to engage multiple perspectives and to accommodate differences; and to establish an identity for the institution as a place for dialogue (1999, Schaffer-Bacon et al., p.4-5). Perhaps the most important aspect of successful arts-based civic dialogue occurs when there is an in-depth understanding of an organizations context in relationship to, and knowledge of, the communities they seek to engage (1999, Schaffer-Bacon et al., p.45). In the form of comparative case analyses, we can see how these factors contribute to successful arts programming that fosters civic engagement.

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