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Making Sense of Things: Access and the Therapeutic Turn in Museum Gardens and Galleries

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Abstract

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This project examines the uneven adoption of therapeutic initiatives within the organizational field of American museums to ask: How do people frame museum-going as "good" for visitors' health? Existing research on legitimation processes would predict cultural institutions respond similarly to pressures for greater accountability from their external environments, or resist utilitarian justifications to preserve their autonomy. More than resigned acceptance of an instrumental policy trend or defensive arguments of "art for art's sake," I argue responses to museums' "therapeutic turn" reveal the multiple, and often conflicting, ways people negotiate the worth of aesthetic worlds. Ethnographic study of how museum staff develop programs for visitors with disabilities across two art museums and two botanical gardens reveals this process unfolds at the level of sensory experience, and demonstrates its effects. Such experiences vary across places, mediating organizational conventions; among people, creating group boundaries that maintain and challenge social differences; and by practice, in which objects afford different uses and interactions differently framed as healing. These findings have implications for how sociologists study the interpretation of culture and health, the regulation of bodies, and the politics of access and inclusion.

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From the outset, I have always understood this project as an investigation of value: of how people understand the worth of what they do, whom they do it with, and how. It is with all of my heart that I give the first words – there will be a good deal of them, as will surprise no one who knows me – to those who brought to this project and bring to my life worth beyond measure.

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dispassionate undertaking of scientific research. I have carried the sentiment with appreciation ever since.

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cheerfully when my long-winded sentences were a “real bummer;” and for all that he has given me, I am grateful.

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I dedicate this dissertation to you and to my parents, Maria Chiara Carta and Salvatore Mangione. Five years into graduate school, I concluded that people find particular sensory experiences healing, and that I would investigate this idea in my dissertation. Not long after, I read a book chapter on the sensory history of medicine that discussed the role of diet in Eastern medical treatments and of a doctor's touch in clinical exams. In that moment, I realized my mother the Ayurvedic practitioner and my father the medical historian of physical diagnosis actually knew what they were talking about all these years or, in short, we all become our parents in the end. I am lucky for their company and their example, as well as the emotional, financial, geographic, and otherwise limitless forms of support and sacrifice they offered me as I finished my Ph.D. and all the years prior. Vi voglio tantissimo bene, famiglia mia, ora e sempre.

Table of Contents

Copyright		2
Abstract		3
Acknowledgments		4
Part I. Places		
Introduction	"All Art is Useless"	12
Chapter One	Sensory Conventions	49
Part II. People		
Chapter Two	Adaptive Expertise	84
Chapter Three	Access and Disability	122
Part III. Practice		
Chapter Four	In the Galleries	166
Chapter Five	In the Gardens	207
Conclusion	Making Sense of Things	248
Appendix A	The Ethnographer in the Museum	268
Appendix B	Index of Key Informants	273
Appendix C	Institutional Prevalence Across Three Research Journals	274

Part I:

Places

Introduction

"All Art is Useless"

> "Art is useless because its aim is simply to create a mood. It is not meant to instruct, or to influence action in any way. It is superbly sterile, and the note of its pleasure is sterility. If the contemplation of a work of art is followed by activity of any kind, the work is either of a very second-rate order, or the spectator has failed to realise the complete artistic impression.
>
> A work of art is useless as a flower is useless. A flower blossoms for its own joy. We gain a moment of joy by looking at it. That is all that is to be said about our relations to flowers. Of course man may sell the flower, and so make it useful to him, but this has nothing to do with the flower. It is not part of its essence. It is accidental. It is a misuse. All this is I fear very obscure. But the subject is a long one."
>
> –Oscar Wilde*, Letter to a Fan (Bernulf Clegg)*[1]

In June 2013, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) – the largest and only non-profit accrediting museums in the United States – released a report detailing the "significant role" museums have begun to play in U.S. healthcare issues.[2] Acknowledging the institutions' longstanding demonstration of their "public value as educational providers, community anchors and stewards of our national heritage," the introduction highlights the recent expansion of museum programming into 10 areas of healthcare ranging from health literacy to medical training to mental health.[3] The report's subsequent summary of trends within these fields, along with its state-by-state appendix, further details initiatives contributing to such areas. Among them are tours and art-making workshops for people with Alzheimer's disease, led by museum staff who are trained to "trigger memories using works of art as prompts."[4] Also included are

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[1] "Letters of Note: Art is useless because...," Letters of Note, January 4, 2010, accessed September 25, 2016, http://www.lettersofnote.com/2010/01/art-is-useless-because.html.
[2] "Museums on Call: How Museums Are Addressing Health Issues," American Alliance of Museums, June 7, 2013, accessed September 25, 2016, http://www.aam-us.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/museums-on-call.pdf?sfvrsen=8: 1.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 2.

exhibits in science centers and natural history museums contributing to "disease prevention" efforts by considering, for example, evolution's impact on obesity and lactose intolerance, or the development of health care in South Central Appalachia.[5] Museums promoting "nutrition and wellness" through walking tours and community vegetable gardens count as well.[6]

The generously inclusive range of museums' health initiatives reveals the broad contours of contemporary museum practice: it outlines the diversity of these institutions, their public offerings, and their audiences. This state-of-the-field might surprise those who share a common perception of museums as sacred temples dedicated primarily to stewarding history's most priceless objects: as places where a particular kind of person looks closely and treads lightly, and where many others may feel bored, uncomfortable or, unwelcome. Furthermore, one longstanding view – captured in this introduction's epigraph – holds that culture is fundamentally "useless."[7] Art, like a flower, is "superbly sterile:" it is defined by its beauty, and the sensuous pleasures it provides. In short, it exists for its own sake and that, end of discussion, is the point. From this perspective, it is certainly hard to imagine how our exposure to culture may mediate degenerating illness, improve our eating habits, or lower our heart rate.

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[5] Ibid., 4-5.
[6] Ibid., 9-10.
[7] Wilde's quote reflects the principles of Aestheticism, or the Aesthetic Movement, a literary and artistic movement in Britain and the United States that flourished between 1870 and 1900 and opposed utilitarian (didactic, moral, political, practical) framings of art's value. For a recent analysis situating Wilde in relationship to Aestheticism, see Michele Mendelssohn, *Henry James, Oscar Wilde, and Aesthetic Culture* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2007). An important social scientific perspective on "art for art's sake" comes from Pierre Bourdieu's broader theory of symbolic fields, which argues that at stake in imposing criteria of evaluation is the autonomy of a given field: people's ability to reproduce their own positions and interests. In art worlds specifically, Bourdieu suggests, people tend to value "disinterestedness" in efforts to challenge instrumental logics – particularly market-driven ones – in order to control the criteria by which their worth is judged. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

However, people seek out, respond to, and use objects not simply because of their essential properties, but also because of the social meanings they attribute to them.[8] It is, Wilde permits, "what man does" with a flower that ultimately makes it useful to him, and so too it is people's interpretation of culture and museums that make them healthful. Further, and of course, "as society has changed" (the AAM paper's introduction states) "so has the work of museums."[9] Shifts in organizations' external environments shape what those organizations do, and museums are no exception.[10] On this front, the AAM report frames the emergence of museums' health outreach in part by acknowledging the ever-growing number of Americans diagnosed annually with Alzheimer's disease, and highlighting the "special challenges" facing the "estimated five percent of children seven and under" with "a disability or special need."[11] Attention to health outcomes for particular publics echoes across the landscape of contemporary American cultural policy. It is visible, for example, in The National Initiative for Arts & Health in the Military led by Americans for the Arts, along with the National Endowment for the Arts's 2013 evidence-

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[8] This finding is supported by anthropological and sociological research on cultural goods. Paul DiMaggio, "Social Structure, Institutions, and Cultural Goods: The Case of the United States," in *The Politics of Culture: Policy Perspectives for Individuals, Institutions, and Communities,* ed. Gigi Bradford, Michael Gary, and Glenn Wallach (New York: The New Press, 2000), 38. "Meaning," Griswold writes, is made "by the interaction of a socially situated, presupposing recipient and a cultural object." Wendy Griswold, "The fabrication of meaning: literary interpretation in the United States, Great Britain, and the West Indies," *American Journal of Sociology* 92, no. 5 (March 1987): 1111.

[9] American Alliance of Museums, "Museums on Call," 1.

[10] This idea is the bedrock of neo-institutionalist theories of organizations, which explain the endurance of particular organizational forms over time. In this view, organizations adopt similar strategies in response to their changing institutional environments, and vis-a-vis other organizations in that shared environment, to pursue legitimacy (defined as "the degree of cultural support for an organization.") John W. Meyer and W. Richard Scott, *Organizational Environments: Ritual and Rationality* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 201). For the foundational volume on neo-institutionalist theory, see Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio, eds, *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). For original formulations of these ideas, see John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan, "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony," *American Journal of Sociology* 83, no. 2 (September 1977): 340–63 and Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields," *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 2 (April 1983): 147-60.

[11] American Alliance of Museums, "Museums on Call," 2-3.

based white paper "The Arts and Aging: Building the Science."[12] Indeed, the AAM report identifies Alzheimer's, autism, and visual impairment as distinct areas of healthcare to which museums can contribute, thereby suggesting one byproduct of "museums on call" is these institutions' increased attention to underserved constituencies and specifically, visitors with disabilities.

In light of existing pressures on American museums to account for their broad social relevance, this point is significant. Notably, the current gold standard for assessing the vitality of non-profit arts organizations is participation, measured through attendance numbers.[13] This emphasis on such quantifiable indicators of museums' worth further reflects decades of changes in their economic and cultural climate. Following World War II, the governments of Western industrialized countries began to increasingly invest in welfare, social services, and the cultural sector, but the economic downturns of the late 1970s and public spending reforms of the 1980s and 1990s had a major impact on museums.[14] These shifts resulted not only in the diversification of museums' funding base through increased admission charges and pursuit of external sponsors, but also a rise in outcome-based performance evaluation.[15] The American museum in particular is under pressure to provide measurable results. It is both part of a changing global museum

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[12] "The National Initiative for Arts & Health in the Military," Americans for the Arts, last modified 2015, accessed September 25, 2016, http://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/legislation-policy/the-national-initiative-for-arts-health-in-the-military; and National Endowment for the Arts, "The Arts and Aging: Building the Science," February 2013, accessed September 25, 2016, https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Arts-and-Aging-Building-the-Science.pdf.

[13] Steven J. Tepper and Yang Gao, "Engaging Art: What Counts?," in *Engaging Art; The Next Great Transformation of America's Cultural Life*, ed. Steven J. Tepper and Bill Ivey (New York: Routledge, 2008), 17-48.

[14] Carol Scott, "Measuring Social Value," in *Museums, Society, Inequality*, ed. Richard Sandell (London: Routledge, 2002), 41-55. See also DiMaggio, "Social Structure."

[15] Scott, 42. See also Victoria Alexander, "From philanthropy to funding: the effects of corporate and public support on American art museums," *Poetics* 24, no. 2-4 (November 1996): 87–129; Steven J. Tepper and Bill Ivey, eds., *Engaging Art; The Next Great Transformation of America's Cultural Life* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Stephen E. Weil, *Making Museums Matter* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2002), 30-40; and Stephen E. Weil "Creampuffs and Hardball: Are You Really Worth What You Cost or Just Merely Worthwhile?" in *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift,* ed. Gail Anderson (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2004), 343-347.

community that increasingly values public service as a fundamental part of museums' mission, and also part of an American non-profit sector that demands programs with demonstrable impact, preferably on improving people's quality of life.[16] Given this context, as the museum studies scholar and social worker Lois Silverman has written, developing the therapeutic potential of museums both evinces the institutions' important social role and – acknowledging that museums otherwise "assume a healthy visitor population" – provides a "pathway to inclusion" for underserved audiences.[17] Moreover, it is a strategy that benefits not only from its association with the epistemic authority of scientific research, but also with the common perception of health as a universal good, wherein assigning health benefits to an activity is understood as saying definitively: "This is good for you!"[18]

In what follows, I explain how people in museums accomplish the ostensibly unusual conceptual pairing of culture and health. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork at four institutions, I examine how museum educators and therapists organize programs for visitors with disabilities in two types of American museums – the art museum, and the botanical garden – and ask how people construct, interpret, and contest the therapeutic value of museum-going. This is thus in many ways a project about health, though it does not enter any hospitals or clinics, examine doctors or nurses, track diagnoses, or make reference to insurance or prescription coverage. Nor is it intended to be a comprehensive overview of health outreach programs at museums across

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[16] Weil, *Making Museums Matter,* 40.

[17] Lois H. Silverman, "The therapeutic potential of museums as pathways to inclusion," in *Museums, Society, Inequality,* ed. Richard Sandell (London: Routledge, 2002), 69 – 83.

[18] An array of literatures in medical sociology highlights the moral foundations of injunctions to health and well-being, which stem from the "super value" constructed for health (see Robert Crawford, "Healthism and the Medicalisation of Everyday Life," *International Journal of Health Services* 10, no. 3 (July 1980): 365-88). In this view, an "imperative of health" mandates the self-regulation and moral obligation of well-being. Deborah Lupton, *The Imperative of Health: Public Health and the Regulated Body* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995). See also Jonathan M. Metzl and Anna Kirkland, eds., *Against Health: How Health Became the New Morality* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

the United States. Instead, I compare a subset of therapeutically-oriented museum initiatives developed for a particular visitor group – people with disabilities – to illuminate how health functions as a legitimating ideology: a system of ideals that confer worth upon particular activities and experiences. I ask: How is this legitimacy constructed, and under what conditions does this process vary? How does what people do in museums reveal what health and culture means to them? What does framing art and nature as therapeutic make possible? And what's at stake in arguments that museum-going doesn't (or shouldn't) have anything to do with therapy at all?

My analysis explains how both culture and health function as ideals of the public good, and how they come together through sensory practice. By practice, I mean how people do things together, embedded within particular contexts and mediated by the conventions and resources of those settings.[19] By sensory, I explain how people's perceptual interactions with art and nature shape their valuation of these domains and the museums dedicated to them. In doing so, I find that even in efforts to democratize and commensurate museums through the "therapeutic turn," aesthetics endures as a substantively meaningful value of these institutions. However, I also show how in serving visitors with disabilities, people in museums are revisiting, reinterpreting, and innovating aesthetic meanings, and specifically their grounding in visual perception. I do so by tracing the organizational conventions, group interactions, and material cultures that differentiate sensory encounters across the galleries and gardens.

[19] This formulation of practice is indebted to the "practice turn" in science and technology studies and more broadly, in contemporary social theory. For an overview of the former, see Andrew Pickering, *Science as Practice and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). For an overview of the latter, see Theodore R. Schatzki, "Introduction: practice theory," in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory,* ed. Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eike von Savigny (London: Routledge, 2001), 10-23.

The account of legitimacy I present here is thus neither a simple top-down story of homogeneity or a bottom-up story of resistance. Instead, I draw on comparative ethnographic study to reveal the practical, institutional, and material arrangements bringing people and objects together in the production of museums' therapeutic meanings.[20] Throughout, I highlight varying and often competing justifications (cultural, civic, salubrious) for museums' existence, though my task as a sociologist is not to privilege one over another. Instead, I aim to identify and explain how different sensory practices reflect just which justifications art museums and botanical gardens can draw upon and which are resisted or constrained, how, and with what consequences. Thus continually at stake in this discussion – especially given my attention to the museum-going experiences of visitors with disabilities – is how such constructions impact not only the interpretation of culture, but also opportunities for access and inclusion.

This project's main finding is that people presume a greater democratic capacity to appreciate nature when compared to art, and also that those in botanical gardens are more willing and able to develop the therapeutic potential of their programs compared to those in art museums. I argue this is in large part because people view nature's aesthetic pleasures – when constructed as multi-sensory, and unmediated – as being inherently "good" for people and acting upon them in favorable ways. In this way, nature as an ideological construct functions much like health and for this reason, there is alignment between nature's aesthetics and the therapeutic. Given that most of botanical gardens' therapeutic programming benefits the often otherwise disenfranchised public of visitors with disabilities, one might conclude that art museums have much to learn from botanical gardens in offering visitors the broadest array of opportunities for

[20] Within science and technology studies, this approach is captured by the concept of "actor-networks." For a primer, see Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

well-being through museum-going. In many ways, this is true, and this project explains why while tracing the work art museum educators must undertake, and the challenges they face, in making art accessible. However, I also seek to tease out the ironies and contradictions of such "universal" logics of worth, and particularly which social differences they reinforce (or elide), and whose values and choices they reflect.

In studying the movement to achieve diversity in medical research – the effort to broaden clinical research beyond the study of white, middle-aged men – the sociologist Steven Epstein outlines both its boon and unintended consequences.[21] Increased representation, he argues, comes concurrently with the reification of biological differences, thereby drawing attention away from social inequalities. His empirical case is quite different from the one I consider here, but the theoretical implications of an "inclusion-and-difference" paradigm regardless have purchase. In examining museums' efforts to develop therapeutic interventions – and focusing on how these play out through sensory practice – I show how such commitments broaden access to cultural institutions and understandings of well-being across embodied capacities. However, I also explain how they can reproduce boundaries among social groups, particularly across the forms of bodily differences we know as disability. Ultimately, explaining how legitimacy, interpretation, and access come together in American public culture – considered through the lens of museums' "therapeutic turn" – is the task of what follows.

Museum Education and Visitors with Disabilities: A Brief History to Situate the Case

Accomplishing this, I suggest, requires first examining cultural participation as a right, not a privilege. Much of the existing literature on museums examines their entanglements with

[21] Steven Epstein, *Inclusion: The Politics of Difference in Medical Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

elitist, imperialist, and conservative politics of exclusion; in essence, it represents these institutions — as Andrea Witcomb has stated plainly – as "bad objects."[22] As sociologists have shown, however, museums – and particularly American museums – continually struggle to balance internally conflicting institutional logics: the organizing principles people draw on to elaborate what they do in organizations, and why.[23] In their studies of American art museums, for example, Paul DiMaggio and Vera Zolberg have called attention to the enduring organizational tensions of museums' elite and democratic interests.[24] More recently, as Steven Tepper and Yang Gao write (emphasis mine) "…underlying the interest in [cultural] participation is the idea that egalitarianism, the hallmark of American democracy, requires not only equal access to material and political resources (i.e., 'the opportunity to do well for yourself') but also to culture (i.e., *'the opportunity to live well'*)."[25]

This section historicizes how American museums have adapted their programs and practices to better facilitate "equal access" – in essence, the right to culture – for visitors with

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[22] Andrea Witcomb, *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum* (London: Routledge, 2003), 2. For a succinct, yet thorough, review of competing perspectives on the global imperialist legacy of museums, see Peggy Levitt, *Artifacts and Allegiances: How Museums Put the Nation and the World on Display* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 6-9.

[23] Throughout this project, I conceive of institutional logics more generally as guiding principles for organizational practice, and more specifically as stemming from American museums' historical conflict between elite and democratic values. My emphasis on the historicity of institutional logics draws from Thornton and Ocasio's definition of them as "the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality." Patricia H. Thornton and William Ocasio, "Institutional Logics and the Historical Contingency of Power in Organizations: Executive Succession in the Higher Education Publishing Industry, 1958–1990," *American Journal of Sociology* 105, no. 3 (November 1999), 804.

[24] See, for example, Paul J. DiMaggio, "Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century Boston, Part I: The Creation of an Organizational Base for High Culture in America," *Media, Culture and Society* 4, no. 4 (October 1982), 33-50; Paul J. DiMaggio, "Constructing an Organizational Field as a Professional Project: U.S. Art Museums, 1920-1940," Powell and DiMaggio, 267-92; Vera Zolberg, "Conflicting visions in American art museums," *Theory and Society* 10, no. 1 (January 1981), 103-125; Vera Zolberg, "Tensions of Mission in American Art Museums," in *Nonprofit Enterprise in the Arts: Studies in Mission and Constraint*, ed. Paul DiMaggio (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 184-198; and Vera Zolberg, "Barrier or Leveler? The Case of the Art Museum," in *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*, eds. Michele Lamont and M. Fournier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 187-209.

[25] Tepper and Gao, 24.

disabilities, thereby elaborating one of these institutions' founding democratic logics. I begin by outlining the role of museum educators in facilitating this access and then trace how this process bears upon both aesthetic interpretation and health interventions in museums. This discussion highlights how efforts to frame museums as inclusive, socially relevant institutions have also continually positioned them as capable of responding to the pressing issues of their time. Here one begins to see how museums might take up the banner of health, for as defined by medical sociologists, medicalization is the process by which a social problem (here, access for disabled people) becomes a medical one (cause for therapeutic interventions).[26] More broadly, however, examining the museum-going experiences of visitors with disabilities in the context of these institutions' aesthetic and health agendas reveals both an ideal of the social good and a politics of embodiment are central to both domains. This offers a starting point for the subsequent section, which details how sensory practices in museums link the domains of culture and health at the level of therapeutic experience.

Education

In 2016, museum "accessibility" – as it pertains to the development of inclusive practices (facilities; programs; exhibits) for visitors with disabilities – is most often discussed in cultural policy in relationship to enfranchisement and rights. An issue of the AAM member magazine dedicated to "Museums and Accessibility" makes this explicit. It considers the museum-going experience of visitors with disabilities in light of the 25th- anniversary of the July 1990 passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a federal law guaranteeing equal access for people with disabilities to employment, government programs and services, transportation, and

[26] Peter Conrad, "Medicalization and Social Control," *Annual Review of Sociology* 18 (1992), 209-232

public accommodation.[27] For example, in one article, "Museums and ADA@25: A look back," Beth Ziebarth, the director of accessibility at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., writes (emphasis in the original):[28]

> The most important thing for people to understand is that the ADA is a *civil rights* law for people with disabilities… It came about because people with disabilities in the United States wanted to get rid of outdated stereotypes and to be more fully included in society—whether it was employment, being able to go to the dry cleaners in your neighborhood or going to your local museum.

Museums' attention to visitors with disabilities began some time before the ADA, however. Building on a momentum of advocacy burgeoning across distinct disabled constituencies (the blind; veterans returning from the World Wars) early in the twentieth century, a broader collective coalition of disability rights activism would surge alongside other civil rights movements of the 1960s and 70s.[29] Notably, legislation passed during this time – specifically, the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 – directly impacted museums. The former mandated that museums receiving federal money for the design and upkeep of their facilities meet minimum accessibility guidelines set by the law. The latter mandated, via the introductory sentence to Section 504 of the law, the accessibility of programs and services for visitors to any museums receiving federal funds: "No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States… shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination

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[27] American Alliance of Museums, "Museums and Accessibility," *Museum* (September/October 2015).
[28] Greg Stevens, "Museums and ADA@25," in American Alliance of Museums, "Museums and Accessibility," 26.
[29] Scholars have debated the extent to which the disability rights movement parallels social movement models more generally. See, for example, Jacqueline Vaughn Switzer, *Disabled Rights: American Disability Policy and the Fight for Equality* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, 2003). They have also examined their relationship to the civil rights movement specifically (see John D. Skrentny, *The Minority Rights Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004)). For a broader consideration of the disability rights movement in the context of federal policy legislation, see Switzer, 112-172, and Richard Scotch, *From Good Will to Civil Rights: Transforming Federal Disability Policy* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001).

under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."[30] In so doing, The Rehabilitation Act established full social participation as a civil right and was thus seen as the first major civil rights legislation for people with disabilities.[31] It further began the earliest formative conversations within museums about how best to serve this demographic.[32]

Here one begins to see how a contemporary framing of museum accessibility as the right to cultural participation evolved alongside the changing legal and political conditions of visitors with disabilities over the last half-century in the United States. Unsurprisingly, it also evolved in tandem with changes in the museum field, most of which – more significantly – regarded the increased prominence and relevance of museum education.[33] In the 1960s and 70s, American legal efforts and advocacy toward greater civil rights for minority groups – women, racial and ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities – accompanied protest actions for greater equality in education, including for children with disabilities.[34] Collectively, this new emphasis on education as a national priority, the rise in social programs that began during Lyndon Johnson's administration through his "Great Society" initiatives, and the increased federal funding available to museums opened an opportunity for museum educators to organize themselves and

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[30] See the National Endowment for the Arts, Office for Special Constituencies, *The Arts and 504: A Handbook for Accessible Arts Programming* (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 1991) and *Everyone's Welcome: The Americans with Disabilities Act and Museums,* prepared for the American Association of Museums (Takoma Park, MD: Universal Designers & Consultants, Inc., 1998).

[31] Scotch, 3.

[32] In a 1979 conference on "Access to Cultural Opportunities" organized by and for museum professionals through the Association of Science and Technology Centers, for example, the art historian and Deaf activist Deborah Sonnenstrahl described the Rehabilitation Act as a "turning point" for museums tending to "handicapped" visitors. *Access to Cultural Opportunities: Museums and the Handicapped*. Proceedings of the February 22-24, 1979 conference of the same title, sponsored by the Association of Science-Technology Centers, with support from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped Association of Science-Technology Centers (Washington, D.C., 1980).

[33] My discussion of changing museum practice in light of the political shifts in the 1960s draws from the work of the education theorist George Hein. See George Hein, *Learning in Museums* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 7-9 and George Hein, *Progressive Museum Practice: John Dewey and Democracy* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2003), 155-162.

[34] For an examination of educational reform for children with disabilities during this period, see Colin Ong-Dean, *Distinguishing Disability: Parents, Privilege, and Special Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 13-38.

rise as a distinct profession. For example, the first formal degree programs in museum education were established in the 1970s, a decade that included the founding of the Education Committee of the AAM and the Museum Education Roundtable in Washington, D.C. [35]

In an interview on September 29, 2014, Bonnie Pitman – whose near-50-year career in museum education includes founding the AAM's Education Committee and developing the influential policy paper *Excellence and Equity: Museums and the Public Dimension* – told me the role of public education in American museums has always been, on paper at least, a "high priority," but was rarely "nurtured and flourished" until the sweeping social changes of the civil rights era. [36] Despite educators being at "the front line in terms of connecting our community" to museums, she stated, more often than not the "profile and value of educators was very diminished, [while] the directors and the curators sat at a much higher level." Since Bonnie began her career in the late 1960s, however, educators' visibility and prestige in museums have grown considerably. This is not simply because of their self-organizing and attendant professionalization, or the changing economic and legal conditions that supported it. It is also because those shifts would trail, shortly after, into the aforementioned period of sustained pressures on museums to account for their social value and broaden their audience base, along

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[35] In 1981, these two groups would join forces to found and co-publish the *Journal of Museum Education.* Hein, *Progressive Museum Practice,* 160-161.

[36] Ellen Cochran Hirzy, ed., *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* (Washington, D.C.: American Alliance of Museums Press, 2008). *Excellence and Equity* was the final and most significant of three AAM reports collectively signifying a shift in how museum educators viewed themselves, and museums viewed educators (Hein, *Learning in Museums,* 7-9). The first, *The Belmont Report* (1969), arose from museum professionals' interest in being included in the social programs originating during Lyndon Johnson's administration, and warned of the increasing pressure on museums to serve the public and the necessity of resources to do so. The second, *Museums for a New Century* (1984), stressed that the educational function of museums was as important as other aspects of museum practice (research; conservation) and its full potential had not been realized. In our conversations, Bonnie referenced the founding charters of the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston) and Metropolitan Museum as touchstones for the long history of American museums' educational mission. For a thorough historical review examining the differing educational philosophies associated with these and other institutions, see Terry Zeller, "The historical and philosophical foundations of art museum education in America," in *Museum Education: History, Theory, and Practice,* ed. Nancy Berry and Susan Mayer (Reston, VA: National Art Education Association, 1989), 10–89.

with the recognition that – more than any other museum professional – it is educators who through their teaching and outreach do the most work to engage the institutions' diverse publics. Along these lines, museum professionals regularly frame the aims of education and accessibility as nearly one and the same. Consider *Excellence and Equity*, which sought to champion an understanding of museums as principally public educational institutions. Among the three key tenets the report charged museums to embrace was for these institutions to be "places of inclusion that welcome a diverse audience, and that reflect our society's pluralism in every aspect of its operations and programs."[37]

Aesthetics

What do museums as "places of inclusion" look like? If access is the name of the game – the fruits yielded by the disability rights movement – what, specifically, do people with disabilities see museums as providing "access to?" One answer regards the interpretation of public culture through encounters with objects, as well as the attendant efforts to broaden opportunities for such interpretation. This was the topic of a 2013 article in the satirical newspaper *The Onion,* entitled: "Struggling Museum Now Allowing Patrons to Touch Paintings."[38] The article begins by noting that in an effort to boost attendance, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) in New York has launched a new initiative allowing patrons to "prod and scratch at the classic paintings in its revered collection." As part of these changes, the Met decides not only to let visitors touch but also let them try on the medieval suits of armor and

[37] Cited in *Everyone's Welcome*, 7, a manual designed to assist museums with ADA compliance, which supported the authors' claim that the spirit of the ADA was fully in line with the increasingly inclusive spirit of the American museum field.
[38] "Struggling Museum Now Allowing Patrons to Touch Paintings." *The Onion* 45, no. 41 (October 2009), http://www.theonion.com/article/struggling-museum-now-allowing-patrons-to-touch-pa-2821.

participate in mock battles, and climb inside ancient Egyptian sarcophagi. As the Met's director notes in the article's concluding line, the initiative is going so well that next year the museum is considering "letting people grab any masterpiece they like and just take a poop on it."

Depending on which museum one favors within the wide range of American museums, efforts to facilitate "hands-on" experiences for visitors may seem either unnecessary or, revolutionary.[39] Anyone who has attended a science and technology center or a children's museum, for example, knows there are plenty of opportunities to interact with and handle various technologies and simulations. In contrast, however, targeted efforts to promote touch in art museums go against everything we've been taught about museum etiquette. To be sure, this emphasis on "look, don't touch" reflects the enormous amount of cultural value we place on the collections of art, history, and natural history museums, as well as our attendant efforts to conserve and protect them. We believe if a touch screen breaks in the planetarium, it would be a hassle, but if the Mona Lisa gets ripped at the Louvre, it would be a tragedy.

A deeper look at museums, public value, and the senses, however, reveals how their relationship bears significantly on museum professionals' efforts to diversify their institutional offerings. *The Onion* article in particular highlights how people construct touch as a form of populist entertainment (or, ignorance). The satirical Met changes its policy on tactile engagement somewhat resentfully: put simply, the institution does it solely to boost attendance. In this view, offering visitors opportunities to touch is both a legitimation strategy and a way to democratize the institution. This idea is echoed, albeit far less cynically, in the introduction to a 2015 volume

[39] Among the 30,000 museums accredited by the AAM are both governmental and private museums of anthropology, art history and natural history, aquariums, arboreta, art centers, botanical gardens, children's museums, historic sites, nature centers, planetariums, science and technology centers, and zoos. "About Us," American Alliance of Museums, accessed September 26, 2016, http://www.aam-us.org/about-us.

discussing possibilities for *The Multisensory Museum*, wherein the authors explicitly connect the necessity of a "multilayered [museum experience] that is proprioceptive, sensory, intellectual, aesthetic, and social" to the evolving social role of museums. "Today's museums," they write, "are much more than repositories of ancient artifacts to be preserved for the future, although collection care remains a critical function in any museum. They are centers of learning, community centers, social hubs, even places of healing and contemplation."[40]

The centrality of vision to contemporary art museum practice has its origins in the evolution of both Western museums and Western understandings of aesthetic experience. As the German philosopher Alexander von Baumgarten first argued in 1750, aesthetics is a process dedicated to the "perfection of perception:" a process rooted in the body, and in the nature of sensory experience.[41] Later elaborations within aesthetic philosophy would intellectualize these origins of the concept to argue that the eye offered the most objective or "disinterested" faculties for aesthetic judgments and the cognitive and affective pleasures believed to accompany them.[42] These are what John Cotton Dana, the early twentieth-century reformer, librarian, and museum director, would later describe as "those refinements of human nature – those betterments of manner and feeling, which I have ventured to name as good things which art museums exist to promote."[43]

As an array of scholars have documented, such ideas about "proper" aesthetic appreciation interfaced with a variety of factors in the modernizing West – including the rise of

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[40] Nina Levent and Alvaro Pascual-Leone, eds., *The Multisensory Museum: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Touch, Sound, Smell, Memory, and Space* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), xiii. See also David Howes, "Introduction to Sensory Museology," *The Senses and Society* 9, no. 3 (April 2014), 262.
[41] David Howes, "Hearing Scents, Tasting Sights: Toward a Cross-Cultural Multimodal Theory of Aesthetics," in *Art and the Senses*, ed. Francesca Bacci and David Melcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 167.
[42] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[43] John Cotton Dana, "The Gloom of the Museum," in Anderson, 13-29.

visualization techniques in science post-Enlightenment, increased surveillance within social institutions, and, significantly, the rise in museums' public access – to create by the mid-nineteenth century museums that would go on to privilege vision among sensory faculties.[44] Notably, however, this precedent is in tension with contemporary museums' efforts toward access and inclusion along several dimensions. For one, in museum education, structuring visually-focused museum-going experiences assumes everyone learns in the same way – visual-spatially – rather than, for example, through movement, through words, or through music, math, or logic.[45] And, as sociologists themselves have noted, such experiences presume that everyone has the same capacity for visual *interpretation*, rather than acknowledging how – particularly in museums of art – some, through their education and upbringing, have been tutored to appreciate and understand high culture while others have not.[46] When it comes to visitors with disabilities, however, these expectations bridge with the assumption of a different kind of sameness: in particular, a sameness among *bodies*, motivated by the belief that everyone can, quite literally, see. Perhaps for this reason, efforts to incorporate touch into museum-going and aesthetic experience through museum programs have predominantly focused on the blind. More broadly, they are most often connected to accessibility initiatives, and the primary audience (visitors with disabilities) such programs benefit.

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[44] See, for example, Fiona Candlin, "Museums, modernity and the class politics of touching objects" in *Touch in Museums: Policy and Practice in Object Handling,* ed. Helen Chatterjee (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2008), 9-20; Fiona Candlin, *Art, Museums and Touch* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2010); Constance Classen, "Touch in the Museum," in *The Book of Touch,* ed. Constance Classen (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), 275-288, and Constance Classen and David Howes, "The Museum as Sensescape: Western Sensibilities and Indigenous Artefacts" in *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums, and Material Culture*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden and Ruth B. Phillips (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), 199-222.

[45] Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

[46] On this point, see Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel with Dominique Schnapper, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public*, trans. Caroline Beattie and Nick Merriman (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990) and Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.)

Health

Considering the museum-going experiences of visitors with disabilities reveals how the dominant mode of aesthetic interpretation in museums privileges particular forms of embodied knowledge when compared to others. As a corrective, and as part of efforts toward broader accessibility, museum professionals must thus endeavor to consider the multiple sensory modes through which people come to perceive, interpret, and appreciate cultural objects. In some contrast, however, the push toward achieving "health" outcomes through museums would appear to acknowledge and address *a priori* the needs of different bodies. As it impacts visitors with disabilities, the trend, at least on its face, presumes the conferral of corporeal benefits.

Such an assumption, insofar as it aligns with efforts within museums to account for their public worth, also has a long historical life. Indeed, if it is true that museums' contemporary articulations of their social value to some extent reveal "what's old is new," efforts to improve the "health" of society through museum services – as they reflect a broader, more abstract notion of museums as stewards of the "public good" – are no exception. In her 2010 book on *The Social Work of Museums,* Silverman provides an international history of museum's attention to social problems and social conditions, dating from Egypt's third-century B.C. mouseion to Western European collectors' cabinets of curiosities to the global community-based institutions emerging in response to museums' "new museology."[47] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, she notes, museum leaders in the United States and United Kingdom began to broaden access to underserved publics, believing their institutions could combat the "poverty, alcoholism, and

[47] Lois H. Silverman, *The Social Work of Museums* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 5-13. The "new museology" refers to efforts among museum professionals and scholars to transform the exclusive, socially divisive institution of the museum into an accessible institution of public service. See Peter Vergo, *The New Museology*. (London: Reaktion Books, 1989).

social unrest" facing immigrant and working-class individuals.[48] For instance, Henry Cole, the founder of England's South Kensington Museum, argued in favor of extending the museum's hours, noting it offered working-class men an alternative to drinking in the form of beneficial family leisure: "The Museum," Cole wrote, "will certainly lead [the man] to wisdom and gentleness, and to Heaven, whilst the [Public-house and Gin Palace] will lead him to brutality and perdition."[49] This implicit moral boundary between the pub and the museum have led scholars to ask over the years whose interests museums' "social work" benefits. The English sociologist Tony Bennett, for example, has argued that museum leaders in this period of Western museum history were more interested in targeting the "popular body as an object for reform" – in essence, attempting to indoctrinate the working classes into mannerly behavior – than breaking down barriers to participation.[50]

Thus from the very starting point of museums' history, efforts to position themselves as institutions of public service have, embedded within them, an ideology of reform and improvement aimed at particular publics. Contemporary efforts toward "health" for visitors with disabilities are arguably not an exception. From the outset of my work on this project, I have described it to curious interlocutors as an investigation of how people in museums develop programs for visitors with disabilities. When sharing this, they would brighten and knowingly respond: "Oh, like art therapy!" This underscored both the positive associations people bring to health-focused initiatives, as well as the enduring coupling of disability and illness.

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[48] Silverman, *Social Work,* 8. As Silverman notes, museum professionals often drew on philosophers such as John Ruskin and William Morris to motivate their claims by referencing the "transforming power of art and culture."
[49] Henry Cole, Alan S. Cole, and Henrietta Cole, *Fifty Years of Public Work of Sir Henry Cole, K.C.B., Accounted for in His Deeds, Speeches and Writings, Volume 2* (London: George Bell And Sons, 1884), 368, cited in Silverman, *Social Work,* 9.
[50] Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1995): 100. See also Silverman, *Social Work,* 10.

Regardless, conflicts in interpretation over the benefits of "therapy" versus "access" programs occurred regularly within and across my field sites, stemming in large part from the more recent gains of the civil rights reforms described earlier in this section. This is because one goal of the disability rights movement was an effort to move away from the "medical model" of thinking about disability as an individual, functional impairment that resides in an individual person to a "social" or "minority group" model, wherein disability is a form of social difference that results from interactions between humans and their social, physical, and political environments.[51] A social model of disability argues adapting environments and removing barriers to access allows for the most inclusive social participation possible. Here one begins to see how a framing of "access" has, in some respect, ideological dissonance with a framing of "health." Arguably, each offers a way to promote inclusion among visitors with barriers to cultural participation. The latter, however, aligns with efforts to "better" or "improve" such visitors, while the former concentrates on "bettering" or "improving" museums to meet visitors where they are.

These tensions between the medical and social model of disability resound not only in everyday but also academic debate. For one, the social model's efforts to critique the medical model ultimately concede the body to medicine, understanding impairment only in the context of medical discourse.[52] The medical sociologist Gareth Williams has argued similarly that at stake in such debates between disability as a medical impairment versus social condition is the body

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[51] The "social model" of disability is most often used in the United Kingdom, whereas the minority-group model is more popular in the U.S. and aligns with the race, gender, and ethnicity social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Gary L. Albrecht, "The Sociology of Disability: Historical Foundations and Future Directions," in *Handbook of Medical Sociology,* ed. Chloe E. Bird, Peter Conrad, Allen M. Fremont, and Stefan Timmermans (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2010), 194.

[52] Bill Hughes and Kevin Paterson, "The Social Model of Disability and the Disappearing Body: Towards a sociology of impairment," *Disability and Society* 12 no. 3 (1997): 325-340. See also Irving Kenneth Zola, "Bringing our Bodies and Ourselves Back In: Reflections on a Past, Present, and Future 'Medical Sociology," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 32, no. 1 (1991): 1-16.

itself: the idea that disability "has undeniably to do at some level with the pain or discomfort of bodies, and this is a dimension of the oppressive quality of chronic illness and disability for large numbers of people."[53] (Or, as Tom Shakespeare writes: "Impairment is not the end of the world, tragic and pathological. But neither is it irrelevant, or just another difference.")[54] Museum professionals working with visitors with disabilities may thus ultimately find themselves in a double-bind, asking whether their primary task when promoting access and advocating for museums as an institution in the public service is to create museums that are "for" this group (inclusive) or "good for" this group (ameliorative).

Making Sense of Museum Practice

Six days after the September 11 attacks in 2001 that killed nearly 3,000 people across New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania, Michael Kimmelman – the architecture critic for *The New York Times* – wrote about the increased number of New Yorkers venturing into the city's cultural institutions, entitled: "The Solace in Sharing the Beauty of Great Art and Music."[55] Quoted in the piece was the then-director of the Met, Philippe de Montebello, who described the museum's decision to start a free lunchtime concert series by explaining (emphasis mine):

> This is precisely the time we should be providing a comforting experience. People who haven't had the heart yet to go back to work have been coming here for a sense of serenity and the intercession of other people, rubbing shoulders in a kind of womb of culture. *Hospitals are open. They're around to fix the body. We're here to fix the soul.*

de Montebello's distinction reveals both the enduring ideology of "betterment" associated with museum-going, as well as the presumed duality of "body" and "soul:" the idea that these

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[53] Gareth Williams, "Theorizing Disability," in *Handbook of Disability Studies,* ed. Gary L. Albrecht, Katherine D. Seelman, and Michael Bury (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 135.
[54] Tom Shakespeare, *Disability Rights and Wrongs* (London: Routledge, 2006), 62.
[55] Michael Kimmelman, "Critic's Notebook: The Solace in Sharing the Beauty of Great Art and Music," *The New York Times*, September 17, 2001, accessed September 27, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/17/arts/critics-notebook-the-solace-in-sharing-the-beauty-of-great-art-and-music.html

(along with their broader analogues, medical and social) can, effectively, be decoupled. However, examining the museum-going experiences of visitors with disabilities reveals that embedded within debates about aesthetics and health is not only a concept of the social good, but also an accompanying set of body politics. Accordingly, rather than placing these domains in opposition to one another, this project thus considers how they come together in the construction of therapeutic experience. My task is to explain which emerges as a legitimate justification of contemporary museum experience, under what conditions, and with what impact.

Revisiting Legitimacy: Or, First Studying Museums as Museums

Doing so – and in particular, explaining the variation I found when tracing museums' legitimation processes – requires first focusing more centrally on the particularities of museum practice: how museums get things done, and how they do so differently. For sociologists who study museums to theorize legitimacy, this is somewhat of a departure, as these institutions offer an excellent example of how organizations respond similarly to their broader external environment.[56] Neo-institutionalist theories of organizations offer a helpful way to understand what I have termed museums' "therapeutic turn" as an effect of growing economic and political pressures for accountability.[57] These efforts toward legitimacy contribute to our understanding of why, even in the face of institutional change, organizations within the same field (and across fields) often converge over time.

Indeed, it was with this theoretical framework in mind that I began my pilot research in the summer and fall of 2010 on programs for visitors with disabilities at the Met and the Chicago

[56] Nicholas Rowland and Fabio Rojas, "Bringing Technology Back In: A Critique of the Institutionalist Analysis of Museums," *Museum & Society* 4, no. 2 (July 2006): 84-95.
[57] See n. 10.

Botanic Garden (CBG) in Glencoe, IL, anticipating each museum would welcome wholesale the opportunity to identify and quantify the health benefits of their initiatives. In the course of completing it, however, I swiftly discovered that while the Met's art museum educators adamantly rejected labeling their "access" initiatives as a form of a therapy, counterpart programs at the CBG were led by horticultural therapists: professionals trained in the use of gardening as a clinical modality. This variation – how people in museums, facing similar pressures for accountability, differently emphasize the therapeutic value of art compared to nature – is the primary empirical puzzle of this study. In the language of organizational theory, I have thus taken – and argue for – a microsociological approach to studying the institutional change museums' "therapeutic turn" would suggest.[58] So doing reveals how people within these organizations make sense of things through interactions: how they both work within the constraints of, and reshape, the broader templates for organizational action that define what they can do in museums and how they do so differently.[59]

What I found in taking such an approach is that museum professionals across the gardens and the galleries elaborate their organization's broader institutional logics and respond to the exigencies they face by drawing on the different material and symbolic resources available to them in the domains of art and nature. Notably, this became clear not only by focusing on practice, but also by undertaking comparative analysis *within* the organizational field of

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[58] Katherine C. Kellogg, *Challenging Operations: Medical Reform and Resistance in Surgery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[59] This is informed by the "inhabited institutions" approach in organizational theory, part of a broader effort to connect micro-, meso- and macro-sociological approaches to organizational behavior. See, for example, Tim Hallett and Marc J. Ventresca, "Inhabited institutions: Social interaction and organizational forms in Gouldner's *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy*," *Theory and Society* 35, no. 2 (April 2006): 213–236 and Amy Binder, "For love and money: Organizations' creative responses to multiple environmental logics," *Theory and Society* 36, no. 6 (December 2007): 547-571. For reflections on coupling micro- and macro-level analyses of organizations, see Walter W. Powell and Jeannette A. Colyvas, "Microfoundations of Institutional Theory," in *Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, ed. Royston Greenwood, Christine Oliver, Kerstin Sahlin-Andersson, and Roy Suddaby (New York: SAGE, 2008).

museums. This, too, is a shift in focus for sociologists studying museums, for if it is true that museums as a field are of interest to organizational sociologists because these institutions are so tightly linked to their organizational environments, it is equally true that art museums in particular are of interest to sociologists of culture because as institutions of high culture (like operas and symphonies), they both reflect and can reproduce social (socioeconomic) inequalities. This is the position advanced most saliently by Pierre Bourdieu, who in his studies of cultural participation in France, and Europe more broadly, during the 1960s and 1970s demonstrated how aesthetic appreciation – a form of "cultural capital" acquired through family upbringing and higher education – functions as a mark of class distinction.[60] As Gordon Fyfe has noted, sociological research highlighting how museums function as exclusive places catering to elite interests has been consistently refracted – until quite recently – through empirical research on art museums.[61]

However, the strength of the Bourdieusian framework has had one perhaps unexpected consequence: that a good deal of what sociologists know about museums, inclusion, and access – much the concern of this project – comes from studying museums in a very specific historical (and national) context, leaving unanswered the question of how museums undertake the necessary contemporary project of legitimating their worth, democratizing their offerings, and

[60] Bourdieu and Darbel; Bourdieu, *Distinction*.
[61] Gordon Fyfe, "Sociology and Social Aspects of Museums," in *A Companion to Museum Studies,* ed. Sharon MacDonald (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 37-9. Victoria Johnson and David Grazian offer two recent exceptions to this trend in their (respective) research on botanical gardens and zoos. While neither explicitly aims to theorize these institutions as museums, they each examine issues of organizational identity that can contribute to studies of museums more broadly. David Grazian, *American Zoo: A Sociological Safari* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015) and Victoria Johnson, "Identity, Sustainability, and Local Setting at U.S. Botanical Gardens," *Organization and Environment* 25, no. 3 (September 2012): 259-285.

diversifying their audiences.[62] This project thus refigures the locus of the analysis not only by considering the twenty-first-century American art museum in particularly "unsettled" times but also – and perhaps more significantly – comparing art museums and botanical gardens.[63] In doing so, I propose a shift in "genre" – what Wendy Griswold has defined as a system of relations, or category, in which the sociologist may come to understand and make claims about social phenomena – insofar as I ask what we gain if we considered art museums as an example not of non-profit institutions, or high culture institutions, but instead as *museums*.[64]

American museums in particular offer an apposite site for comparative study, as they constitute a historically capacious category. In 1888, George Brown Goode – the influential museum administrator who oversaw the expansion of the Smithsonian Institution – first enumerated six types of museums classified by their contents, including museums of art; historical museums; anthropological museums; and natural history museums (including botanical gardens and zoos). This taxonomy has not only sustained through the present day, but has also diffused beyond American walls. Both the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the AAM, the largest and only professional organizations representing museums and museum professionals in the United States, include among their current ranks museums of anthropology, art and natural history, aquariums, arboreta, art centers, botanical gardens, children's museums,

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[62] As Michele Lamont has argued, some of Bourdieu's broader findings suffer from lack of cross-national comparison. Michele Lamont, *Money, Morals, and Manners: The Culture of the French and the American Upper Middle Class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[63] According to Ann Swidler, ideologies emergent during "unsettled" periods establish new styles, or strategies, of action when the status quo can no longer hold. Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (April 1986): 273-286

[64] Wendy Griswold, "A Methodological Framework for the Sociology of Culture," *Sociological Methodology* 17 (1987): 1-35.

historic sites, nature centers, planetariums, science and technology centers, and zoos.[65] Ultimately, I suggest bringing the museum into the analytical frame can explain how those within and across these institutions differently interpret and negotiate their broader social contexts. More broadly, it underscores how people negotiate legitimacy struggles at the local level. Comparative, ethnographic study of practice reveals how people "make sense of things" by drawing simultaneously on diverse justifications of action, and how they elaborate the worth of what they do based on the different cultural, moral, and material resources available to them.[66]

Access, The Therapeutic Turn, and A Return to Meaning

Empirically, it does so by tracing the different sensory practices of museums, through which therapeutic meanings are made.[67] Comparing the differing institutional cultures of art museums and botanical gardens illuminates how people innovate sensory practice to democratize aesthetic experience and thus challenge the sensory – and therefore embodied – hierarchies

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[65] American Alliance of Museums. "About Us."; International Council of Museums, "Development of the Museum Definition according to ICOM Statutes (2007-1946)," accessed September 27, 2015, http://archives.icom.museum/hist_def_eng.html.

[66] See Michele Lamont, "Toward a Comparative Sociology of Valuation and Evaluation," *Annual Review of Sociology* 38 (2012): 201-221. Rather than examining how value gets calculated by particular devices or methodologies (evaluation), this project takes from Boltanski and Thévenot's conception of value as justification in order to explore how people assign legitimizing, and often competing, qualities of worth to objects and activities. Luc Boltanskiand Laurent Thévenot, *On Justification: Economies of Worth,* trans. Catherine Porter (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[67] To study sensory experience as a form of practice is to underscore the broader idea that sensory experience is *social* experience: it is more than a simple matter of bodies meeting objects, unmediated. As Phillip Vannini and colleagues have noted, sociologists are not the first social scientists to make this point, and anthropologists in particular make it quite regularly. Indeed, despite significant attention to sensory experience in the classical sociology of George Simmel, among others, and a handful of more recent studies, sociologists are somewhat late to the game in theorizing the sociality of sensory experience. Philip Vannini, Dennis Waskul, and Simon Gattschalk, eds., *The Senses in Self, Society, and Culture: A Sociology of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 6-15. For a notable recent exception, see Asia Friedman, who positions a "sociology of the senses" within research on culture and cognition. Asia Friedman, *Blind to Sameness: Sexpectations and the Social Construction of Male and Female Bodies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013) and Asia Friedman, "Perceptual Construction: Rereading The Social Construction of Reality Through the Sociology of the Senses," *Cultural Sociology* 10, no. 1 (March 2016): 77-92.

contemporarily associated with it. In particular, I find that while museum staff and visitors acknowledge the prominence of aesthetic meanings in each institution, they define and frame them quite differently. While people working in art museums frame aesthetic experience in art museums as an exercise in "how" to look – a product of the trained eye, or a learned faculty of interpretive judgment – people in botanical gardens frame aesthetics as how "things" look (beauty; the unmediated, sensuous pleasure celebrated by Wilde and his fellow aesthetes). Acknowledging the limits of privileging vision, art museum educators innovate their modal practice by not only encouraging visitors' subjective interpretations and expressive experience of art, but also – and when it comes to visitors with disabilities – broadening the somatic (tactile; kinesthetic) modalities through which they come to understand its meaning. Similarly, those in botanical gardens – drawing on the properties of their collections – invite visitors' diverse forms of sensory engagement by curating multi-sensory spaces and leading workshops that incorporate plants and flowers carefully selected for their interesting textures and pleasing scents.

Because such sensory adaptations are developed principally for visitors with disabilities, however, they often also intersect with the "therapeutic" goals of museum programs: a curious irony, given participants most often end up appreciating art and nature for the aesthetic dimensions that educators have made accessible to them. For museum staff, however, such aesthetic experiences are not so easily commensurated. In particular, art museum educators worry that art's aesthetics are elitist and exclusionary (because they require training to appreciate), while botanical garden educators and staff therapists worry nature's are perceived as frivolous (because they do not). This – coupled with the constructed understanding that nature's unmediated multi-sensory pleasures are "inherently" accessible and therefore broadly "good" for people – results in a stronger push within the botanical gardens to develop and assess the

therapeutic potential of their initiatives. It also results in botanical garden program staff's continued emphasis on nature's affective and sensuous dimensions for visitors with disabilities, at the expense of alternate framings. In contrast, I find art museum educators resist overt therapeutic framings by continuing to innovate diverse ways to make artistic content accessible for all visitors. In so doing, they continually elaborate a frame of "access" that resonates with the disability movement's politics of inclusion and American museums' democratic principles.

Ultimately, this project seeks to answer the question of how museums frame cultural participation as "good" for visitors' health, positioning health as an instrumental logic of practice in aesthetic worlds that have historically resisted utilitarian justifications. For those whose empirical interests span beyond museums, aesthetics, or health, however, the story I tell here is more broadly about how legitimation processes in aesthetic worlds can mediate interpretation and impact social inequalities. On the one hand, I find external challenges to account for art and nature's "inherent" worth (*pace* Wilde) yield greater democratization of museum practice, thereby broadening the playing field of who can partake of and enjoy public institutions. In particular, museums' push toward inclusion, including their "therapeutic turn," charges educators to innovate sensory practices that take into account the diverse modes and embodied capacities through which people experience aesthetic pleasures.

On the other hand, the broader push toward health in the gardens and the galleries reveals the challenges in standardizing the worth of aesthetics, and of substantive value constructions more broadly. That people enjoy art and nature for the cognitive and affective pleasures they afford matters little in the contemporary context of accountability in which museums presently find themselves, where the value of such pleasures cannot be easily measured. The museum staff and therapists I studied felt these tensions most acutely and were candid about the trade-offs of

medicalization. Early in my fieldwork, I attended a session of the Chicago Botanic Garden's horticultural therapy certificate program, in which staff and students were tasked with presenting an overview of the field's current research. Barb Kreski, presently the Director of the CBG's Horticultural Therapy Program, noted in her conclusion that the future of the profession depended on its ability "to define and regulate itself… on the quality and quantity of supportive research published [and] on the future of healthcare provisions in the U.S." She added it seemed "doubtful" that horticultural therapy could be "seen as something more than nice, [as not] expendable when money is tight." Those in attendance pushed back against what one therapist termed this "realistic" but "pessimistic" assessment, speaking encouragingly about the growing professionalization of the field. To this Barb responded the profession regardless ought to be "careful what you ask for. If you sit down and write your goals and plans to match the standards of an insurance company, you'll take a lot of the joy, pleasure, and fun out of what you do."

More broadly, tending to the "joy, pleasure, and fun" in museum-going requires sociologists investigate and explain what objects signify to the people who are actually using, experiencing, and "making sense" of them. This formulation aligns with a broader, more recent call in the sociologies of art and culture, though in this particular case, the stakes are arguably more than theoretical.[68] As a social process, (e)valuation is of significant interest to sociologists in part because of how it can shed light on the formation of symbolic boundaries: the conceptual

[68] See Sophia K. Acord and Tia DeNora, "Culture and the arts: from art worlds to arts-in-action," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 619 (September 2008), 233; Tia DeNora, *Music in everyday life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). In keeping with the practice approach I take here, this position holds that for a while in the study of "explicit" culture – cultural objects, such as artworks – the emphasis has been either on "how" things are made (specifically, the American production of culture school) or "how" they are interpreted (through shared cultural suppositions), rather than how they are used. Claudio Benzecry has also argued that sociologists' overt focus on conditions of production, or on the status hierarchies of taste, leaves emotional attachment to cultural objects relatively undertheorized. Claudio Benzecry, *The Opera Fanatic: Ethnography of an Obsession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

criteria people use to categorize people, objects, and practices.[69] Advancing the medicalization of museum-going in the name of the public good may not only distort the substantive values people place on such experiences, but, as I trace in what follows, complicate the goals of cultural accessibility. Such a project is continually negotiated in the liminal space between inclusion and difference, and to be sure, visitors with disabilities present with special needs that museums must adapt their practices to address. However, this project shows how championing the value of therapeutic interventions for this group – and thereby aiming to standardize therapeutic outcomes and practices – may ultimately limit, more than promote, access by shaping who can do what in the museum. For those in cultural policy, these findings allow practitioners and policy makers to make informed choices about the values inherent in museums' "therapeutic turn" and broaden understanding of its effects.

Description of Research

This project is the culmination of ethnographic fieldwork spanning five years that began with a four-month period of research in 2010 at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) in New York and then the Chicago Botanic Garden (CBG) in Glencoe, IL, 30 miles north of downtown Chicago. The broader research focuses on four institutions in New York and Chicago: a botanical garden and an art museum in each city, all of which are accredited by the AAM. Primary research sites include the CBG and the Met; secondary sites include the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC) and New York Botanical Garden (NYBG). The Met and CBG are leaders in the field of health outreach and cultural accessibility. By contrast, the AIC and NYBG are more

[69] Lamont, "Toward a Comparative Sociology," 210. See also Lamont, *Money, Morals, and Manners* and Michele Lamont and Virag Molnar, "The study of boundaries in the social sciences" *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002): 167–95.

typical, which prevents generalization from exceptional cases. I completed 18 cumulative months of fieldwork at the CBG and the Met between the fall of 2010 and the fall of 2014 and additionally completed a nine-month period of continuous observations at both the AIC and NYBG during that time. I dedicated the fall of 2015 to follow-up visits and interviews across all four sites. In this section, I provide information on methodological procedure and review the data I collected. Appendix A provides a more brief statement on how I negotiated research access and my role as a researcher within my field sites.

The primary unit of my analysis was programs for visitors with disabilities held on-site at each museum. While in many museums – as I discuss at greater length in Chapter 3 – educators today carry out a number of responsibilities related to access, the most salient among these is creating accessible programs.[70] Through tours of the galleries, hands-on workshops, lectures, and performances, museum educators teach people from and about museum objects, translating the meaning of our cultural and natural heritage for and across diverse audiences. Given that a recent (2012) NEA *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* found that adults with disabilities comprise less than seven percent of all adults attending performing arts events or visiting art museums or galleries, outreach programs – tailored specifically to the needs of particular constituencies, and led nearly invariably by educators – offer an important site where one can see how the meanings of "access" are negotiated.[71]

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[70] As the AAM states in its standards manual: "Beyond what is required by law – notably the Americans with Disabilities Act – museums have an ethical imperative to make their resources as accessible as possible. This includes physical assets such as the building and grounds, and intellectual assets – information about the collections, results of the museum's research, exhibits, programs and website." American Alliance of Museums, *National Standards & Best Practices for U.S. Museums* (Washington, D.C.: The AAM Press, 2008), 23.

[71] Quoted in Beth Bienvenu, "Museums and ADA@25: Progress and Looking Ahead," in American Alliance of Museums, "Museums and Accessibility," 29-35. There is not, to my knowledge, current statistical data on the participation of visitors with disabilities in museums. This gap can likely be partially attributed to the murkiness of "disability" as a demographic category, and attendant difficulties with commensuration. Other challenges regard from the constraints museums face when collecting visitor data more generally. A 1989 national survey of

Both the Met and CBG offer regularly scheduled programs dedicated to people with disabilities. At the AIC, accessibility initiatives primarily fell to staff overseeing programs for older adults. At the NYBG, I examined how concerns about accessibility impacted guides leading public tours and educators leading programs for children. For context, I also observed in my primary case studies (and to a lesser extent, my secondary case studies) a sample of programs for other audiences, including teens, families, school groups, and the general public; educational programs led off-site at schools, hospitals, community centers; and training and professional development sessions for educators.

I supplemented these observations with 142 in-depth interviews. Fifty four were conducted with museum program staff, including staff educators who primarily oversaw program development and training; freelance, or contractual, educators who primarily led programs; and recreational therapists who participated in both, depending on the institutions. Twenty seven were with professionals who interfaced with these program staff, comprising 20 museum staff in curatorial, security, development, and visitor services departments and seven external program consultants in fields including medicine, design, and social work. My conversations with nine leaders in the field of cultural accessibility provided both historical context for the project and assessments of the broader field of cultural and museum policy.

I further interviewed 52 adult participants in accessibility initiatives: 36 from the Met, 12 from the CBG, and four from the AIC.[72] These numbers are proportional to the number of

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accessibility in U.S. museums found, for example, that few museums collect and maintain data about their general audience, and that fewer than 1 in 5 museums could estimate how many of these were "visitors who have special needs." The report also found a relationship between size of museum and tendency to collect such data, signifying that larger museums (with, accordingly, larger budgets) had the resources for such efforts. Mary Ellen Munley with Jeff Hayward, *Museums: Opening Doors and Expanding Awareness: National Survey of Accessibility in Museums in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1989), 10-11.

[72] It here bears note that several of the educators I interviewed were people with disabilities, including Rebecca McGinnis, who oversees access programs at the Met. While my formal interview guides with these educators

visitors with disabilities I observed these museums serve throughout the course of my fieldwork. Roughly half (27) were professional or personal care partners and attended the museum programs with their friends, family members, or clients they served through social service and other non-profit organizations. In the case of program participants on the autism spectrum or with developmental disabilities or dementia, I spoke with care partners to determine in advance of the interview whether their loved ones or client would be able to participate in a verbal consent process and roughly half hour-long conversation with me. If eligible, I conducted interviews with the dyads. Given the constraint of current social scientific interviewing methods, my sample of visitors with self-identified disabilities privileges those with physical disabilities over those with cognitive disabilities: 14 of the 25 were blind or partially-sighted. Many participants were interviewed in their places of work, their day programs, or their homes, which provided me insight into their lives beyond their museum-going experiences.

Among those I interviewed, I have named with permission a group of 13 key informants, many of whom have published, or are otherwise leaders, in their fields and whose names are publicly available (see Appendix B for a list of associated institutions and titles). From my case studies, these include Rebecca McGinnis and Deborah Jaffe at the Met; Lucas Livingston and Deborah (Deb) DelSignore at the AIC; Barbara Kreski and Alicia Green at the CBG; and Jamie Boyer and James Vickers at the NYBG. From the broader field of cultural accessibility and art education, I have named Rika Burnham; Janice Majewski; Bonnie Pitman; Betty Siegel; and Beth Ziebarth. For all other subjects I have provided pseudonyms and changed identifying

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focused primarily on their teaching practices, questions about the impact of their disabilities on their work and approach to programs manifested in various ways, most often in personal and informal conversations with me throughout the course of my fieldwork. I have tended to these as relevant in the data.

information. All consented to their interview knowing the institutions they were associated with would be named and that their identity might thus become known.

Throughout this project I use "person-first" language, acknowledging that the language and terms for identity categories – particularly those at the center of minority rights movements – are often contested and in flux and that no choice will satisfy all parties. Person-first language recognizes, simply, that the person comes first – one is a person before they are a disability – and is the most common term in disability studies and other scholarly research.[73] Further, those leading accessibility trainings in my field sites also emphasized the importance of person-first language, indicating it is politically mainstream not only in the academy but also in everyday discourse. While several of the disability advocates and activists I encountered during my research mentioned their interest in self-identifying as a "disabled person" so as to more directly embrace "disability" as an identity category, they regardless deferred to person-first language, acknowledging it was the choice that more broadly satisfied the disability community.

Plan of the Dissertation

My analysis is organized into three sections: Part I, "Places"; Part II, "People"; and Part III, "Practice."[74] These map onto the differences in organizational conventions, group

[73] Switzer, 10-11.

[74] Portions of material throughout my dissertation draw from two prior publications: Gemma Mangione, "Access to What?: Alzheimer's Disease and Esthetic Sense-Making in the Contemporary Art Museum," *Poetics* 41, no. 1 (February 2013): 27-47, and Gemma Mangione, "Making Sense of Things: Constructing Aesthetic Experience in Museum Gardens and Galleries," *Museum & Society* 14, no. 1 (March 2016): 33- 51. The 2016 publication includes my introduction of "sensory conventions" and my description and analysis of the concept, which I discuss in Chapter 1. The article also includes examples in Chapters 4 and 5 explaining museum staff members' multi-sensory innovations in aesthetic meanings. Quotes from program participants with dementia and their caregivers, along with the educators who work with them and the broader idea of "access to," appear in Chapters 3 and 4; these draw from the 2013 article. Whenever possible, I have rewritten any specific sentences or passages that appear in these articles, though at times preserved them when rewriting would have distorted readers' interpretation of the data or of my argument.

interactions, and material cultures I argue collectively structure the differing value constructions and therapeutic ideologies across the galleries and the gardens.

Part I, Chapter 1 extends this introduction's more theoretical "emplacement" of museums as a category of sociological analysis to an empirical examination of my four case studies. Here I introduce the concept of "sensory conventions" – the rules structuring how visitors come to use their senses in museums, and which they use – to examine how such conventions both organize visitors' interactions with museum collections and reveal how museum staff differently construct the worth of their collections. Aesthetics offers a prime example, and here I introduce the distinction between how *to* look and how *things* look that differentiates aesthetic meanings across the galleries and gardens. I further trace museum staff members' – and particularly education members' – anxieties about such aesthetic logics. While those in the art museum worry that the aesthetic experience of art can be exclusionary, those in botanical gardens worry that the aesthetics of nature limits educational goals by detracting from the other activities of botanical gardens, and particularly their scientific research.

Part II contrasts the work of museum educators – those professionals who undertake the work of translating art and nature's value for diverse audiences – with recreational therapists, who coordinate programs for visitors with disabilities. Chapter 2 documents how educators – often given very little information about visitors in advance – adapt their programs based on the perceived interests of a given group and by balancing expert and emotional labor. The necessity of this "adaptive expertise" reveals that museum education is an interactional accomplishment favoring customized experiences tailored to visitors' backgrounds. Chapter 3 explains the limits of such "adaptive expertise" in programs for people with disabilities, where staff are not always familiar with such visitors, where information about visitors' needs is typically not available,

and, most importantly, where such programs are also often led by recreational therapists. Overall, I find recreational therapists frame nature and art as means to a therapeutic end and are therefore likely to organize more structured programs favoring hands-on interactions. In general, botanical garden staff have more readily incorporated recreational therapists than art museum educators, who instead frame cultural participation around "access." One key exception here regards the museum-going experiences of visitors with dementia, in which art therapists more prominently figure. This visitor public offers an important site for examining boundary work among the able-bodied and disabled, and between the disabled and ill.

Part III outlines how staff working with visitors with disabilities extend their institutions' framings of aesthetics in art and nature. Chapter 4 describes how art museum educators broaden possibilities for aesthetic interpretation – how *to* look – among visitors with disabilities by emphasizing the senses' ability to further understanding. I show how providing opportunities for touch, for example, provides information on an artwork's weight and temperature, information not necessarily visually discernible. While art museum educators express uncertainty about how to commensurate program outcomes, discussing them in more relativist terms, program participants emphasize the symbolic benefits of access to institutions with high cultural capital and express their appreciation for the learning opportunities the museums provide. Chapter 5 suggests educators in botanical gardens overall incorporate more "hands-on" experiences into programs that frame nature as, variously, science, horticulture, food, and craft. When working with visitors with disabilities, however, staff tend to emphasize the aesthetic dimension of nature – how *things* look – at the expense of alternate framings, while elaborating it to include non-visual senses. In particular, horticultural therapists at the CBG curate garden spaces and workshop activities incorporating plants with interesting textures, agreeable scents, and bright

colors. Though staff and participants alike celebrate nature's sensory pleasures, therapists nevertheless face difficulties both commensurating them as therapeutic using the standards of biomedicine and justifying their aesthetic worth.

The summative chapter "makes sense of things" by considering key findings and themes from this research. It aims to trace for both sociologists and cultural practitioners the opportunities, and potential consequences, of museums' therapeutic turn. I discuss implications of my project for work on culture, art, embodiment, knowledge, and health, and for decision-making within museums and the broader cultural sector.

Chapter 1

Sensory Conventions

Brent has worked in the New York Botanical Garden's education department for more than a decade. One gets the impression meeting him that he spends a lot of time outdoors: skin the shade of the tomatoes in the garden where he leads workshops, and hair dappled gold from the sun. (He cuts it, he told me, only several times a year: right before summer, and right before he sees his mother). Inspired by an undergraduate professor, he'd studied biology with a concentration in plant science. College was the first time he became interested in teaching about plants: "Right now, I supervise programs for the most part for primary school children. And when I was that age I was just, you know, interested in my soccer ball. And so my experiences in gardens were just getting my soccer ball out of the garden… Without, you know, leaving any trace."

Brent adores his job. After I concluded my interview with him, I asked if there was anything I'd left out. His eyes widened, excited by all the other things he might share with me, as he responded: *Yeah*, with emphasis. "It's a lot of fun working in a botanical garden!" His love for the NYBG and its plants made him protective of the institution. He said when he talked to people about his job, he always framed the garden as a "big museum of plants," with "programs and collections and all these kinds of things." He felt it was particularly important to "frame" the garden as a museum when he saw "people abusing it… when you see people climbing the trees, or just throwing trash or playing." Sometimes, however, he saw in young visitors the "kid with the soccer ball" he had once been:

> [The other day] I was put in a very tough position. I was on my way to the propagation greenhouses, and I was on the service road behind the Rose Garden. And there's a little bit of a lawn back there. And our Rose Garden is surrounded by kind of a trellis fence. And there's a soccer game going on with a couple of kids. And they were like, kicking the ball, and it landed in the rose garden. And meanwhile, there's like, lots of visitors in there, and the roses themselves. And I'm not even a big fan of roses. But I slammed on my brakes. And I'm like, oh, what do I say now?… They got a soccer ball. I love that. But, you know, you're not really supposed to have soccer balls in the botanical garden. There's a park across the street. You know, play soccer there and come over here and enjoy the garden. So, like there's, just - for them it's a field. Green space. And there's not that many green spaces. There is, you know, a small park across the street, but maybe it was full of people. So, it was just an interesting moment.

Convention holds that in museums we look, but do not touch. One somewhat exaggerated, and yet illustrative, example from popular culture reveals that our socialization into this most sacred museum rule begins quite early. In a 1983 Sesame Street special filmed at the Met, Cookie Monster famously learns while gazing upon Philippe Rousseau's 1870s' *Still Life*

with Ham that you "don't eat the pictures."[75] (Even if the ham is represented so vividly you want to stack the painting on bread and have a ham sandwich, as Cookie Monster desires to do). Such sensory imaginings notwithstanding, Cookie acknowledges that from his visit, he has learned "big lessons about museum etiquette." "Pictures aren't cookies," he sings. "They're meant for looking. So if hungry, eat with your eyes!"

For this reason, we find it hard to imagine a group of young children kicking a soccer ball around the Met's European art galleries (or any other art museum, really). However, broadening the frame of analysis to compare art museums to other types of museums (like botanical gardens) somewhat complicates the story. The NYBG, notably, has been accredited by the American Alliance of Museums since 1971, the same year the advocacy organization's accreditation program began.[76] As a "living museum," the garden studies, exhibits, and teaches about the natural world, with collections that include more than 1 million living plants.[77] It serves 900,000 visitors annually, including 300,000 through its educational programming; it operates a plant research and conservation program staffed with nearly 200 people who conduct fieldwork in the museum's laboratories and across 49 countries.[78] On paper, one fails to imagine anything less museological. In practice, however, the museum-going conventions of botanical gardens differ from others across the organizational field.

This chapter explains how "sensory conventions" – templates for action defining how people use their senses in a given social context, and which senses they use – vary across

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[75] Arlene Sherman, Tony Geiss, and Lisa Simon, *Don't Eat the Pictures: Sesame Street at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, dir. Jon Stone (New York: Children's Television Workshop, 1983).
[76] Cecilia A. Walls, e-mail message to author, February 25, 2014. At the time of correspondence, Walls was the Accreditation Office and Information Center Manager, American Alliance of Museums.
[77] "Studying, Exhibiting, And Conserving Plants For 120 Years | NYBG," NYBG.org, 2016, accessed September 28, 2016, http://www.nybg.org/about.
[78] Ibid.

museum gardens and galleries.[79] In so doing, I depart somewhat from studies focused on how external environments shape what museums do to focus on how their internal cultures shape organizational practice. To be sure, museums, on the whole, work to protect the symbolic value of collection objects by preserving their material form. This is why Brent is most likely to describe the garden as a museum when he sees people "abuse" the plants. Doing so confers a particular degree of value on those plants by drawing on the logic that museums must protect the priceless artifacts within them (which they do, of course, in large part by policing touch). However, it bears note that Brent also acknowledges both that people appreciate nature because of the broader outdoor experience it offers (rare in urban New York) and that nature affords opportunities for play. Here he recognizes "green space" – be it a botanical garden, a field, or a park – invites the kind of hands-on interaction at odds with conservationist policies. Examining museums' sensory conventions thus ultimately reveals tensions in how museums justify their mission – for example, as "preservationist" (in the service of the objects) versus "populist" (in the service of the people) – and shows how they vary across types of museums and museum collections. Ultimately, I argue, the sensory interactions people have with museum objects shape, and are shaped by, people's interpretation of their worth. These value constructions impact not only the kinds of visitor experiences that are possible, but can also constrain or enable different organizational goals.

In what follows, I trace sensory conventions across the gardens and galleries in two sections. The first begins by introducing readers to the diverse organizational field of American museums, thereby foregrounding longstanding tensions of mission within and across museums that map onto contestations of practice. Comparing through ethnography how museums organize

[79] Mangione, "Constructing Aesthetic Experience."

visitor experience through sensory conventions – specifically, how art museums and botanical gardens differently enforce the "look, don't touch" rule – further reveals that the affordances of collection objects and museum environments mediate the kinds of sensory experiences visitors can have.[80] The second section elaborates this point by investigating how sensory conventions reflect different uses and interpretations of objects in art and nature. I focus particularly on how aesthetic understandings vary for objects across these domains, explaining how in art museums aesthetic experience is organized around how *to* look while in the botanical gardens it is focused on how *things* look.

What Museums Do

American Museums: Hybrid Field, Hybrid Organizations

Considering how interactions vary across types of American museums necessitates first some historical and cultural context. In America, the rise of museums that would include the establishment of the NYBG in 1891 coincided with the large-scale industrial and commercial expansion following the Civil War.[81] During this time, many entrepreneurs – mainly in Massachusetts and New York City – felt wealthy enough to spend large sums on arts and culture, invest in private collections, and contribute philanthropically. In particular, the concomitant founding around 1870 of the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan

[80] As Tia DeNora writes, the concept of "affordances" captures how the materiality of things mediates and can structure "styles of consciousness, ideas, or modes of embodiment." While she primarily focuses on affordances in the context of music, the concept contributes more broadly to sociological theories of cultural objects by moving beyond how people "interpret" objects to examining what those objects make possible. I use the term here in reference to the sensory properties of objects embedded in particular curated environments, so as to explore the interactions these settings invite or proscribe. Tia DeNora, "Music into action: performing gender on the Viennese concert stage, 1790-1810," *Poetics* 30, no. 1-2 (May 2002): 19.

[81] In this paragraph and the next, I rely on Edward Alexander and Tony Bennett's review of American and European museum histories. Edward P. Alexander, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1979) and Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*. Alexander's account is both helpful and distinctive in its focus on all museums that fall within the American museum genre.

Museum of Art in New York, as well as the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, confirmed the United States as a key player in the international museum arena.

Broadly, however, the formation of these encyclopedic institutions and later museums occurred through the interaction of a number of factors. These included the desire to refine and nationalize industrial design; to educate and improve national taste; and, perhaps most importantly, to challenge the primacy of an elite high culture by displaying cultural objects in public spaces, thus affording access to those who might not otherwise have it. Beginning in the fifteenth century, the object collections of the Western world – whether of "curiosities," scientific pieces, or artworks; whether labeled *studioli, cabinets des curiex,* or *Wunderkammern*; whether in the name of displaying aristocratic power, or storing and disseminating knowledge – shared two main principles: private ownership, and restricted public access. It wasn't until the establishment of the South Kensington museum in mid-nineteenth-century London that the European states began systematically maximizing museum accessibility, particularly for the working classes. This endeavor would progress somewhat unevenly, as the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu showed nearly 100 years later in his formative studies correlating attendance at European art museums and French cultural institutions with class status.[82] In contrast, the charter of nearly every major American museum emphasized its educational purpose and required public access to collections from the outset. "Perhaps the most significant contribution America has made to the concept of the museum," wrote Germain Bazin in 1967, then chief curator of the Louvre, "is in the field of education."[83]

As long as there have been museums in America, however, there have also been tussles over what they ought to do, how, and for whom. In the language of organizational theory,

[82] Bourdieu and Darbel; Bourdieu, *Distinction.*
[83] Qtd. in Alexander, *Museums in Motion*, 15.

museums, like many other cultural institutions, are "hybrid" organizations: they have multiple, and often conflicting, goals and values to meet and maintain.[84] These, in turn, often confuse how the organizations are supposed to operate themselves.[85] Conflicts about organizational practice can occur at different levels: for example, they can be found within a single type of museum. Art museums in particular have a well-documented history of tensions between notions of the museum as an educational forum versus an exclusive aesthetic sanctuary. One can see these conflicting democratic and elitist visions in the early writings of pioneers in museum thinking. In 1917, John Cotton Dana – writer, librarian, founder of The Newark Museum – famously asked people to consider whether a department store might count as a museum: "A department store is not a good museum," he wrote, "but so far are museums from being the active and influential agencies they might be that they may be compared with department stores and not altogether to their advantage."[86] Around the same time but with a distinctly different ideological spirit, Benjamin Ives Gilman, secretary of Boston MFA, drew contrasts within the larger museum genre to defend the value of "art for art's sake" and argue against aesthetic experiences explicitly designed to convey information: "A museum of science… [is] in essence a school; a museum of art in essence a temple."[87]

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[84] Cultural institutions often have internally conflicting identities, in large part due to the different professional actors within them that favor different parts of their institutions' mission. Mary Ann Glynn, "When Cymbals become Symbols: Conflict over Organizational Identity within a Symphony Orchestra," *Organization Science* 11, no. 3 (May 2000): 285-298.

[85] For a review of challenges hybrid organizations face making organizational identity claims, see David A. Whetten, "Albert and Whetten Revisited: Strengthening the Concept of Organizational Identity," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 15, no. 3 (September 2006): 227. For recent analyses of hybridity as they relate to institutional logics in nonprofit organizations, see Steven Rathgeb Smith, "Hybridity and Nonprofit Organizations: The Research Agenda," *American Behavioral Scientist* 48, no. 11 (September 2014): 1494-1508 and Chris Skelcher and Steven Rathgeb Smith, "Theorizing Hybridity: Institutional Logics, Complex Organizations, and Actor Identities: The Case of Nonprofits," *Public Administration* 93, no. 2 (June 2015): 433-448.

[86] Dana, 25.

[87] Qtd. in Alexander, *Museums in Motion*, 12. For analyses of how Dana's and Gilman's different philosophies influenced the Newark Museum in New Jersey and MFA Boston, see DiMaggio, "Cultural Entrepreneurship," and DiMaggio, "Constructing an Organizational Field," respectively; for their role in museum education, see Zeller.

Gilman's distinction reveals that conflicts in defining what museums are occur not just within a single museum, but also between different *types* of museums. This is particularly important given the broad and diverse American museum field, ranging from art to natural history museums to zoos and botanical gardens. In penning his "Agenda for American Museums in the Twenty-First Century," Harold Skramstad reminded museum scholars and practitioners to remember one of the most distinguishing features of American museums was their diversity: "[Museums] might focus on one particular area such as art, history, science, or archaeology, or they might take a mixture of subjects, each represented by a mass of collection materials."[88] Regardless, as we have seen from Brent, definitions "on the books" differ from socially agreed upon categories. In a special issue of *Exhibitionist* aptly titled "Is It a Museum? Does It Matter?", one piece entitled "Are We Museums Too?" discussed the minorities of the museum world – zoos, aquariums, and botanical gardens – to acknowledge that while ICOM and AAM have recognized these institutions as museums for more than half a century, the public "seems a bit confused. Are we museums? Conservation organizations? Entertainment venues?"[89]

Here one sees that when it comes to comparing museums to other types of institutions, the elasticity of contemporary field-level definitions still offers ample opportunity for quibbling. Since its founding in 1946, the International Council of Museums has revised its definition of the term "museum" eight times, most recently to describe it inclusively (albeit less than pithily) as "a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and

[88] Harold Skramstad, "An Agenda for American Museums in the Twenty-First Century," *Daedalus* 128, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 109-128.
[89] Jenny-Sayre Ramberg, Sonal Bhatt, and Kitty Connolly, "Are We Museums Too?", *Exhibitionist* (Spring 2011): 66.

enjoyment."[90] In these terms, the museum remains similar to a number of other entities. Permanent, civic, educational, non-profit organizations include schools and libraries; the latter even shares the museum's exhibitionist impulse. While professionals championing a mission of public service may reject as museums for-profit tourist destinations such as the Biltmore Estate, Graceland, and the International Spy Museum, the average visitor coming in from off the street may otherwise embrace them.[91] Ultimately, as Elizabeth Merritt admits in the AAM's *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums* – the manual detailing the organization's criteria for accreditation – there is a bit of disconnect between people's perception of museums and those institutionally and professionally established as such: "We may have to live with the fact that 'museum' is a concept at the intersection of many complex categories, resulting in an organization that people can identify intuitively but that cannot be neatly packaged in a definition."[92]

Museums and Sensory Conventions

Inevitably, confusion over what museums "are" comes to bear on what they do. In reflecting on the "contradictions of purpose" facing the paradigmatic example of the museum genre – "Should [art museums] be ivory towers or discotheques, merry-go-rounds or morgues, patrician preserves or uplifting Chautauquas?" – the sociologist Vera Zolberg has pointed out that whatever the answers, these debates "reflect conflicts among actors who want to mold them in one image or the other."[93] Examining museum practice more closely, however, reveals people

[90] International Council of Museums.
[91] Elizabeth E. Merritt, *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums* (Washington, D.C.: American Alliance of Museums Press, 2008), 2.
[92] Ibid., 3.
[93] Zolberg, "Conflicting Visions."

"mold" these organizations not only due to the broader environments in which they operate, or through their interactions with one another, but also by drawing on the different resources they have available to them: specifically, their collections.

Outlining two general points of agreement proves helpful in illustrating this process. First, museums have objects. As the AAM's *Code of Ethics for Museums* notes, all museums make their "unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving, and interpreting the things of this world."[94] Second, people perceive objects through their senses: our experiences of them are not reducible to text. Sensory anthropologists have made this argument more generally in noting that every artifact affords different ways of sensing, either in its production, its circulation ("given the way its properties appeal to the senses and so constitute it as an object of desire or aversion"), and its consumption ("…conditioned by the meanings and uses people perceive in it according to the sensory order of their culture or subculture)."[95] Reflecting on American museums specifically, the museum studies scholar Edward P. Alexander points out:[96]

> [American museums] frequently refer to the kind of education they provide as interpretation, that is, teaching through the use of original objects. Interpretation relies heavily on sensory perception – sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and the kinetic muscle sense – to enable the museum-goer emotionally to experience objects. This interpretation complements the rational process of learning through words and verbalization.

As Alexander indicates, the sensory experience of objects in a given museum may thus include the five "exteroceptive" senses that provide information about the world external to us (touch, taste, smell, sound, and sight), but also (and inevitably) the "interoceptive" senses that provide information about the internal world of the human body, including among others

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[94] American Alliance for Museums, "Code of Ethics for Museums," 2000, accessed September 27, 2016, http://www.aam-us.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices/code-of-ethics.
[95] Classen and Howes, 200.
[96] Alexander, *Museums in Motion,* 12.

movement (kinesthesia) and proprioception (the positioning of the body in a given space).[97] Walking through the CBG's Rose Garden on a summer's day, the air pregnant with a barely-gusting wind, one takes in both the warm color spectrum of the roses and a pervasively fragrant floral freshness. Approaching individual roses for a long whiff, one can discern a distinctive scent in some, while noting other varietals smell similarly to other flowers. Sitting with me one fall day in the light-flooded glass atrium of the Met's Charles Engelhard Court, one curator nodded to a visitor angled up on her tiptoes, imitating the arching pose of Augustus Saint-Guaden's bronzed *Diana*. As the curator explained, Engelhard was designed to allow for visitors to "get up close and experience the sculptures:"

> Looking at sculpture is a participatory act. There's circumambulation ideally involved. Moving around … There's a lot of charades. People love to pose in front of these objects, and that's a form of engagement and interaction with them. Being able to move around them, being able to get up close and appreciate… that what you see in a sculpture changes depending on your vantage point, the time of day, the weather, and how high the piece is positioned. These were considerations that went into this installation.

Rather than individual, perceptual encounters, interactions with museum collections are profoundly social. Bound by "conventions" – shared templates for interpreting situations and guiding action – they shape possibilities for sensory engagement with museum objects and within museum spaces.[98] To study sensory experience as guided by "sensory conventions" is to understand that an array of factors shape how visitors come to use their senses in a given social context, as well as which senses they use. As anthropologists have argued, these include the cultural understandings that shape the practices people come to accept as customary.[99] For example, we bow to one another in a business meeting in Japan, but shake hands in the United

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[97] Vannini et. al, 6.
[98] This definition of conventions derives from Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008). See also Mangione, "Constructing Aesthetic Experience," 47, n. 5.
[99] See David Howes and Constance Classen, *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society* (London: Routledge, 2014), 4-5.

States. Beyond such presuppositions, however, *sensory* conventions also underscore how the materiality of objects and environments shape norms and social action.[100] Reflecting on a visitor's likely interaction with the garden's roses and the galleries' goddess makes this interplay clear. One can smell the rose because its petals have an odor (which the marble of the statue does not). However, even though both objects are three-dimensional, one can "circumambulate" around the statue because of how the curator installed it in the sculpture court. In contrast, the rose is one of many in a larger bed and cannot be effectively circled.

In this way, the position determined for museums objects interacts with the material properties of those objects to establish cues through which visitors know how to sensorially engage in the museum.[101] Sensory conventions are not born, but made: the construction of museums as sensory environments either makes possible or limits particular forms of perception. In the words of the learning theorists John Falk and Lynn Dierking, museums thus function as "behavior settings."[102] As Falk and Dierking point out, museums can be classified as "hands-on," such as science centers and children's museums, which encourage active participation with exhibits, simulations, and other technologies. Alternatively, they can be "hands-off," such as art, history, and natural history museums. In these, the public expects to find treasured, priceless objects (a Picasso in a gilded frame; the bones of a pterodactyl), which they must look at, but not

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[100] In referring to "materiality," I bridge approaches across science and technology studies and cultural sociology to examine how the physical properties of objects and environments mediate action, interpretation, and practice in ways that cannot be reduced to "realizations of cognitive representations" Chandra Mukerji, *Territorial Ambitions and the Gardens of Versailles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 36. See also Terence E. McDonnell, "Cultural Objects as Objects: Materiality, Urban Space, and the Interpretation of AIDS Campaigns in Accra, Ghana," *The American Journal of Sociology* 115, no. 6 (May 2010): 1800-1852 and Chandra Mukerji, "Toward a Sociology of Material Culture: Science Studies, Cultural Studies and the Meanings of Things," in *The Sociology of Culture: Emerging Theoretical Perspectives,* ed. Diana Crane (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1994), 143-162.
[101] As Griswold et. al have argued in their study of art museum exhibition design, non-human agents interact with human bodies to choreograph the art encounter through two processes of emplacement: physical position and cognitive location. Wendy Griswold, Gemma Mangione, and Terence E. McDonnell, "Objects, Words and Bodies in Space: Bringing Materiality into Cultural Analysis," *Qualitative Sociology* 36, no. 4 (December 2013): 343-364.
[102] John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2000): 54-57. See also Mangione, "Constructing Aesthetic Experience," 47, n. 9.

touch. As long a museum is consistent in how it presents its behavior setting, visitors will be able to interpret how to interact with the objects it contains.

The botanical garden, however, offers a particularly salient case of inconsistency. One way to see this, and the workings of behavior settings more broadly, is to explore in depth both museological organizations of space and the interactions they afford. These vary substantially between the galleries and the gardens, beginning upon the very moment of arrival to each museum, from which the visitor's experience proceeds quite differently. Entering the Met's majestic Great Hall on New York's tony Fifth Avenue, one looks up into a soaring neo-classical façade, with stone ionic columns framing eight arches looming over marbled mosaic floors. Both here and in the museum's education entrance on 81st Street, visitors must present his or her bags for a security officer's examination, and then check any bag larger than a laptop. The officers will also ask visitors with bulky backpacks to move them from back to front as they navigate the galleries. The main entrance of the Art Institute of Chicago on Chicago's Michigan Avenue is flanked by two bronze lions, weathered sea green since their installation in 1893 and named unofficially for their poses: the south lion stands "In an Attitude of Defiance," with the north lion is "On the Prowl." The entrance to the museum's Modern Wing, opened in 2009, is similarly spectacular: one arrives to the dramatic, light-infused space of Griffin Court to stare up into the two three-story pavilions of installation space and, through its glass and steel atrium ceiling, the sky of the Chicago day. As one senior staff lecturer pointed out while leading a group tour through the atrium, the Modern Wing's architecture is "peculiarly directive … if you want to move from gallery to gallery, or from, say, select galleries to the café or bookshelf, you often have to descend down the steps into the [Griffin Court] and back up the steps."

The visitor's experience of art objects in the museum is ultimately one of distance. As people pass through the art museums' galleries, audibly aware of conversations clustered around single artworks and their own footsteps echoing over marble and hardwood, low silver rope barriers and glass displays create space between them and the artworks. If one leans in too closely to particularly fragile freestanding objects, alarms either human (security officers, watchful in black suits and crisp white shirts) or occasionally technological (piercing, repeated, beeped warnings) sound immediately. Such that touch functions as one of the most intimate ways to experience an object, various practices in the art museum either implicitly (barriers; security) or explicitly forbid it. Trained volunteer guides who lead student groups – those pre-socialized museum visitors – through the galleries begin each tour by discussing the "rules:" we don't run in the museum, don't chew gum, and don't touch the art. Presentations of "look, don't touch" rule in particular range from the focused ("what's the most important rule, here in the museum?") to the creative. One Met educator leading a program for families with children ages 5-12 led everyone in a group movement exercise on "how to look" prior to beginning the tour. She encouraged them first to put their hands up, straight in the air over their heads; then to lower them, clasped, behind their backs; and then to bend forward, slowly, their bodies tilted at a 45 degree angle toward the art, their hands bound behind them.

As the art historian Carol Duncan has suggested, art museums – like palaces and temples – are environments structured around "civilizing rituals," which thereby shape the sensory conventions of the organization.[103] Designed by museums through a carefully sequence of

[103] Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (Routledge, 1995).

spaces, arranged objects, lighting, and architectural details, visitors enact and embody the ritual by behaving properly. She writes:[104]

> Like most ritual space, museum space is carefully marked off and culturally designated as reserved for a special quality of attention – in this case, for contemplation and learning. One is also expected to behave with a certain decorum… Museums are normally set apart from other structures by their monumental architecture and clearly defined precincts. They are approached by impressive flights of stairs, guarded by pairs of monumental marble lions, entered through grand doorways. They are frequently set back from the street and occupy parkland, ground consecrated to public use.

The tight coupling of art museums with such sensory conventions – orienting bodies, creating distance, and policing touch – is evident when considering how staff within the botanical gardens draw on the art museum as a point of reference for introducing and enforcing such conventions. According to one school program staffer at the CBG, her educators often begin programs by giving school children – the greenest of museum visitors – guidelines that "like an art museum," the plants are a "living collection." Thus students must be careful "not to run, not to disturb other visitors, and to respect the different plants in the space," (acknowledging, of course, "that there's still lots of cool things to touch and smell.") Or consider this introduction to this tour of the NYBG's Enid A. Haupt Conservatory greenhouses on a particularly chilly early spring day:

> The 20 students milled about underneath the clear blue sky, exclaiming and chattering excitedly, four chaperones dispersed evenly among them. As the group settled into quiet, Susan, the volunteer educator leading the tour, smiled and opened with a "*Good. Morning*," resting on each word for emphasis. "Welcome to the New York Botanical Garden! Now, do you all know you're at a museum today?" There were intermittent echoes of both yeahhhhs and nooooos, as she continued: "Now is this the kind of museum where you see dinosaurs? Or what about big paintings and sculptures?" Susan, interrupted the echoing nooos and giggles as she raised her finger to her nose to gather attention, and then, in the briefest of silences following, she asked: "Raise your hand if you know what type of thing we have in this museum." "Flowerssssss!" someone offered, their voice rising up from among the crowd of tiny bodies clad in puffy winter coats and hats. Susan responded: "Flowers, ok, I love it, I love flowers. Any other word come to

[104] Ibid., 10.

> mind?" Responding to a soft voice from the crowd, Abby repeated the correct answer back: "Plants!" Turning around once more just as the group entered the greenhouse, Susan stated: "Make sure you stay with your partner and stay on the path. Because this is a museum, just like every other type of museum. So, also, please don't touch the plants."

Notably, the NYBG's Conservatory offers some natural affinity with the art museum. The Victorian-style glasshouse – inspired by the glasshouses at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in England – is an impressive piece of historical architecture, maintaining within it (and year-round) several enclosed micro-climates ranging from a tropical rain forest to the cactus-filled deserts of America and Africa. Scattered volunteers collect visitor's tickets for entry, and enforce verbally the signs studding the conservatory's winding pathways that request visitors "Please stay off the path" and "Please do not touch the plants." The world outside of the greenhouses, however, tells a different story that highlights both the periodicity of plant collections' life cycles, and the control museum staff must yield to an ever-changing outdoor environment. The setting of the garden changes, and is changed by, its plants; both of these are organized around the seasons. The NYBG, for example, filters its collection pages by winter, spring, summer, and fall, and lists for prospective visitors the months in which different garden areas and plants (the daffodils, the herb garden) are at the height of bloom. These changes shape both choices and challenges for interpretation. As Jamie Boyer, the Vice President for Children's Education at the NYBG, told me, "We [in the botanical garden] aren't usually dealing with static exhibitry… our exhibitry are the trees around us, and they're seasonally changing. So it gives us also a unique perspective of, how do you deal with that? How do you deal with putting up [interpretive] signage when the tree above it keeps changing?" Another staff member leading a training session for the garden's volunteer tour guides stated:

> I harp on this a lot because I come from an art museum background… don't forget our garden-specific challenges. Weather. You might get a really hot day, a really cold day. It might start raining. It might start snowing… You want to be prepared for these things…

> You are obviously going to cut a tour short if it starts pouring… Unexpected changes would be a plant is gone or this path is closed for maintenance or the gardeners are mowing the grass here so I can't pause because they're mowing the grass and it is loud.

Museum gardens ultimately offer visitors a far less controlled environment than museum galleries. In the open air, visitors can stroll the meandering wide asphalt paths of the NYBG; trees loom left and right over carefully kept lawns, saturating the eye with spring and summer greens. In warmer months, people feel the sun on their face and shoulders, or can enjoy the shade of a tram tour car; in late autumn, they feel the rawness of dry cold on their skin. They experience the call-and-response of birds and insects, with raspy grating, episodic chirping, and constant steady trills blending together. Winter in Chicago brings snow banks encrusting the pine and gingko trees of the Japanese Garden at the CBG, and visitor attendance often dwindles to the bravest of joggers along the garden's southern bike path. Personnel scattered throughout the gardens year-long make visible the banality of plant-people interactions. Natural sounds blend in with the man-made symphony of lawnmowers moving back and forth on the tall grass, with tones alternately low and humming and sharply whirring. Staff in hunter-green NYBG T-shirts maintain a steady spray of hoses on green lawns; various workers in overalls and jeans at the CBG clip, prune, and propagate along the stone and brick paths that weave through the garden's carefully manicured grounds. While security personnel respond to calls, traveling the grounds on golf carts, one CBG staff member noted: "It's really hard to protect the plants." Plant theft in particular is a "real problem, and security doesn't really take care of that."

In the art museums, spaces that challenge the modal visual convention of museum-going are quite literally set apart. The AIC's Touch Gallery (like its education center, which includes studio classrooms for art-making) features five portrait sculptures and is located in a quiet space outside of the main galleries before the ticket counter and security checkpoint of the museum's

Modern Wing. As an education staff member told me, the Touch Gallery is often used as a "teaching moment" to "talk about why we don't touch all the *other* works in the museum" (touch opportunities in the museum itself are forbidden for AIC visitors). The Met offers them only by appointment to visitors who are blind or partially-sighted, with information listed on the Web only on the audience page for this visitor group and signage in the galleries emphasizing the restrictions.

The CBG also has a multi-sensory space dedicated more broadly to visitors with disabilities, including the Buehler Enabling Garden. Like the CBG's adjacent Sensory Garden, Buehler features a wide range of carefully curated objects encouraging, and explicitly designed for, visitor interaction, inclusive of chocolate mint-scented geraniums, edible nasturtiums people can taste, varying herbs, and lavender. The sound of rushing water throughout Buehler is strongest near its two cascading "water wall" fountains, happily accompanied by the shrieks of young children. Notably, this garden is located on the main museum island and available to all visitors, as are several other spaces at the NYBG and the CBG expressly dedicated for hands-on interactivity. These include the NYBG's Ruth Rea Howell Family Garden, open from the spring through the early fall and offering drop-in gardening activities ranging from seed planting to cooking demonstrations, as well as scheduled school and family programs that animate the space with group gardening sessions. The Everett Children's Adventure Garden, just past the Garden's main entrance with a thruway marked by colorful streamers, offers a blend of informal and more structured science-based education programs, as well as a maze and a boulder pile to climb.

Other areas may not encourage multi-sensory engagement, but they do not expressly forbid it. As one CBG staff member noted, the visitor's ability to touch the plants "kind of depends on … where you're at. If you're in the Rose Garden, you're not going to pick a rose. But

maybe if you feel you're not in this walled area that's really well-kept, maybe you're more inclined to touch things." After all, plants and flowers, according to the NYBG's online collections guide, are meant to "activate all your senses."[105] The packed beds of plants and flowers of the CBG's curated gardens are open to the public, for people to lean in to and notably, to smell. Scents from the garden fill the air but are all the more vivid when one leans in closer for a whiff. Visitors encounter the 3,000 azaleas and rhododendrons of the NYBG's Azalea Garden by following a meandering mile of woodland paths. Unencumbered by ropes or security officers, people can enjoy intimacy with the greater outdoors, a communion Brent praised when reflecting on the nature of living collection museums:

> You know, I very much dislike zoos… I recognize the value of them, but just seeing animals caged up... And so then I ask myself, you know, botanical gardens are basically plants that are brought here and put in a place that they would have not necessarily have naturally grown. But as far as this botanical garden, it is a nice blend or a combination of formal collections and actually some relatively like wild native spaces. And even in some of the formal collections, a style of horticulture that is not very rigid is something that I've always admired and it's something I gravitate towards.

Museums, The Senses, and Interpretation

Instrumental and Substantive Value

In the art museum, thus, the conventions are clear: Look. Don't touch. The construction of the botanical garden, in contrast, offers an exemplary case of ambiguity. Tracing how visitors navigate different museums reveals this distinction, while also explaining how environments establish cues for particular types of sensory experiences while limiting others. However, it does not entirely explain how and why some museums may police particular forms of interaction

[105] "Gardens & Collections | NYBG," NYBG.org, 2016, accessed September 28, 2016, http://www.nybg.org/gardens/.

while other museums permit it, nor what is at stake in maintaining particular sensory conventions.

Explaining this necessitates considering another general principle of museological form and function, this one emergent from its objects. Museums have objects, but perhaps most importantly, these objects shape a more general story about particular domains: art and science; culture and nature; flora and fauna; sky and sea. Goode's classification of museums by their contents offers an early precedent for this idea: his was an effort to give institutional shape to emerging and changing categories of disciplinary knowledge (art history, archaeology, natural history) in late nineteenth-century America.[106] In this view, museums function as what the sociologist of science Karin Knorr Cetina has termed "epistemic cultures," wherein the objects people work with in a given expert setting differently organize interactions, possibilities for interpretation, and ultimately, the forms of knowledge produced.[107] Given the increasingly crowded recreational marketplace in which contemporary American museums find themselves – and their culturally-sanctioned and institutionally-mandated mission of making publicly accessible their collections – people's use of objects in museums further aids in legitimating the social relevance and symbolic meaning of their particular "epistemic culture."

One begins to see how sensory conventions shape interpretation when examining how museums differently construct the value of their collections. Recalling Falk and Dierking, it here bears note that the "hands-off" end of the spectrum includes more traditional museums: art, history, and natural history. These are tilted toward the "preservationist" logic of a museum principally concerned with protecting objects in the public trust. Accordingly, museum staff most

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[106] Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 20-24.
[107] Karin Knorr Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

often legitimated the "look, but don't touch" rule by referencing the value of the objects they were tasked with protecting. At the Cloisters, the satellite branch of the Met dedicated to medieval art, a sign in the main ticketing hall makes the rationale for the museum's "hands-off" policy explicit. It acknowledges that while "touching seems natural," "since we experience the world through our senses," the "oils and acids on our skin" can be quite harmful to the museum's artworks: "The works of art and architectural elements in the Museum are part of everyone's artistic legacy; they are unique, fragile, and irreplaceable." A similar sign in the Art Institute's American Wing, with a bold red bandeau at top lettered "Do Not Touch the Artwork," clarifies through a softer gray panel that the museum's mission is "to preserve and protect art for the enjoyment of our visitors today and for future generations."

The botanical gardens borrow similar language in guiding visitor way-finding, with multiple signs anchored at the edge of the NYBG's lawns that read: "Please stay off the grass." This rhetoric resonates not only with Brent's effort to protect the NYBG's plants from "abuse," but also with his and other botanical garden staff member's distinction between the botanical garden and other natural spaces. During a professional development session for special education teachers, for example, Alicia Green, the horticultural therapist I followed over the course of my CBG research, paused to examine a visitor's name crudely carved into the thick, thorn-edged leaf of a plant in the desert conservatory. Undoubtedly, it is commonplace (perhaps even romantic, when it comes to lovers' initials) to see such inscriptions in the bark of trees. But within the space of the museum, Alicia noted, "it's plant vandalism." Here she constructs the museum as conferring a degree of symbolic value upon its objects they may not have if located elsewhere.

Ultimately, however, the presumed sacredness of museum spaces (and museum collections) is informed by, but not ultimately reducible to, the organizational identity of the

institution. Across these domains, differences in objects – what they're made of, how people understand them, and how people use them – matter. That it is unthinkable for one to imagine a visitor carving initials into an Impressionist canvas, but probable (albeit condemned) to have such etchings on a greenhouse plant, offers one example. Others are evident when considering the "behavior settings" in which visitors enact the rituals of museum-going in art and nature. People construct art as rarefied, and nature as everyday; way-finding is directive in the galleries, wandering facilitated in the gardens. The NYBG and CBG artfully blend plants in their more curated garden spaces to provide a rich, synthetic experience; art museums do their best to provide discrete experiences of artworks.[108] Despite illusions of timelessness, artworks, like plants, change, degrade, and decay as the temperature, humidity, and light of their environments vary.[109] However, while art museum staff manage the impermanence of a van Gogh, those in the botanical gardens accept the ephemerality of violets. These differences are thus mediated by, but not reducible to, material differences: plants in the NYBG's conservatory are treated differently than those in the old-growth Thain Family Forest, and Rose Gardens across New York and Chicago require protection from wayward soccer balls. Creativity and craftsmanship, for example, lead people to confer an additional degree of symbolic value on museum objects, regardless of whether they're rendered through paint or with plants, or located in the gardens versus the galleries. Each display table in the outdoor bonsai exhibit at the CBG is wired with an

[108] Ideas of abundance versus singularity also refract across other areas of museum practice. One of the CBG's curators explained differences in conservation between living collection museums and art and history museums in the U.S. in noting: "An art museum may be trying to save this one painting. But we're trying to save a whole species." For botanical gardens, he stated, it is instead standard practice to have a particular plant seeded and growing in multiple geographic areas (or, many different museums across those areas). As he went on to explain, in the unlikely scenario that "half of the U.S. is wiped out," botanical gardens can function as a safeguard against the loss of entire species of plants. In some contrast, he added: "No one is going to propagate the 'Mona Lisa.' "

[109] Fernando Domínguez Rubio, "Preserving the Unpreservable: Docile and Unruly Objects at MoMA" *Theory and Society* 43, no. 6 (November 2014): 617-645. These conservationist practices can also affect the sensory experience of a space. As one Met educator explained on a program led for families, a dim room with drawings by the French Impressionist Edgar Degas had significantly lower lighting than a nearby room with his oil paintings because drawings are "more delicate" than paint on canvas.

alarm system to caution visitors against venturing too close to each trees' carefully curated branches. Beside nearly every one of the 16 different Ikebana flower arrangements in the Met's spring 2014 exhibition was a sign beside it reminding visitors "Please don't touch."

One sees, thus, that staff construct the worth of their collections differently across the domains of art and nature. These, in turn, shape sensory conventions within the space of their respective museums. Again recalling Falk and Dierking, museums manage interactions with collections so as to construct them as precious, priceless things (the art or history museum), or as interactive technologies (the science or children's museum). However, with the botanical garden, people can ultimately position plants as either. Reframed, nature can be valuable in and of itself or, it can be valuable because it is a tool to realize some larger end.

Examining how museum staff distinguish among the three program areas of children's education at the NYBG makes these tensions of substantive and instrumental value further clear. The Haupt Conservatory (through programs offered out of the Garden's "Green School"), The Family Garden, and the Adventure Garden all offer scheduled programs for school groups, and the latter two also offer programs for children and families and less structured drop-in programs and activities. Consider how the different education staff members who oversee education programs in and across these areas reflected on the function of their spaces when answering the question of whether they considered the botanical garden a museum (emphasis mine):

> I think *specific to my side in the conservatory [with the Green School], this to me is a museum. It's sacred. It's a place that's calm. It's peaceful. It has museum qualities for visitors to come and marvel at the displays… It's a science research center,* and schoolchildren are definitely following in the same footsteps of 125 years of science research in the botanical garden, in the conservatory, to see plants that come from around the world, to see plants collected by scientists and displayed there. *But it's also a peaceful, calm, beautiful place to appreciate plants.*
>
> …Our [Adventure Garden] programming, especially with [our summer] camps, *it's just a place to run, and place to be that's beautiful that I think is a little different than a*

> *museum space…* the camp here has really figured out what those wild, unwashed spaces are, and whenever we can with the kids, we go poke at it when there's no one watching. *Where everything is no-touch, but we have to kind of do our job and have the kids touch and explore.*
>
> I've worked in all three spaces… [and] in all three spaces I've taught… And *there's less of an emphasis at the Family Garden on kind of framing the botanical garden as a museum… I guess the reason I would say that is because our groups arrive to our site, and our site is a working garden.* And, so yeah, it is, you know, every once in a while I'll overhear an instructor that makes that kind of direct connection to "this is a collection of plants. It's a museum." But then, *our site's like a working farm… So, there's a little bit of a different experience.* And you're literally walking into a space that's walled in and almost like it's separate, in a sense, from the garden.

One sees here that when nature is constructed as an outdoor environment affording visitors hands-on interactions in the name of play, exploration, and work, nature has instrumental value. When nature is instead constructed as an environment exhibiting sacred objects to contemplate visually and learn about, it is, in contrast, displaying essential "museum qualities."[110] The botanical garden may offer up opportunities to learn (as the Green School program manager phrased it, "schoolchildren are definitely following in the same footsteps of 125 years of science research in the botanical garden"), but most importantly, it is a "peaceful, calm, beautiful place to appreciate plants."

Aesthetics: How "Things" Look versus How "To" Look

[110] The *de facto* association of "hands-off" objects with "the museum" becomes evident in a recent book by the historian Steven Conn, which poses the provocative question "Do Museums Still Need Objects?" As Conn notes: "…the use of objects inside [museums] has changed significantly. In some cases, objects continue to play a central role in the function of the museum; in others, their role is clearly a reduced one; in still others, objects have virtually disappeared from galleries, replaced by other didactic devices – audio-visual, interactive technologies, and so on."[110] Implicit in this description of museum objects is a dominant, or at least historical, understanding of the museum as an institution dedicated to showcasing a particular category of objects: valuable objects in the public trust. These objects limit sensory engagement to the visual (the inclusion of audio or otherwise "interactive" technologies is described as a recent shift). Steven Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects*? (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 20.

One of the most explicit examples of how sensory conventions both reveal and shape interpretation across the gardens and galleries can be seen when examining how museum staff differently construct the aesthetic experience of art and nature. In conversation with me, an array of botanical garden staff members continually pointed to the role of aesthetics in their organizations, which they defined as beautiful displays.[111] (Notably, in its collection pages, the NYBG offers visitors not only a list of plant blooms by season, but also a profile of "What's Beautiful Now.")[112] On the whole, garden staff members tended to describe aesthetic experience in the botanical garden using the language of beauty: in short, how things look. Staff ascribed "the beautiful" most commonly to what Brent termed the "formal collections" of botanical gardens, which he contrasted to the NYBG's more wild, native, and natural spaces.

One CBG curator, Owen, summarized best the import on aesthetic experience in his garden in acknowledging that the CBG generally tended to prioritize the planting of cultivars, or plants selected for desirable and often decorative characteristics that can be sustained by propagation (among them roses, daffodils, and azaleas). Ultimately, he explained, "because we are a display garden, we tend to try to have the showiest plants." When asked what this meant, he clarified: "Mostly ornamental features… as a display garden, we try to have these really fancy showy exhibits. That's why we have so many annuals here every year. That's why we plant thousands of tulips every spring." Speaking with the Garden's Vice President of Facilities and Planning, I asked him to define what he meant by aesthetics, a word I noted he had used considerably when reflecting on a successful visitor experience. "Simply put, beauty," he responded:

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[111] See Johnson for a discussion on how growing activism related to sustainability has challenged botanical gardens' longstanding emphasis on aesthetic beauty.
[112] NYBG.org, "Gardens & Collections."

> And the universality of human beings to respond to beauty in the natural world, and with plants as a subset of that, because of course you could respond to Yosemite or Yellowstone or Niagara Falls, and that's not what's here. But in the natural world, if you narrow that down to an assembly of plant materials. And things with flowers. Good color. Plants that flower. That's an essential part of creating an aesthetic that's beautiful... that is engaging.
>
> Think of the Rose Garden. Where can you go where there are hundreds and hundreds of rose bushes? Not anybody's home. But you come here and here's this profusion in June and echo in September of beautiful roses, attractively arranged to be able to *see* them [*with emphasis*], successfully, to walk among them the way the paths works and so forth, and you have put in place something that's known to be sort of universally engaging to human beings. Flowers. And done in an aesthetic way that people literally want to come and see. Can't get much more powerful than that. That's the purpose and why it works, I think.

Consider the use of verbs here – "creating" an aesthetic that's beautiful; attractively "arranging" the roses, a display "done" in an aesthetic way" – and the acknowledgment that of the countless species of plants in the world, those "that flower" with "good color" are most engaging for people to "want to come and see." This underscores that the beauty of the CBG's 385 acres is in fact the product of significant cultural work. Regardless, garden staff position the aesthetic value of the natural world as a "universal" one: they conceive museological seeing as pleasing stimulation of the visual eye through the use of color, line, and design. To this point, the most explicit language discouraging visitors' tactile engagement with plants in botanical gardens were about protecting this visual aesthetic.[113] One educator who works with teen and family

[113] In 2013, the CBG's two tram tour scripts – for the abbreviated "Bright Encounters" and the extended "Grand Tour" – permutations of the word "beaut" (including beauty and beautiful) appeared 14 and 10 times, respectively. The Bright Horizons script contrasts beauty with particular smells, emphasizing the perception of beauty as primarily visual: "Some [roses] are strongly scented, while others are appreciated strictly for their beauty." Flowers in the garden are chosen "not only for their beautiful blossoms, but also for their scent, low maintenance, historic value and continuous bloom." "Low maintenance" further underscores tensions between instrumental and substantive value in the botanical garden: an effort to build visually pleasing displays that can also sustain the exigencies of an outdoor museum. The rainwater glen at the Plant Science Center discussed on the Grand Tour offers one example: "Though beautiful, the glen is above all practical: designed to hold back storm-water runoff, it allows deep-rooted native plants to facilitate absorption and help filter impurities."

audiences acknowledged that one of the "unwritten rules" of the CBG was to "maintain a nice display garden:

> Like, I know that if kids want to come and do a program that's fine. We can do it in the outdoor space. But we can't leave anything behind. I work with Boy Scouts on a couple of programs, and a lot of their badge requirements are like to mark off a four-yard area, like a two-by-two area, come back and see it in different seasons to compare what lives there, what grows, how it looks, how it smells, and stuff like that. We couldn't even leave stakes in the ground. So, we do have to maintain that high aesthetic level.

Similarly, while a CBG horticulturalist admitted, it's *possible*" (a pause) "to touch any plant," he went on to clarify: "But you don't *encourage* it… otherwise you end up with a lot of trashed plants." With a chuckle, he added: "You know, kids are pretty aggressive." Or, in Owen's words (emphasis mine):

> There's really no problem with people touching the plants. That doesn't really hurt the plants at all. We discourage them from picking the plants, or anything off of the plants, because that can, you know, *that can affect the way it looks*. And, if they pick a flower, then it's not there for the next person. Touching the plants, yes, go for it.

Aesthetic constructions in the art museum work somewhat differently. The Met and AIC's encyclopedic collections include objects ranging from the life-size Body Masks of the Asmat people of Papua New Guinea to the nineteenth-century Impressionist canvases rendering waterlilies in the south of France to Ellsworth Kelly's 7 by 4 foot monochromatic paint series. This, coupled with the rise in contemporary art forms that challenge pre-conceived ideas about what art is or should look like, limits fixed criteria for collection items like "showy" or "ornamental." To this point, one Met curator explained her professional responsibilities as "taking care of the collection… and interpreting and sharing" this "love for the objects" with the public, and described the Museum's efforts to accomplish this goal by having "the "piece [of artwork] itself" be the "main focus:" "You want the objects to speak for themselves," she explained. "You want to make sure the objects can speak. That people can look at them without

distractions. You want to support the beauty of the piece." After a beat, the curator added that a great number of works in the Met's collections are archaeological: a museum's artwork may thus not be "just about the beauty" in the conventional sense of a "masterpiece" but rather, about historical significance. To this point, she cited one example of an ancient wooden hammer in the Egyptian collections.

In the art museums, then, to "see" aesthetically is not necessarily to experience pleasurable beauty from a natural object, but instead, to interpret a representation using visual evidence: in short, it is about *how* to look. For example, artworks installed in art exhibitions make an argument, and these shape interactions by moving bodies through space. When I met with one staff member in the Met's Visitor Services department, she explained that just that morning she had met with the museum's head of photography about his concerns that visitors would end the "back end" of his exhibit (where, in essence, the exhibit's "argument" ended). Accordingly, she was working on vinyl lettering to post at the exhibition's exit that would deter visitors from entering there. Constructed as such, artworks shape how visitors are, in essence, expected "to see:" a spatially and culturally enforced emphasis on looking offers the opportunity to learn from, and thus gain greater appreciation of, an artwork. Another way this becomes evident is in considering the materials accompanying artworks in the galleries, such as the audio guide or informational labels. Consider Eduoard Manet's "Young Lady in 1866," an apposite work at the Met for thinking about the role of senses in aesthetic representation. The text label adjacent to the painting notes elements (the parrot, the orange, the nosegay) in the artwork that support its curatorial interpretation as an allegory of the five senses.

At a most basic level, then, the aesthetics of plants and artworks regards the visual. What is distinctive, however, is that the former places greater emphasis on how "things" look

(beautiful) while the latter is principally concerned with how "to" look (interpretation). The distinction between the aesthetics of nature and art museum staff maintain across the gardens and galleries is perhaps most famously captured by Immanuel Kant's distinction between the "agreeable" and the "beautiful." According to Kant, judgments of taste can be divided between the *agreeable*, which is subjective to inclination: "That is agreeable which the senses find pleasing in sensation" and the *beautiful*, necessitating judgment on what we see: a play of the imagination and understanding, rather than sense and imagination.[114] Red, for example, may be my favorite color: if I see a red flower, I will find it agreeable to me. Your favorite color may be yellow, and thus you would find a yellow flower more agreeable than a red flower. However, in either case, when it comes to the agreeable, the stakes are low: you may like what you like, and I may like what I like. In contrast, according to Kant, one arrives at a judgment of the "beautiful" through reason: a process of cognitive activity. In the Kantian view, there can thus always be consensus on the beautiful, for so long as two people follow the same path of intellectual argumentation, they will arrive to agreement. Here the stakes are higher. With the Kantian "beautiful," there is, ostensibly, no disputing of tastes: the line between right and wrong is more clearly defined.

As Bourdieu has argued, explicitly against Kant, taste functions as a marker of distinction.[115] One's choice to go to the art museum, and his or her ability to discuss what's in it with ease, designates one as a person of a particular social standing. Our passing this form of "cultural capital" to our children through education can aid in the reproduction of socioeconomic inequality. In this view, the skill for "seeing" (and appreciating) art is inculcated, rather than

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[114] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 91. For his comparison of the agreeable and the beautiful, see 97-98.

[115] Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

innate. The ostensibly "pure" Kantian gaze through which one arrives at judgments of the beautiful must be learned, and thus the skill is not available to everyone. Here one begins to see how aesthetic constructions map onto conflicting museum agendas. This is particularly evident when – coming full circle to where we began – considering the perspectives and practices of museum education staff like Brent. More so than any other museum professional, educators are the men and women tasked with providing various entry points through which diverse visitors can access and interpret the value of museums and museum collections.[116] Educators' understandings of their museum's modal aesthetic practices thus highlight how sensory conventions make particular types of visitor experiences and organizational goals possible, while limiting others.

This particular fact was something educators acknowledged regularly, for example, when reflecting on the limitations of aesthetic constructions within art museums. As Abby, the manager of school programs at the AIC, told me: "I think that we should be cognizant and supportive of the variety and multitude of experiences that art engenders, be they aesthetic or not." She went on to say:

> I think aesthetics is a loaded word, and art has been equated with beautiful. That's not to say that's not true. It's true, but I think art is many other things, and rather than give it parameters I would rather open it up to people's experiences in general. I think we do it a disservice when we simply talk about what's pleasingly beautiful. There's nothing wrong with it. There are wonderful aesthetic experiences in the museum to be had. But I think the experience of art doesn't necessarily have to be aesthetic too…

Abby's use of the word "beautiful" provides an additionally excellent example of how differently the word is used in museum galleries versus the gardens, accounting for why educators in particular might shy away from it. In the botanical garden, "beauty" is a construct democratically enjoyed: a description of "universally" pleasing plants. In the art museum, an

[116] Zolberg, "Tensions of Mission," and Zolberg, "Barrier or Leveler?"

assessment of an artwork as beautiful is "loaded:" it is an authoritative judgment that limits or marginalizes alternate judgments ("gives it parameters.") Art museum educators' sensitivities to this elitist valence emerged as they characterized their perceptions of visitor expectations for the art museum. One Met educator, reflecting on how goals for programs should vary based on the needs and interests of different audiences, waved her hands in sweeping pronounced gestures as she intoned magisterially the "onerous expectations" of the art museum, emphasizing select words with a labored pause on each (emphasis mine):

> There is an expectation at this museum that people are going to *learn* things in front of the art. We're going to *teach* them about the art. This is an *education department*. We are supposed to be passing along information about the show, about the education, about the artist. We are supposed to *research*. Read the catalogue, *read* the essays, go online.

Many educators felt this was or should be an antiquated organizational standard, as Abby at the AIC clarified: "[I] think … people's perception to this day are kind of in this old model where you come to the museum and they tell you why this is such a marvelous painting. You know? Once you know that you're acculturated and then you're in the same crowd. There you go. That's an outdated model." Museums, she argued, should engage visitors and "should be cognizant and supportive of the variety and multitude of experiences that art engenders, be they aesthetic or not." Within the botanical gardens, in contrast, educators acknowledged the agreeable "beauty" of nature as a prime motivator for visitor attendance. As Helen, a school programs educator at the CBG, noted, the gardens offered visitors a democratic experience in large part because of the amount of sensory stimulation it afforded:

> I think botanic gardens have the opportunity to be more universally accepting than other kinds of museums anyway, because of it being an environment where you do have … sounds and colors and aromas and… lots of levels of engagement, just by being there, in a way. Compare that to a history museum, where they have specimens that are antiques, that are under special lights, that are behind glass. And walking through that kind of environment, having any kind of experience [there], enjoyable or learning, is quite different from wandering through a garden. Because our collections are all exposed and

> open and available… we are about an environment and an immersive situation, as compared to something where they're showcasing objects to tell a story, or [objects] that you can't touch because you would destroy [them].

However, framing nature as having "universally" accessible value also had pitfalls. According to a CBG staff member in exhibition interpretation, Alice, the garden's aesthetics presented it with challenges compared to other museums:

> **Alice:** I think people who tend to go to a science museum or art museum or history museum, I think maybe their perception as they're going is it's going to be somewhat educational. You know, I'm going to go to the Lincoln Museum in Springfield because I've never been. And I anticipate that I'm going to learn more than when I first came in about Lincoln's presidency, his boyhood, his slavery issue, why he got assassinated… I mean my sense [in museums] should be I'm going to learn something, information, or I'm going to the Art Institute, and there's that cool new exhibit … It might just be pretty there, but there's like an [educational] goal, you know.
>
> **Gemma:** Do you think people don't bring expectations of learning to botanic gardens?
>
> **Alice:** I don't think so, as much, because I think they perceive them more as pretty places.

Along similar lines, Jamie Boyer acknowledged the garden "is beautiful and it's a restful place. It appeals… I feel alive and well when I'm outdoors, and those kinds of aspects, you know, I think we can embrace all of them." Regardless of this ascribed democratic capacity for appreciation, he noted the aesthetic dimension of botanical gardens often curtailed other framings and specifically, educators' interests in teaching plant science:

> I have a love and hate relationship with aesthetics. To some degree, the garden is all about aesthetics, and that, more than anything, becomes the driving force for a lot of what we do, and notice that sometimes comes in conflict with trying to do good science…
>
> Bring yourself to the garden. It's beautiful. Now, I'm going to teach you something when you get here because you probably didn't realize that plants were so fascinating. They're not just pretty. They're actually fascinating on top of it. And so, we'll use [aesthetics] to our advantage, but it's a love-hate relationship…

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained how museums function as organizations that facilitate

people's sensory interactions with objects. Drawing on Thomas Gieryn's formulation of place, I have argued these institutions have a material form of physical "stuff" that is infused with meanings "flexible in the hands of different people or cultures, malleable over time, and inevitably contested."[117] I argued first, that museums have objects people perceive through their senses; and second, that museums organize their objects and facilitate interactions with them so as to construct a particular story about the value and meaning of the objects within them. While people construct art museums as environments with priceless, culturally valuable objects, people in botanical gardens somewhat unevenly balance this substantively meaningful construction of plants with a more instrumental construction of plants as interactive tools or technologies. These differences – mediated by the material affordances of art and nature – further shape visitor experience. As an anchoring link between materiality and museum practice, sensory conventions ultimately structure how people use their senses, which they get to use, and, in essence, how they are to "be" embodied in a given museum.

In conceptualizing museums as behavior settings, I have further shown how differences across settings can both enable or limit particular organizational goals. This is perhaps most explicit when considering how aesthetics differently functions as both an organizing justification, and mechanism of visitor perception, across the domains of art and nature. In the galleries, the modal emphasis is on how *to* look: aesthetic constructions afford opportunities for interpretation. In the gardens, the modal emphasis is on how *things* look: aesthetic constructions afford opportunities for visual pleasure. The benefits of each construction have attendant consequences. Art museum educators describe how visitor's varied capacities to visually interpret artworks may shape who feels included in the museum and why. In contrast, botanical garden education staff

[117] Thomas F. Gieryn, "A Space for Place in Sociology," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 465.

believe an emphasis on unmediated (and often multi-sensory) aesthetic stimulation, while "universally" pleasing to visitors, can limit educational goals.

Considering implications of these findings reveals how staff choices can make certain visitor experiences possible while limiting others. Notably, the Kantian ideal of the "beautiful" was, in fact, a rose, not a Rembrandt. One can easily construct the rose as an interpretive object by discussing its cultural history, including its symbolic function in the Roman Empire or its role in Islamic and Sufic gardens. Similarly, in looking at a Yves Klein "blue" painting, one may find immediately agreeable the ocular vibrations of his distinctive patented blue color without engaging in a larger conversation about the canvas's relationship to performance art, and how it serves as a forerunner to later Minimalist and Pop Art movements. While different objects provide different possibilities for perception or action, people ultimately choose how to experience or use them.[118] Examining the work of museum educators – as I have done with increasing emphasis as this chapter progressed – bring this idea to the fore. Mindful of the diverse interests and capacities of the visitors that navigate the gardens and galleries, and their professional mandate to make accessible the collections within these environments, educators make explicit alternative forms of engagement possible for museum-goers beyond the modal practices of their institution.

Examining in more depth exactly how they do so is one of the tasks of Part II: "People." As I have suggested here briefly, the spatial organizations of botanical gardens and art museums between New York and Chicago highlight that different forms of sensory engagement with collections vary not just across institutions, but also by audience. Chapter 2 introduces the reader to the women and men tasked with facilitating visitors' interpretation of objects across the

[118] James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (New York: Psychology Press, 2015), 119-136.

domains of art and nature, and how they do so variously depending on the groups they engage. Chapter 3 examines the challenges museum educators face adapting modal practice for people with disabilities, and the incorporation of recreational therapists into programs for this audience.

Part II:

People

Chapter 2

Adaptive Expertise

Violet – petite in pressed pants and a cardigan, with red hair just past her shoulders – told me I was welcome to join her in a quick walk-through in the minutes before the fifth-graders arrived for their tour. We headed up the steps, and then past the Met's African galleries at a steady clip; she spoke fluidly as I tried, simultaneously, to keep up, take notes, and not knock into things. She shared that the students were "studying famous artists." Their teacher had written Violet to say this was a wide-spanning category, ranging from Michelangelo to Pollock and including "*everything* in between." For the most part, she told me, teachers will respond to a museum educator's check-in e-mail with "hey, great, thanks, we're coming!" though sometimes they'd provide a little bit more information or some version of: "Hey, you should really know this." I asked her where most information on tour groups comes from, and she said it came from the online intake registration form. "But usually, the teacher is very thoughtful, filling that out."

We first entered the white-walled quiet of the Modern galleries, in a room studded with the paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe. Violet, looking around, offered slowly as though thinking aloud: "So I'm going to show them the O'Keeffe *Cow's Skull*…" Then a short nod, and onward, briskly, to the next planned stop. The teacher had "mentioned Pollock, as someone the kids were studying so… I was thinking [of discussing his] *Autumn Rhythm*," Violet stated. I asked how she selected these objects, and she reaffirmed the teacher had mentioned Pollock, but Violet also thought it was "important to have a woman artist" in a unit on great artists. Did she know if it was a history unit, or if it was an art class? I asked, as we moved quickly to the gallery with *Autumn Rhythm*. She planted herself, momentarily distracted, scanning left to right.

The Pollock canvas was adjacent to a darkly lit room-sized installation by William Kentridge, a South African artist known for his animated films. As its low music rumbled in the background, Violet stated, after a beat: "Sorry, I'm – I'm not answering… I'm just thinking about the possible route here." Another pause, and she began to shake her head, telling me quickly she didn't know what kind of class it was as we descended down a flight of stairs. She was a bit worried about being too close to the Kentridge, she shared: she'd heard it was distracting for people, and she personally found the "sensory experience very jarring."

Making our way back, Violet offered, unprompted, that she liked to open all of her tours with an "assessment." We passed through Oceania, my boots clanking against the marble floors, a sound previously muffled by the carpeted modern art galleries. This was because on occasion, she told me, teachers won't necessarily provide the kinds of information that might be relevant for a tour. You know, "sometimes these kids are *experts*." We passed out of Oceania, the soaring glass atrium and armless marble busts of the Greek and Roman galleries to our right, then down the steps back to the school group entrance. Or sometimes, Violet continued, most of the students have never even been to a museum. The teacher might only know the one or two students who have been to a museum many times, and thus tell an educator the class *as a whole* is comfortable in museums. I suggested that Violet's "assessment" seemed mostly to be about the student's level of art museum familiarity. She nodded, then added: "It's also about how they express themselves. Are they excited? Are they *quiet*? How much do they want to volunteer? How many

of them are talkers? Do they raise their hands? This shapes how I'll interact with them, how I present myself, what energy level I should have. If they're really shy, I'll try to not overwhelm them. If they're really hyper," and here she sucked her breath in sharply, raising and rounding down her shoulders, and then exhaling. "Let's all do that," she said, slowly, emphasizing each word, as though speaking to the children. "Welcome… to the *Met*."

Facilitating encounters between people and objects: this is the bailiwick of museum educators. Violet's pre-tour walk-through across the continents and cultures of the Met's collection illuminates the different constraints shaping her execution of this encounter for visiting school groups. Before the visit, teachers provide guiding background information on their students to varying degrees, and some not at all; curators swap things out without much notice, necessitating double-checking; objects on display may prove distracting. Perhaps most importantly, during the program, educators face visitors with an array of backgrounds, learning styles, and even moods, and assess the gestalt of the group accordingly to communicate information about their collections and structure a successful visit. These circumstances collectively necessitate an interactional skill set among museum educators leading programs that I identify and define in what follows as a form of "adaptive expertise."

This chapter examines the nitty-gritty of museum education practice across the gardens and the galleries. In tracing Violet's story, and those of other educators like her, I illuminate the professional, institutional, and interactional factors shaping how museum educators, as a form of "expert service" workers, differently structure visitors' museum-going encounters based on their knowledge of museum collections and (to borrow from Violet) their "assessments" of visitor needs and interests.[119] To do so, I outline in three sections who museum educators are, focusing

[119] Drawing on diverse literatures examining the breakdown between the expert and service economies, George introduces the idea of "expert service work" to investigate the interactional accomplishment of professionalism among workers with specialized knowledge engaged in primarily client- and commission-based labor. Molly George, "Interactions in Expert Service Work: Demonstrating Professionalism in Personal Training," *Journal of*

on their professional backgrounds and training; what they do, and particularly the institutional mandates they carry out; and how they do it, working within a system of constraints that necessitates adaptability to diverse museum audiences.

Ultimately, I argue that educators in the museum work with a broad toolkit of interpersonal and teaching strategies, and they draw on them to varying degrees while engaging visitors.[120] In particular, educators' assessments of visitors' needs and interests shape how these professionals frame museum-going encounters for particular publics. The sensory conventions that shape visitors' experience do not simply vary across institutions, but because a set of professionals shape those experiences differently across social groups. While bound by institutional arrangements, visitors' experience of museums through programs is an interactional accomplishment realized by educators' coupling expert and emotional labor.

The Who: Or, "The Uncertain Profession," 30 Years Later

The first time I met Aaron, who coordinates the Met's school programs, he sat waiting for me in his supervisor's office with a fresh notebook page and a number of questions. He was curious about my research, he told me, and more broadly how museums could better serve their communities. He felt that museums had a long way to go in thinking about how they could contribute to societies and that libraries might be a good model for thinking of the museum as a form of "service organization." Some weeks later, as we sat in an office he'd decorated with student artwork and shelves he'd stocked with books on museum studies and learning theory, he

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Contemporary Ethnography 37, no. 1 (February 2008): 108-131. For an analysis of how the sociology of professions has evolved to examine a broader range of "knowledge-based" occupations, see Elizabeth H. Gorman and Rebecca L. Sandefur, " 'Golden Age,' Quiescence, and Revival: How the Sociology of Professions Became the the Study of Knowledge-Based Work," *Work and Occupations* 38, no. 3 (August 2011): 275-302.

[120] Swidler.

clarified:

> Libraries keep all these books, but they exist as a service organization, so they teach people resume writing. They have 'How to Use a Computer' workshops. They do Ph.D. level research. They also do story time. For museums, especially museums like the Met that are incredibly old and have long histories, adjusting course can be difficult. But I think museums are starting to realize that they are service organizations too, even though they keep all of these fantastic objects safe for future generations.

A good starting place for the museum to reimagine its mission, he added, was "being interested in the people who visit you, and listening to them."

When I asked Aaron how he'd come to his position at the Met, he explained that after completing undergraduate studies in art history, he worked at an art auction house and then an art gallery before he realized he "hated" selling art. However, he clarified with a smile, "I really liked having conversations about works of art. I thought, 'Well, surely there must be a way to have conversations with people about art and not sell it to them at the end.' " This led him to begin exploring possibilities in museum education. He started out by volunteering one of his two weekly days off with an initiative that sent teaching artists into public schools for year-long residencies and was more broadly aimed at integrating the visual and performing arts into social studies curricula. Through this program, he worked as a teaching artist assistant with a group of second grade classes in a Brooklyn public school, in a project that integrated techniques of portraiture into a unit on the Brooklyn Bridge. As part of a culminating project, the second graders painted portraits of fictionalized workers who might have worked on the bridge, augmented by the children's independent research. Reflecting on his experiences, he shared:

> There was one student named Chloe. She wanted to do a portrait of a worker who was dying. She was very fascinated at how many workers died in the construction of the bridge, and we said, 'Well, that doesn't really meet the criteria of the project. Right? We are doing portraits.' But we negotiated, and it was my first experience learning to have a constructive conversation with a second grader about their work, and we decided that she would do a portrait of the worker as he was plummeting down. So she did her full portrait action pose, all of the sort of tips and tricks that we were working on, and then she

> flipped it upside down and painted the background that way so that her worker was falling. And it could be displayed either way. She was comfortable with the upside down and the downside up.

Aaron's description of the young girl's artwork reminded me of *The Falling Man*, a controversial photograph taken by Associated Press photographer Richard Drew of a man falling from the North Tower of the World Trade Center during the September 11 attacks in New York. When I shared the association, Aaron immediately began to nod. "[The school] looks out over the Manhattan skyline," he told me, "and these kids saw everything… I was really struck by how this project allowed Chloe to communicate something very complicated, even if she didn't have the words to do it yet." Ultimately, his experiences volunteering in the school made clear to him that what he really wanted to do was "was work with arts and kids and find ways to bring them together." He went on to pursue a degree in education from one of the first schools in the country to offer an advanced degree in museum education.[121] After this, Aaron began to work in school programs at an art museum in lower Manhattan. Following five years as an educator and later a program manager there, he joined the Met's education department.

Who are museum educators, and how do you become one? Like Aaron (who left gallery work convinced he could talk to people about art without having to sell it to them), most of the 27 full-time staff educators I interviewed sought museum work after realizing that they could bring together their two passions – museum collections and visitors – by facilitating museum encounters.[122] Brent at the NYBG had studied biology with a concentration in plant science, teaching undergraduate laboratory classes for years, and realized in taking some time off after

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[121] Nina Jensen and Mary Ellen Munley, "Training for Museum Education Professionals," *The Journal of Museum Education* 10, no. 4 (Fall 1985), 12.

[122] I interviewed 7 full-time staff educators at the AIC, CBG, and NYBG, and 6 educators at the Met, sampling across audiences to make sure staff members working with adult, student, family and (when present) teen visitors were represented. I do not include here those education staff members I interviewed who worked exclusively with visitors with disabilities, whose backgrounds I discuss in Chapter 3.

college that what he most liked was "to talk about plants and the things that I had learned about them and share with other people, my friends, my family." According to Lucas Livingston, Assistant Director of Senior Programs at the AIC, he was working in one of the museum's curatorial departments after completing his graduate studies on ancient art and civilizations when he was offered the opportunity to lead a gallery talk for a student group:

> And that was great. And I thought, you know, people do this for their *job*! This is fantastic!... Just being able to engage directly with the works of art, because there are so few positions in the museum where you interact with the collection. So much of it is behind the scenes, administrations. Also engaging with the visitors… there are very few positions in the museum where you engage with the patrons. There's the security officers and visitor services staff and all of them, but to find that beautiful happy middle place where you're working with the collection and the visitors in an interpretive basis… that's where museum education comes in.

In other ways, however, Aaron's background is somewhat unique: his suggests a clear path of professionalization within an occupation where patterns, but few direct routes, exist. Among the 128 "formal training" programs for museum professionals identified by the Smithsonian – a diverse list that includes 22 bachelor degrees, 38 certificate programs, and ranges from anthropology to cultural studies to historic preservation degrees – only eight (or about six percent) focus on museum education.[123] This wide playing field of potential possibilities mapped onto the backgrounds of those educators I interviewed. More than two-thirds of them held an undergraduate or graduate degree from an area of their museum's specialization. Art museum educators tended to hold undergraduate or graduate degrees in art history or art theory and practice (including BFAs and MFAs), while botanical garden educators had studied in fields ranging from plant science to environmental studies and ornamental

[123] "Studies Training Directory [By Discipline]," Smithsonian Museum, accessed July 7, 2015, http://museumstudies.si.edu/training_discipline.html. Four of these museum education programs are at Bank Street College of Education, which Aaron attended. The list notes that while these programs focus exclusively on museum education, other listed programs offer coursework in Museum Education. (As of October 1, 2015, Museum Studies Program Directory is hosted by the American Alliance of Museums and no longer available on the Smithsonian website).

horticulture. About half held a degree in education at either the graduate or undergraduate level, including in art education, museum education, and elementary or general classroom education.

In a *sui generis* volume on museum careers published by the Smithsonian Museum (its opening chapter posing the playful question: "So you want to work in a museum. … Why?") Jane Glaser, a career-long advocate of museum professionalization, notes that for museum educators, a "master's degree in an area of the museum's specialization, with coursework in learning theories, or graduation from a museum studies program with a concentration in museum education" is the typical background, with a "combination" of the three being ideal.[124] Indeed, those educators I spoke with that had a background in both an area of academic specialization and in education often (like Aaron) acquired advanced degrees expressly to pursue a career teaching in museums. Those (also like Aaron) who specifically completed those rare museum-focused degrees didn't hesitate to praise their value: "I wouldn't be able to do any of the work I'm doing now without the thoughtful and theoretical foundation [Bank Street] gave me," he told me, later adding: "You have to be able to speak about how you think people learn before you start putting together a program that will ostensibly help people learn."

Notably, however, when I asked museum educators to tell me about their training – in essence, how they "learned" to teach – they regularly and immediately emphasized the import of experience: learning on the job. For example, when asked about her training, Amanda at the Art Institute of Chicago stated that much of it involved observing people, through which she gained information both about the art at the AIC and different teaching approaches. Her opportunities to shadow different educators extended over a substantial period, but did not keep her from jumping (or being thrown) into the water, an experience she praised in equal measure. Just a

[124] Jane R. Glaser with Artemis A. Zenetou, *Museums: A Place to Work: Planning Museum Careers* (Routledge, in association with the Smithsonian Institution, 1996), 92.

week or so after Amanda began at the AIC, and right after she finished school with a joint 5-year bachelor and masters degree in art history, her direct supervisor got married. She was thus on her own coordinating a week-long program for a group of visiting older adults. While Amanda's case provides an example of how younger staff members were particularly likely to "learn-by-doing," the more general valuation of this training strategy also contributed to the "grandfathering" of many educators as experts due to their seniority. In reflecting on training, a Met staffer in adult programs first responded: "We have an existing pool of contractual educators, many of whom have been associated with the Met for decades. Oftentimes, they came to us through curatorial departments as fellows or interns or research associates and have stayed on over the years."

As this educator's comment indicates, experience is a particularly valuable commodity for another class of museum educators: those who worked on a volunteer or freelance basis. Like Aaron (and Amanda), nearly all full-time staff members had experience teaching. However, at the time of their interviews, only about half regularly taught in the galleries as part of their day-to-day work. In order to serve the massive amount of visitors who passed through their museum's doors every day, they instead recruited, trained, and relied on a combination of volunteers and paid freelance or "contractual" educators: people like Violet. Most museums do not have specific educational requirements for this group of personnel. Both training and evaluation occurs within the education departments, with opportunities ranging in level of degree and structure.[125] The docent program at the AIC, for example, includes an extensive application

[125] Such boots-on-the-ground educators are often called "docents," or "guides:" they are "in effect the 'voices' of the museum… Their function is to serve as catalysts in the interaction between object and observer" (Glaser, 88). While docents are most often volunteers, museums additionally employ a number of guides as paid staff (Ibid.). For the origins of "docent" in American museum history, see the introduction to Elliott Kai-Kee, "A Brief History of Teaching in the Art Museum," in *Teaching in the Art Museum: Interpretation as Experience,* Rika Burnham and Elliott Kai-Kee (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), 19-58.

process and two rounds of interviews, in addition to a three-semester training program (during which they are allowed on the floor only in the final semester, under the supervision of a more senior docent mentor). Other training resources for volunteer or contractual personnel across my sites were more informal, including annual two-day "refresher" workshops or other semi-regular meetings and professional development sessions; working with and reflecting on lesson plans developed by senior staff; and observing, and being observed by, those staff. Such opportunities were often constrained by time and resources. As one NYBG education staff member noted, "There is no money in the budget for professional learning in the botanical garden at all… the reality is that we're given the same amount of money every year, and it's never enough."

What accounts for the importance of experience as expertise? One explanation regards the structural organization of the profession: the idea that experience matters because other professionalization opportunities are at best, limited and at worst, absent. Beginning with her doctoral dissertation on the AIC in the late 1970s and continuing through the early 1990s, Vera Zolberg penned a series of articles that to this day comprise nearly all that has been written by sociologists about museum educators. As Zolberg has argued, there is very little specialized expertise to which museum educators can lay claim. Their "jurisdiction" – seminally defined by Andrew Abbott as the link between a profession and its work – is ultimately weak, she suggests, in part because educators must manage volunteers who undertake most instructional activities; in part because of the lack of career and professionalization opportunities available to them; and in part because of broader social divisions in society, reflected in the professions' largely female staff and low pay scale.[126] Such structural constraints on professionalization did not escape the

[126] "The low status of the art education profession, the prevalence of unpaid volunteers, a largely female staff, a predominantly child client, and… a small financial outlay testify to the low priority assigned this activity." Zolberg, "Tensions of Mission," 193-194. See also Vera Zolberg, "The Art Institute of Chicago: The sociology of a cultural

notice of museum professionals themselves reflecting on museum education during the years of Zolberg's research, as they attempted through their writings and conferences to untangle the link between occupational status and formalized expertise.[127] In 1986, for example, the Smithsonian organized the first of two conferences regarding women's roles in museums. In a presentation discussing different generations of women's work in museums, the museum administrator Jean M. Weber concluded the greatest hope for women in this field would stem from their professionalization:[128]

> There has been a great deal of debate over whether there is such a thing as the museum profession. It is a fascinating topic for conversation, but debating it is just about the most unproductive thing we can do. The more important step, it seems to me, is to recognize the idiosyncrasies and the diversity and get on with the business of defining particular problems and determining the best possible array of skills needed to solve them. For women of the '80s, that can mean many opportunities.

Some thirty years later, the story remains much the same. All but four of the 44 education staff members (full-time, freelance, or volunteer) I interviewed were women, proportions representative of the full personnel sample at field site.[129] Educators are also still underpaid. As one AIC staff member told me, "This is such an overplayed joke, but it's not a joke, and it was always given to me in grad school, which is this: people who do museum education, they love it, because they're barely getting paid… And so, every class in grad school would say, 'So, you better love museum education!'… [And] I absolutely love it, [but] I do get paid like an intern still." When I asked a school programs educator at the NYBG what she looked for in recruiting

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organization" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1974); Vera Zolberg, "Conflicting visions;" and Vera Zolberg, "Barrier or Leveler?" For foundational discussions of professional jurisdiction, see Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[127] Kai-Kee, "A Brief History," 39-44.

[128] Jean M. Weber, "Images of Women in Museums," in *Women's Changing Roles in Museums, Conference Proceedings* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1986), 20-26.

[129] This number reflects the full sample of education staff interviewed across all four sites, including those working with visitors with disabilities, and those in administrative or director capacities who were not involved in managing or leading education programs.

program facilitators, she responded promptly: "You know, unfortunately, one of the things is finance, because you cannot make a living off this job."

Some changes, however, have come to pass. In the years since Zolberg's studies of the profession, museum education has evolved in noticeable ways, at least (and literally) in theory. Both the timing of Weber's conference presentation and of most of Zolberg's writings coincides with (and indeed, Zolberg cites) a 1986 report on the "uncertain profession" of museum education, prepared by two professors of art and art education on behalf of the Getty Center for Education in the Arts.[130] Drawing on interviews from 20 art museums across the United States, Elliot Eisner and Stephen Dobbs painted what Elliott Kai-Kee – currently an Education specialist at the Getty – termed a "highly unflattering portrait of a profession uncertain of its own intellectual foundations" that was particularly critical of its lacking both a scholarly literature and theoretical base.[131] As Kai-Kee has suggested in a detailed historical review of art museum education, the report galvanized existing efforts to evolve more formal pedagogical approaches within art museums throughout the 1990s and particular in the 2000s, which provide the bedrock of curriculum at programs like Bank Street and are incorporated into docent training programs at both the AIC and the Met.

The comments of several art museum educators I spoke with provide further evidence for these shifts at the level of practice. These were most common from educators with advanced degrees who were familiar with changing educational theories (like Aaron), but also, notably, those who were able to assess how professionalization had changed over time. For example, one volunteer educator at the Met who began teaching in the mid-1980s began to chuckle when I

[130] Stephen M. Dobbs and Elliot W. Eisner, *The Uncertain Profession: Observations on the State of Museum Education in Twenty American Art Museums* (Los Angeles: Getty Center for Education in the Arts, 1986), cited in Zolberg, "Barrier or Leveler?", 196.
[131] Kai-Kee, "A Brief History," 40.

asked about her training. "It's interesting that you ask that," she stated, "because I just found the notebook that I kept during [that initial] training… It's about a half-inch thick. Today's training is volumes. It is so different." Other more senior staff members, such as Beth at the Art Institute of Chicago, noted the increase in literature on museum education since she started full-time at the AIC in the 2000s:[132]

> There wasn't a lot of pedagogical information [at that time]… most of the literature I found on adult education was English. Was way ahead of the Americans. Nobody really published work. I was fresh out of library school. So, I was going into ERIC [Education Resources Information Center online library], and I was going into fairly significant databases trying to narrow down the literature. It was either old and out-of-date, or it didn't exist. So, I think that the field itself, pedagogically, has changed. Has really come into being in the last ten years.

The What: Or, "Interpretation as Experience"

Understanding "who" educators are aids in identifying the broader social systems in which they undertake their work and either constraining, or enabling, their professionalization. Subsequently, this raises the question: Working within these systems, what, exactly, do these professionals do? Across the gardens and galleries, those educators I interviewed consistently and collectively articulated an ostensibly simple goal: to create experiences between people and objects that could further visitors' appreciation of the museum and its collections. More than any other museum professional, educators undertake the work of communicating the value of the institution, and its collections, to those who traffic through the museum circuit. As one staff

[132] As Beth suggests, the contributions of British scholars to museum studies as a broader interdisciplinary field is prolific. This is particularly the case for those working out of the School of Museum Studies at The University of Leicester, which publishes the peer-reviewed journal *Museum and Society*. For an inclusive review of sociological approaches to museums spanning the American and British literature, see Fyfe. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, professor emeritus at Leicester, is particularly known for her work on museum education. See, for example, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museum and Gallery Education* (Leicester, UK: Leicester University Press, 1991) Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, ed., *The Educational Role of the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1999); Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education: Purpose, Pedagogy, and Performance* (London: Routledge, 2007).

member stated pithily, when asked to reflect on goals for the CBG's school programs: "Everything about the program should be enhancing [visitors'] experience of the garden."

When it comes to understanding the scope of museum education, the word "experience" is particularly meaningful. For one, it is rooted in broader scholarly traditions investigating the nature of learning. Principal among these are the writings of the pragmatist philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey, who suggested education be both active (promote "doing," or begin with experience) and reflective (using such experiences as a basis for learning.)[133] Perhaps more importantly, however, it recurs throughout the aforementioned literatures on pedagogical practices in art museum education reflecting on how people learn *in museums*. These provide a starting point for understanding how some of the larger institutional conventions outlined in the prior chapter interface with how museum educators across the gardens and the galleries understand what, exactly, they are to do when teaching.

In the introduction to their book, *Teaching in the Art Museum: Interpretation as Experience*, Kai-Kee and his co-author, Rika Burnham, lay out their guiding philosophy for interactive gallery teaching (emphasis mine): "We strive not to impart any particular received knowledge about a given artwork, but to create the conditions for a *shared experience* of looking, seeing, thinking, feeling, and talking."[134] This, they maintain in a later historical chapter, is the culmination of a decades-long move in museum practice to create a more participatory approach to learning in the art museum: a shift from imparting "defined content outcome" to promoting "meaningful experience," to quote George Hein, a museum scholar who

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[133] For foundations, see John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Touchstone, 1997). Fittingly for this study, Dewey has explored the conceit of experience in the domains of nature and art. See: John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2000) and John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee Books, 2005). For an extension of Deweyan theories of education to the history of museum education and museum work more broadly, see Hein, *Progressive Museum Practice*.

[134] Rika Burnham and Elliott Kai-Kee, *Teaching in the Art Museum: Interpretation as Experience* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), 1-2.

has drawn extensively on Dewey in his writings on progressive museum practice.[135] This sea change proceeded slowly among educators, in part shaped by changing economic and political factors impacting museums over the last century.[136] However, it accelerated with both the professionalization frustrations of the 1980s and broader theoretical shifts in the academy throughout the 1990s and 2000s highlighting the authority of the "reader" in shaping the meaning of interpretive texts.[137] These ultimately contributed to museum educators' embrace of constructivist learning theories suggesting visitors should participate in, or co-create, the meaning of their museum-going experiences.[138]

As the political scientist James L. Nolan, Jr. has noted, Dewey's experiential pragmatism in the Progressive Era is a significant predecessor of the "conspicuously therapeutic tendencies" of American education in the 1990s, which aimed to foster warmth and empathy in teacher training and led to an emphasis on fostering individual students' "self-esteem" in classroom teaching.[139] Once sees such values play out in the contemporary museum, as constructivist teaching necessitates the focus be on the learner, not necessarily the subject to be learned.[140] Such an approach, further, resonates with both the democratic mandate of the American museum – principally undertaken in the name of education – and most recent writings conceiving of museums as institutions of social service.[141] (Here it bears referencing both what Aaron described as a good starting place for re-imagining the art museum's mission – "being interested

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[135] George E. Hein, "Museum Education," in *A Companion to Museum Studies,* ed. Sharon MacDonald (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 348.
[136] Kai-Kee, "A Brief History."
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid. Here I also note his citation of Lois Silverman, "Visitor Meaning-Making in Museums for a New Age," *Curator* 38, no. 3 (September 1995), which discusses the broader academic shifts corresponding with changes in museum teaching.
[139] James L. Nolan, Jr., *The Therapeutic State: Justifying Government at Century's End* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 181.
[140] See, for example, Hein, *Learning in the Museum*.
[141] Silverman, *Social Work*.

in the people who visit you, and listening to them" – and more programmatic comments from James Vickers, who oversees volunteer tour guides at the NYBG: "…one of the reasons why we have our customer service or visitor services staff do our first training [is] to really set [the volunteers] up in knowledge that the botanical garden is a customer service based organization. That every department here, whether it's internal or external, is part of customer service at the Garden.") In particular, as Hein writes, constructivism calls upon educators to "associate an educational situation with what is already known."[142] To illuminate the more general difficulty in learning new information without associations to more familiar categories, Hein writes:[143]

> Adults who are suddenly able to see after having been blind all their lives, have great difficulty in making any sense of out of the perceptual field that greets their eyes. They cannot distinguish the foreground from the background, the "shapes" from among the multitude of sensations; they lack the repertoire of ordered perceptions that is necessary to make visual meaning out of their environment… we can carry out no research without imbuing it with our mental constructs. Even observation is not neutral.

Understanding the nature of participatory museum-going experiences co-created by visitors thus requires careful attention to the experiences and backgrounds of visitors attending a given program. Hein's metaphor of blindness is particularly apposite when reflecting on visitors' art museum-going experiences. As the sociologist and historian Tony Bennett has argued, many of the efforts to translate aesthetic experiences through educational resources – successful or otherwise – have been an attempt by museums to "speak to all eyes."[144] This returns us to ground covered in Chapter 1, where as I have shown, the modal aesthetic practice facilitated by museum educators modeled for visitors "how" they might look at art. Further, and perhaps more importantly for this chapter, art museum educators' efforts to teach visitors "how" to see – rather

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[142] Hein, *Learning in Museums,*156.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, and Tony Bennett, "Civic Seeing: Museums and the Organization of Vision," in *A Companion to Museum Studies,* ed. Sharon MacDonald (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 263-281.

than assuming their *a priori* familiarity with the codes of visual art – reveals their awareness of the elitist master narrative of the museum and the varying comfort levels with which visitors approach the artworks within them. Consider here my conversation with a freelance educator at the Met, who had held various full-time and contractual positions with the museum since her first tour in 1980:

> **Sabrina:** [We] try to serve everybody… I'm obsessed with that. I think we have to try to get the community [in here] more. Not just the privileged, but our neighbors up the street. We haven't reached enough of them. It's ridiculous that some people live up on 96th and don't come to the Met, or 102[nd Street].
>
> **Gemma:** Why do you think that is?
>
> **Sabrina:** Because they think it's for – they think the museum is only for the very rich. For the privileged.
>
> **Gemma:** So how [do museum educators] try to change that notion?
>
> **Sabrina:** Right after we get them in the door, we make them feel comfortable with the art. We make them feel that it belongs to everybody. Because it does. We make them feel that we all have the right to enjoy it. Yeah. Very much so.

In order to build interactive museum-going experiences that could make visitors "feel comfortable," make connections to the familiar, and empower their contributions, art museum educators relied primarily on open-ended questions soliciting visitors' opinions and observations. They often contrasted this approach to imparting art historical information in a lecture format.[145] Reflecting deeply embedded assumptions about the "top-down" nature of knowledge construction in art museums, the move from lecture-based to dialogic programs often required managing visitors' expectations. Some educators even went so far as to preface their tours with some announcement that their programs would aim to foster conversation. For example, Lucas,

[145] "Questioning strategies found a ready reception in the 1980s among museum educators searching for a methodology to replace a gallery lecture format that had come to seem increasingly out of style and out of touch with then current educational philosophy." Burnham and Kai-Kee, 97.

speaking at the orientation to a week-long program of tours at the Art Institute for a group of visiting older adults, informed program participants with a smile that the in-gallery tours "will not be just *lectures*," drawing out the last word and shaking his head playfully, with a smile. "We will solicit your opinions and questions, and it will be an exercise in art appreciation together."

The open-ended nature of questions geared toward soliciting observations ("What do you notice, first off, what caught your eye?" "What reactions do you have to how [this work] is painted?") somewhat belies how strategically art museum educators use them to further visitors' interpretations and thereby deepen their understanding of artworks discussed. Consider this public tour of the AIC's American art wing with a group of older adults, led by Beth:

> We are in a quiet, charcoal-gray rectangular gallery decorated with flat, evenly-spaced canvases and a single polished wooden bench at center. The group, approximately 15 older adults visiting from all around to country for a week-long continuing education course, settle into their small silver stools in front of John Sloan's *Renganeschi's Saturday Night* (1912). Beth, cheerful with a short gray pageboy and her distinctive red glasses, encourages them to place their stools as close to the work as possible.
>
> Beth then asks if anyone can remember the last time they asked themselves the question: What is this? Why on earth is this here? in an art museum. "Sure," one of the gentlemen pipes up, promptly: "Yesterday." The group bursts into laughter and Beth says see – this is the "common reaction" to our experience of modern art – "aggrieved, offended" rather than the "aesthetic response it can offer to us." She then turns to the work, to her right if you were facing her and it, and asks the group what they think is going on here. In response to a participant's observation, Beth nods, asking "what visual cues" he sees to support this: "How do you know?"
>
> The next question she asks is: "Who else are you noticing that may be staff figures?" Someone points out a "waiter" and Beth asks: "How do you know?" His outfit, the visitor offers, and Beth repeats this: "Sure, his outfit: he's dressed in black tie – and probably not coming from a wedding." The group laughs, and Beth asks for more observations. "What else do you notice?" One of the women offers that there is a lady with her arms wrapped around a chair and Beth nods. "Isn't that interesting? Is that lady-like?" The woman seated to my left, sitting tall and straight with short gray hair, shakes her head. "No." Beth nods. "Sure, that's what we're told not to do." After a pause, the woman relaxes back into her stool, offering: "And, she has her elbow on the table." Yes! Beth says. She has her elbow on the table. "These are all clues the discerning eye begins to pull out. We see that one doesn't have to be highly educated, or genteel, to eat in this establishment."

Here Beth facilitates a group discussion about the Sloan painting in order to frame aesthetic experience as interpretation of "visual cues." While not every visitor may be familiar with Sloan's interest in representing the leisure activities of working-class women in the early twentieth century (or Sloan himself), they were more than likely all capable of observing (as one female visitor did) that one of the prominent women in the painting had her arms wrapped around a chair and her elbows placed on the table. Visitors can thus "see" why one doesn't have to be "genteel" to eat in Renganeschi's restaurant and build on this observation to engage in a larger conversation about the changing social mores of Sloan aimed to represent. Other teaching strategies involving soliciting or responding to visitors' personal associations. For example, one visitor's observation that a statue of Herakles "looks almost like what we could call bodybuilding" prompted an AIC staff lecturer to confirm this was indeed the intention of the artist, who was interested in representing and creating an effect of "hyper-ideal" bodies.

But what about the botanical gardens: do educators face similar challenges "speaking to all eyes?" Considering how and why teaching varies within the broader organizational field of museums offers one way to begin exploring this question. Helen from the CBG holds a masters degree in Museum Education from The George Washington University: the country's first program in this area.[146] In our interview, she demonstrated an extensive and somewhat unique understanding of how teaching practices varied across types of museums. After undertaking a lengthy search for secondary literature on nature education, I thus chose to share with her my discovery that most histories of "museum education" seemed to default to art museum education and my curiosity about where botanical gardens fit in.[147] This observation prompted an

[146] Jensen and Munley, 12.
[147] Shortly after beginning my fieldwork, I located with little difficulty several substantial reviews of art museum education – dating from as early as the late 1980s – that compared and contrasted the pedagogical philosophies of

immediate and lengthy e-mail from her, and two days later a follow-up reflection, excerpted here:

> You're right: art museums, followed by history museums, dominate the scene with respect to the history of museum education. The reason, I think, is that these kinds of museums (you can add natural history museums, zoos, aquaria, and botanic gardens) are based on collections of objects, and the educational function is interpreting a collection. Science/technology museums and children's museums may have collections, but the attraction for these institutions are exhibitions or experiences, or it could be said collections of ideas rather than objects…
>
> The question [in those museums is] more about how an exhibition on, let's say, "biomimicry" illustrates principles and current thinking in science instead of how a collection of domestic objects from Colonial times tells us how they lived, or what a retrospective of Picasso tell us about how his art was influenced by his contemporaries… So I guess part of the issue is understanding that traditionally museums were object-based, places where people went to see things and learn about them. Science museums are places where people go to "play" or actively engage with ideas.

Here Helen suggests that rather than the art museum setting the tone for museum education practices more broadly – the nucleus in a circle of different educational practices at different types of museums – we might instead consider it on one end of a spectrum, with science

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different museum pioneers, educational theorists, and institutions (See, for example, Hein, "Museum Education;" Kai-Kee, "A Brief History;" Zeller). In contrast, it seemed relatively little had been written on the educational pedagogy of botanical gardens: how staff teach there, and how. Digging deeper, I also noted that other markers of professionalization favored art museum educators, including accreditation programs, professional societies, and professional journals. Among the different museum training programs the Smithsonian has identified, for example, about one-fifth are arts-related – including art, arts administration, arts management, art history, and decorative arts programs – with no corresponding emphasis on environmental or plant science (or any of the broader natural sciences, for that matter). While there is no formal professional organization for museum educators, the National Art Educators Association (NAEA) has included museum educators among their ranks through a special subdivision formed in 1981; there is no analogous "nature education" association. (Elliott Kai-Kee, "Professional Organizations and the Professionalizing of Practice: The Role of MER, EdCom, and the NAEA Museum Education Division, 1969-2002" *Journal of Museum Education* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 13-23.) Keyword searches within the two professional journals by and for museum practitioners – the more generalist *Curator* and the more niche *Journal of Museum Education* – revealed that occurrences of "art museum education" outnumbered those for "botanic garden education," "nature education," or "nature-based education" to a substantial margin (as did more general searches for "art museum" versus "botanic garden") (see Appendix C:1). There are several plausible interpretations of this discrepancy, among them that art museums have a longer institutional history of being museums, and therefore educational institutions. Another argument, more in keeping with the data I present in this chapter, is that art museums – as principally collection-based institutions – have clearer educational goals and methods than botanical gardens, which straddle the collection-based/"experience-based" divide.

and technology centers on the other end.[148] Each institution is further clear on how visitors should engage, sensorially, with the objects within it, which then impacts the educational practices developed across these types of museums.

Helen's grouping art museums and botanical gardens under the umbrella of more "traditional" museums is further helpful in understanding why a good number of the garden educators I spoke with also praised the importance of open-ended questions to facilitate observation: what they (and art museum educators) referred to as "inquiry-based" teaching. Seen through this lens, botanical garden and art museum educators were akin in their efforts to make collection content accessible, and particularly when they framed explorations of nature around scientific content: specifically, botany and horticulture. As garden educators noted in conversation with me, science – again like art – could often be quite inaccessible (or, borrowing from one program director at the NYBG, "intimidating"). Those who said they combatted visitors' ostensibly negative connotations of science with observation-driven questions (akin to their art museum counterparts' inquiry-based teaching) thus drew on a language and logic quite similar to the art museum educators. See this comment from Jamie at the NYBG:

> …Science can be a very fact-driven - this is right, that's wrong in a way, I would say most of us try to avoid that completely, because what you are trying to do is - yes, maybe it's filled with a lot of technical language, but that just sucks the air and the life right out of the whole subject.
>
> So, I'll give you an example. If you're trying to identify a tree, let's say, with a bunch of teachers, you can just simply walk to up to the tree and say, 'Okay, this tree has low leaves. Teeth [referring to the edges of the leaves] - do you see them?' But, a much easier way into that whole thing is: 'Okay, everybody spread out. Everybody pick a tree. Take a look. We're going to convene back in five minutes and talk about it. So, what did you

[148] To this point, the counts for keyword searches of science museums, science and technology centers, and science museum education in *Curator* and *Journal of Museum Education* were parallel to, and in some cases higher than, corresponding counts for art museums and art museum education (see Appendix C:2). They also have a sizable professional association (ASTC, the Association of Science - Technology Centers), which represents more than 400 hands-on science museums around the world.

> [notice]?' 'Well, I noticed my tree had…' [then] let them use their own language. Let them have an experience, because my guess is 90 percent of them have probably never been a tree hugger and gone up and really looked at the leaves, or - you know, everybody just walks by plants. You never look at them.

What pairing art museums with botanical gardens misses, however, is that botanical gardens straddle the "hands-on" "hands-off" divide. This was in part due both to the relative flexibility of their sensory conventions, and the less rarefied construction of natural objects. For example, school programs across both botanical gardens I studied included some form of hands-on activity. This might be threaded throughout the program – for example, in both the Children's Adventure Garden and Family Garden, school groups circulated among activity stations – or might anchor the program at the front or back-end. This latter scenario was typical in programs where school groups were also visiting spaces more clearly demarcated as "hands-off," such as the garden greenhouses. In the CBG's "Flower Lab" program, students dissect an alstroemeria flower, one stalwart specimen of the museum's bulb garden, to identify parts including its stem, stamen, anther, and pistil; carefully remove each to affix them with scotch tape to a makeshift field journal; and label them (as young botanists do) before following a guided exploration sheet around the 83-degree tropical greenhouse. In contrast, at the AIC and the Met, the majority of education programs for students (like those for adults) consisted of drop-in, gallery-based tour discussions of three to five objects, organized into a loose theme.[149] (And in the art-making programs offered to students and families by the AIC and the Met, it would, of course, be unthinkable for any audience to scrape layers from a Vermeer to improve their understanding of

[149] At the Met, guided tours focused on museum highlights are free with admission and do not require tickets or reservations. These tours, offered in multiple languages, are led by volunteers and run for an hour every fifteen minutes between 10:15 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. "Gallery Talks," sometimes listed as "Gallery Conversations," are more specialized talks, also drop-in and free with museum admission. These focus on specific aspects of the collection or special exhibits, and are led by paid education staff or, on occasion, curators, conservators, and invited specialists. Public gallery talks at the AIC, also offered daily, have a similar organization of offerings, with highlight tours offered by volunteer docents and thematic and collection tours led by museum education staff. Non-education staff participate less regularly in touring, with exhibition curators occasionally offering exhibition overviews.

it). Ultimately, while educators across the gardens and the galleries praised the unique learning experience afforded by interactions with objects – often when contrasting museums to schools, or "informal" versus "formal" learning environments – art museum educators privileged viewing artworks in the galleries. In contrast, botanical garden staff often incorporated activities in which plants were used as raw materials, not only singular objects to contemplate. All told, the botanical gardens both benefitted less from and were less burdened by the singularity of mission that defines either the "traditional" museum (i.e. the hands-off art museum) or its extreme opposite (the hands-on science and technology center). This, in turn, engendered more hybridity of sensory practice.

The How: Or, The Necessity of Adaptive Expertise

When reflecting on what museum educators do, we have so far been mainly working with ideal types. In an ideal world, motivated (consciously or otherwise) by constructivist philosophies of education, educators meet visitors where they are to facilitate value-added, object-based museum-going experiences. I have further suggested the affordances of educators' varying collections, embedded within the particular institutional setting of the museum, both bound and make possible the structure, or format, of such experiences. On the ground, however, programs often played out quite differently.

For one, museums are not static places, particularly given their competing internal agendas. Consider again Violet and her pre-program walk through the galleries. Among many educators I observed whose programs directly engaged collection objects, this was standard practice: a way to ensure objects they planned to discuss were, in fact, still there. One mid-spring morning, I arrived to the Met to follow Deborah Jaffe, who was that day leading a tour for

25 fourth-graders visiting from Connecticut. She'd just found out that morning that the Engelhard Court in the American Wing, wherein she'd planned to stop, had closed for a special event 12 days earlier than scheduled. As Deborah explained to me, the teacher had requested her students tour the Met's Native American galleries, but those galleries were too small to fit 25 children at once. The original plan was thus to "divide and conquer:" split the group in half; have two educators each lead 12 students; start one group in the American wing (including Engelhard) and the other in the Native American galleries; and then switch. The unexpected gallery closure required Deborah and her co-teacher quickly negotiate a contingency plan in the 15 minutes before the group arrived.

These constraints spanned both indoor and outdoor museum environments. According to a staff member who coordinates programs at the NYBG's "Green School," a 30-foot palm could be there one day and "for days at a time, in fact, and then gone the next," depending on what the curators were planning. In the gardens, of course, such collection-based changes also often corresponded to the changing seasons. In one April "Sensory Walk" for early elementary-school students at the NYBG, the educator told me that the lesson plan called for the children to match plants in the Perennial Garden with different color and shape cards. Unfortunately, as she pointed out, the garden was two and a half weeks behind on bloom, so she'd instead adapted a planting activity for the students to do in the Education Pavilion of the Native Plant Garden.

Undoubtedly, however, the biggest challenge for undertaking the "ideal" museum program within the informal setting of the museum was educators' understanding of visitor backgrounds. Given the shift in recent years toward visitor-based museum teaching, one would assume the success of such a strategy rests on the familiarity museum educators across the gardens and galleries have with their visitors. However, with rare exceptions, those who teach in

museums facilitate episodic encounters with groups they know little about and may never see again. The extent to which they are able to garner information about visiting groups in advance depends on several factors. Program structure is one. Drop-in programs, by their very nature, allow for any combination of visitors to assemble on a given day (and as discussed, drop-in tours was the staple adult program format at both the AIC and the Met). In contrast, (comparatively rare) multi-week program models allowed educators to get to know their students over time. This was the case with the NYBG's 6-week (11 in the summer) Children's Gardening Program. To a lesser extent, this was also true of multi-week continuing education programs at the NYBG and CBG, which more closely mirror a traditional classroom setting. On occasion, however, adult students might just sign up for an introductory survey class, and when they did so, they provided minimal information about themselves. For certificate and other programs, registration was thus often required, but the information sought, and its utility, were limited. When I asked the head of adult programs at the CBG how much information she and her lecturers received from visitors prior to their enrollment in courses, classes, or even public symposia, she told me historically it had been very little, and presently it was even less:

> Our older registration system used to capture a person's company as well as their name and address. Our new system does not. So, while we would use that company list a lot if we were running some sort of professional-based class to gauge who our audience was, we don't have that now. So, we really [have their] name, address, email, that's it.

Arguably, of course, adult program educators could make some assumptions about visitors in advance. Studies show, for example, that the demographics of adult museum visitors to cultural institutions remains markedly consistent over time.[150] School program registration thus offers a helpful counter-example exploring how more diverse museum audiences (whose

[150] See Paul DiMaggio and Toqir Mukhtar, "Arts Participation as Cultural Capital in the United States, 1982-2002," in Tepper and Ivey, 273-306.

participation is brokered by third parties) come to traffic in the museum circuit, and how educators prepare for them. All four museums I studied required advance registration for school programs, and the division of labor facilitating registration significantly shaped the degree and kind of information educators obtained about their visitors. If non-education staff handled the process, educators, perhaps not surprisingly, had much less control over getting the information they needed.

Consider school programs registration at the NYBG. To register their classroom for a program, teachers go through a telephonic registration process handled by the museum's registration department. When I asked an educator in the NYBG's Everett Children's Adventure Garden what information she received about school groups from this department in advance of executing programs, she responded: "Nearly nothing." She and the staff member in the Green School I spoke with agreed that most often, they knew a groups' grade level, and how many children would be attending. According to the Green School staff member, the registrars, while offering much-needed logistical support, knew less about how to match an interested teacher with an appropriate program model.[151] In part because of this, she believed:

> I think we could put more development and improvement into registration by having the people who are answering the phone, one, know more about the programs, two, know something about pedagogy, three, know what grades are studying which standards, and, four, to really in an informed way help steer teachers to an appropriate program.

Regularly, however, educators suggested the visitor information necessary for a successful program spanned beyond curriculum alignment. Such information was often difficult to capture in an intake form, even for institutions with a more formalized registration system, like the Met. Let us again return to Violet. She knew from the Met's online registration form for

[151] As she further pointed out, for her to manage every teacher's question about program logistics while also training staff, organizing programs, and executing them would be a considerable burden, especially given she was the only full-time staff member in her department.

student groups that the students were "studying famous artists," and that the teacher conceived this category quite broadly. Violet even acknowledged that teachers were "often very thoughtful" in filling out their registration forms. Regardless, at the beginning of all of her programs, she conducted an informal "assessment" to identify the things a teacher might not readily volunteer (or know in advance): how many students had been to the art museum versus how many had not; how talkative they were (particularly important for "inquiry-based teaching"); or what mood they might be in. When I asked a long-time Art Institute docent, Daphne, about how she approached tour planning, she responded in a way that underscored the commonality of such "assessments:"

> **Daphne:** You don't know them [the students]. And you also don't know the environment they live in, or that they're coming from. So, it's a dance. The first piece when I- you know, I have a plan, a tour plan. And my first piece really can change my mind. And I can say, "Okay, these kids are not interested in this type of art. Abstract doesn't mean anything to them. They're concrete thinkers." And I will make an immediate switch, that I won't do any more abstract art. I will go to something that I think is more- that they will connect with. That has symbols that they will, that are objects that they can recognize, recognizable objects. So, I can switch gears where I couldn't always do that in a lesson plan.
>
> **Gemma:** How would you know they didn't really connect with a piece of abstract art?
>
> **Daphne:** If you continue to ask questions and they have no frame of reference. And they are just not- there's no response. Sometimes a no response is that they're just shy kids, and they've been trained [to not talk], like in some parochial schools. And you get some kids, and they just don't talk. But sometimes you can see that it's just outside their experiential world. And so, you want to go to something maybe that they're more connected with. Like, you know, if you're in African art or you see that these kids just aren't connecting at all and it's not making any sense and you [feel] that maybe there's a piece that would- they would be more interested in. You might go to [Doris Lee's] *Thanksgiving*, which is you know, a piece of art that almost everybody connects with… to draw them out.

The visitor information deficit they faced ultimately presented educators with a conundrum: How does one "meet visitors where they are" when one does not really know where that is? One answer, as we have seen in the previous section, is to develop best practices that could work for "any" visitor. To again paraphrase Hein, the turn toward "meaningful

experiences" (close looking through facilitated dialogue) and away from "content-based" instruction (lecturing) arguably engenders teaching approaches inclusive of many different visitor backgrounds. But few educators accepted a one-size-fits-all approach as the gold standard for programming. Over and over again, they stressed the importance of adaptability. On the one hand, this was logistical. As we have seen – and as Daphne asserted later in her interview – "in a museum environment, nothing is for sure." Buses could be late, cutting a 60-minute program in half; curators swapped paintings or palm trees out last minute; special events led to gallery closures; the New York winter stretched two months longer than it should have. But another, and even more crucial, form of adaptability required reading the group to understand what they might want their museum-going experience, so as to be able to provide it. The valuation of this form of adaptive expertise came up consistently, across age groups and field sites, when I asked what made a "good" educator:

> Well, it's a two-branch response, which is: Know the information about the art, but also know a little about people. As a matter of fact, know a lot about people. Be willing to listen to people. Be willing to gain an understanding of how to read facial expressions. When people have tuned out. When it's time to change course. When it's time to leave that artwork and move on to the next thing. So, it's a little bit of both. I don't think content, in terms of knowing about the art, is enough to carry a person through. I think you really have to understand what motivates people to come. And then what keeps them coming, if it's a situation in which you'll have more than one-off interaction with them. – **Adult Programs Lecturer, AIC**

> You can plan for as much as you want, but things are usually never going to go according to plan… You're going to have one group that knows just about everything there is, and the next group could be total blank state, and you're just starting – you're laying the foundation for them. So expect the unexpected is definitely how we do it. Here I always tell my volunteers, at least in dealing with student groups – every group is going to be different. And you may teach the same program every day this week but every experience is going to be 100 percent different because it depends on how the kids are coming in. – **School Programs Assistant, CBG**

> What I'm looking for in that one-hour [tour] experience for [adult] visitors … is that they have a chance to look, look closely at the works of art. That's very much about the object that's in front of them rather than the art historical or other context. And the works of art

> become kind of illustrations for that… So, I'd say object-centered in that way. [But] it's also focused on the visitor and who those visitors are… because these are all drop-in programs. We don't know in advance who's coming. To be able to adjust for, you know, are these all people who are very familiar with the museum who come all the time? Or are there people in that group who are new to visiting the Met or are new to whatever the content matter is, or if they're visitors who need some kind of assistance, that the educator is able to adapt their plan to account for that as well, to account for the visitors. – **Adult Programs Coordinator, Met**

> … It requires great skill to measure up your group and kind of meet them where they are and make that decision at the moment that you meet the teacher and meet the students. I mean, each class, each teacher comes with their own culture. You know how you can deal with them. No, I guess you can't really - I can't write it into the lesson plan. There's just some things you just can't write into the lesson plan. And so, I think that those are the hard things to teach. – **School Programs Coordinator, NYBG**

One also sees the necessity of such adaptive expertise when considering another way that educators attempted to manage in-group diversity: by grouping visitors into pre-established categories. According to John Falk – the museum scholar and learning theorist who developed the idea of museums as "behavior settings" – museum practitioners might do well to conceptualize visitor attendance as emergent from identity-related motivations.[152] In Falk's view, people decide (or not) to spend a chunk of their leisure time going to a given museum based on how well it fits into the needs he or she has for filling that leisure time. From this it follows that museums should strive to augment and support accommodations for different identity needs visitors may have. On occasion, educators would describe their visitors in these ways, most often when identifying motivations for self-selecting program participants. For example, in our interview, I asked the director of adult programs at the NYBG to describe the adults who registered for her certificate or continuing education programs. "On average," she told me, the adult education learner "falls in two different categories," either a mid-career professional looking to switch careers (or investigate the possibility), or a life-long learner, most commonly a

[152] Falk's visitor types include the explorer, experience seeker, recharger, professional/hobbyist, and facilitator. John H. Falk, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2009).

retiree, with time to learn about something they'd always been curious about. Or consider Beth, who led the conversation about *Renganeschi's Saturday Night*. After hearing Falk speak at a conference about the five museum visitor types he had identified, she adapted her own model of adult visitor types at the Art Institute:

> There are half a dozen types of adult visitors who attend public tours at our museum. I'll rattle off some for you. There are 'enablers.' They come because art is 'good for someone,' they see it as edifying; they usually bring someone else, their kids or their grandmothers. Then there are 'those seeking spiritual sustenance' – they don't come on all our tours because they really just want to take time in the galleries, looking and letting it all sink in. They don't need or want someone talking in their ear. There are 'life-long learners' – those who have a long-term relationship to the museum and come because every single time, they leave excited or surprised. Finally, of course, you have 'notch-on-belt visitors.' They want to knock off the greatest hits. They are usually visiting from out of town and they may not care anything about Grant Wood but they're in Chicago, so they have to see *American Gothic*.

More formally, however, education departments organize their programs and their staff structure by audience. The number and type of these categories varied, but most commonly included adults (or "public" programs, for visitors 18 and older); schools (encompassing K-12 student programs and less commonly, professional development programs for teachers); families; and teens. The motivation behind this organization corresponds loosely with developmental theory: the idea that children learn differently than adults, and younger children differently than older children (and, by extension, that specific teaching approaches could be developed to meet the learning styles of these particular audiences). Most importantly, the audience-based organization of education departments further helps to explain how the inclusion of more hands-on activities and teaching strategies varied not only across sites, but *also by audience*.

In this way, differences in program facilitation were often not just developmental, but also served as somewhat of a status order. Within the art museums, for example, art-making

programs had been historically geared toward younger children and incorporated into family programs. These might include making art in studio spaces outside of the main galleries, or participating in in-gallery activities including sketching, or handling other tools and materials.[153] Along similar lines, continuing education programs for adults offered at both gardens occasionally incorporated, but did not require, hands-on components in the garden beyond classroom discussions; others, such as public lectures, or symposia, did not include them at all. This was clearest when educators spoke to me about their continued emphasis on the educational value of "play:" what Helen described as hands-on engagement with ideas characteristic of science museums, but was often otherwise dismissed as entertainment. For example, when I asked one of the members in her department working with family audiences about the role of play in family programs education, she responded:

> **CBG Educator:** Play, obviously, is very important in helping kids socialize with each other, and then even just parallel [play] - like, with the two-year-olds, you'll just see a lot of playing next to each other. But that's all part of learning how to socialize.
>
> So definitely play is part of socializing. Play, I think, is really important in developing imagination, kind of learning how to play. I mean, sometimes we'll just give them - they might get rocks and sticks and leaves. Some kids don't know what to do with that, so it's kind of like learning how to play with these things that [aren't] toys. It doesn't have a 'you don't push this button, and music goes off,' or 'I'm not supposed to match this animal's front end and back end.'
>
> Sometimes play is just about creating… It could be anything. It could be creating a little house. It could be creating patterns. It could be all sorts of - so I think it develop imagination and creativity.
>
> **Gemma**: What about for parents?

[153] Bringing materials of any kind into the art museum was often, as one staff educator at the Met described it, "a real operational challenge" requiring curatorial and occasionally conservation approval: "Materials-wise, for art-making programs in the museum, it takes so much. We do it every week and every day, but you have to go through curatorial permissions and you have to - you know, we're working out this whole system of art supply management and communications so that we can ask for the permission for that particular material that we need for that particular program that day. It's a ton of work."

> **CBG Educator:** I would say the biggest thing is teaching them that play is an important part of a child's development. An unstructured chance to just kind of explore is really important. It's so funny because parents, they're like we're not going to spend our whole time on the Play-Doh table today. It's like, no, it's fine if they want to do that, because they are learning lots of things: fine motor skills, gross motor skills.

Regardless, because the educators were teaching not just content, but also facilitating appreciation of disciplines (art, science) and institutions (museums) to which visitors brought varying degrees of familiarity, diversity within visitor groups continued even within these established categories. Adult visitors again offer a clear example. As an audience category that often included the most experienced museum-goers, they thus might be more interested in building upon their established base of knowledge by soliciting information from an expert, or less familiar with the admittedly recent turn toward participatory dialogue (or hands-on experiences) in museum education. Therein lay the necessity of being flexible with incorporating sketching activities or movement exercises, for as Beth stated, "Each [adult] group has an identity. A gestalt. You have to seek to establish a volley back and forth – a dialogue of sorts – but if people don't feel comfortable, or they'd prefer to just listen, yes, a situation occurs where you do much of the talking, and lecture. And that's ok." However, educators also wanted to recognize the possibility of heterogeneity even within these ostensibly homogeneous categories, particularly when discussing how to diversify audiences or innovate practice. Or, as one program director at the Met stated, one of the problems with working with adult audiences regarded both their "assumptions" about museum-going and what museums assumed for them:

> So some of [the challenges] are just assumptions that I think are changing a little bit, assumptions about what different groups of people want or don't want. I think to some degree, I think we've made a lot of progress there, but to some degree that remains as well. You don't want to do that with a group of adults. Well, why not?

On Adaptive Expertise, Institutional Context, and What's At Stake

What are we to make of this particularly adaptive set of skills museum educators deploy in their everyday work? On the one hand, educators' efforts to discern what was situationally appropriate for a given visitor group met the organizational goals of the museum conceived as a "social service organization." In this way their adaptability was emergent from what the sociologist Arlie Hochschild has termed "emotional labor:" the process by which service workers (and especially female workers) are expected to manage their feelings – and in this case, those of visitors – in accordance with organizationally defined rules and guidelines.[154] Educators goal, ultimately, was to create an experience that would foster both visitors' appreciation of art or nature as well as their comfort with the museum, particularly for the hesitant, the suspicious, and, the uninitiated.[155] One garden staff educator speaking about school groups phrased it explicitly as follows:

> **Educator:** You don't ever want to send a kid out the door saying: That was really boring. I wish I was in school. You know? You don't want that.
>
> **Gemma:** Just to play devil's advocate, why don't you want that?
>
> **Educator:** Because you want to build *fun* memories… you want kids to have fun with nature, you don't want them to think nature is boring. And in regards to growing our institution: You don't want them to associate the [garden] with the world's most boring

[154] See Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 2016). For a recent extension of Hochschild's theoretical work to museums, see Ealasaid Munro, "Doing emotion work in museums: reconceptualising the role of community engagement practitioners," *Museum and Society* 12, no. 1 (March 2014): 44-60.

[155] Analogous to the sociologist's Erving Goffman's emphasis on studying social life as a form of dramaturgy – conceiving people and their actions as actors fulfilling roles on a stage – many educators, reflecting on best practices, often emphasized the performative nature of their work. This was, admittedly, bound by notions of authenticity. As one Met staff member stated about working with teens: "There's a performative aspect to it, but without going over the top. Without being too theatrical. Maybe that's my own personal preference, but I think you want someone with high energy who's going to make it infectious and fun without them feeling like they're being kind of goaded or that it's too over the top, that it *is* a performance. Disingenuous." Or, see this comment from Jamie Boyer at the NYBG, connecting his own enthusiasm as an educator to achieving his broader goals in teaching: "…My goal is to get you to appreciate nature. [So I] take that infectious [energy] and pass it on to the kid. Well, my job is done, and I hope we all have you come back once again… I'm always amazed at how different educators have their way of getting you enthused and engaged… And then, you don't have to be a joker to do it, but just for me personally, it's a lot about enthusiasm, and joking round, and having a good time." Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1956).

> field trip… Because say their parents want to come back on the weekends, imagine them being like: No. That place is boring. You know? Then we've lost a future member, a future donor, we've lost a future plant conservationist because they didn't have a fun time engaging with nature.

On the other hand, however, given that museum educators work straddles the expert-service divide – and that, as the sociologist Eva Illouz has noted, a certain emotional intelligence has become a prerequisite for entry into varying professional fields – an alternate perspective is that educators' adaptive expertise offered them a form of capital to advance their goals.[156] For example, educators wanted to create positive experiences for visitors, and they wanted to meet them where they were. However, they were unwilling to be completely relativist when it came to information about their collections: stated plainly, they didn't let people get things wrong. Reflecting on the use of open-ended questions in museum teaching, it bears repeating that this tactic was quite strategic. Nowhere was this clearer than when considering those educators whose open-ended questions were, in many cases, quite closed, as with this school program educators' discussion of *Night Life*, Archibald Motley's 1943 vignette of a night club in Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood:

> "So what are we going to do," Gladys asks, "once we walk into this scene?" Her tone is very matter-of-fact, to the point, almost as though she were taking measurements for a dress. "We change our clothes," one student volunteered, and Gladys smiled in response to some laughs, as she asked: "Then what?" "We go dancing!" A student volunteered, leading Gladys to shuffle her legs in place a bit, looking up and saying: "How could you not?" Two blond boys perched on stools in the back giggled as Gladys then asked: "What kind of music do we think we are hearing?" One boy, Eric, ventures: "Pop music?" leading Gladys to state ok, today we dance to pop music, and there was even some popular music back then. "But I'm looking for another word…" From somewhere in the crowd, several voices offered: "*Jazz*." Jazz! Gladys stated, triumphantly.
>
> "OK," she continued. "What night do you think it is." It is not even a question, insomuch as her voice does not lift up at the end of the sentence, and a student suggests: "Sunday?" "Sunday, ok. It might be Sunday." "Friday?" "Friday, could be Friday." Eric then

[156] Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and The Culture of Self-Help* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 236.

> suggests: "Is it the day World War II ended?" after quickly grabbing a peek at the wall label adjacent to the canvas. Gladys complimented him: Very good, the war did end just about this time, and when it did, people celebrated! "That's a very good answer!" Eventually a student asks: "Saturday?" as it seems this question is still open-ended and Gladys nods. "Probably Saturday. That's a good night to go dancing. Where's the music coming from." The sentence again reads like a statement, and a girl suggests: "Off to the side."

In this interaction, one sees that the educator's point that the scene represented mid-nineteenth-century black nightlife led her to suggest that "jazz" was more correct than "pop music," and that "dancing" was a better answer for what was going on (albeit less humorous) than "changing outfits." Notably, the wall label, in the end, offers more authoritative information than the children themselves (and as we have seen, some children know this well). The encounter underscores the use of ostensibly open-ended questions to advance aesthetic appreciation, as do recent writings by Rika Burnham, who worked at the Met from 1974 through the 1990s.[157] In our interview, she elaborated her reservations about questioning as a museum teaching strategy. Her preference was to instead serve as a facilitator: she encouraged visitors to exchange observations with her, and with one another, and participated by providing information that could deepen discussion in response to visitors' questions. As she stated in separate conversation with me, reflecting on the influence of Philip Yenawine's Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS):

> [For a time] docents or the volunteers [lectured] along the curatorial model of a gallery lecture, whereas the educators thought, 'No. We want to get people to talk. Let's start asking questions.' So I would guess [the shift] happened in the 80s. I myself considered myself to be the queen of questions. I thought I asked really good questions. I think you know my position now that there is no such thing as a good question…They're all hostile, and they're all basically a lecture just in disguise… you're always on safe territory, and it goes where you want it to go… It manages the conversation. So with pretty hard practice of my own, I now feel I teach very successfully without questions and without lecturing. So I'm pleased with that at this moment.

[157] See also Burnham and Kai-Kee, 94-111. For background on VTS, see "What is VTS? - Visual Thinking Strategies," VTShome.org, 2016, accessed September 27, 2016, http://www.vtshome.org/what-is-vts. For a critique of it, see Burnham and Kai-Kee, 47-48; 102-104.

Educators' cultural capital, however, was often an asset for educators (when appropriately deployed). In large part this was because the wider array of tools in the kit, the more ably they were able to adapt to different visitor learning styles, backgrounds, and personalities. In discussing on-the-ground training, educators often cited helpful exposure to different approaches to programs. Returning to Amanda – thrown in the water at the AIC, shortly after she began her first museum job – she expressed gratitude for the opportunity to follow different educators throughout the first week-long program she facilitated, explaining why she did so:

> It wasn't just to travel with the group. It was to learn about the collection, also observe different styles of delivering information, a lecture format versus inquiry versus a blending of the two, kind of where you inject humor, where you invite the group to participate.
>
> All of that was really what I was kind of gathering when I would sit there with the group. And that was really the best training I could have had because it was people who knew the collection so well... And then just being in the spaces, so learning the flow for [the program], knowing where all the elevators are located, knowing that you had to get the door unlocked to [the restaurant] through the back route behind the trading room if you had somebody in a wheelchair, knowing where the bathrooms were. So all those were practical things as well. So that was really the training.

Herein, ultimately, lies the boon of experience: educators who had been out in the galleries, and the gardens, teaching over many years had seen many visitors come through their doors and had grown familiar with how to read them. In this way, one sees how a niche set of skills emergent from emotional labor and predicated on negotiating successful interactions served as a form of expertise: local knowledge of both people and things ultimately made educators successful.[158] And, as Amanda notes, more time on the floor also meant greater

[158] For discussions of experience as a form of lay expertise, see Brian Wynne, "Misunderstood Misunderstanding: Social Identities and Public Uptake of Science," *Public Understanding of Science* 1, no. 3 (July 1992): 281-304; and Steven Epstein, *Impure Science: AIDS, Activism, and the Politics of Knowledge* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

familiarity with a museum's collections. Part of being able to "meet groups where they were" was also the ability to provide a rigorously content-based experience, if groups were interested and willing. Strong grounding in content was, ultimately, another tool in the kit that educators could rely on to varying degrees when appropriate. Given the institutional context of the museum, the relative homogeneity of its visitor body, and the expectations those visitors brought to the institution, this was often a very important tool indeed. As one family programs educator at the NYBG noted:

> For our gardening workshop program, they are literally provided a script of the four or five different stations that are affiliated with that program and that program – that's baseline information that has to be administered in a short period, or window of time. So you have to be pretty skilled if you're going to add additional information to that. If you are in a time jam, how you modify that appropriately. So they really are regurgitating information. Now, I always try to encourage them to [innovate], because I think otherwise it can get very mundane and very repetitive. But because I think every group is different, you have the opportunity as an educator to have a whole new experience because your audience is a whole other population.
>
> There's not a lot of flexibility there unless you have your own knowledge base. Or you're willing to invest in additional time in terms of that knowledge base. For Dig, Plant, Grow, our afternoon public program: the same thing is true, they get a program outline that we may be covering for the next three to four weeks. There's a write-up regarding the various stations. But even the feedback from that came back to say, we might be planting the kohlrabi for the public. But if that's not a crop you're familiar with, we need to do a better job educating them so we can do a better job off the cuff.

What are the stakes of successfully adapting: of discerning participant's expectations of their visit, of being sensitive to competing understandings of museum-going, and balancing the varying frameworks with which people encounter museums? The simplest response regards not giving visitors the program that they want. The longer answer – on which this chapter closes, and which the following chapter discusses in depth – regards narrowing which experiences are possible for visitors within the museum, and particularly for those visitors who less regularly traffic in the museum circuit and with whom staff were thus less familiar.

Conclusion

In discussing who museum educators are, what they do, and how they do it, I have identified a particular form of professional expertise that I have termed "adaptive" expertise: skilled labor, contingent on assessing and meeting client needs in often episodic encounters. Within museum education, this process of "assess and adapt" engenders educators' ability to respond to the background and motivations of a given visitor group and structure an educational program accordingly. The efforts museum educators undertake to create a positive visitor experience emerges from a conception of the museum as a social service organization: an institution that strives to meet the needs of diverse communities who may (or may not) attend. Further, the lack of clear professionalization opportunities available to them – and the other constraints within which they operate – makes experience a necessary form of professional training. This experience, however, reciprocally informs their efforts to adjust program formats to a given audience accordingly. The greater amount of time "on the ground," the greater the exposure educators had to diverse visitors groups, and the wider the repertoire of potential teaching strategies. These include (perhaps most importantly) content-driven, collections-based experiences, which often align with the motivations of seasoned museum-goers. Adaptive expertise ultimately allowed museum educators to successfully straddle both the elite and democratic dimensions of their institutions and, correspondingly, both the expert and service dimensions of their job.

I have further suggested here that museums' sensory conventions operate not just at the institutional, but also the group level: even ostensibly fixed program offerings (by audience, or by format) may vary based on educators' efforts to assess their visitors. Ultimately, educators

aim to promote museum access by starting from the perspective of visitor experience. The subsequent chapter focuses on how they elaborate this ideology of access for visitors with disabilities, for whom the necessary assessments, adaptations, and thus, sensory conventions are not always as clear. I trace how educators adapt to and work within the institutional constraints established here to meet the needs of this visitor public, as well as how the engine of expertise driving museum educators interfaces with that of more therapeutically-focused clinical professionals assisting them in programming.

Chapter 3

Access and Disability

The Education Center – tucked to the side of the AIC's heavily-trafficked Modern Wing lobby – is reasonably quiet for today's Art in the Moment program, organized for people with dementia. In the front of the studio are rows of tables facing a projector screen showing Mary Cassatt's *The Child's Bath,* with a reproduction of the image propped on a dark brown easel at right. Lucas stands beside the reproduction to welcome the group of 14 visitors. He explains the program will begin in this studio classroom, proceed to the galleries, and return to the studio for an art-making activity led by a consulting art therapist, Deb DelSignore. There are some eyebrow raises. Lucas responds in an encouraging tone, with emphasis: "Nowwww, nothing too *complicated*." After asking group members to introduce themselves, Lucas states they'd begin by talking about this work (the Cassatt) and noting that, later in the program: "We're not going to *lecture* you." Instead, they would focus on what people can see, emphasizing there's no "right or wrong answer." Then: "I like to begin by everyone just taking 30 seconds and looking at the work, just contemplating the work, taking it in."

A silence falls over the room. After a bit, Lucas asks, slowly and earnestly: "So. What is it we *see* here?" Another silence before people began to respond with different observations – "a mother and her child," for example. Lucas always repeats the observations – "Great, a mother and her child" – before adding: "So, how do we know that?" The question makes the group chuckle, as if to suggest the answer is obvious. One participant says with a hint of incredulity: "Well, there's a woman, and she's bathing a child. It's a very intimate scene." "Great," Lucas says, widening his eyes, "OK, intimate. What makes you say that?"

Most people are responding by calling out observations and contributing comments. However, one woman, Lisa, is whispering heatedly with the visitor next to her while repeatedly shaking her head. Meanwhile, Lucas asks the group what kind of a setting they think this is. Someone says: "Inside a home, domestic." He responds: "Great, what makes you say that?" More chuckles before the visitor says, with some emphasis: "Well, it's a child's *bath*." As this continues, Lisa nods at Lucas, leading him to cross over to her. She says, sharply: "You don't have to dumb things down for us." Lucas pauses, flashing an embarrassed smile before returning to the front.

Not long after, Lisa begins to participate in the conversation, making clear the kind of conversation she would like to have. When Lucas begins asking about the representation of the scene – "Is it a clearly outlined scene? What do you think about the brushstrokes?" – someone says they're "textured." Lucas repeats this back, his voice slow and calm, nodding and offering an affirming "great!" Lisa, looking straight at him, says pointedly: "French. Impressionism."

To this, Lucas responds: "Did you say impressionistic? Great, tell me what you mean by that." She answers: "I mean, as it is associated with the school," going into a detailed visual description of Impressionist brushstrokes. She adds that if we were to get close to the painting, it would have a very different effect than if we were far away. Lucas nods, stating "in fact, many of you may know" this work and its artist. Lisa begins to nod, too, seemingly satisfied, along with many

other members of the group. Lucas stops just short of naming the artist, allowing program participants to chime in with a shared and knowing murmur: "Cassatt."

While museum educators have been serving visitors with dementia informally for many years, such programs began to garner broader recognition in approximately 2006.[159] This was accompanied by their formalization, ushered in largely by The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)'s Alzheimer's Project. Through a two-year grant from MetLife, the MoMA Alzheimer's Project expanded MoMA's "Meet Me at MoMA" – a monthly tour program for people with Alzheimer's disease, and their professional or family care partners – into a nationwide training initiative, designed to create museum programs for people with dementia throughout the U.S.[160] As part of the MoMA's Alzheimer's Project, MoMA staff approached Lucas and Deb, offering information and training on the "Meet Me" program model.

At the time, Deb was working for a social service organization serving older adults, and a funding opportunity arose within the organization's center for "healthy living." In 2009, she thus wrote a grant proposal for "Meet Me at AIC" – what would eventually become Art in the Moment – which proposed expanding the organization's existing creative arts therapy program into the museum. While modeled after MoMA's program, one of Meet Me at AIC's proposed unique features would be an art-making component, facilitated by a creative arts therapist. Creative arts therapy, the proposal states, "uses the creative process of art making to improve and enhance the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of individuals of all ages." Ultimately, it concluded: "We believe the 'Meet Me at AIC' program is the vehicle that can bring an evidenced-based version of the 'Meet Me at MoMA' program to Chicago at the Art Institute of

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[159] Libby Rhoads, "Museums, Meaning Making, and Memories: The Need for Museum Programs for People with Dementia and Their Caregivers," *Curator* 52, no. 3 (July 2009): 229-240.
[160] Francesca Rosenberg, Amir Parsa, Laurel Humble, Carrie McGee, *Meet Me: Making Art Accessible to People with Dementia* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009).

Chicago."

This chapter revisits museum educators' model of access – grounded in adaptive expertise – to trace how it applies to visitors with disabilities. So doing tests the limits of the model by revealing the difficulties educators face both making assessments of these visitors' needs and adapting to them. Lisa and Lucas's détente offers a clear example of this. For a start, the interaction highlights how museum educators partly resolve the difficulties in serving visitors less familiar to them by formalizing, rather than leaving fluid, program strategies for such groups. As Lucas shared with me in our conversations, Art in the Moment was unusual for a number of reasons. It was the only program for older adults that had an art-making component; it was the only that involved an art therapist; and it was the only program offered for people with cognitive disabilities, an audience he had never before worked with. He further described Art in the Moment as the "most structured" of all the gallery programs he facilitated, due to its focus on evaluating therapeutic outcomes and its basis in MoMA's tour model.[161] This helps explain his faithfulness to open-ended questioning strategies – rooted in soliciting and affirming visitors' contributions, rather than providing information – for as he stated: "If [a program] does have the end result goal of being a therapeutic experience, then we want to stick to the scientific method."

However, while many program participants were willing to play along with this approach, Lisa defensively displayed her cultural capital to make clear her displeasure. At program's end, she would repeat to Deb that museum staff didn't need to "dumb things down"

[161] MoMA's approach elaborates and formalizes the modal question-based practice of museum education for visitors with dementia. Guides published through the MoMA Alzheimer's Project recommend telling participants at the outset of the program that it will be interactive and discussion-based – not a lecture – and should begin with a brief period of observation before moving into preset questions that prompt description and interpretation, the answers to which should be summarized for the group. See "Guide for Museums," The Museum of Modern Art, 2009, accessed September 27, 2016, https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/meetme/Guides_Museums.pdf, 128; and "The Museum of Modern Art: Lessons for Engagement with Art," The Museum of Modern Art, accessed May 5, 2016, https://www.moma.org/meetme/modules/index.

just because the group was "older." It is a meaningful irony that at program's end, I found out from a CJE volunteer that this particular group was not, in fact, a group of older adults with dementia. Those in attendance that day were older adults who lived independently in a North Chicago retirement community: not too dissimilar from those visitors Lucas – as the director of the museum's senior programs – regularly served as part of his comparatively "less structured" gallery tours. This snapshot from Art in the Moment thus raises the broader challenges educators encounter adapting their existing practices to serve visitors with disabilities and highlights how such challenges bear upon group boundaries shaping who can do what in the museum. This chapter traces how such conflicts arise from institutional staffing arrangements; through efforts to classify "disability" as a museum audience; and across the differing skill sets of therapeutic and education staff.

Staffing

The Access Assemblage

In 1987, Janice (Jan) Majewski published *Part of Your General Public is Disabled* through the Smithsonian Institution press.[162] The 96-page manual, prepared for the Smithsonian's volunteer docents, offered a basic description of disabilities including "mental retardation," learning disabilities, hearing impairments, cerebral palsy, and mental illness, and provided appropriate terminology and strategies for adapting tours for visitors with these disabilities. Some 30 years later, Jan and I sat down to chat about *Part of Your General Public*, joined by Beth Ziebarth, Jan's mentee, colleague, and currently the Director of the Accessibility Program at the Smithsonian.

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[162] Janice Majewski, *Part of Your General Public is Disabled: A Handbook for Guides in Museums, Zoos, and Historic Houses* (Washington, DC.: Smithsonian Institution, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 1987).

An elegant woman with rich dark hair, Jan has a gift for making people feel heard: always maintaining steady eye contact, nodding thoughtfully as she listens, and repeating your questions as she answers them. In our conversation, she shared how she came to write one of the earliest manuals exploring accessibility issues in museum education. Jan began her career as a classroom teacher for deaf children and arrived to the Smithsonian for a 1-year position established in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) to look at education programs for this audience. Following a Smithsonian grant and ensuing publication in the late 1970s designed to promote awareness of accessibility issues in education and museums, the institution created a full-time position in OESE for Jan, where she stayed until 1991.[163]

While OESE served as a liaison between the Smithsonian and schools in the broader community, the department's collaborations with the museum's education offices led them to understand that general tours were not broadly accessible. Thus Jan's goals when drafting *Part of Your General Public is Disabled* were to "give the docents on the ground tools to improvise" when encountering such visitors.[164] However, when discussing accessibility efforts in museums, she stressed repeatedly that creating accessible education programs was only one part of the equation. In the 1980s, the Smithsonian had bigger accessibility challenges, most saliently developing facilities, exhibitions, and exhibition materials that could accommodate visitors with physical disabilities. As Jan reflected: "The [accessibility] load was being put on the docents to Band-Aid. 'You make it accessible. You make these inaccessible exhibitions accessible.' "

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[163] For the resulting publication, see Harold W. Snider, *Museums and Handicapped Students: Guidelines for Educators* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1977).

[164] As Jan stated in our interview, docents at the time would "repeatedly" say to her: " 'Well, but my general public needs this. But my general public needs this. And I said, 'This is part of your general public. Which is where that [title of the publication] came from.' "

Ultimately, she told me, she wrote the publication "because we needed something for docents who were really out there." As she wrote in her introduction:[165]

> You, as a docent, are used to "playing your audience:" your tour approach and depth of subject matter vary according to whether you have on tour a subject-area scholar, a teenager on spring break, a visitor with general interest in the collection, or all three together. You accommodate their individual needs in the context of your standard tour, you challenge your ability to interest and inform them on many different levels at once. You accept the fact that a program presented in a single way will never reach every person, and you act accordingly.
>
> However, many docents balk at the idea of having disabled visitors on their tours. They say that they don't know how to tour disabled people, that they can't change their tour enough to make it a valid learning experience for persons with disabilities.
>
> The truth is that most museums, zoo, or historic site visitors who are disabled are even more *like* than *unlike* those who are not disabled: they have varied interests, backgrounds, abilities, learning styles, and needs for accommodation. They will challenge your creativity and perception, and perhaps cause you to develop innovative approaches to your standard tour material.

Anticipating with her readers the obvious follow-up question, Majewski nevertheless went on to note: "It may sound as if common sense, sensitivity, and a willingness to adapt are all you need to successfully assist a disabled visitor. For the most part, this is true. So why have a training manual about people with disabilities?"[166]

For museums, accessibility is at once a task, a problem, and (ideally) an institution-wide accomplishment.[167] The introduction to Jan's own manual, by then-secretary of the Smithsonian Robert McCormick Adams, Jr., gestures to this idea in acknowledging that "for years" the institution had "set up, albeit inadvertently, physical and attitudinal barriers that have kept disabled people from enjoying the educational experiences our museums have to offer," among

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[165] Majewski, 1.
[166] Ibid.
[167] In referring to "tasks and problems," I am here indebted to Abbott's call that a sociology of the professions should focus on the history, content, and changing jurisdiction of professional work, rather than the study of professional groups in isolation from one another (Abbott, 314).

them "multi-level buildings, low lighting, mauve-on-beige colored labels, and nonparticipatory tours."[168] Taken together, these examples potentially concern staff across facilities and maintenance, exhibitions and design, curatorial, and educational departments. Thus to understand both the particular form(s) of expertise necessary for leading museum accessibility efforts requires first tracing accessibility's (at times uneasy) fit within museum education.

One way to do so is to compare the varying backgrounds and responsibilities of those professionals overseeing accessibility efforts at their institutions, as well as how they came to oversee them. At the NYBG, staff and contractual educators – like Jan's Smithsonian docents nearly 30 years ago – regularly encountered visitors with disabilities in their school and family programs. However, such efforts ran parallel to, rather than being fully integrated with, the broader oversight of accessibility at the garden. This fell primarily to Visitor Services, and specifically to James Vickers. As the NYBG's Director of Volunteer Services and Administration, James's job required fielding applications for, interviewing and placing all volunteers at the garden, and also overseeing the volunteer guides who lead public tours. About two and a half years into his time at the NYBG, however, he told me senior staff discovered he had a degree in architecture and that a lot of the language and requirements of the ADA were legible to him. Following this, he took over ADA compliance, primarily focused on office and space planning.

Compare James to Lucas. As the Assistant Director of Senior Programs within the AIC's Education Department, Lucas oversaw programs for adults 55 and older ("we're not checking IDs at the door, though," he'd often joke) and also visitors with disabilities, which included by-request American Sign Language (ASL)-interpreted tours for the deaf and tours for the blind and

[168] Majewski, 11.

partially sighted, along with Art in the Moment. Lucas came to museum education from academia, holding undergraduate and graduate degrees in ancient culture and civilization. In one of our early meetings to plan my fieldwork, in which he showed me brochures and training materials while enthusiastically describing the various programs he oversaw, I mentioned my interest in the Art Institute's accessibility efforts as they related to museum facilities: the tasks under James's purview.

Here Lucas stopped to sigh, and then nodded after a beat in a way that seemed both reflective and hopeful. Perhaps, he told me, my looking into this would lead to the "revival of the ADA committee," the museum's aforementioned interdepartmental committee around accessibility issues that he said "died out with the retirement of my predecessor." Lucas had found this committee important and helpful for facilitating communication across the AIC. He stated he personally had "always had a bit of an issue with the fact that museum accessibility has always historically fallen under museum education," asking, rhetorically: "Why is having a wheelchair ramp an educational issue?" More generally, he clarified in later conversation, he felt his ability to respond to such concerns often spanned beyond his jurisdiction:

> **Lucas:** … Accessibility matters that are not related to an education or interpretation – just raw physical access, or if the sinks are not high enough, or the paper towels are not properly located – I mean, these are things that, of course, I have no authority or control over so… I guess that some people in the museum might say: "Oh, that's a Lucas issue." But then when it gets to my desk it's really not, because I have no say in the case of exhibitions, when there is like light-colored text on a light gray backing, and it's very difficult for people even with full vision to be able to read that text. Or the text is too small. Lots of these exhibition and gallery issues [like that] sometimes make their way to my desk, and I try to redirect them.
>
> **Gemma:** But you don't participate in those decisions?
>
> **Lucas:** No. I mean exhibition design … museum education never factored into that. At least, not in this museum. In other museums, yeah, education certainly plays a much larger role in the overall exhibition design, and gallery labels, and interpretation.

Juxtaposing James and Lucas reveals how people come to be tasked with responsibilities for accessibility that otherwise fall beyond their skill sets, thereby raising questions about the ease with which such responsibilities might be executed. It also reveals the wide distribution of people, ideas, and institutional mechanisms that collectively constitute accessibility expertise: in sum, the assemblage of arrangements necessary for accessibility to be accomplished.[169] Some, importantly, are historical. In contrast to the relatively recent accessibility services at the NYBG and AIC, for example, accessibility efforts were formalized at the Met during the 1970s under the tenure of Charles Steiner, a studio artist who accepted a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1976 that first brought him to the museum. As with Silverstein, the AIC, and the ADA, Charles's arrival to the Met coincided with a particularly fertile political moment in the disability movement, specifically the passage of Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973.[170] After procuring a then-unprecedented $30,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to develop programs for "mentally retarded" adults, Charles was hired full-time in 1979 and oversaw programs for "disabled visitors" through the next decade.[171] When Rebecca McGinnis, presently Senior Museum Educator, Access and Community Programs, arrived to the Met, she thus arrived to an institution with sustained attention to accessibility issues.

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[169] As Gil Eyal has argued, to make a distinction between "experts" and "expertise" is to understand that there is a difference between the people who claim jurisdiction over a task, and the objective ability to accomplish that task. In weighing these differences, he maintains it is not enough to focus on people and their skills but rather the process through which particular tasks are realized and the arrangements that must be in place for this to happen. Expertise, he writes, is ultimately "a network connecting together actors, devices, concepts, and institutional and spatial arrangements" Gil Eyal, "For a Sociology of Expertise: The Social Origins of the Autism Epidemic," *American Journal of Sociology* 118, no. 4 (January 2013), 877.

[170] This background, discussed at greater length in this project's introduction, was also cited in the introduction to a manual published by the Met and overseen by Charles Steiner. *Museums and the Disabled,* 1979, 7, accessed in The Metropolitan Museum of Art Services for Visitors with Disabilities [Folder], Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

[171] For the grant application, see "Museum Education for Retarded Adults," 1977, accessed in the National Foundation for the Arts and the Humanities [Folder], Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

She also arrived with a strong investment in thinking about museum accessibility as an assemblage of expertise. This was in part reflected through her professional background. When I asked her how she came to her position at the Met, she responded with a deep breath, and then an extended "oooooookay" to indicate the story was a long one. As a graduate student in art history and a woman with a visual impairment, Rebecca first discovered "finding barriers to accessibility: things like labels that I couldn't read at the Met… and the attitudes of professors, their lack of awareness of what having partial sight meant or what accommodations I might need, or what my abilities might be." It was then she decided she wanted to focus full time on "remov[ing] those barriers for people, because it seemed so simple to me in many regards, from my own personal kind of experience." After graduating, she moved to London, where she attained a second master's degree in museum studies. She also worked on accessibility in museums including the Victoria & Albert and the arts division of the Royal National Institute for the Blind before leaving to run her own accessibility consultancy and eventually, joining the Met.

Given her diverse background and mélange of skill sets, Rebecca – unlike James – had experience with program development for visitors with disabilities. Unlike Lucas, she had the background to answer questions about ADA compliance. She knew, for example, that a cane would not detect wall-mounted objects above 27 inches and thus could be hazardous to the blind; she knew effective exhibit labels should have print a minimum of 24 points or larger and a 70 percent minimum contrast between the print and the paper.[172] But perhaps more importantly, as

[172] For contemporary guidelines on accessibility compliance as it relates to museums, see "Design for Accessibility: A Cultural Administrator's Handbook," National Endowment for the Arts, 2003, accessed September 26, 2016, . https://www.arts.gov/publications/design-accessibility-cultural-administrators. The publication updates much of the information in National Endowment for the Arts, *The Arts and 504*.

much as she believed "there isn't one degree you can do to prepare you for this job," she believed there wasn't one department to which accessibility could be assigned. As she stated, reflecting on her responsibilities at the Met:

> I oversee access coordination, which is the division of education concerned with programs for people with disabilities. But we have sort of three hats. We develop programs specifically tailored to meet the needs of people with disabilities, but we also coordinate accommodations across the museum [for] initiatives and programs not initiated by access. That can be anything that happens in the museum: large-print labels for special exhibitions, sign language interpretation for a gallery talk or a lecture. Anything like that. We also act as internal advisers on accessibility throughout the museum. So we work a lot with just about every department: facilities management, security, visitor services, design.

To this end, she met regularly with staff in other departments to make sure accessibility was front of mind. When I told Rebecca and Deborah Jaffe, Rebecca's colleague in access, that I was interested in speaking with other staff members connected to Met accessibility, they listed from memory 15 names covering multiple staff members in departments including security, visitor services, development, curatorial, operations, design, and digital media. (Rebecca also excitedly proposed the "counsel's office" before acknowledging, sheepishly, the probably necessity of my "limiting things.") At the time I completed my fieldwork in 2015, she had been at the Met for 15 years. Notably, however – despite the position she arrived to, and the groundwork she had undertaken afterwards – the level of involvement she had in institution-wide conversations about accessibility issues had varied over that time. In particular, it had changed along with the leadership of the education department, including across the tenure of three different department chairs in my five years of fieldwork.

Why Educators Carry the Torch

Why is it that a position like Rebecca's – which did much more than programming – was located in the education department, and a principally educational position like Lucas's came to be associated with accessibility at the AIC? In short, why did issues of access so often fall to staff members associated with educational services? Given her acknowledgment that many matters of accessibility span beyond education, I asked Jan in our interview why she thought so many accessibility coordinators were located in museum education departments, or came from education backgrounds. She responded:

> I think the reason that [access staff] ended up in education - or started in all of the education departments primarily - was because those were the people most open to serving their audience. And they were also the ones who were serving their audiences. They were the faces of the museums. And they were trying to deal with usually very inaccessible buildings and exhibitions. And trying to make them accessible. So, I think it makes sense that they end up there, or ended up there, in the beginning.

The experiences of educators I spoke with across the gardens and galleries aligned with Jan's hypothesis. Their shared currency was adaptive expertise: the ability to create museum-going experiences for diverse publics, which provided a necessary foundation for meeting the needs of people with disabilities. However, educators often implicitly (and at times explicitly) took this one step forward to elaborate adaptive expertise's connection to the emotional labor viewed as particularly necessary for this visitor group. This becomes clear when looking at how Met staff members selected access educators. These tended to be seasoned contractual educators understood to have a particular sensibility, as explained by Deborah Jaffe:

> **Deborah:** For the most part… people who work in our programs were already working in the museum with different audiences, and they knew the collection. Some people were recommended to us by other program areas, who would say "I think this person would be really good for your programs, basically."
>
> **Gemma**: What does it mean when someone is particularly "good" for access?
>
> **Deborah:** I think they mean that they're very sensitive people. Intuitive people. It's more a personality thing.

As with other educators, experience also remained the gold standard for training, though with access groups this took on special meaning. Like their colleagues working with other audiences, the 15 Met access educators I interviewed – six full-time staff members, and nine contractual educators who did most of the teaching – had undergraduate and graduate degrees including art and art history, art education, and museum studies. All had a background in teaching adult, student, or family audiences at the Met and often, other museums. But in their interviews, 10 also described the impact of having had siblings with Down's syndrome, family members with dementia, and parents who were social workers or gerontologists. They talked about living with a visual impairment, or being a member of the Deaf community, or having volunteered as a teenager and through college for programs and centers dedicated to people with disabilities.

Access educators' familiarity with the disability community was more than coincidence: it was considered asset for working with access audiences. Two of the answers Jan provided to her own question — "so why have a training manual about people with disabilities?" — regarded people's attitudes toward disabled individuals, which she suggested emerged due to lack of exposure.[173] Access educators at the Met in particular believed that addressing attitudinal misconceptions about visitors with disabilities was an important part of work in access. One spring day, I entered the Met's program ready room, where educators often stocked tote bags with sketching materials for the galleries, checked their e-mail, and otherwise prepared for, or unwound after, the day's programs. An otherwise confident and outspoken longtime contractual educator stood near the room's small round table, her arms folded loosely with her hands

[173] "One reason is that some people feel so uncomfortable around disabled individuals, and see them as so different from non-disabled people, that they fail to use common sense… Second, several sources indicate that the more non disabled people learn about disabled people, the more positive their attitudes are toward them." Majewski, 1.

hugging her torso, completely still. Struck by her silence, I asked if something had happened. She explained, slowly, that she had just led a program for a group of older students with developmental disabilities, during which one student had gotten startled in the galleries and, in reacting, accidentally hit her in the stomach. I asked immediately if she was ok, to which she responded, nodding, that since it'd happen she'd been thinking about the nearby security guard's reaction. She wasn't sure if he knew hers was an access program, and if he did, that such encounters were rare and that the student had not had malicious intent.

Given their concern about misperceptions, much of the training access coordinators led for their educators and other staff members regarded what Met staff called "disability awareness" training. Some of this was informal and geared toward easing some of the uncertainty with which educators otherwise approached access groups. For example, when I asked Lucas if he did any particular training for volunteers leading programs for visitors who were blind or partially sighted, he told me that the first part of training for any new educator interested in working with this group involves "don'ts," which he felt entailed a "certain kind of sensitivity." These included reminding volunteers not to pull people's arms when wandering between galleries by explaining that volunteers are "guiding" such visitors, but not "dragging them like children." He would tell them to check impulses to say things like "so you can see," but if they did say things like that, "don't make a big deal out of it," here waving his arms a bit, performatively, to demonstrate the exaggerated apologies that could result: "Oh, I'm so sorry!" I observed several such conversations occur with volunteers interested in leading such programs:

> Passing through the glass doors taking us from the open, airy Modern Wing toward the Asian galleries, Lucas takes a moment to tell the volunteer, Larry, about how to lead someone blind through a doorway. He states it's best to first announce the door and then, tell the visitor you will lead them through. Here he cuts himself off to demonstrate by turning up his elbow, moving sideways through the door to leave the hypothetical visitor behind him. Now through the doorway, Lucas explains that often people will take the

> back of your arm or elbow rather than the arm itself. Also, he continues, "like most people," no one likes to be grabbed by the arm and dragged. He makes a gesture as we continue to walk, imitating this, pulling on an imaginary person in an exaggerated fashion. "I mean, you wouldn't like that," he says, with a smile. So, he continued, it's always best to ask: "Can I help you?" or "How can I help you?"
>
> Lucas and two volunteer tour guides – Beatrice and Peggy – and I are standing in the Main Lobby, waiting for the two visitors to arrive. Beatrice will lead the tour today, and Peggy, who is interested in becoming involved with such programs, will be observing. Peggy asks Lucas a question about Dave, a repeat visitor who has been blind since birth and will be attending the tour today. She refers to Dave as "blind" and then immediately raises her hand to her mouth, shaking her head repeatedly as though ashamed. She then asks, hesitantly, her words now proceeding more slowly if it's "perhaps, instead, visually-impaired?" After this she states, by way of explanation, that she has a relative who is blind, and he self-identifies that way. Lucas says in a reassuring tone that she shouldn't worry so much, as Dave is always the first person to say things like: "Well, see you later!" at the end of a tour.

In more formalized trainings, staff members overseeing accessibility placed such directives and "don't"s in context, linking debates in disability politics to the broader ethos of access advanced in museum education. As part of the training for new volunteer tour guides at the NYBG, for example, James discussed the importance of understanding that "disability is not the totality of a person's experience" and that "people with disabilities are *living* with their disabilities, and are not suffering from, victims of, or afflicted by those disabilities." To understand that serving visitors with disabilities meant first and foremost overcoming challenges to their participation in the museum, James showed a PowerPoint slide discussing the legal definition of "equal opportunity" protecting against discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, and other categories of identification. Similarly, at the Met, Rebecca and her staff led mandatory Disability Awareness Training for volunteers across the museum (organized by visitor services) and guards (organized by security). She led a version of this training for Met Education staff members, in which she contrasted the "medical" model of disability (which, she stated, is often equated with "illness, diagnosis, or cure," a "health problem" "situated within the

person"); the "tragedy" model of disability (in which "people are brave, to be pitied" and in which people often ask " 'isn't it amazing they can do that?' "); and the "social" model of disability. This latter, she added, emerged from "thinking about equality as a human right" wherein the difficulties disabled people face (rather than innate to the person) were social. Because "you can't change if people have a disability or not," the key, Rebecca explained, was to break down, rather than set up or maintain, barriers to inclusion.

Sorting

As we know from the preceding chapter, museum educators organize visitors' museum-going experiences by first segmenting them into pre-established categories. These provide the templates for program format and execution that educators then elaborate through interaction.[174] Given that educators for the most part carry the access torch, it follows that they must similarly endeavour to sort out "who counts" as disabled. The challenges they encounter reflect the persistence of institutional constraints on their professional practice, while also emerging from broader debates about disability, identity, and inclusion ongoing beyond museum walls. Together, however, they underscore at once the enduring necessity of "adaptive expertise" in initiatives for visitors with disabilities, as well as the constraints on fully realizing it.

Disability: A Constitutive Category

Formal definitions and statistics of disability offer a starting point for tracing the presumed contours of the category, while also revealing the general difficulties in bounding it.

[174] As Susan Leigh Star and Geoffrey Bowker have noted, classifications facilitate the accomplishment of practical work, consisting of a "set of boxes (metaphorical or literal) into which things can be put to then do some kind of work – bureaucratic or knowledge production." Susan Leigh Star and Geoffrey Bowker, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 10.

These standards tend to conceptualize disability as the physical or mental anomalies within a given population, measured by a person's specific impairment or condition, limitations on activities, and/or departure from the routines of everyday life.[175] The United States Census Bureau's 2010 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) offers one recent example. SIPP identifies 56.7 million people (close to 20 percent of the U.S. population) as having as having some form of disability.[176] The study partitions disability into "communicative," "physical," and "mental" domains, wherein communicative disabilities include, among others, the blind and visually-impaired and deaf and hearing-impaired. Mental disabilities include people with learning, intellectual, and developmental disabilities, along with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Physical disabilities encompass people who use a wheelchair, walker, cane, or crutches, as well as those who experience "activity limitation" due to myriad conditions ranging from a hernia to stroke to thyroid problem. Such activity limitations include difficulties in completing physical (lifting; grasping), daily (dressing, bathing), and instrumental (managing money; preparing meals; using the phone) tasks.

Studies like SIPP vary along several dimensions, including within and across cultures and according to the definition and measure used or the population sampled.[177] This partly explains

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[175] The ADA defines disability with respect to an individual as (1) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual, (2) the record of such impairment, or (3) being regarded as having such an impairment. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), 1990, accessed September 26, 2016, http://www.ada.gov/pubs/adastatute08.htm#12102, Sec. 3(2), 42 U.S.C. 12102.

[176] Matthew W. Brault, "Americans with Disabilities: 2010," United States Census Bureau, 2012, accessed September 26, 2016, http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p70-131.pdf.

[177] As Brault, 2, notes in his introduction to the SIPP report: "Readers should take care when comparing the estimates from this report to other disability estimates from other data sources because of differences in the criteria used to define disability." As he further acknowledges, competing ideas about social versus medical definitions of disability (discussed at greater length later in this chapter) have also substantially influenced models of its statistical calculation over time. For different reviews on this point, see Barbara M. Altman, "Disability Definitions, Models, Classification Schemes, and Applications," in *Handbook of Disability Studies*, ed. Gary L. Albrecht, Katherine D. Seelman, and Michael Bury (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 97-122 and Glenn T. Fujiura and Violet Rutkowski-Kmitta, "Counting Disability," in *Handbook of Disability Studies,* ed. Gary L. Albrecht, Katherine D. Seelman, and Michael Bury (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 123-144.

statistical discrepancies. As the medical sociologist and disability rights activist Irving Zola has noted, the number of people in the U.S. with a disability documented in legislation grew by 11 million, or 34 percent, between the passing of section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA in 1990.[178] Unexplained by attendant population growth, the increase could undoubtedly be accounted for by changing methodology.[179] (Accordingly, Zola cited one review of a 1969 study that asked respondents – with a tone of implied desperation – "Is there ANY way in which your child is limited?")[180] However, in reflecting on "what we count and what it tells us," Zola suggests the increase emerged as much from conceptual as procedural blind spots: specifically, an effort to make disability "fixed" and "dichotomous," when people might better conceptualize the category as "fluid" and "continuous." As he points out, the length of time that people live with their disabilities has been steadily increasing. Many conditions commonly cited as disabilities (including AIDS, cancer, and diabetes) may experience a decline in mortality rates due to advances in medical science, with no comparable reduction in morbidity. Demographic shifts corresponding with a rapidly aging Baby Boomer population further reveals that regardless of its definition, disability increases with age. Ultimately, Zola argues, disability is a category that may indeed include us all at some point.[181]

Within museum education, disability similarly functions as a "fluid" and "continuous" category. Unsurprisingly, this presents some challenges for a profession that organizes its

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[178] Irving Zola, "Disability Statistics, What We Count and What It Tells Us," *Journal of Disability Policy Studies* 4, no. 2 (July 1993): 13-14.

[179] See also Eyal et. al for an examination of how the rise in autism diagnoses constituting a so-called "epidemic" varies across cultural contexts. In particular, the authors demonstrate how a particular state or country's autism prevalence correlates with its rate of deinstitutionalization following the 1970s. The higher the rate of deinstitutionalization – defined as the release of developmentally disabled persons from institutional to community care – the higher the rate of autism reported. Gil Eyal et. al. 2010. *The Autism Matrix: The Social Origins of the Autism Epidemic* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010).

[180] P. B. Budetti and P.W. Newacheck, "Chronic disease and disability: Are the risks increasing?" *Mobius* 4, no. 3 (1984): 14-19, cited in Zola, "Disability Statistics," 14.

[181] For Zola's defense of universalism as it relates to disability and disability policy, see Irving Zola, "Toward the Necessary Universalizing of Disability Policy," *The Milbank Quarterly* 67, sup. 2, part 2 (1989): 401-26.

clientele into subgroups. The history of the Art Institute of Chicago's "Lifelong Learning" program, located under the "Adult Programs" division of the museum's education department, offers one example of classificatory slippage that speaks concretely to the relationship of disability and aging.[182] After the passage of the ADA, the AIC developed a "senior program" that came to include various accessibility services. This shift began in the mid-1990s when Mickie Silverstein proposed an outreach program offering slideshow presentations to older adults at off-site senior centers and assisted living facilities. The initiative, currently termed "Art Insights," joined the Art Institute's existing Elderhostel (now Road Scholar) program. Through Mickie's participation in the Art Institute's ADA Steering Committee – an interdepartmental coalition of museum staff dedicated to accessibility issues – these enhanced "senior programs" grew to include tours and additional resources for visitors with visual impairments in the early 2000s. When Lucas replaced Mickie in 2006, he thus inherited a hybrid program area, one that would grow to include Art in the Moment: the initiative bringing Lucas and Lisa together.

Notably, this hybridity occurred not just in format – i.e., "Lifelong Learning" initiatives that included programs for seniors, and for visitors with disabilities – but also in practice. For example, one volunteer senior programs educator, Margaret, who led off-site talks slide through Art Insights told me she and her co-presenters had begun circulating reproductions of artworks some years ago, in addition to projecting images. Over time, she'd come to understand that many older adults had visual impairments and thus experienced difficulty seeing her slides even though, she noted quietly, shaking her head: "They just wouldn't say anything." When I asked Lucas about the relationship between "seniors" and "access" in his program area, his answer

[182] See, for example, Irving Zola, "Aging and Disability: Toward a Unifying Agenda," *Educational Gerontology* 14, no. 5 (August 1988): 365-387.

further underscored how "disability" functions as a constitutive category:

> Yeah, there's an overlap [between the two]: to an extent. But then we often find that there comes up a hot potato situation where a segment that might not perfectly fit into one category or the other and nobody knows what to do with them so. But just historically, my position has been responsible for, or has been, somewhat, the accessibility advocate for the Art Institute. [This began] 20 years ago or so when Mickie Silverstein started senior programs. She was a voice and support of accessibility around the time, even when the ADA was new. But older adults may often have mobility concerns and so, well, then that just kind of naturally fit with senior programs… But then you get into, of course, there's not only adults with disabilities, but children. So then – since I work specifically with an adult population – that gets into different territory, wherein of course other members of museum education need to get involved.

The Information Deficit

The prior discussion highlights how educators may indeed create programs dedicated to (following SIPP) people with "communicative, physical, [and/or] mental" disabilities. However, such visitors of course fit appropriately into other established audience categories organized by age (adults; teens) or institutional units (schools; families). In particular, Lucas's acknowledgment of the slippery relationship of access and aging gives some context to his encounter with Lisa described at the beginning of this chapter.

Given all this, one potential tactic for classifying audiences with disabilities in the museum is not to do so at all, allowing the existing aforementioned education categories to serve as the primary "sorting" criteria. Along these lines, as Aaron from the Met noted in our conversations, his educator training focused on approaches for "*all* learners," acknowledging that "even if people say they've never worked with visitors with a disability, they're wrong about that: they've seen them." Further, James at the NYBG said he knew from his volunteers that visitors with developmental disabilities attended tours at the garden. Having himself participated for three years in The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Art's Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability (LEAD) conference – a professional conference for accessibility coordinators

– he was particularly struck by recommendations from institutions to create inclusive teaching strategies or "programs [designed] for everybody."

Educators' emphasis on a "social model" of disability suggests such efforts toward inclusive teaching served, in no small part, as a normative guiding philosophy. However, they were often additionally a matter of necessity. School programs in particular – as a result of seminal mid-nineteenth-century shifts in education policy – regularly served students with disabilities (often discussed as "special needs") alongside those without.[183] Further, as discussed previously, educators' ability to gain advance knowledge about (and thus prepare for) visitors was often curtailed by existing organizational procedures, among them scheduling systems. Along these lines, online registration for CBG family programs requests the child's first and last name, birth date, and number of attending adults. In one such program, a woman entered the classroom with a cane, escorted by her son. Following the event, I asked the educator over e-mail if she had known a blind parent would be attending, and if so, how she had planned accordingly. She responded that she had "no idea" anyone attending had a visual impairment, and that the only planning time she'd had was while the participants were eating dinner (after their arrival, but before the formal program began). At that point, the educator asked a volunteer to shadow the woman and her son and "step in to help them out when necessary." Similarly, in advance of one NYBG school program at the Everett Children's Adventure Garden, an education staff member noted that while they had heard from the registrar the group attending would include "special needs" students, they had been unable to get further clarification as to what that meant. As another staff educator in school programs explained in her interview:

> We get the [school group's] grade. We get how many kids are in the class. Sometimes we'll find out if they have special needs, and even what the special needs are. And

[183] Ong-Dean, 13-38.

> sometimes we don't…. I wish we could get more information specific to, like, "on the autistic spectrum" or "use wheelchairs and walkers," or whatever the needs are. Or different learning styles, whatever. Just capturing a bit more information would help us better prepare and set up our program stations. And [similarly] … whether [the school group is] ESL and what the language is. Maybe we have an instructor who speaks that language, and can translate. It's important. But it isn't always, either on our end or on the school's end, an awareness to communicate that.

Educators' displeasure – often coupled with resignation – about the information deficit they faced in scheduling reveals that despite efforts toward inclusion, visitors with disabilities had particular needs that had to be accommodated. Further, such varied considerably, thereby revealing the internal heterogeneity of "disability" as a category as well as its relational character. One of the tenets of a social model of disability is that disability is not simply about a categorical syndrome or quality inherent to a person, but also about that person's interaction with a particular social environment.[184] For example, if one breaks both legs and must get around with a wheelchair, they are not "disabled" when entering the first floor of a building via a ramp, but they are if the building only has stairs. As Zola has noted, "some physical differences become important only in certain social situations," and museums are no exception.[185] Thus, in the context of a museum tour or gardening workshop, a visitor with type 2 diabetes – who may well be categorized as "disabled" in the context of a study like SIPP – would not necessarily be an "access" concern and thus would not fall under educators' jurisdiction. Further, accommodations

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[184] For a broader discussion of how tensions between medical and social models of "disability" challenge efforts to define it, see Mike Bury, "Defining and Researching Disability: Challenges and Responses," in *Exploring the Divide*, ed. Colin Barnes and Geoffrey Mercer (Leeds, UK: The Disability Press, 1996), 18-38. As Bury suggests, the finding that some medical or "disability" labels stick to particular groups and not others is explained by broader research in medical sociology regarding medicalization and social control, as well as the social construction of medical knowledge. For foundational sources and reviews, see, Irving Zola, "Medicine as an Institution of Social Control," *Sociological Review* 20, no. 4 (November 1972), 487-504; M.R. Bury, "Social Constructionism and the Development of Medical Sociology," *Sociology of Health and Illness* 8, no. 2 (June 1986), 137- 169; Peter Conrad and Joseph W. Schneider, *Deviance and Medicalization: From Badness to Sickness* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1992); Peter Conrad, *The Medicalization of Society: On the Transformation of Human Conditions into Treatable Disorders* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); and Peter Conrad and Kristin K. Barker, "The Social Construction of Illness: Key Insights and Policy Implications," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 51, S (2010): S67-S79.

[185] Zola, "Toward the Necessary Universalizing," 406.

for some disabled constituencies are not necessary for others, as an educator might plan to discuss tightly clustered objects when leading a school tour including two students in wheelchairs. However, they would likely not need to alter question- and dialogue-based program content in the same way they would if leading a tour for a group of non-verbal students on the autism spectrum.

The Met: A Case Study in Access as an Interactional Accomplishment

For educators leading *program*s, adaptations for access groups most often regarded their institutions' sensory conventions. For example, visitors with low vision in the art museum required extra verbal description of artworks in order to interpret and speak about them. If garden staff expect that a picturesque scene in a botanical garden is intended to stand alone as aesthetically pleasing, it cannot do so for a group whose visitors are primarily in wheelchairs and thus for whom the path to the view is rocky, or the sightlines are blocked. Taking such factors into account was thus often a crucial factor in accessibility planning.

However, doing so did, of course, require educators have both some degree of control over their scheduling process and, to some extent, differentiate among audiences. Regardless, even those educators who did differentiate among audiences to respond to their particular needs – sensory or otherwise – faced their own set of challenges. Consider the Met's Education Department, wherein staff members shared with me both efforts to refine scheduling processes so as to better accommodate students with disabilities, and also to serve visitors with disabilities more broadly through a specific "access" (accessibility) division. The access division of Met education offers in-gallery and studio programs created specifically for four subgroups, reflecting the areas of disability that would most significantly mediate modal museum-going

experiences: the blind and visually-impaired; the deaf and hard-of-hearing; visitors with developmental disabilities; and visitors with dementia and their caregivers (thereby mapping, loosely, onto the SIPP's domains of disability). By-request individual and group tours further broaden the scope of access services.

At the Met, program registration for access programs is handled directly by access staff.[186] Those who call Sarah, one Met staff member who oversees registration for access programs, skip one fundamental first step of sorting – does the visitor group consist of or include visitors with disabilities – by self-selecting into programs developed for these audiences. When they do so, they encounter a registration process Sarah described as focused on connecting with people through conversation and learning more about them. Acknowledging her own "preferences" and "personal style," she nonetheless believed this interactional process was more helpful than automated systems for registration:

> If I have [potential visitors] on the phone I'm able to have more of a conversation with them and can just ask really open-ended questions of like, 'Tell me more about your group.' 'What kinds of things do you think would be helpful for the educator to know?' If it's e-mail or a quick request, sometimes that information never gets transmitted and it's simply: 'This is a group of adults with developmental disabilities.' As we know, there's so many differences [within that]. That's such a broad category.

Sarah further felt Met Escapes, the museum's program for people with dementia and their caregivers, provided a particularly salient example of the importance of an interaction-based registration process. For two specific programs – Met Escapes and Discoveries, a family program for children and adults on the autism spectrum and those with learning and developmental disabilities – Sarah filled out intake forms for first-time visitors, which were then organized into binders for access educators' consultation. For Met Escapes in particular, she used

[186] Scheduling for all other Met programs were handled by visitor services. With access, in the words of one senior staffer, "they know just to send it to us."

these forms to arrange participants into groups and also placed them in folders for program educators' day-of reference. During Sarah's tenure at the Met, she had refined the Met Escapes form and her use of it to take into account her finding that it was not always easy for care partners to share specific information about the stage of dementia and associated behaviors. Using the example of a first-time registrant calling about a recently diagnosed spouse, she stated: "They're not, for the most part, going to say: 'Oh, it's early dementia,' or, 'It's mid-stage'," later adding: "I mean, they just probably heard the term 'dementia' a couple of months ago. They have no idea what's going on."

Accordingly, the Met Escapes intake form asks about age and accommodations for physical disabilities (such as if program participants would benefit from a wheelchair or assistive listening devices). However, it also included more subjective questions designed to enhance educators' preparation and improve visitor experience, such as visitors' past profession and hobbies, as well as whether the participant with dementia "enjoys social environments" or is "nervous around crowds," or whether they are "very chatty or mostly non-verbal." Regarding the latter, Sarah explained her intent was to use these questions as a guideline, rather than script, for conversation and information-gathering:

> I'll try to fold in the questions as I talk about the program, [like] "We typically divide into smaller groups of about eight people and the tour is very discussion-based, would you say your husband enjoys being social or is he more of an introvert?" Then that naturally can lead to "Oh, my husband used to be quite the chatterbox, but now has some trouble with word retrieval: but I think he'll love being in a group setting."

Ultimately, she stated:

> [Scheduling is] a lot of intuitive learning how to read people and understand how much to push, not to push, just let people come and we'll figure out when they're here. The whole purpose of Access is not to have any barriers to participation. So, if someone is already anxious about coming and then I ask them a question it might put them off. So, it's like just let them come and we'll figure it out when they come to the thing.

Sarah's registration process – centered on the informality of an open dialogue that could be adapted based on a prospective visitor's specific responses – highlights both educators' ongoing efforts to create positive museum-going experiences for their visitors, and, perhaps more importantly, a perception that scheduling access programs required a certain amount of delicacy: yet another example of the emotional intelligence educators associated with access work.[187] Educators across the board elaborated this idea by referencing the stigma they felt mediated visitors' self-identification as disabled.[188] (Here, we might revisit the AIC volunteer educator's observation that older adults with visual impairments would not directly communicate to her their difficulties seeing slide presentations). This occurred not only in segregated, but also inclusive, programs, as evident in my conversations with school program coordinators. Consider this observation from Abby at the AIC, who (like Sarah) had her school program docents follow up on classroom teacher's online registration with a phone call asking teachers whether students had "special needs" (emphasis mine):

> Special needs can be defined in so many different ways. I think the most important thing to understand is the way in which the teacher is defining her students or his students as having special needs and what that means. [And] once the teacher defines that, understanding from our end what that means. I think we often do. And sometimes we don't. *Or sometimes a teacher doesn't wish to identify students with special needs, but they currently have special needs.* We find out when they come for their visit.

Or, consider my first meeting with Aaron at the Met, wherein he discussed his efforts to evolve online registration forms for school tours so as to better serve students with disabilities.

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[187] Here it bears note that even if Sarah had for whatever reason been interested in diagnoses, educators by both law and custom do not ask about specific disabilities, thereby necessitating they seek alternate kinds of information.

[188] According to Erving Goffman, stigma – rather than solely the intrinsic attribute of a person – is negotiated through interaction, and such "spoiled identities" are managed before a "stigmatizer" (or the "normal") and "stigmatized." Goffman's theory aligns with the social model of disability insofar as his conception is that stigma is a relationship between an individual and social setting with a particular set of expectations. As Bowker and Star, 44, have further noted, the "practical politics" of classifying and standardizing reveal there are "always advantages and disadvantages to being visible, [which] becomes crucial in the workability of the scheme." Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc,, 1963).

Opening the form for me on his computer, he highlighted a few key things, among them four groups into which the teacher requesting the tour could assign his or her group, including general education; inclusion; integrated co-teaching (ICT); and special education classes.[189] In the last two boxes of the form, where there were opportunities for "open comments" (asking educators to "tell us anything else we should know"), he said that they had worked very hard to tweak the language for the first sentence. "Please tell us about your students' learning styles (i.e. visual, tactile, kinesthetic) so we can improve the experience, and so forth." At this point, he paused, looking at me to say I'd soon probably come across in my research the experience of teachers of students with "special needs" not wanting to volunteer information because they were afraid. Originally, they didn't have the "i.e."'s, and people were providing answers like "my kids are great!" "they're very enthusiastic!" "Well, great, thank you," he said (as though responding to them): "But that can't really help us with teaching them."

Not long after, I shadowed Deborah Jaffe at the Met, who had been asked to lead a special education tour. Prior to the program, she had forwarded me a booking e-mail from the teacher. In the "open comments" section, the teacher noted her students had a "simple learning disability" and "short attention spans" but were "not physically handicapped." They would learn best, she'd written, when "moving around, interacting with their environment, seeing and touching everything… for short time periods." I asked Deborah if this sort of descriptive information was typical, and she said it was. However, she added, "even until very recently,

[189] All but the "general education" choice were defined in the form with supplementary information, as follows: "Inclusion (general education classes that include some special education students); Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) (classes in which a general education teacher and a special education teacher teach students with and without disabilities together); Special Education (classes of students with IEPs taught by special education teachers)." "School Group Visit Request Form | The Metropolitan Museum of Art," Metmusem.org, accessed December 30, 2015, https://www.metmuseum.org/visit/plan-your-visit/group-visits/school-groups/school-group-visit-request-form.

teachers were very afraid" to volunteer information about their classes and "how they learned," so there was "lots of training on how we use language to get the information we need."

All told, the process of "sorting" visitors with disabilities so as to adapt to their needs often necessitated, as with other visitor groups, adapting through interaction. Even though educators agreed visitors with disabilities needed particular accommodations, they could not consistently make those in advance due to several factors: because the "fluid, continuous" disability category and ethos of inclusion mediated efforts to distinguish such visitors; because getting advance information about program participants was limited by existing organizational procedures; and because of the stigma associated with self-identification. Regarding the latter, to be sure, not all visitors held back (as Sarah noted: "Moms with kids with developmental disabilities, she's been doing this her whole life. She'll tell me what his diagnosis is, if he's verbal. She knows all the lingo like 'verbal,' 'ambulatory,' all of that kind of thing.") Additionally, as one can see with the Met, some museums were able to get more information than others, and through established programs served repeat visitors. However, they were also not immune to the problem of information deficit, as it often spanned beyond scheduling into the actual programs. Consider these two moments from the Met's "Picture This!" program, a guided tour program focused on describing artworks for the blind and visitors with visual impairments:

> Jeanette, a retired teacher, had arrived to the education center carrying a folded-up cane in her hand. She smiled at the staff member checking her in without focusing her eyes directly on the educators' face. Before the program began, a freelance educator, Abigail, sat down to chat with Jeanette and the other two program participants. Abigail had worked with the other two women closely in prior programs, and having found out from Jeanette that this was her first Picture This! Program, Abigail then asked her, in an even tone, about the extent of Jeannette's vision. For example, could Jeannette see color? "Yes, but only some," Jeannette responded, and then Abigail extended her arms a bit to bring her bright red print dress into Jeannette's field of vision. She said: "For example, can you see the color on my dress?" To this, Jeannette said no, shaking her head, adding with a smile: "Perhaps if it was, you know, a bright orange..." Abigail, again very evenly,

said: “Okay. Because this is a pretty full red.” She nodded to herself, twice, as though making a mental note.

An older couple, Alex and Anna Maria, were visiting from San Diego and attending Picture This! with their son-in-law. They’d found out about the program online, and the visitors scheduled to accompany them were no-shows. In pre-program conversation with their educator, Nora, the family mentioned they’d never been to the Met. This led Nora to suggest they go “off theme” (that day, “Visions of Spring”) to instead do a tour of the Met’s greatest hits. She first proposed this to Anna Maria, who responded: “I think he’d love that.” Nora then suggested the plan to the full group and asked: “What do you think?” “Oh yes, yes!” Everyone agreed, nodding and smiling broadly. After ascending the elevator to the Greek and Roman galleries, Nora said to Alex, her tone gentle, her voice somewhat slow: “Alex: do you mind if I ask you about the degree of your sight? Can you see light, for example?” Alex paused for the briefest of moments and then said, simply, “Well, sometimes if I am in areas that have a good lot of light, I can see it and…” Here, his voice trailed off and Nora nodded, asking: “Can you see silhouettes?” Another brief pause and then, a slight smile as he said, slowly, “No… I can’t really…” Nearly cutting him off, Anna Maria interrupted: “He really can’t see anything,” shaking her head. Alex, not looking at or toward her, said simply that he’d lost his sight three and a half years ago. Nora then responded: “So, you remember color.” “Oh yes, yes,” he said, loudly and firmly for the first time, nodding emphatically.” “OK,” Nora said, and then added: “Well, thank you. I’m just asking so I know how much to describe.”

These encounters emphasize not only efforts by educators to curate tailored museum-going experiences for visitors with disabilities – in this case, adapting the sensory conventions of the art museum for people who do not primarily experience the world visually – but also to seek information of various kinds to do so. Some information was general: Nora knowing her program participants hadn’t been to the Met before enabled her to propose a highlights tour, rather than offering them a thematic tour. But some was specific, such as ascertaining the degree of vision visitors with visual impairments have in order to understand relevant points of reference (such as color) and the degree and kind of adaptations necessary (such as description). These pre-tour conversations also reveal the care with which that information was sought and hesitancy with which it was often volunteered. Ultimately, this process underscores the enduring challenges to educators’ adaptive expertise in access programming.

Specializing

My discussion so far reveals that educators for the most part rely upon their adaptive expertise (and its component emphasis on emotional intelligence and labor) to lead access programs, an approach that resonates with a "social model" of disability aimed at breaking down barriers to facilitate participation for diverse audiences. In particular, I have shown how educators strive to work within this model of assess-and-adapt even despite substantial constraints on assessment from scheduling systems, episodic program structures, and varying degrees of experience with access audiences. In other ways, however, access programs differed from other education programs. These included not only the accommodations necessary for particular visitor publics, but also – and most saliently – the recreational therapists variously incorporated into museum education departments to work with visitors with disabilities.

Such therapists were on staff in two institutions I studied, and they worked solely with visitor groups that fell within access. First, as we have seen at the AIC, art therapists like Deb collaborated with Lucas and his volunteers to lead the Art in the Moment program for visitors with dementia. Second, and perhaps more significantly, at the CBG, horticultural therapists – professionals trained in the use of gardening as a clinical modality – led accessibility efforts through the garden's horticultural therapy services program, located within the Garden's Department of Community and Education. As I discuss in this section, while facing similar institutional constraints, educators and therapists differed in key ways that impacted the organization of visitors' experience. For therapists, program goals were clearer: they were aimed, fittingly, at realizing therapeutic outcomes. Thus therapists' program formats – concentrated singularly around hands-on activities – were less fluid, and their emphasis on adaptive expertise less prominent.

The Impossibility of Therapy

Establishing this difference first requires taking a step back to explain how, exactly, recreational therapists come to figure into museums anyway. The horticultural therapy program at the Chicago Botanic Garden offers one way to begin exploring this question. Notably, the initiative shares some defining features of its access counterparts at the Met, AIC, and NYBG. Its program origins were associated with a particular figurehead: in this case, Gene Rothert. Gene was a horticulture student at Southern Illinois University in 1976, when he suffered a spinal cord injury in a climbing accident. As he explained in our interview, while undergoing physical therapy at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, he was exposed to a variety of rehabilitative resources and vocational and rehabilitation counselors who "hooked [him] up" with an internship in the CBG's burgeoning horticultural therapy program. Gene would go on to oversee the program for the next three decades, overseeing its expansion from the development department into museum education, the founding of the CBG's horticultural therapy certificate training program, and the opening of the Buehler Enabling Garden, a fully accessible garden on the CBG's main campus designed to facilitate gardening opportunities for visitors with various forms of disability.

As the youngest institution among my case studies, the CBG's founding was nearly contemporaneous with the Civil Rights and disability movements and, thus perhaps unsurprisingly, its accessibility initiatives.[190] Archival materials from this time and other

[190] Some archival material in Gene's personal files, which I had the chance to explore during my research, dates the founding of the CBG's horticultural therapy program to 1957, when the Garden implemented programs at five schools serving "physically, mentally, and emotionally handicapped" student in south Chicago. At the time, the CBG was a garden overseen by the Chicago Horticultural Society, which would in 1962 agree to fund and manage a new public garden that broke ground in 1965 and opened in 1972. In 1976, the CBG opened the "Learning Garden for the Disabled," specifically designed to be accessible for gardeners with physical disabilities. This galvanized interest on the part of the institution to formalize their horticultural therapy services, later supported by the CCT grant they received in December 1977.

reflections on the founding of the program suggest an impetus to account for the CBG's social role, as well as a new interest in people with disabilities as a growing visitor demographic. For example, in the CBG's 1977 grant application that would result in a sizable three-year grant for HT from the Chicago Community Trust, James Daubert, then the Director of Horticultural Therapy Services, stated: "The Botanic Garden of the Chicago Horticultural Society offers an exceptional opportunity for handicapped people to learn and enjoy the plant world. Our nature trail, greenhouse, tram tour, and Rehabilitation Garden offer an especially valuable resource for the proposed program."

Why incorporate recreational therapists into museum access programs? The instrumental language and logic framing the formation of the horticultural therapy program offers one answer: in short, because they at once underscore the worth of museum collections, increase access, and highlight how museums can "do good" through therapeutic intervention. This rationale persisted beyond the 1970s, as the woman who replaced Gene – Barb Kreski – had 30 years of experience in occupational therapy, an asset that outweighed her not having any formal training in horticulture or plant science. The assemblage of expertise necessary for achieving museum accessibility offers another explanation for the relevance of therapeutic staff. After all, when developing *Part of Your General Public is Disabled,* Jan Majewski herself had relied on an advisory committee of 19 individuals, including education specialists staffed in hospitals and occupational therapists.[191] Such advisors contributed content defining various disabilities, explaining their origins, effects, and associated behaviors, and providing relevant citations for future research.

However, a third explanation for the incorporation of these professionals into museums

[191] Majewski, ix

regards the professional similarities they shared with museum educators. For example, if exposure to people with various forms of disability was one helpful determining criteria for proficiency in access work, Barb came to the CBG with decades of experience working with people with disabilities in hospitals and in the Chicago Public School system. The two art therapists I interviewed at the AIC similarly had experience working with clients in a range of institutions – hospitals, social service agencies, foster homes, homeless shelters, counseling centers, day programs – in addition to completing the clinical hours required for their master's degrees in art therapy. Though they had ultimately pursued therapeutic, rather than educational, work, five of the six consulting or staff therapists I interviewed also shared with educators a background in their museum's area of specialization, including degrees or training in studio art, art history, landscape architecture, horticulture, and plant and soil science.

Perhaps most importantly, museum educators and art and horticultural therapists faced similar institutional constraints and in many ways, these mediated the accomplishment of "therapy" in the museum setting. For one, therapists I interviewed described the professionalization of their fields as ongoing. When I first asked Deb, the consulting art therapist for AIC's Art in the Moment, how she defined art therapy, she hesitated to give me a formal definition: "It's changed over the years, I think, because my practice has changed. And I think that there is, again, such a variety of the way that people can practice that it's become a challenge for me to come up with an all-inclusive definition." Similarly, Alicia Green, a horticultural therapist at the CBG, stated: "Horticultural therapy is … still a very unorganized, very young profession in terms of certification. There is no certification. There are people who are actively practicing hort therapy who aren't [registered]." The "therapy" label was further muddied when implemented in the museum, as these therapists often discussed when reflecting on the ever-

present challenges of information deficit in episodic programs with one-time visitors. (In one particularly memorable program, Alicia, waiting in the garden for a group to arrive, received a radio call from a staff member to which she responded, calmly: "Oh, they are children? I thought they were adults today. That'll be interesting.") All told, while identifying as therapists, none of the therapists I interviewed described the programs they led as therapy. As Barb explained it to me: "We're not like therapists in the sense that we see the same clients over and over again and can work towards goals or biomarkers. For example, if we had a child with sensory defensiveness come to us, we could work toward touch goals in their experiences of the plant." However, she added, the "therapy experience of moving from here to there is not something that we can accomplish when sometimes we are only seeing these groups once in the course of a season."

The Organization of Therapeutic Experience

Ultimately, then, educators and therapists were aligned in a shared general goal to create positive museum-going experiences for visitors organized around museum collections. Where they differed most substantially, however, was in their understanding of what role those museum collections should play and the formats through which visitors should engage them. For museum educators, the objects were end game. As discussed in this chapter and previously, museum educators drew on constructivist theories of education to discuss meeting visitors where they were so as to increase, if not their understanding, at least their appreciation of art and nature. This idea resonated in their definitions of museum education, wherein those I interviewed stated in various ways (to borrow from a Met staff member): "We're [as museum educators] not turning everyone into artists or even art historians. I'm just trying to teach people to access the

museum on their own terms." Along similar lines, in a volunteer training for the NYBG's public tour guides, Jamie offered tips and tricks to "communicate information" about plant science, arguing to do so would increase visitors' willingness to engage:

> I'm sure many people thought of science as a fact-based, knowledge-based kind of thing that you got spoon-fed in school. Think of how bored you were as a middle-schooler being spoon-fed fact-based information… So don't make the mistake your middle school teachers did and spoon-feed information. Most people will last for 10-15 minutes of heavy, fact-driven science information.

Most significantly, educators' efforts to foster appreciation of their museums' collections thus aligned with Rebecca's (at the Met) and other's claim toward embracing a "social" model of disability in the museum. In museums, educators teach from and about objects. Thus in offering visitors with disabilities "access to" the same experiences offered to other visitors, educators had to adapt practices and break down barriers to effectively teach those visitors from and about objects. When I asked one Met educator, for example, if she considered the programs she led for visitors with dementia a form of therapy, she stated, simply: "No." When I asked her why, she responded (again simply): "Because I wouldn't call the other programs [I lead] that way." Or consider these two Met access educators speaking about their work with the same audience:

> I find the word therapy like the word disabled . . . I find the word therapy to be more critical. [Like] art therapy would be to sit and evaluate how you drew, why you drew it, where it comes from, where it's going. I'm more interested in interactions, and [being] able to demonstrate that when you're not threatened, there's a whole part of you that usually is shoved in a pocket that could come out and get some air.

> I'm not a therapist … As an educator, I'm extremely sensitive to people and their reactions, but I don't know who has Lewy Body's disease and who has FTD [frontotemporal dementia] and this stage or that stage of Alzheimer's. I'm not a diagnostician. I don't know. And I don't want to know. Because it gets in the way of what I'm trying to do for people, which is not focus on what they have… you just have to treat everyone with respect and try to gauge their level, not ever speaking down, especially with adults… Making sure they're coming along with you in your thought process as you're teaching. And that's all I can do.

In contrast, the art and horticultural therapists were more likely to discuss people's interactions with art and nature not as a way to increase their appreciation of objects in these domains, but rather as the means to an end.[192] Their language thus aligned more closely with a medical model emphasizing change or improvement, as across the AIC and CBG, these professionals discussed art and nature in terms of use value (emphasis mine):

> [Art therapy] is *the use* of the creative process to basically deepen our understanding of ourselves, and try to use that process to create wanted change in a person's life.
>
> [Horticultural therapy] is *the use* of gardens, any form of horticulture, [and] outdoor spaces to then help patients, participants, [and] residents facilitate therapy practices through gardening and outdoor engagement.
>
> [Horticultural therapy] is a way in which a trained individual… *uses* plants and nature as a non-threatening medium to achieve a specific goal.

More than mere discursive distinctions, these differing professional identities and their attendant orientation to museum objects shaped their organization of programs. In particular, therapists privileged hands-on experiences, believing visitors were, ultimately, better for the making. In contrast to educators' more adaptive approach, therapists' program formats were thus more rigid. At the CBG, horticultural therapists involved participants in work throughout the garden, such as clipping, weeding, or deadheading (removing faded or dead flowers from a plant to encourage more blooming). Alternatively, they led other hands-on activities such as potting or propagating plants, or using natural materials in a craft project. Throughout my fieldwork at the AIC, Deb oversaw the program's art-making portion, leaving the gallery tours to Lucas and his education volunteers. When I asked her and Elisa, another therapist who had been involved with

[192] For a discussion of how different professionals use objects to distinguish their work, see Beth A. Bechky, "Object lessons: Workplace artifacts as representations of occupational jurisdiction," *American Journal of Sociology* 109, no. 3 (2003): 720-52.

the program, if it would be possible to lead an art therapy program without an art-making component, they both concluded separately that it would not be. As Deb stated:

> There will always be an art-making component… a person can't call themselves an art therapist, or can't graduate from an art therapy school without there being a consensus that that person really understands the art-making process and materials on top of the psychological and educational and all that stuff. There are so many different pieces to the art therapy degree that that's what's central.

Even while both working *within* hands-on formats, however, therapists differed from educators in their approach to affective outcomes, and the types of emotional labor they felt were appropriate to undertake. The art and horticultural therapists continually emphasized affective outcomes as an intentioned effect – and benefit – of their programs. Compare, for example, the Met and AIC's art-making programs for visitors with dementia. At the Met, Met Escapes art-making programs (offered in addition to gallery tours and sessions with the touch collection, among which visitors could choose) were organized around techniques including watercolor, block printing, and painting, and were focused on assisting participants and caregivers with completing projects in these formats. One such program I observed was designed for participants to paint flowers on canvas inspired by paintings in the Met collection. Speaking to her volunteers before the program began, the instructor, Tali, noted the group would be discussing the texture of van Gogh's brush strokes, and so she asked the volunteers to "talk about how to incorporate texture into the painting," gesturing to the sunflower seeds and small white finger bowls of sand at all of the tables. At each table there was also a palette (white plastic dinner plates, still in their sheer plastic packaging) puddled with circles of black, red, yellow, and blue paint; a palette knife; and black circles cut from construction paper she said participants could perhaps use as the center of a flower to anchor the composition. Throughout her facilitation of the program, she return to van Gogh, discussing his use of a palette knife to "make his paint very thick" (and here

she plucked the tool from the center of one of the tables, holding it up and moving it back and forth with a very tight, controlled motion of the wrist, as though icing a cake). As she circulated the room, her suggestions – always deferent to the needs and interest of the participants – tended to focus on the aesthetic of their works. For example, standing behind one participant, a slight, white-haired woman with thick, round glasses, Tali gestured to the van Gogh on the screen to emphasize how he had spent a lot of time working not only on the flowers, but also on background details. "I like it white," the woman said, promptly, not looking up. To this, Tali smiled, straightening her shoulders. "Oh, good idea," she agreed. "I like it white, too."

The theme of Lisa's Art in the Moment program, however, was "The Wonder Years," which Lucas described to volunteers in an pre-program e-mail as intended to explore "artwork that evokes nostalgic feelings of play, whimsy, and childhood." Accordingly, following the participants' gallery tour, Deb covered the studio tables with inspirational quotes and drawing materials, encouraging people to "just feel free to draw something that evokes a memory from a time when they allowed themselves to be free" and uninhibited, adding: "This is really about the experience of getting that memory on paper, what it brings out in you." She encouraged them to think about why adults are so inhibited about doing what we once "did so happily as a child: that period, you know, we call 'The Wonder Years.' " In efforts to lower their inhibitions, she explained the group would be working with "some very simple materials, and people should just feel free to draw something that evokes a memory from a time when they allowed themselves to be free in that way." Throughout the program, participants worked with freshly sharpened colored pencils and markers on paper. Lisa, for her part, diligently completed a three-dimensional line-drawing of a rectangular box with a child-like figure inside. She captioned it: "Me in my Playpen with Redbook magazine," and when I crossed over to her we talked about

the importance of having a space to yourself. Lisa said, with emphasis: "Oh I loved that play pen," asking me and her tablemate, Anne: "Didn't you just have a space that you liked to go to, just you, where no one bothered you?" At program's end, Deb thanked everyone for being "open-minded," acknowledging that it can be hard to open yourself up to making art. As participants filled out their post-program evaluative mood scales, she added that there was all kinds of "problem-solving" that we do when we make art, and that even the seemingly effortless, simple process of drawing on paper has enormous "emotional and cognitive" benefits. "So this is good for you, even if you're not realizing it!" She said, with a grin.

In many ways, these programs I've described are quite similar. Staff organized their projects around a shared theme and connections to the artworks in the museum: at the Met, the flowers of Joan Mitchell, Georgia O'Keeffe, and of course, van Gogh; at the AIC, gestural, abstract paintings by Joan Miró and Paul Klee. Both programs concluded with an opportunity for participants to share and, when possible, discuss their works. And both facilitators created an affirming space that welcomed all contributions. Ultimately, however, the programs differed not due to format, or even the sensibility of the educator, but rather the organization of experience. In Deb's program, art is a medium for "evoking memory," facilitating "problem-solving," and providing "emotional and cognitive" benefits. In contrast, Tali's program aims to foster visitors' appreciation of art through making, bringing the art museum's dominant sensory convention – "how *to* look" in order to further interpretation and understanding – to a hands-on activity.

Conclusion

Acknowledging that museum educators rely on their adaptive expertise to facilitate access, this chapter has examined the limits of this model when they are working with visitors

with disabilities. In particular, I focus on three mechanisms – staffing, sorting, and specializing – that collectively reveal the challenges educators face assessing and adapting to this audience *in situ*. Some of these play out at the interactional level. Facing the stigma of labeling and of "other," for example, such visitors are often reluctant to volunteer if they need accommodations. Other factors stem from existing organizational policies. Despite acknowledging that "access" audiences present with special needs – often in relation to existing sensory conventions – educators receive little information about those needs in advance. Further, while expertise in museum accessibility requires an assemblage of different people, ideas, and institutional arrangements, in museums, accessibility often falls to educators who may or may not have experience with the visitors within the category.

A third level mediating the accomplishment of adaptive expertise in the museum regards the other forms of expertise in play during access programs. In particular, I find art and horticultural therapists brought in to lead such programs share educators' emotional intelligence and have years of experience working with people with disabilities. However, they are overall more likely to use objects to facilitate therapeutic outcomes, as they construct art and nature as the means – or tools – toward a therapeutic end. In programs incorporating such professionals, strategies and format are more fixed – favoring hands-on interactions – and the push for adaptability less pronounced. Lisa's dialogue with Lucas makes this plain. Ultimately, the degree and character of emotional labor expected in work with visitors with disabilities differs between museum educators and therapists. Drawing on an institutional and political frame of "access," educators organize their practice around fostering visitors' appreciation and understanding of museum collections and largely bound their expertise to this pursuit.

It bears note that these findings highlight differences in program facilitation not only

between educators and therapists, but also across the gardens and galleries. Notably, the CBG is the only museum with an initiative for visitors with disabilities staffed entirely by therapists. At the AIC, the involvement of therapists is restricted to people with dementia. The latter finding additionally suggests the particularity of formalized dementia programs in the art museums and reinforces the distinctions Lucas made about such programs that I discussed in this chapter's introduction. These programs differ from other access initiatives because they involve the greatest number of non-education staff, expertise, and resources. Beyond the involvement of the art therapists at the AIC, Met educators participating in Met Escapes also interfaced with clinical and social work professionals, even while keeping the facilitation of access programs within their jurisdiction. When Rebecca and Deborah began developing Met Escapes, they organized trainings for their access educators led by a neurologist and genetic counselor at the Taub Institute for Research on Alzheimer's Disease and the Aging Brain at Columbia University. Early in my fieldwork, I also observed several "Greet Art" programs, a collaboration between the Met and the Alzheimer's Association designed to teach professional and family caregivers how to use the museum to talk about art with people with dementia.

Art in the Moment and Met Escapes were also distinct from other accessibility initiatives due to their strong emphasis on research. Part of this came from MoMA's precedent, as the museum had produced through the MoMA Alzheimer's Project a research study designed by the Psychosocial Research and Support Program of the New York University Center of Excellence for Brain Aging and Dementia. The study was designed to evaluate the "efficacy" of the program, drawing on self-rating scales, observer-rated scales, and a take-home evaluation to evaluate visitor's engagement levels, enhancement of their self-esteem, and their mood

improvement, among other outcomes.[193] The effects of this research approach are seen, as stated, with Art in the Moment, which extended MoMA's model to develop a program predicated on evaluating therapeutic benefits, facilitated by the incorporation of a creative arts therapist (and predicated on art-making).

Such differences in museum's approach to dementia programming compared to programs for the blind, deaf, or people with developmental disabilities demonstrate that people in museums draw boundaries not only between those who are disabled and those who are not, but also between the disabled and the ill. The more general goal of a "social" conception of disability is to challenge the pathology and the stigma associated with bodily difference, and its contrast to what Rebecca described as "medical" or "tragedy" frameworks manifests in various ways within disability politics. In some cases – such as the Deaf community – people embrace their disabilities with pride, organizing themselves around a unique culture, language, and even educational and social institutions.[194] Thus for many who self-identify as Deaf, the rise of cochlear implants – surgically implanted electronic devices which stimulate the auditory nerve to provide a sense of sound – is akin to genocide.[195] Resistance to the medical model – though not always medical services – is visible also in health social movements, such that we see in autism or AIDS advocacy, which reflect how people with disabilities organize to publicly combat misperceptions and promote new types of clinical research and practice.[196]

Dementia presents a more complicated story. As the medical sociologist Renee Beard has noted, various factors have shaped the organization of the Alzheimer's disease movement, which

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[193] See Rosenberg et. al, 87-108.
[194] Andrew Sullivan provides a thorough and accessible examination of Deaf culture and politics: Andrew Sullivan, *Far From the Tree: Parents, Children, and the Search for Identity* (New York: Scribner, 2012), 49-114.
[195] Laura Mauldin, *Made to Hear: Cochlear Implants and Raising Deaf Children* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).
[196] See, for example, Epstein, *Impure Science*; Eyal et. al.

for the most part has been slow to incorporate public spokespersons.[197] These barriers, she suggests, are in part attitudinal: the diagnosis and progression of Alzheimer's disease functions as a form of "social death" which can undercut perceptions of personhood and competency, even among those in the earliest stages of the disease. Attention and advocacy has historically been focused on caregivers, just as much, if not more, than on those diagnosed with the disease itself. Rather than being associated with pride, autonomy, and identity, dementia – and particularly degenerative dementias like Alzheimer's disease – is ultimately a condition often perceived as a "never-ending funeral." In addition, Alzheimer's – unlike deafness, or blindness, or even autism – is terminal. For this reason, research to identify the efficacy of interventions or seeking a cure – that favored trope of the medical model, and its therapeutic analogs – may be less an affront than a desired goal.

This chapter concludes Part 2's focus on the professional and group dynamics structuring therapeutic framings of the museum as they impact people with disabilities. In Part 3, I focus more closely on the sensory practices these professionals innovate for this visitor public. In particular, I examine how efforts to innovate the modal visual practice of museum-going differs across the gardens and the galleries, and explain how the different aesthetic meanings and sensory conventions of these institutions mediate therapeutic understandings of art in Chapter 4 and nature in Chapter 5, and how these are co-produced among museum staff and visitors.

[197] Renee Beard, "Advocating voice: organizational, historical and social milieux of the Alzheimer's disease movement," *Sociology of Health & Illness* 26, no. 6 (September 2004): 797–819.

Part III:

Practice

Chapter 4

In the Galleries

Today's tour incorporates three of the Art Institute's five 8.5'' x 11'' low-relief graphic tile reproductions made of colored plastic, known as "TacTiles."[198] About halfway through the program, we find ourselves in front of a 17th-century Dutch Still Life, *Trompe-l-Oeil (Still Life with a Flower Garland and Curtain*). The two visitors attending the tour stand in front of the painting. Each is holding a TacTile reproduction of the work in their left hand, using the fingers of their right hand to explore it. The gallery is intimate and quiet, otherwise empty of visitors that might otherwise trek hollow footsteps across its wood floors. Beatrice, one of two volunteer guides, begins with some historical information: "One of the first interesting things about this painting is that it was painted by two people." Offering the title and date, and explaining why the work has two artists, Beatrice explains "at right" (and here the two participants, Dave and Tanya, move their fingers over the TacTile) – there is a "lovely, lovely blue curtain" and "you can feel the folds." Beatrice discusses how the painting is "designed to look like what a curtain would look like if you dragged it across the canvas," adding "it looks as though you could reach right out and touch it, it is so vivid."

As Tanya engages Beatrice and the other guide, Peggy, about the different types of flowers in the painting, Dave – who I know from past tours has been blind since birth – begins to ask me questions. These start with him orienting himself to various elements of the work: "OK, so the curtain is over here," and I confirm yes, that is correct. He begins to run his fingers methodically up and down each of the individual raised, ridged folds on the powder blue TacTile, and then asks me: "Now, what is this?" I look down at the TacTile and see Dave's finger linger on a thin, winding line with a single curl halfway through, descending from the area between the rod and the first fold of the curtain.

I begin to say "a vine," but I hesitate, as I have looked at this painting numerous times and have never observed such a vine. I tell Dave "just a second" and get as close as I can to the painting before spying it: a mossy, hunter green, barely perceptible on the ink-black shadows of the painting's background. I would never have noticed it looking at the painting from afar, where the brilliant curtain and beautiful flowers immediately grab your eye because of the vibrant colors. I explain to Dave that it's interesting that he identified the vine on the TacTile, because it's hard to see in the actual painting. It blends into the background, in contrast to the brighter details of the flower and the curtain. "Huh, yeah, interesting," he states, identifying more of them with his fingers, and smiling. "Sinister," he proclaims, and at that moment I see for the first time one of the flowers in this otherwise vibrant bouquet appears to be dead.

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[198] "Accessibility," Artic.edu (Art Institute of Chicago online), accessed October 25, 2016, http://www.artic.edu/visit/accessibility.

As noted by the medical sociologist Arthur Frank, experience "may partake of both body and environment, but environment is already constituted on a bodily basis."[199] Given the strict policing of its sensory conventions, the art museum is not, *de facto*, an accessible environment for different types of bodies. More to the point, it is an environment that can reinforce boundaries across different embodied capacities by shaping who can experience the art, and how. When working with visitors with disabilities, art museum educators must thus endeavor first and foremost to facilitate a wider range of sensory experiences. This is particularly the case for blind and partially-sighted museum visitors. In investigating the museum-going experiences of this group, for example, Kevin Hetherington has argued that art museums' efforts to accommodate them continually make plain the spatial politics of an institution that is centrally organized around visual interpretation.[200]

This chapter builds on such investigations of access and interpretation by examining the facilitation of sensory experiences in art museum teaching. I organize my analysis into three sections. Focusing initial attention on the museum-going experiences of blind and partially-sighted visitors, I aim to show how educators at the Met and AIC challenge the privileging of sight within the museum through descriptive and tactile accommodations for this group. I then consider the degree to which museum staff extend and build upon such approaches in programs for visitors within the broader category of "access," and for other audience groups in museum education. I suggest this process reflects educators' efforts to develop program strategies that engage and act upon visitors' bodies through the senses in various ways. I conclude by reflecting

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[199] Arthur W. Frank, "Bringing Bodies Back In: A Decade Review," *Theory, Culture & Society* 7, no. 1 (February 1990): 159.

[200] Kevin Hetherington, "Museums and the visually impaired: the spatial politics of access," *The Sociological Review* 48, no. 3 (August 2000): 444-63, and Kevin Hetherington, "The Unsightly: Visual Impairment, Touch and the Parthenon Frieze," *Theory, Culture and Society* 19, no. 5-6 (December 2002): 187-205.

on the meaning of these programs in the lives of those visitors who experience them, and particularly how they and museum staff understand their therapeutic value.

In many ways, this chapter expands Chapter 1's discussion of how art museum staff frame aesthetic experience as an interpretive process, geared toward enhancing visitors' appreciation of artworks. However, more than identifying the challenges art museum educators face engaging multiple senses, I show in what follows how they work to broaden the modes through which aesthetic experience – contemporarily framed as visual interpretation – can happen. Dave and Tanya's experience of *Trompe-l'œil* reveals the effects of this process. Experiencing the work through touch allows these visitors to develop a fuller picture of it in their mind and identify key details that can generate specific questions. So doing contextualizes information about the work shared by their guide.

At the heart of such efforts in sensory innovation, I suggest, rests educators' intent to make art accessible to those for whom art museums are not typically welcoming places. This chapter thus concludes with a discussion exploring the question: Access to *what*? I argue that for art museum educators relying on their adaptive expertise, multi-sensory modes of engaging art are situationally, rather than inherently, valuable: in essence, they function as one additional tool in the kit for teaching visitors how to appreciate art and locate its value in their own lives. While at times educators discuss program benefits in more relativist terms – particularly when discussing the museum-going experiences of visitors with dementia – the practices I trace highlight their efforts to make art appreciation the central focus of access initiatives. Toward this end, they are aligned with the expectations of visitors they serve, whose "access to" the cognitive and affective pleasures afforded by art encounters motivates both their participation in art museums and defines the value they ascribe to art museum-going experiences.

Moving Beyond Sight: Accommodating Blind and Partially-Sighted Visitors

As discussed in Chapter 2, the standard art museum program consists of an in-gallery tour of approximately five objects, organized around a pre-set theme. The theme may be broad (Highlights of The Metropolitan Museum) or narrow (Impressionism and Japonisme); focused on a collection (Art of Africa) or a special exhibition (*The Passions of Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux*); abstract (Gesture and Movement) or concrete (Women Artists). Throughout the tour, museum educators promote observation-based dialogue by posing open-ended questions that invite visitors' reflections; educators then build upon these contributions by sharing art historical information. As we have seen, museum programs often depart from this standard. For example, late arrivals, crowded galleries, and unexpectedly large groups – coupled with diverse visitor backgrounds – often lead educators to adapt their best-laid plans (providing more information on some tours, and asking more questions during others; swapping an object out to save time; focusing on three of a pre-selected five artworks, or adding a sixth).

What remains constant, however, is how educators guide looking to further interpretation. Thus no matter how they may otherwise vary, art museum programs do indeed assume one "standard" among their visitors: that they are sighted. Accordingly, access staff at both the Met and AIC provide two types of accommodations for visitors who are blind or visually impaired. First, they offer detailed "verbal description" tours of works on view; and second, they facilitate opportunities to touch collection objects, or reproductions of those objects. Examining how these strategies work in practice reveals how educators adapt their programs for visitors with barriers to participation, while continuing to frame those visitors' experiences in the art museum as primarily interpretive. It further reveals the privileging of vision within the art museum field, along with people's efforts to contest and transform it.

Verbal Description

One early spring day, I assisted Margaret – one of the AIC's more experienced senior program volunteers – as she guided two legally blind adults through the museum's *Picasso and Chicago* exhibit. It was only Margaret's second time leading a "verbal description" tour. She'd asked Lucas over e-mail for a copy of the Picasso audio tour script, as well as whether either of the participants "knew color." Lucas replied by sharing what he knew of the visitors' background (one had been blind since birth; he was unsure about the other), while also reminding Margaret "it's helpful to describe color through other familiar associations – the sense of touch (warm, cold, cool, soft, harsh), [and] emotion (cheerful, somber)." As a reference for what he termed "best practices," he also included several links to Web resources for Art Beyond Sight (ABS), a consultancy and advocacy organization based in New York City that provides educational materials and training on accessible art and museum programs for blind and visually impaired visitors.[201]

How do you visualize what cannot be seen? Educators leading the AIC's "Escorts for the Blind" and the Met's "Picture This!" tour programs – and by-request tours for blind and visually-impaired visitors – did so through verbal description, defined by the ABS as "a way of using words to represent the visual world" that "enables persons who are blind or visually impaired to form a mental image of what they cannot see."[202] Despite the varying institutions, levels of experience, teaching styles, and training among the educators I observed, they often approached

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[201] See Elisabeth Salzhauer Axel et. al, "AEB's Guidelines for Verbal Description," in *Art Beyond Sight: A Resource Guide to Art, Creativity, and Visual Impairment* (New York: Art Education for the Blind, Inc.: 2002), 229 - 237. Because AEB's online resources are identical in content to their printed resources, I cite material from these guidelines by using page numbers from the printed guide.

[202] Ibid., 299. On occasion, contractual and full-time education staff at the Met referred to this process as "verbal imaging." For consistency and because it is the more common term, I have elected to use "verbal description" throughout this chapter. I make exceptions when quoting research subjects who used "verbal imaging" in conversation with me.

verbal description similarly.[203] For example, they tended to begin discussion of each object with information found on a museum's object label (such as the title of the work, the date it was created, and its dimensions). They oriented the viewers with directions by (as ABS suggests) referring to the numbers on a clock (for example, Margaret stated the angle of the guitarist's head on Picasso's *The Old Guitarist* fell somewhere between 9 and 10 o'clock"); or by breaking the image into "registers" and "zones" they discussed individually and sequentially. Educators would tie visual details to art historical information, noting, for instance, that "dirty fingernails" were the telltale sign of a figure painted by Caravaggio, the pioneer of Baroque painting. They also often drew on common points of reference. When discussing a Mexican "wedding coverlet," one Met educator asked a group of older women about their familiarity with "homespun" cotton weaves, which opened onto a broader discussion about the process of their construction and their texture.

The discussion of the coverlet further reveals that while educators could not solicit participants' observations, they continually endeavored to facilitate conversation when presenting descriptions to further interpretation. Their tours were thus similar in notable ways to those offered to sighted visitors. (Along these lines, Lucas recommended Margaret select four to six works that she was "comfortable with and would enjoy describing," and include background information and "engaging questions" in addition to her "detailed verbal descriptions.") Educators promoted dialogue by asking the participants questions, some interpretive (when discussing Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *Acrobats at the Cirque Fernando*: "There's no people in the balconies [at the circus]; what does that tell us?") and some more personal (when discussing Amedeo Modigliani's painting of his friends *Jacques and Berthe Lipchitz*: "If you wanted your

[203] The common techniques I discuss in this paragraph are also outlined in Salzhauer Axel, et. al, 229, 230, 234-5, 236.

portrait done, would you want it done by a friend?") Significantly, they also often encouraged visitors to volunteer their *own* descriptions, thereby taking advantage of (and often learning about) the varying levels of sight among program attendees while also actively involving participants in the program.

Educators' efforts to build description by consensus was, further, particularly important in light of the interpretive power educators held when describing art to blind and visually impaired visitors. A sighted person, strategically positioned in front of an artwork, can look while listening, and can choose to ask about or draw attention to details that are of personal interest to them. The more limited a person's vision, however, the increasingly dependent he or she is on the educator. For instance, Drew, one regular participant in programs at the Met who lost his sight in his late 20s, noted in his interview that every verbal description "is always an interpretation" and educators "can choose to describe what they want. They're censoring the artwork to what they're seeing." Thus, he continued, when "there's a bunch of people talking, you're not just getting one person's perspective. That kind of helps." The presumed objectivity of the eye does not, ultimately, negate the subjective filtering through which a person processes visual information and deems particular aspects of it more important than others. As ABS cautions educators to remember: "… the listener is depending on you to give an accurate description. Try to use objective references rather than ones that might sway a blind person's point of view. Give enough information so that listeners can form an image in their minds, and come to their own opinions and conclusions about a work of art."[204]

On the one hand, participants considered educators experts, and thus expected them to assume some degree of descriptive autonomy. As one legally blind woman acknowledged in her

[204] Ibid., p. 233.

interview, a trained eye "is going to go to certain things," and she appreciated that often yielded "information only a specialist can give me." Sometimes, this involved sharing information even a sighted visitor would not intuit from observation alone. For example, when discussing Picasso's painting *The Old Guitarist*, Margaret told the two participants the guitarist rendered was blind, to which one responded: "Blind, wow! How do you know?" Here, Margaret faltered a bit, responding first that the man's eyes were closed, before communicating that she was drawing on her background knowledge about the work, rather than descriptive observations.

Regardless, engagement with artworks solely through verbal description necessitates blind and partially-sighted visitors rely primarily on the educator's interpretation of the work.[205] Participants were well aware of this, and were also willing when necessary to point out educators' unconscious editing, such as in this otherwise droll moment during a tour of a temporary sculpture exhibition:

> The educator, Angela, was concluding her introductory description of the nude warrior, offering: "He's barefooted, and I can see the pulse of veins in his feet." As she went on to ask the participants if they were familiar with Homer's *Iliad,* or the story of the Trojan Wars, one woman, Joan, raised her hand in the air. Once called upon, she adjusted her purple necklace over her purple blouse, then stated: "Here is a question. Would you say that his genitalia is unusually small?"
>
> At this, the group burst into uproarious laughter, with another participant, Edward, calling out: "He's only 2 feet tall!" Now, now, now, *wait a minute*, Joan said, repeating it again and again until the laughter slowly died down, her tone sharp. "Sighted people – the *first* thing they notice is the genitalia, so why should I be embarrassed about asking, or wanting it described, or wanting to learn more about it?" The group was quiet, and Edward stated, quickly: "No no, sure, of course." Angela, nodding, responded: "Yeah. It's a good question. Anyone have any ideas?" Amid the cross-talk that followed, one muttered comment from the front led all participants to erupt into giggles. I asked the volunteer seated beside me at the back of the group what had been said. She told me, grinning widely, that the woman had observed: "Well, he's not wearing any clothes. That tends to make things shrink."

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[205] Allowing, of course, that their level of dependence varied according to the degree of vision they had at the time of the program, and at what point in their life they had lost (or begun losing) their vision

Touch

Importantly, affording opportunities for tactile perception offers blind and visually impaired visitors a way to factor an educator's (or companion's) account of the work into their individual experience of an object. Given the constraints on tactile interactions with collections at the AIC and Met more broadly, it follows that opportunities to handle collection objects directly were primarily restricted to this visitor public (in addition to particular artworks, or particular museum spaces, or restrictions along all these dimensions). At the Met, for example, visitors who are blind or visually impaired may schedule an appointment to explore the museum's touch collection, an assemblage of replicas, models, and original works of art contributed by the conservation and curatorial departments for the purposes of educational programming. (In one notable exception, touch collection programs are also scheduled regularly for groups of visitors with dementia and their care partners). Programs with the touch collection take place in quiet classrooms in the Education Center, outside of the main galleries, where participants sit at tables covered by white foam runners. Visitors may also tour on their own or with a guide a select group of objects within the museum itself, including a designated group of ancient Egyptian sculptures and to a more restricted degree, sculptures in the Greek and Roman galleries and American wing. Touch opportunities in the galleries proper are entirely restricted to visitors with visual impairments, with text on the Met's Web site and signage in the galleries emphasizing the restrictions.

The AIC's Touch Gallery, outside of the main galleries and just past the entrance to the museum's Modern Wing, includes five portrait sculptures from the museum's collection, ranging from the marble bust of a twentieth-century aristocrat to the head of a Guardian King from the Chinese Tang dynasty. Here all visitors are encouraged to explore the objects through touch,

while simultaneously advised through placards on the walls and by educators (when present) about the effects different oils from their hands may have on the sculptures, and to remove any large rings. Additionally available to blind and visually impaired visitors at the AIC, of course, were the TacTiles. These are stored in the AIC's education center for self-guided visitors and are incorporated into tours by request. While ostensibly they could be used on tours for any audience, information on TacTiles tours is listed on the "Accessibility" Web page of the AIC's site.

Educators facilitated tactile interactions with objects in two ways. In the first, touch served as a substitute for vision: a way to approximate visual interpretation through haptic exploration. The TacTile reproductions offer one example of this.[206] Dave and Tanya's program reflects a typical TacTile tour, wherein each visitor stand with a volunteer in front of one of the five artworks reproduced in the TacTile kit. The volunteer assists with questions as a visitor explores the reproduction through touch, listening to a verbal description led by a group volunteer. In this encounter, one sees how the TacTiles afford visitors the opportunity to highlight details of interest to them, much as a sighted visitor could if observing an artwork during a tour. However, these details become "visible" to blind and partially-sighted visitors through touch. The faithful rendering of visual details through texture can, further, allow particular attributes to emerge that might otherwise be missed by the eye. Notably, this level of

[206] Archival materials detailing the TacTiles production in the early 2000s make clear efforts to faithfully translate visual representation into a functional tactile tool. In a 2003 letter from a collaborating designer to one of the AIC education staff members, for example, the designer wrote that the CAD-CAM (computer-aided design and manufacturing) firm tasked with translating the images to a tactile graphic "expressed concern that the complexity of detail, composition and the dark tonal quality of the [Jan] Steen painting [a busy scene of a family concert] might make it 'unreadable' when reduced to an 8.5'' x 11'' relief." The Steen was later removed from the 5-work TacTile set. Along these lines, translating Renoir's *Two Sisters (On the Terrace*) proved equally difficult, as the work was painted in an impressionist technique where edges were more suggested than defined. This complicated the designer's efforts to trace each element of the work without "inserting too much interpretation" before it was sent to a 3D computer file.

tactile nuance was an intended feature of the TacTile design. A focus group with visually impaired visitors early in the TacTiles' development revealed visitors disliked the vacuum-formed plastic in the initial TacTiles prototype. The museum ultimately chose to use a harder plastic that allowed for a range of textures.

If framing touch as a proxy for vision was the first way educators facilitated tactile encounters, foregrounding touch as a distinct mode of perceptual interpretation was the second. This strategy was evident in practice across programs led with collection objects at the AIC and Met, but was particularly explicit in discourse at the latter institution. Consider Rebecca's presentation at a national workshop led for a group of professionals in the field of arts and disability, wherein she contrasted sight and touch:

> We think about [touch] mostly for visitors with vision loss, and think of it a little bit sloppily as this is the equivalent of seeing, or a stand-in, which it isn't… With sight we get certain types of information about an object – overall form, shape, spatial orientation. A lot of information is really visual-spatial information. Whereas touch is the substance, the physicality of the object – texture, hardness, temperature, volume, weight, contour. You can't tell the temperature of an object by looking at it. Touch offers you something vision *can't* give you. … because tactile perception differs from visual perception.

Across the AIC and Met, touch programs led in the galleries or with touch collection objects showcase access educators' efforts to facilitate what the artist Rosalyn Driscoll has termed "aesthetic" touch, or "conscious, inquiring touch that explores forms, materials, and spaces for their qualities, their effects, and their meanings."[207] In this way, and assisted by a sighted guide, participants were able to interpret attributes of an artwork's "form, shape, and spatial orientation" otherwise apprehended visually (determining, for example, whether a replica of a Degas statue was of a man or a woman; or what the fine features and jewelry adornments of a bust in the Touch Gallery suggests about a woman's class status). But at times, visitors also

[207] Rosalyn Driscoll, "Aesthetic Touch," in *Art and the Senses*, ed. Francesca Bacci and David Melcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 107.

experienced properties of the object *not* discernible through sight alone – texture, temperature, and weight – that yielded information about its meaning and history. In one private tour of the Met's touch collection with a visually impaired older adult, for instance, the educator introduced a cast brass memorial head commemorating an *iyoba* – or "Queen Mother" – from the Nigerian court of Benin. As the woman explored the piece, she repeatedly called attention to its weight – an attribute not visible to the eye – before asking the educator: "But why is it so *heavy*?" The educator responded: "It's meant to be placed atop an altar. It's not processional; it's not meant to be carried around."

Broadening the Scope

"Multimodal" Learning

Examining accommodations for blind and partially-sighted visitors provides an entry point for understanding how access programs relate to broader museum norms, and how they may broaden possibilities for visitor experience. Practices of verbal description highlight that the "objective" eye is, indeed, also discerning; tactile encounters with objects further reveal the limits of visual perception. Regardless, some educators expressed concerns, in interviews, that bounding opportunities for touch in museums to the experiences of the blind and partially-sighted only enforces their "otherness." Here we can recall Rebecca's acknowledgment that we think about touch "mostly for visitors with vision loss." As Amanda at the AIC additionally noted:

> [I'm sometimes] frustrated… about our Touch Gallery because before, it was located within the museum, but it was still within the family area. So [there was] kind of this implication that it was for the kids that just wanted to touch things. But now it's outside of the museum perimeter. It's not even within the museum, and so it really separates anybody who is using that, but especially an audience that is relying on that for a certain

> type of experience. It's like removing them from just the visual landscape of the museum even. It's not even seen within the museum for the general public.

The question thus remains how adaptations for a specific visitor public can inform program approaches across the broader category of disability, and across museum education audiences more generally. The answer that emerged through my fieldwork suggested a shift from thinking about how people learn in designated audience groups to how people learn through modalities that could potentially transcend such boundaries. Consider, for example, four staff educators at the Met I interviewed who discussed "multisensory learning" as a distinct teaching strategy.[208] Defined by one senior staff member, Anna, as a way of "learning through a variety of senses," educators described "multisensory learning" as one of several practices they collectively included under "multimodal learning." This latter term they defined quite broadly, but all emphasized the importance of engagement with visitors' bodies. For example, Anna said that multimodal learning involved "literally engaging the body in different ways" by "structuring experience in a wide variety of ways and through different means of accessing through the body."[209] Aaron stated: "If what you do involves stopping talking, and doing something, then you're on the road to something more multimodal. That's a pretty broad generalization, but I like to try to find ways to encompass everything from touch objects to pose-taking. Kinesthetic learning, embodied learning, entry points that go beyond dialogue or passive reception."

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[208] Despite the centrality of "learning" to these terms, educators tended to discuss them most often as teaching strategies, rather than focusing on what program participants took away from them.

[209] Along these lines, Rebecca, in conversations with me, often stated she was unsure why people in the department would differentiate between "multimodal" and "multisensory," arguing these were one and the same and that a more expansive view of sensory perception should take into account multiple ways of engaging the body beyond the exteroceptive senses of sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing. In its guidelines for verbal description, Art Beyond Sight also emphasizes the utility of providing opportunities to touch artworks or tactile reproductions and encourages "understanding through re-enactment," or positioning bodies in space (Salzhauer Axel et. al, 235-37, qtd. 237).

Coupled with Anna's understanding of the term, Aaron's definition of multimodal learning describes efforts by educators to engage the body in art museum teaching. It does so in large part by contrasting them to the conventional organization of aesthetic experience around visual interpretation ("look and talk.") Throughout the course of my research into the history of the Met programs, I became increasingly aware of the fundamental, and longstanding, opposition of these two types of art encounters. On the one hand, former Met staff I interviewed suggested "what's new is old." Consider Rika Burnham, first discussed in Chapter 2. Originally trained as a dancer, Rika had during her time at the Met authored an essay on "art and movement" in one of the Met's early accessibility training manuals. She further described in her interview her involvement with the now-defunct Arts Awareness initiative from the 1970s, a "very vibrant experimental program" designed to further visitors' experiences with art through multiple artistic fields, included dance. Additionally, when I told a former access staff member affiliated with the department throughout the 1980s that my dissertation would likely investigate the role of the senses in museum teaching, he wrote me back later that day to say:

> I think [that] focus may get in the way of your research operation as there is a fundamental conflict between "multisensory" and "visual" approaches to art, and somewhere along the line the two inevitably crash – at least that is my experience, as sympathetic as I am with visual disabilities… People [in the museum field] may just roll their eyes, thinking – right or wrong – that they've heard all of whatever it is before.

This quote underscores the enduring association of multisensory forms of engagement in the museum with blind and partially-sighted visitors. Those with a long view of their institutions who had stayed, however, offered a slightly different perspective. Specifically, they suggested that increasing efforts to create more inclusive museum experiences necessitated educators challenge their preconceptions about how the "appropriate" forms of aesthetic engagement varied across audiences. At the AIC, for instance, a family programs educator spoke with me at

length about the hands-on exhibition spaces she had designed over several decades for school groups and families. She stated originally these were spaces "that had more than just the object," offering things to touch and manipulate, activities for engagement, and art materials. While previously "dubbed an experimental space in the museum," she observed that she was increasingly seeing among her colleagues "more of a mission to be making [the museum] more accessible… whether they know it or not they're doing what they did in our educational galleries in the 90s." As she stated, engaging the body in gallery teaching provided a way to engage the maximum amount of visitors possible:[210]

> …has to do with the multiple sensory, kinesthetic ways that children learn*, and we all learn*. There's the Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences. We all learn differently. It still happens and it doesn't just apply to kids, it also applies to adults. Some adults are gravitated towards reading. Some – believe it or not, and they probably don't even want to admit it – they're more gravitated towards physical movement and gesture. They can hear better, or they can listen to music. They can make associations. You try to just bombard [visitors] with all the kinds of connections that can enrich them and make connection for them to something in the museum.

However, while educators across the AIC and Met acknowledged the value in multisensory encounters of art, the Met did more to formalize and advance the facilitation of such experiences across audiences. This largely came down to the staffing and organizations of these institutions' Education Departments. The AIC had a much smaller access program; as discussed in Chapter 3, Lucas had inherited a senior program that oversaw tours for the blind and visually impaired solely due to his predecessor's personal interest in this latter audience. Understaffed (outside of his Senior Programs volunteers, he worked alone) and thus overextended, he grew, developed, and tended to access initiatives as much as he was able while

[210] Along similar lines, several educators referenced Gardner's theory of "multiple intelligences" when discussing multimodal learning with me. In general, they did so to acknowledge the more general idea that people learn best through combinations of different "intelligences" (bodily-kinesthetic, visual-spatial, musical, logical-mathematical) and that educators should thus not privilege one particular mode of learning when teaching. See Gardner previously cited.

also still managing his substantial suite of programs for older adults. At the Met, in contrast, access was a stand-alone program with its own funding line, three full-time staff members and a corps of contractual educators, along with a multi-decade history within Met Education. As discussed in Chapter 3, Rebecca further brought to the program years of specialized accessibility experience and enjoyed a broad rapport with staff members across the institution around accessibility concerns.

Perhaps most importantly, designated program areas within her department allowed her to collaborate and interact regularly with staff members working across diverse audiences. At the AIC, Lucas worked in the museum's "adult programs" division (not least because seniors are, indeed, adults), whose program offerings primarily consisted of in-gallery public talks. His offices were located in the floors above the AIC's main building, closer to the main Michigan Avenue entrance; school and family programs were in the basement of the Modern Wing, which people entered via Monroe Street. Adult programs were thus both conceptually and spatially separated from the school and family program staff that more regularly incorporated hands-on teaching strategies.

The Met access program was, in contrast, located (organizationally and physically) in a closely-knit multi-generational "Gallery and Studio Program" (GSP) division resultant from the Education Department's 2010 restructuring, led by the then-head of Met education. According to Anna, the former head designed the "Gallery and Studio Program" (GSP) division in part to respond to what she saw as a shift toward "participatory" art experiences and a turn toward "creativity" in culture more broadly, as well as an acknowledgment that "the [Met] needed to embrace and bring that into in our programs." When I asked Anna to clarify what she meant by creativity, she stated: "[Art]making… While [some] programs were there [at the time of the

restructuring], only kids got to create. Adults didn't get to create really. It wasn't really embraced."

Beyond "Studio," programs, however, GSP included "Family, Teen, and Intergenerational Learning" and, significantly, "Access" programs. As one full-time educator in the division stated, all three of these reflected efforts to move beyond "pre-fixed group categories" educators had themselves established to begin thinking more concretely about *how* people learn. Such modalities thus addressed how people learn through art-making ("Studio"), but also how they learn in different combinations of social groups ("Intergenerational Learning") and how they learn through varying senses ("Access.") Perhaps most importantly, educators in GSP were tasked to think through how such modalities would be relevant for *all* audiences. So doing complicated the very idea of organizing museum education programs by audience in the first place. The novelty of this strategy was underscored by Rika Burnham, who stated she had left the Met at a time that she was "much less interested in audience divisions," acknowledging that the Met continued to maintain them, for the most part, and that at the Frick she had tried to do more experimental programming. When I asked her what she saw as the purchase in moving away from audiences, she stated:

> Well, I think what's limiting about audiences, what was limiting about organizing programs by audiences, is that it's essentially informed by developmental theory. I think, and this is unscientific, but it's my sense of being in the field for so long, is that the museum breaks down what might be seen as developmental barriers or developmental possibilities so that an 8-year-old might be more insightful about a Rembrandt than a 70-year-old, or a 50-year-old might have less capacity to see than a 15-year-old… [If] you go in thinking, 'Well, ten-year-olds are really only capable of building narratives,' then you're not allowing for the possibility that that ten-year-old may be very capable of poetic and abstract experiences. So I find developmental theory in the museum – and I wouldn't speak to the classroom – but in the museum, it seems that the works of art make possible things that developmental theory tells us are not possible.

Handling and Moving: Keeping it Situational

In keeping with their view of multimodal learning as a way of teaching about art by engaging the body, Met staff members – and particularly those in access – tended to use strategies they labeled as multimodal in order to advance visitors' understanding of artworks. In particular, two common techniques they used to facilitate visitors' kinesthetic and tactile experience of artworks in the galleries ultimately served the larger goal of furthering aesthetic interpretation. Throughout, however, educators drew on such techniques strategically, aiming not only to connect them to particular interpretive elements of artworks, but also to the interests and styles of particular visitors.

The first common multimodal teaching technique consisted of movement-based activities led in the galleries, and typically pose-taking. Educators I observed often led such activities to enhance visitors' appreciation of a work's form and shape. Consider this Discoveries tour led by a Met access educator, Polly, one chilly February New York day. The Met's Discoveries program, for children and adults with developmental disabilities, their friends, and their families, includes both an in-gallery and art-making portion. Two programs are led one Sunday of the month: a session for children ages 5 through 17, and then another for adults 18 and older. The day started with the children's program, and Polly first assembled her group on stools in Gallery 814: a small rectangular room encircled by glass display cases containing foot-high cast bronzes by the French Impressionist artist Edgar Degas.

> Polly began by tucking herself in the corner of the gallery, adjacent to a display of bronze ballerinas, and saying with a warm, full smile: "OK, now, we're going to play a little bit of a game." I'm going to look around, she stated, and I'm going to pick a sculpture, and you won't know which one I'm choosing, but you'll have to guess based on what I'm doing with my body, what *gestures* I'm using. There were some giggles and smiles. "Hmm hmm hmm hmm," she said, as though thinking very hard, and then began to angle her body slowly, her arms curving up and over her head, legs bowing slightly, head tilted just short of 45 degrees. Who am I? She asked, smiling. Johnny, who attended the program monthly with his parents and his twin brother stood up immediately and began peering around the display case. In the briefest of silences that followed, Polly asked:

> "I'll give you a clue – it's in this area," angling her head to her left. "Does anyone want to guess which one I'm being?" Johnny pointed out one of the ballerinas, and Polly, still keeping her arms and legs fixed, turned her head slightly as his father said, encouragingly, "Yeah I was thinking the larger one, but it could be that smaller one. You're right, Johnny." Floating up from a stool in the front, Tina, one of the parents, offered: "No, it can't be that one, because your right leg isn't bent."
>
> Polly, relaxing her body slowly, one limb at a time, unfurled like a flower. She then looked over at the work and flashed a brief, impish smile. "I was being imperfect," she announced, and the group began to chuckle, collectively. "How can I make it better?" She asked. "Tell me, Tina." Tina stood up, peering at the bronze, directing Polly as Polly asked follow-up questions: "Is my leg *too* bent?" Finally, she had craned her body, almost like a folded piece of origami, only her lips moving to say: "By the way, this is not that easy," to even more laughter. Relaxing her body completely she asked: Who else would like to try the game?
>
> Johnny, still standing, flung his hand into the air, and Polly gestured him forward. Scratching his chin somewhat theatrically, he circled in the small amount of open space in front of the assembled stools, and his mother, from the back, called out jokingly: "The thinker!" This resulted in more chuckles, mostly from the adults. Johnny picked a cast of a woman examining the bottom of her foot and had a bit of trouble angling his knee toward his body to turn up his heel, so Polly offered him a hand. Even sculptures need their supports, Polly said, with a smile.

The second recurrent multimodal teaching strategy regarded educators' practice of bringing "handling materials" to the galleries. I first became aware of handling materials when observing Met access educators stock the shoulder bags they often brought into the gallery for programs. They tended to do so while standing in the narrow, charmingly cluttered supply closet of the Education Center's "program ready room," muttering to themselves aloud while contemplating the supplies stacked on metal gray shelves. These included those materials allowed for in-gallery activities (most commonly, sketch paper mounted on cardboard, and regular or colored pencils), and the broader spectrum of wet and dry media available for studio programs. But more often than not, educators also selected materials for visitors to touch or "handle" during a program – fittingly called "handling materials" – that could supplement discussion of artworks. Some were neatly organized in the supply closet. Others came from

educators' personal or professional collections. In his office, for example, Aaron kept a crystal ball he used when teaching *PixCell-Deer #24,* a taxidermied deer covered in artificial crystal glass.

The crystal ball provides an example of how educators used handling materials to provide information on what Aaron termed the "materiality" of a work that was not otherwise discernible through vision. In so doing, they affirmed the distinctions between touch and sight McGinnis had described to participants in her workshop. (Aaron, for his part, handed me the crystal ball during our interview, and his eyes lit up when I commented immediately at how heavy it was). Other times, handling materials – such as a palm-sized reproduction of a cat from the Egyptian collection, encased in a detachable two-piece rubber mold and available in the supply closet – aided in explaining artists' creative process. Along these lines, Tali (a sculptor) arrived to the Met's prep room one day prior to her program with a hunk of black-green malachite she'd found in Petra (an archaeological site in Jordan), as well as a rasp (or shaping tool for wood or stone). While sawing away cheerfully at the malachite – creating a thin film of gray powder on the prep room's central table – she told me she planned to circulate the materials to demonstrate how artists used to make pigment, given that "thousands of years ago" they couldn't just go to "Dick Blick" (a popular art supply store with multiple locations in New York City).

Their potential to enhance visitors' experience of artworks notwithstanding, handling materials – as with all other teaching strategies in the museum – had their limits. Consider, for example, these two moments wherein educators incorporated them into discussions of paintings. For example, after introducing Hans Memling's rendering of *The Annunciation*, Anna circulated among visitors with dementia and their caregivers objects including a small palm-size book, a brown feather, and a strand of pearl beads. She then asked participants where in the painting they

might find the different things she was passing around, which instead prompted immediate observations (affirmed by Anna, with a good-natured smile) that the pearls in the painting were gray, while those circulated were white; that the peacock feathers in the angel Gabriel's wing were not a dull brown; and, additionally, that the book she had circulated was in Spanish (unlikely for a psalter featured in a Flemish painting of what is now the Middle East). Or consider this other attempt to highlight visual details through handling materials, wherein one Met access educator, Angela, reconstructed on her Picture This! program a bowl of fruit featured in a recreated Roman fresco:

> Angela first handed a clear plastic bowl to one visitor, Joan, who rested it in her lap and held it still. Angela then alternately began distributing fruit from her tote into the bowl and encouraging the other participants to select a piece from the tote themselves (here, apologies about inauthenticity: Angela had pears, but stated, sorrowfully, she could not find quints that day). As the bowl filled up more and more to the top, the participants laughing a bit and shaking their heads as though humoring her, Angela stated: "And as we're coming up and up, you can still see the outline of the bowl and all the different fruit within." In a tone that seemed hopeful, she asked: "Can you feel that, Joan?"
>
> A pause, before Joan asked: "So, are you trying to say the bowl is clear in the painting as well?" *Yes*, Angela said, with emphasis and a wide smile, and then Joan began to nod, faster and faster, adding: "So what did they use, glass?" Following a brief discussion on the use of glass more than 2,000 years ago, punctuated with lots of nods and "wow, that's great" from the participants, Angela stated: "It's a *still* life… they [the Romans] were thinking about these things long before anyone was putting them on canvas." Joan then said, her voice warm, a smile on her face: "You know, I thought you were crazy to bring this." Angela and the other participants burst into laughter, while Joan smiled and continued. "I did! I thought it was kind of silly, but now I get it, I see…"

These gallery encounters ultimately foreground the value of handling materials was situational. On Anna's tour, for example, the materials she circulated conflicted with visitors' perceptual experience of the work while stopping short of bringing an enhanced material dimension to that experience. Angela's effort (while similarly encountering the "authenticity" problem) had a clearer pedagogical intention – to discuss the history of the still life genre – but

its success was predicated on participants being game for an activity they did not initially understand.

Given this, Met educators often acknowledged (in the words of one access contractual) that "touch works better in some cases rather than others," and "worked better" particularly when it was tied either to a particular learning goal or to the interests of particular visitors. Ultimately, rather than framing multimodal facilitation techniques as having universal value ("everyone should touch, on every program!" "everyone should move!"), educators believed them to be one additional tool in the kit they could rely on and combine as appropriate with inquiry-based teaching, verbal description, and other forms of aesthetic engagement. The metaphor of the toolkit also worked more literally, as educators often packed their bags with more materials than they could use in a given tour. As Tali told me, she amassed materials for her programs the way that her mother always approached a dinner party: "Always have a lot of extra food; more food than you need, because you will never know what your guests will actually want to eat."

Efforts to customize programs to visitors' comfort levels worked at multiple levels. One of these was program design and structure. Program leaders in GSP, for example, promoted visitors' choice by creating drop-in programs, such as the evening "Drop-In Drawing" program or "How Did They Do That." The latter in particular revealed Met educators' efforts to respond to their visitors' interests, while still allowing them the opportunity to be selective. "How Did They Do That" is an in-gallery public program organized among the Met's education, conservation, and curatorial departments and geared toward introducing visitors to the materials, tools, and techniques that construct a given work of art. While it had been marketed for years as a family program, just prior to my beginning my fieldwork, Met educators had made the decision to open the program to all visitors. This was primarily because, as one educator noted, "passing

visitors, young and old, would want to join in. So you did have adults pop into the program and stay, and they were very engaged and interested."

Most adaptations, however, took place at the level of the interactional encounter: they reflected educators' reliance on their adaptive expertise. For example, one educator, following a Picture This! tour she had led, told me that her original plan for her group was to facilitate an in-gallery activity with the Wikki Stix – pliable, colorful yarn coated in wax – and pipe cleaners she had in her bag. However, she felt the activity would be more appropriate for her "more seasoned participants" who were more broadly familiar with the Met and "want to be able to engage in a different way." For a tour that unexpectedly had three first-time visitors, she had instead prioritized a general introduction to the museum. Along similar lines, throughout my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to follow one access educator on several tours led for visitors from day programs for adults with developmental disabilities. Once at the museum, they participated in the program to varying degrees – some, on occasion, not at all – so I asked her how she more generally approached working with visitors who declined to participate in particular activities. She told me a good deal of it depended on what she was able to intuit from them: was it more of a general attitude, or were they actually just afraid? She said she'd try to give them alternate ways to do the activity and gauge their reaction, trying to understand: Did they seem curious or shy, versus completely firm and disinhibited? Ultimately, however, she stated: "I try not to push people too hard. It's not like school."

On Aesthetics, Inclusion, and Therapeutic Experience

The Right of Access

On the whole, as we have seen, educators adapt art museum's sensory convention of "look, don't touch" to engage the body in diverse ways for visitors with varying forms of disability. In many ways, this philosophy of multimodal learning grew out of accommodations made for blind and visually-impaired visitors and was overall more formalized within the Met's education department compared to that of the AIC, due in part to the differing organizations and resources of these institutions' access programs. In particular, recent efforts within GSP to organize Met programs around modalities – *how* people learn – engendered a more diffuse understanding of how to engage the body through gallery teaching and across audiences.

Acknowledging these innovations, it nevertheless bears emphasis that in broadening possibilities for sensory perception at their institutions, educators were concentrated principally on (as they commonly phrased it) "breaking down [physical; attitudinal; symbolic] barriers" to visitors enjoying and appreciating the art in their institutions. Moves toward multi-modal learning, broadly defined, were thus in many ways an extension, rather than an innovation, of educators' modal practice. Along these lines, when discussing their program goals, educators – and particularly those who worked with access audiences – stressed the distinction between teaching art history and fostering a more generalized aesthetic sensibility. Conscious of the elitist master narrative of the art museum, educators sometimes addressed directly how their teaching strategies aimed to deskill the otherwise "intimidating" art encounter (here quoting Rebecca): "There's a skill to making people feel comfortable about talking about a work of art. You don't want to put people on the spot and make them feel like they have to recite some facts and figures and historical information. It's not about that." Or, as Abigail from the Met stated:

> My goal as a museum educator is to bring people to works of art to teach them what I know, if they're interested. But mostly to get out of the way, and assist them in having their own interaction with the work of art. So that they can do it on their own next time, without me, so that they can feel more and more comfortable in an art museum, so that

they can realize that they bring a lot to the conversation that they might not be explicitly aware of.

Notably, several participants I spoke with came to museums with a substantial amount of cultural capital: in essence, they were already plenty "comfortable in an art museum."[211] These interviewees told me, for example, about parents who brought them to museums when they were young, or mentioned doing the same for the children they brought to programs. Some talked to me at length outside of the museum, and without any educator to prompt them, about art and artists they'd learned about in college, or continuing education courses, or travel. In completing my interviews, I met with program participants in a variety of places – museums, coffee shops, offices – but most often, in their homes. Several apartments I visited were in the toniest corners of Manhattan's Upper East Side, with one displaying artworks that rivaled those on display at the museums where I observed tours.

Regardless of their backgrounds, however, these participants emphasized to me how access programs had again made possible aesthetic experiences that were, or had otherwise become, limited for them. In so doing, they highlighted the range of accommodations provided by access staff – inclusive of facilities, equipment, and programs – that (again paraphrasing Abigail) "assisted" them in having interactions with the art. Ron and his wife Erma had spent their lives traveling around the world and visiting its museums but as they got older, they spent less time doing so as it became more "physically difficult" for them. Since they'd started attending Met Escapes after Erma's Alzheimer's diagnosis, he'd found himself amazed at how easy it was to get around the sprawling museum: he could "drive right up to the [handicap accessible] education [entrance], and get a wheelchair, and she'd get into the wheelchair, and I'd

[211] Established social scientific theories would predict these interviewees to be art aficionados, and this group of participants also described having parents who exposed them to art and high culture through their childhoods and education. Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

go park the car across the street and it was wonderful." I first met Jan when she attended one of two tours I observed at the Art Institute led for members of a volunteer-based organization serving people with visual impairments. Growing up in Chicago during the late 1950s and early 1960s, she told me about her love for the Museum of Science and Industry, which at that time "was the most accessible because it had interactive things." On the other end of the spectrum, however, the Art Institute was "standard look, don't touch." It was only as an adult, she told me, and particularly through specialized programs that appreciating art museums became possible:

> Now, I do remember [when I was young] going to the miniatures in those little rooms, you know. And I used to be able to get up close and look at them, and I'm sure I saw a lot, but I didn't see as much as someone who was sighted. I didn't get to appreciate everything that I could have appreciated. So, even then I still felt very depressed. I mean, it was very upsetting because it was like there was so much there, and I wasn't able to access it. So, it was very frustrating.

Or consider Caryn, an artist whose self-described "tunnel vision" deteriorated through the 1990s. "I stopped going to museums until I heard about these programs," she told me, "and you know, I always felt depressed. That I was lost, that my art side was trapped." She spoke to me at length about her enjoyment of the Met's Seeing through Drawing's program, which coupled verbal description of artworks in the galleries and hands-on art-making in a program for blind and partially-sighted visitors. "Ever since I've been participating in classes, I really feel that I can attend an art museum again," she said. "I felt like: I'm included … I feel welcome. Before, I remember being yelled at by security guards. 'You're getting too close!' I kept thinking, people are looking at me suspiciously, and I shouldn't be here. Now, I feel a lot more welcome in a museum and [the programs] give me a more positive feeling about museums."

Notably, many participants I spoke with did not fit the profile of life-long museum-goers. However, in their interviews they similarly highlighted the role of educators in enhancing or making possible their aesthetic experiences. For instance, when I asked Gladys, an 89-year-old

long-time participant in the Met's "Picture This" program, what role art museums had played throughout her life, she told me: "I started out knowing nothing about art, except maybe we had art in school or something. But my parents were immigrants, and they had to concentrate on just making a living. And we were not big on culture, music, or art. So, whatever happened was self-propelled." After completing a degree in social work, she began to take classes at the New York museums, made it a priority to visit these institutions with her husband, and when they did, they always tried to go "around with a docent or whatever person, an educator who explained things, helped our minds to process the material and understand it better."

Another program participant, Cherelle, attended Met Escapes with her client, Ava, and Ava's daughter, Christina. Born and raised in Tobago, she told me that before beginning the Met Escapes tour program, she had spent little time in museums: she had been to the Met only once, and the Brooklyn Museum a handful of times with her children. When I asked to describe her experience of the programs, she responded: "I'm learning, because back in my country they didn't have much about art, all these things. That's a learning process for me." When I asked her what she liked most, she responded: "They [the educators] ask you questions like 'What do you think about what you see?' and there's no right or wrong answer. Everybody look at it differently." She added: "It's so interesting to hear your idea, my idea, and how everybody interpret [the art] different. So it's easy. Very comfortable."

Taken together, these participants' reflections on the "access" in access programs resonate with the art museum educators' conception of the social model of disability, most explicitly articulated by Rebecca. In this view, art was a right, not a privilege, and the role of educators was to mediate any difficulties to claiming that right. Their commitment to this at times even involved gently challenging the preconceptions of both ostensibly well-meaning care

partners and participants themselves. On one touch tour led for high school students in the Greek and Roman galleries, I observed Polly – a practicing artist – ask the group of assembled students if any of them liked to draw. One young woman said, immediately albeit softly: "Oh yes. I do." As Polly turned to smile at her, the teacher scanned the group quickly and then raised his voice a little to say: "How can you draw if you can't see it, right?" with a smile of his own. At this point, Polly shot a glance back toward him before describing, her tone gentle, the Met's "Seeing through Drawing" program, in which educators worked with "adults with … a range of vision" to lead "drawing activities through the use of memory, visual description, mixed media – different materials." The teacher looked at her, now quiet, nodding slowly and then faster as another student, her voice bubbly, chimed in: "I try to draw," she said. "And I kind of like it, but I do it more based on touch, I get a sense of it, a sense of what the whole might be, through touch, but then it never looks like I'd like it to, or at least that's what people tell me," with a laugh. Well, Polly responded, today we're going to have the opportunity to do some drawing in the galleries "and it's not about precision, or accuracy, maybe, in that way." A pause and she stated: "But it'll always be entirely up to you, of course, not mandatory." The teacher nodded, emphatically now: "We can try it, sure, we can try it."

Overall, the "access" afforded to museums through (fittingly) access programs was among the most dimension of the programs participants most valued. Plainly put, it mattered to them that art museums treated them the same as everyone else, and some were explicit on this point. Kristy's 30-year-old son with developmental disabilities, Lashawn, had gotten involved in the Met's Discoveries program through Jody, a 35-year-old woman in his occupational training center with Down's Syndrome. Jody had attended Discoveries since she was a child, along with her father and her mother, Terry, a lifelong museum-goer and graduate of one of the performing

arts schools in New York City. While acknowledging that "unlike Terry, I was never really big on museums… I guess, working mom, never really having the time to do these things," Kristy enjoyed the program as "a learning experience" for herself and for Lashawn. And for him, she additionally stressed the necessity of programs that treated him with dignity, as an adult, in an inclusive setting that didn't otherwise "label" him:

> It's not a point of them being babied. That should be out, okay? They're grown folks. They're coming from childhood, you know, into adult life, into society. You understand what I'm saying? That's the way I treat Lashawn. I don't treat him like he has a problem, 'cause that's not the way that I want other people to perceive [him]. You understand what I'm saying? Because teaching him the ways that, you know, that he can better fit into society without somebody labeling [him], you know, and saying, 'Oh, well, he has, you know, a problem, or he doesn't know what's going on or whatever.' You know? So I'm trying to put him in society without him being labeled as such.

Toward the goal of enhancing visitors' inclusion and access to the art, what role did multi-sensory experiences play? I asked program participants this question in every interview, and answers varied considerably. Some visitors found such interactions invaluable, if not indispensable, most of whom were blind and partially-sighted. I interviewed Dave, for example, some time after I followed him on his TacTile tour and he spoke at length about how much he "loved" the Touch Gallery at the Art Institute and particularly liked to "try to get a full sense of things. I like to feel the different textures of things [and] to take my time observing with my hands… it's really nice to kind of get the feel of all the different nuances and details of the sculpture and how it feels with my hand." Other participants agreed engaging multiple senses offered them a helpful way to learn. Kristy, for her part, noted: "I like to be hands-on. You know, sometimes you can see something, but maybe once you see it up close and touch it, or whatever, then this [experience], more or less, gives you an idea of what maybe that piece of art is really actually looking [like] up there behind that glass." Others felt multi-sensory approaches were most helpful when tied explicitly to a pedagogical point. As one parent, a former art conservator

and long-time Discoveries participant with her son, noted: "You know if you're going to do multi-sensory things, you really have to set it up and make more out of it than, quick, let's pass this around quickly so you can feel what, you know, rice paper is like. As opposed to? It's like, that's nice, but what are we opposing it to?" And still others had little interest at all. When I interviewed Ron and Erma, he spoke excitedly about the conversations facilitated during Met Escapes tours. When I asked them about opportunities to do art-making or touch artworks through Met Escapes, however, Ron shrugged:

> **Ron:** We went to the Temple of Dendur, and the docent told us, "Touch the statue of Senegut." Or something like that.
>
> **Gemma:** Oh, Sakhmet?
>
> **Ron:** Yes. That's the name. They said: "Draw it." And I drew something. And I touched her [the statue's] knee. That doesn't impress me. The touching of the art doesn't impress me. But everyone has a different feeling [about that].

Ostensibly scattershot, this variation in opinions about multi-sensory engagement underscored a central finding in the art museum cases: educators' working philosophy that all program participants were different, and thus that the most successful programs necessitated adaptive expertise (both gauging the appropriate facilitation strategy for a given group of visitors, and providing choices). In the case of Met Escapes, for example, visitors could choose among three formats: gallery tours, hands-on sessions with items from the touch collection, or an art-making program. Some visitors signed up with regularity for all three; others selected the format with which they were most comfortable. Ultimately, sensory accommodations were a means for facilitating access: not an end in themselves.

Access to What?

The question remains, however: access to what? As noted, educators' goals were not to facilitate access for the sake of access, but rather to enhance visitors' comfort with, and consequently their understanding or appreciation of it – through whatever means. And toward this end, they were largely successful, as participants often acknowledged how knowledgeable the educators were and how much they learned from them. For instance, Terry's husband, Saul, said that unlike his wife, he hadn't grown up spending any time in museums. However, having participated in Discoveries with Terry and Jody since Jody was in grade school, he felt he had a new appreciation of museums and the art within them. Describing his recent experience of the Rodin Museum in D.C., for instance, he stated, "[Going there], you can easily form an opinion of what you like, what you don't like… [I] feel [Discoveries] does bring a connection to other things that we never would have considered." As Terry added: "We learned a lot in all the sessions because [the educators are] very knowledgeable. And at the same time, they've given us some language to use that we can do critical thought about the art. Looking at different things." In focusing their programs on the art, educators were also aligned with many visitors' expectations of their visit. When I asked Tanya to describe a "successful" verbal description tour, she said: "Mostly feeling like I really learned something that enhanced my knowledge and enhanced my enjoyment of the piece. Yeah. Having an educational piece, and feeling like there is something that I am burning to share with someone else that I learned."

In tracing these explanations of what participants valued about the art museum programs, and while moving more deeply into my comparative fieldwork, I began both to ask and code systematically for what visitors found "therapeutic" about their programs. My intent was to assess how, if at all, they felt a therapeutic pathway had guided their entry and inclusion in the

art museums.[212] Unlike the botanical garden programs I discuss in the next chapter, however, this turned out to be a somewhat unexpected question for visitors who were regularly confused if I brought up "therapy" at all. As one Met Escapes participant – the wife of another participant with Lewy Body dementia – told me: "Oh, I don't see [Met Escapes] as therapeutic," adding that would be "a different [kind of] program." Or consider Lily, a Met Escapes participant and Vietnamese immigrant, who mentioned to me that her husband, Phil, saw both a musical therapist and physical therapist. In her interview, I thus asked her to compare the Met access educators to these two therapists. Her response emphasized both participants' acknowledgment of educators' cultural capital and how participants used this to distinguish the programs from other therapeutic interventions:

> The physical therapist — very tough, right? They want to make the participant work. And the participant doesn't enjoy it. Cause [Phil] says: "I don't enjoy it"… While the musical therapy involves playing music, and getting the participant to sing along, and enjoy… But [the educators] are so much different. They are very smooth. They're educated. And they know how to convince participants to do things. To talk with them. To express themselves… they know more. They have more knowledge. They are more knowledgeable. Musical therapists have only one skill – they play music for the participant – but the museum educators, they are very skillful.

When participants did discuss the art museum programs in therapeutic terms, they defaulted, notably, to features they associated with art (beauty; emotion; expression) and that they personally enjoyed. For example, James, who has bipolar disorder, told me when describing his experiences with Met programs that he loved learning about the "history" of things and also liked looking at things that were "aesthetically beautiful." I asked him what he meant by this, and he responded promptly: "Monet. Things that, like, bring my blood pressure down. You know?" When I asked Jon Gabry, a deaf-blind artist who participated in the Met's Seeing through Drawing program, to explain what he meant when referring to the "message" of artwork he

[212] Silverman 2002.

created in that program and elsewhere, he responded through tactile sign language interpreted by his mother:

> I enjoy the movement of my own body when I make art. So, I kind of hope that people will see that in the work: that they'll see the movement and the emotion that went into making my artwork. Making art makes me feel good. Sometimes, I make art slowly. Sometimes, I make it really fast. And it doesn't really matter how I make it, but it gives me a sense of feeling. And for me, I always look for it to be beautiful for me, and I make my adjustments. I fix things. I add, take out, whatever. And then, if it looks beautiful to me, I hope other people will enjoy it.

This idea that access programs could be, but did not have to be, therapeutic aligned with educators' emphasis on therapeutic possibility versus therapeutic intention. When I asked access educators across the Met and AIC what, if any, therapeutic value they saw in their programs, they tended to hesitate. As discussed in Chapter 3, they did not identify as therapists and (like the participants I spoke with) they also rejected calling accessibility initiatives a form of therapy, though for different reasons. In part this was because of how they'd been trained and credentialed, in part it was because of the episodic nature of the programs they led, and in part it was because of the label's presumed incongruence with the politics of access and inclusion (this being particularly the case at the Met). Curiously, however, access educators did not necessarily repudiate the putative "therapeutic" benefits of such initiatives. For example, one Met contractual stated she was not sure about the "technicality of [Met Escapes] being called therapy" but regardless acknowledged that the program "definitely has therapeutic aspects to it:" "[it's] an enjoyable experience where people can relate to each other… in a calm, peaceful, non-threatening environment."

What educators were most comfortable with was being *open* to the possibility of therapeutic experience – broadly defined as museum-going encounters that made people "feel good" – rather than organizing programs toward a therapeutic end. In essence, creating a

therapeutic experience was not the point, but it wasn't unwelcome. In this way, they preserved the option that art's therapeutic benefits emerged from visitors' appreciation of it – as visitors confirmed it could – and thus, were specific to the art. This idea was expressed most saliently by Rebecca, when we were discussing Met Escapes: "We feel obviously because of what we do that art has so much to offer any visitor." As she continued, Met Escapes – like all museum programs – was intended to assist "anyone who comes to the Met for a little bit of peace, or maybe learning something new, or maybe… looking at something beautiful:"

> I would say that many or all of the programs we do could be – depending on the individual – could be therapeutic to them. In that they're putting them in a better mood. They're getting them out of themselves. I think learning is therapeutic. Learning broadens your mind and makes you *feel* better. Often – not always, necessarily – but, it can be therapeutic.

Notably, these distinctions among education, therapy, and the therapeutic presented somewhat differently when considering programs for visitors with dementia. As I describe in in Chapter 3, programs for this audience tended to involve health and other allied health professionals far more than programs for any other access group. At the AIC, dementia programs were co-led by art therapists and were organized specifically toward realizing therapeutic benefits: they were more structured in format, strategy, and scope and offered less opportunity for choice. At the Met, collaborations with the Alzheimer's Association through "Greet Art" programs framed conversations around art as a tool for caregivers to foster communication and interactions with their family members or clients. In reflecting on these programs, and the use of art within them, these collaborators tended to more often discuss art in relativist terms. For example, one staff member at the Alzheimer's Association active in the Greet Art programs at the outset of my fieldwork spoke to me in her interview about how the goal for Greet Art was

(emphasis mine) "for caregivers . . . to be able to learn to utilize art, *and it doesn't even have to be art in the museum*, to stimulate conversation."

While stopping short of discussing art interchangeably with any other resource, educators did tend to more often discuss art as inherently polyvocal when reflecting on the benefits of museum-going for visitors with dementia. This frame of course bracketed that in actual programs, educators often developed elegant (and at times not-so-elegant) ways of correcting interpretations that did not align with the canonical art historical narrative. However, it for the most part captured the open-ended spirit of their questions. In this approach, art could mean "everything." Asking for visitors' observations, and encouraging any and all responses, led one Met educator to say that when it came to people with dementia, the beauty of museum-going emerged from the idea that: "Whatever they say – if they see that in the work of art – it's *there*." One sees the inclusive spirit with which educators incorporated participant observations, for example, in the following conversation about Pierre-Auguste Cot's *Spring*, led by Abigail for a Met Escapes group:

> Abigail clarified that the final painting on the wall was by the same artist who completed the painting of a man and a woman running through a storm the group had discussed minutes before. "Something about that teenage romance thing," she said, smiling. These two canvases came from the same collection, she stated: "So you see that there's a similar kind of taste for this art: something playful, a little sexy, but not too much."
>
> A pause, and then she turned to Mitchell, an older, white-haired man with dementia who Abigail had engaged early in conversation at each prior artwork. She said, confidently: "So what's this story, Mitchell? You're good at putting your finger on it." He was quiet for a second before saying, in a halting voice, "You know, they definitely have something to do with one another," leading Abigail to nod and say to the group: "Well, Mitchell says they have something to do with one another. How do you know that, Mitchell?" He said, again after a pause: "Well, neither one is concerned; they seem very nice, with one another." Lourdes, a Hispanic caregiver attending the program with her client, Vera, then stated: "He's saying something nice to her, and she's looking up at him." I had to stop myself from shaking my head, realizing that to me it didn't seem that the woman was looking at him at all.

> Another caregiver, Dawn, then said: "Well… *maybe* it's true that she's smitten by him." "Dawn, you seem unsure if she's smitten," Abigail said, promptly. "What do you think?" In response, Dawn got very personal, and said, her voice slightly hushed: "She's innocent, you know? Love is only like that, that way, for someone so innocent." Lourdes then said: "Oh but that's love! That's love in its purest form," and Dawn, whose face I could not see, must have revealed something in her expression because Abigail said, with that big smile: "So some people are saying love, but Dawn is saying *mmmmmm*..." and Abigail delivered that last word with a high-pitched, dubious tone.
>
> There were several chuckles as Dawn said: "Well it depends on your definition of love… Is it something you can feel, you can see, or something that people *do* every day?" Mitchell's caregiver, Jessica, volunteered: "Maybe it's young love!" "She's enjoying his scent," Lourdes offered, "and there's a sense of protectiveness." Abigail smiled, adding: "She's enjoying being smaller than him… her size next to his size."

On the one hand, educators' emphasis on expression, in contrast to learning outcomes, when discussing with me programs for visitors with dementia arose from a legitimate inquiry posed by Abigail herself: "What do we mean when we talk about learning with someone who is forgetting?" To assert they could enhance visitors' knowledge about the art in the face of degenerative cognitive impairment was, for educators, an achievement they were (understandably) unwilling to claim. In part for this reason, when discussing her goals for Met Escapes, a Met contractual educator underscored the importance of fostering an enjoyable museum-going experience that met visitors where they were. "To me," she stated, "it's not the amount of information that I give over that someone walks away with. But it's more the experience that everyone kind of has a good time, enjoys what they are doing, feels free to participate at whatever level they're able to participate, and just walks away with a positive experience: [that's] my goal." Along similar lines, Lucas – in one of our earliest conversations – told me that he had tried to steer his volunteer educators away from "a more lecture style" over the years. When I asked why, he said that part of the mission for his outreach and access programs, but especially Art in the Moment, was to "create a validating environment" and facilitate opportunities for "socialization" through "art enrichment."

However, what these characterizations somewhat muted was the worth visitors placed on being in an art museum: an institution they considered expressly dedicated not simply to a "positive experience," but to an aesthetic one. This became clear to me as both caregivers and people with early-stage dementia I interviewed discussed how much they enjoyed learning about and looking at the art. One participant, Brian – recently diagnosed with Alzheimer's – told me: "I find that it [Met Escapes] stimulates me mentally. And it gives a fulfillment. And it's also of course an opportunity to see all the exhibits." When I asked what he found fulfilling about it, he said, slowly: "It is the journey through a painter's life that you try to appreciate and understand. And mentally it gives me an understanding of the effort and the artistry that he is capable of and presenting it to the world. It's like an open book—a dictionary of him." Throughout my fieldwork, I observed the enthusiasm with which participants reflected on "love in its purest form" or assessed the "good-looking dame" figured in a portrait of an eighteenth-century princess. The open-ended inquiry educators facilitated, coupled with their cultural capital, ultimately facilitated visitors' opportunities to engage with and enjoy artworks on view.

When working with people in the later stages of progressive dementia, educators sometimes faced challenges facilitating engagement. Many of these participants I observed were non-verbal and could not contribute directly to answering even the broadest ("what do you see?") or simplest ("do you like this?") questions. At times, I observed others sleep throughout most (or all) of their tours or art-making workshops. Regardless, staff members across the AIC and Met spoke to all visitors, addressing them directly and by name, crouching down to eye level, and offering them things to touch and handle. They welcomed responses of any type from these participants, as in this Met Escapes program a contractual access educator described to me:

> We [the tour group] went to another painting. Also of water. And a woman [Mae] who never says anything – and seems in great pain a lot of the time, and is hard to have on

> your tour because she used to be better and now she's declining – Mae looked up at the painting. Which she doesn't even often look up, she's usually hunched over, looking down at her lap. And she looked up at the painting and she said: "Boats!" And I was, you know, practically in tears. It was one of those transposing, transcendent moments. I was like: "Mae said boats!" I was like: "My gosh!" And it was just so sweet. And she was *excited* about that. And it was a *great* moment. And if that was the whole tour, that was the *whole tour.*

Caregivers, however – and particularly family caregivers – more often linked such rare moments of expression or engagement specifically to the art itself. When reflecting on why Met Escapes was important to her, for example, one caregiver, Ida, said that the program put her husband in a different "mental state:" "I've always marveled and wandered at the insightfulness of the [program] discussion in the questions, participation, and answers... The brain is still operating. There is a level and I feel – it's a level of hope. And that's very important, you know, that all is not lost. You can't remember what you ate for breakfast but the intellect is still operating." I spoke with Judith, whose second husband, Otto, had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's just two years after they married (a second marriage for both). We sat in her modest East Village apartment – its walls covered in art reproductions, decorative wall hangings, and lush greenery at every corner – as she told me that since Otto's diagnosis, he had a lot more difficulty censoring himself. Thus she valued that the programs offered him an environment where he could say "anything." But even more so, she valued the moments when he said something: specifically, something about the art:

> …on occasion, though not every time we go, Otto will say something on occasion about a particular painting that is *shocking*. Because it is so astute, it is so profound, it is so on target that I have to tell you – a couple of times I have had to leave the group and walked away, or gone to the ladies' room, or gone behind something, and just started to cry. And you never know when this is going to happen, because the docent can say something to him, because he has his little nametag on, and she'll say: "Well Otto, what do you think about this?" And he'll say: "Well, I think this is a piece of shit." And he has [said things like that], absolutely. I mean I would never, ever think of saying anything like that. But that's what happens with many of these people [with dementia]: they just say whatever thing comes to their mind.

> But at other times – I mean I can't remember exactly which tour it was, I really can't, but I remember that he just talked about what the artist's *modus operandi* was, that he must have had this in his mind when he used that color, and this was significant of something else. And it just blows you away. And it blows the docent away. His answers are so profound. I mean, the next day – the next painting – he might be as obscene as could be, but every once in awhile something like that comes through. If you weren't at the museum, looking at a painting, or having that experience – then he wouldn't be thinking this way. Do you see what I'm saying? So it's just that very presence of being at the museum.

Coupling these comments with those of Jan and Caryn – who described how "depressed" they felt when prohibited from participating in art museums they wanted (or used) to enjoy – and the pleasure visitors said they took from art experiences facilitated for them, the therapeutic dimension of the art museum programs ultimately came access to the art. Accomplishing this necessitated educators create a space welcoming of access audiences, adapting facilitation strategies (including sensory strategies) to visitors' embodied capacities and horizons of expectations, and – most saliently – keeping the focus on task at hand: being in an art museum. This idea was encapsulated in conversation with Ben, a caregiver who joined his wife, Rachel, every month for Met Escapes at the outset of my fieldwork. As he told me, "Met Escapes] doesn't feel like a therapy, and I think that's a good thing," adding: "I don't know how [Rachel, participant with Alzheimer's] would react if it were more obviously therapeutically-oriented." However, he added: "Simply by the nature of the activities that are going on, it's therapeutic, whether it's intended to be or not. It's getting her to think about things that otherwise she wouldn't, getting her involved in conversations she otherwise wouldn't have. It gets her to express her opinions. It's very different from anything that's going on in our lives right now."

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the sensory practices through which art museum educators

facilitate access to art for visitors with disabilities. I begin by discussing how first, verbal description (in-depth descriptions of art works) and second, touch (both through assistive technologies, and direct contact with collection objects) figure into museum programs for blind and partially-sighted visitors. I then examined how adaptations for this specific visitor public inform teaching across the broader category of disability, and across museum education audiences more generally. In particular, I trace the role of "multimodal learning" across my two art museum field sites, defined by Met educators as a set of teaching strategies acknowledging both differences among bodies and across visitors' learning styles.

Throughout, I have argued that at the core of such efforts to "bring the body back into" art museum teaching is educators' mission to break down barriers limiting visitors' appreciation of art. One way this becomes clear is when considering how educators framed multimodal teaching strategies as situationally, rather than inherently, valuable; they incorporated them into programs based on case-by-case assessments of visitors' needs, background, and interests. On the one hand, this approach calls into question how much, if at all, educators were able to challenge the inherent privileging of sight in the art museums and its associated program strategy of "look and talk." While at the Met, incorporation of multimodal teaching was more diffuse across audiences than at the Art Institute, opportunities for art-making, touch, and movement still tended to be incorporated primarily into access programs and programs for children across both museums. The differential emphasis on multimodal engagement also drew distinctions within the broader category of access. At the Art Institute, for example, accommodations for Deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors consisted of ASL-interpreted gallery talks: in essence, a fairly traditional tour format interpreted in another language. This was also the most common format for this visitor public at the Met, though as I was completing my fieldwork, the access department piloted an

art-making program for this group.

On the other hand, a more situational approach to museum teaching aligned, notably, with the interests of participants, who held a range of opinions on the museum-going moments educators described as multimodal. For the participants I spoke with, educators' keeping the focus on the art – and thus engaging multiple senses principally as a way to enhance appreciation of the art – was often central to program success. While at times art museum educators discussed program benefits in more relativist terms – particularly when it came to the museum-going experiences of visitors with dementia – those they led programs for highlighted the symbolic benefits of access to institutions with high cultural capital and expressed their appreciation for the learning and expressive opportunities art museums provide. The value of the programs ultimately came from the enjoyment people took in the art, and the reparative function of access to institutions and resources previously unavailable to them.

The subsequent chapter turns to a different institutional context – the botanical garden – to consider these questions about the framing of sensory experience in museums, its significance for visitors with disabilities, and its therapeutic worth. Tracing differences in sensory practices ultimately reveals that while horticultural therapists – akin to access educators – push to organize museum-going experiences around multiple senses, they construct the value of such experiences as universal, rather than situational, and link them more overtly to therapeutic meanings.

Chapter 5

In the Gardens

Jan and I sat chatting as she enjoyed some take-out lo mein; her cane, Alvin, leaned against the wall behind her, propped at a perfect 45-degree angle. I'd first learned of Alvin from Jan's voicemail, when I'd called her home number ("Hi! You've reached Jan and Alvin!") to set a time for our interview. Alvin had gotten his name, Jan explained, simply because a child once asked her if the cane had a name. "And I don't know where it came from, but I said Alvin, and he's been Alvin ever since."

Normally quick to share, Jan had taken some time to identify the "therapeutic" dimension of her verbal description tours at the AIC. I was interviewing her about her experiences with the Art Institute, but she'd brought up the Chicago Botanic Garden a few times when reflecting on Chicago-area institutions with accessibility resources. I thus asked her to compare the therapeutic dimension of the two museums. To this, Jan began to talk rapidly: "Oh, gardens are therapeutic *completely* differently because they involve the other senses." When I asked her to tell me more, she replied:

> **Jan**: The breeze on your face, the sun, the shade. The sound of the rustling of the trees, the water, all the smells, all the scents of the flowers. And you know, conifers smell *beautiful*. I mean, there's lots of smells. It's not just from flowers. You know, all kinds of smells, and it's an immersion. It's a three-dimensional feeling… I think that's a different kind of therapy because it allows you to diminish anxiety. It can help with depression. I think it can be smoothing over of rough edges…
>
> Gardens can *do* things at a gut level, individually, I think. Yeah: very primal. There's a part of that human core that goes: 'Oh, yeah, this is good,' you know. It doesn't matter whether it's an English garden or a tropical garden, rain forest. It doesn't matter. It really doesn't. I've been in all of them, and they all have cool things to say. And they have a calming, a restful, a de-stressing [element].
>
> **Gemma**: And that's not [true] in the art museum? Not calming in the same way?
>
> **Jan**: Not in the same way. I don't think so… Maybe if I had more sensory, if I had more tactile [opportunities], it could be more calming. But I don't because I don't get it from the visual, no. I get it from the other senses because you've got the breeze. You've got the smells of the wind and the air and the, you know, whatever plant life is scenting the place up… But also because a garden, by definition, leaves industrial noise behind. You don't have the sirens. You don't have the El [Elevated] train. You don't have traffic. You don't have motors. You don't have the bus. You don't have the diesel motor. Because you've eliminated all of that.

In an essay on the history of botanical gardens, Brian Johnson – presently the director of

Educational Research and Evaluation at the Wildlife Conservation Society – traced the institution's evolution from the physic or "healing" gardens cataloguing medicinal plants in mid-sixteenth-century Italy to the nineteenth-century botanic study centers examining flora accumulated through global nautical expeditions to contemporary "conservation" gardens dedicated to research on environmental issues.[213] "Botanic gardens have always been about plants," Johnson writes, "but the history of botanic gardens offer a unique window into how we humans have used and valued plants in the past several centuries… Whether plants were viewed at a moment in history as sources of medicine, income, pleasure or ecological stability can help us understand the role of botanic gardens at that same time.[214]

This chapter extends Johnson's idea that botanical gardens reflect how humans use and value plants, but does so through an interactional framework. More generally, I explain how botanical garden educators and horticultural therapists differently construct the meaning of nature across visitor groups and institutional spaces. Specifically, I show how people construct what Johnson calls "pleasure," and what Jan calls "therapeutic," as an especially valuable dimension of garden-going for visitors with disabilities. In parallel with Chapter 4, this discussion also returns to Chapter 1's account of how aesthetic meanings differ across the gardens and the galleries. In the art museums, aesthetics is constructed as a process of interpretive perception (how "to" look), and educators acknowledge the process often needs facilitation. In the botanical gardens, however, it is constructed as sensory pleasure (how "things" look). Further, such sensory pleasures are believed to act directly *upon* bodies: borrowing from Jan, gardens are understood to "do" things "on a gut level." Illustrating how

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[213] Brian Johnson, "The Changing Face of the Botanic Garden," in *Botanic Gardens: A Living History*, ed. Nadine Monem (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007), 064-081.
[214] Ibid., 064.

botanical garden staff and visitors frame this process as universally valuable – again borrowing from Jan, as the "part of that human core that goes, 'Oh yeah, this is good' " – and how they connect it to nature's therapeutic potential is the task of what follows.

Doing so necessarily presents a contrast with how art museum educators innovate sensory practices for visitors with disabilities. On the one hand, compared to their art museum counterparts, I suggest botanical garden educators have an easier time incorporating multiple senses into garden programming, thereby expanding this point first made in Chapter 2. Explaining how art museum educators incorporate multi-sensory experiences into gallery teaching largely reveals a process of innovation within constraints: of opportunities for touch focused primarily on visitors with low vision, and efforts to push toward more generally inclusive sensory practices. Explaining how garden staff differently organize visitors' sensory experience of nature through programs, however, reveals a process of framing. In particular, this chapter reveals how "hands-on" (and gustatory, and olfactory) experiences are incorporated into myriad constructions of nature, among them nature as science, horticulture, food, craft, aesthetics, and, therapy.

On the other hand, while the botanical gardens' sensory conventions are overall less consistently policed compared to the art museums, I suggest that vision nonetheless remains the privileged mode of museum-going experience across the gardens and galleries, with hands-on experiences designated solely for particular spaces and visitor groups. As with the art museums, it is also difficult for staff to argue for the substantive value of their institutions' aesthetic experiences. While all garden staff I interviewed acknowledged the fundamental pleasure visitors take from curated natural environments, many – again as discussed in Chapter 1 – felt it was reductive to focus too overtly on this dimension of botanical garden experience. In a 1973 article,

Howard Irwin, then the director of the NYBG, wrote "… for all their impressive statistics and colorful histories, botanical gardens today suffer from a lack of identity, especially in our culture where the public regards them as ornamented parks…"[215] Thus tracing how horticultural therapists advocate for multi-sensory garden environments – and how they navigate the push against being solely "ornamented parks" when framing botanical gardens as therapeutic landscapes – constitutes an important part of what follows.

The Senses and Scientific Practice

The Art and Science of Observation

Toward the end of my fieldwork at the NYBG, I attended several weekly training sessions for new volunteer tour guides geared toward professional development on "teaching science." With me in the classroom during this time was an average of nine new volunteers, mostly women over 50, and about half Latino or Latina. James Vickers and his colleague Selena, who oversaw the tour guide training program, were particularly happy about the latter, given their recent efforts to develop a corps of Spanish-speaking tour guides that could better serve the Garden's diverse local communities in the Bronx. I'd also learned from James and Selena that the "tour guide" title had recently replaced "docent," a term that emerged in art museum education as early as 1906 and that the volunteer school program educators still used at the Art Institute.[216] In the words of one senior staffer, the shift came about because docent was "a little bit antiquated; it sort of suggests a stuffy, lecture-based experience to a lot of people."

In keeping with theme, several of the sessions led by botanical garden staff in education and exhibition interpretation were largely geared toward pushing against anything "stuffy" or

[215] Howard S. Irwin, "Botanical Gardens in the Decades Ahead," *Curator* 16, no. 1 (March 1973), 49.
[216] Kai-Kee, "A Brief History," 19.

"lecture-based." This was a particularly necessary undertaking, they told volunteers, when it came to teaching plant science. At one point early in his 90-minute PowerPoint presentation – punctuated by his trademark jokes, winking eyes, broad smile, and indefatigable energy – Jamie displayed a picture of Professor Frink, the nerdy scientist and professor from the animated series *The Simpsons*. As the volunteers chuckled, taking in Frink's Coke-bottle glasses, buckteeth, and foaming beaker, Jamie noted this was "what most people tend to think of as your stereotypical scientist. You, me, all of us [at the garden] are dispelling these kinds of misconceptions and also charging them to think about what scientists do that is so important." There was a lot of "misinformation" about scientific process and scientists, he told the group, adding: "I often find people say: 'I always found science interesting, but I never decided to major in it, because it was so much book learning…' " As Jamie shared, love of "book learning" was not why he pursued his Ph.D. in plant biology. He did because he liked:

> …asking questions, and learning about the world, and figuring out how things work. But science isn't always taught that way. A lot of classes are taught as spoon-feeding, memorization: the *boring* part of science. The fun part for us that we convey to the public is what we like about science – what *people* like about science – with information, but not [with] heavy facts that makes people glaze over.

Jamie's encouraging NYBG tour guides to make science "fun" stands in some contrast to this project's earlier discussions of botanical gardens. To be sure, examining the work of museum educators reveals how across the gardens and the galleries, these professionals equally shoulder the responsibility of creating accessible museum programs and services that engage a broad spectrum of visitors. Regardless, Chapter 1's discussion of the differing aesthetic meanings in art and nature might suggest garden educators have an easier time framing nature's broad appeal.

However, this assumption is primarily contingent on staff framing nature's worth as aesthetic. Examining education programs at the NYBG and CBG reveals that art museum and botanical garden educators are akin not simply in the institutional conditions they face or professional responsibilities they hold, but also in the disciplines they teach. When garden educators understood their job as teaching science from the museum's plants, both they and their art museum counterparts faced the shared challenge of making accessible a domain of expert knowledge about which people could have prohibitive preconceptions. They did so, as Jamie's training session highlights, by avoiding "heavy facts" to instead teach people how to "ask questions, and learn about the world, and figure out how things work" through a process of observational inquiry. In essence, when teaching science, botanical garden educators joined their art museum colleagues in more broadly teaching visitors *how* to look. Or, as Jamie elaborated in his interview:

> As a whole, when we here tend to talk about doing science education, usually what we're talking about is we try to deemphasize the pushing of content. I mean, you could learn the name of that plant, and you know, you could teach the botanical name of that plant and all that kind of stuff, but that's not necessarily the emphasis. The emphasis here is to teach the process of science. So, science as a process of questioning, investigating, exploring… [And] observation. That's a huge one.

As stated, from their very origins, botanical gardens have always had an underlying scientific basis.[217] Both the NYBG and CBG, for example, operate sizable plant science and conservation research centers offering graduate degrees and continuing education courses. Running these centers are professional researchers, technicians, and assistants working across the fields of conservation science, economic botany, and systematics and evolutionary biology,

[217] See also Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, "The History of Botanic Gardens," in *Botanic Gardens: A Living History*, ed. Nadine Monem (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007), 012-017.

among others. When I asked Corinne, a manager of education programs at the CBG, to define the role of education departments within botanical garden, she responded:

> Well, I would say that probably the first and fundamental mission of a botanic garden, regardless of the audience that you're talking about, whether it's an adult or a teen or a child or a teacher, is to present and showcase – in a very engaging way – accurate, and scientifically up-to-date, and sensitively-presented information about the natural environment and the plant world. And the status of, and the role of plants, in our lives. So that's the fundamental role of the botanic garden. In terms of *education*… I don't separate that from the garden's [mission].

Accordingly, the salience of botanical garden's scientific mission resonated throughout many of the education programs I observed across New York and Chicago. For instance, on one NYBG children's education program, the educator, Ashley, asked the group of visiting students what plants needed "to grow." The students had fairly ready answers for this – water, sun – before a third, smaller than the rest of them, volunteered brightly: "Love!" "Love is maybe like, number four," Ashley said promptly, before continuing: "Water, sun, and air, ok?" (Later, she would tell me, laughing, that while she agreed that love may very well be the number one thing plants most need, "we [botanical gardens] are, after all, a scientific institution.") Educators leading school programs also often framed their program introductions around appeals to students' scientific identities by connecting what scientists do to what student scientists could accomplish in a single program. For instance, a NYBG freelance educator, Pat – notable for her big, booming voice that corralled even the most rambunctious of first-graders into attentive silence – opened one Green School tour by announcing to the group: "Today you're going to be investigators, or *scientists*, of plants and trees. What do scientists do?" Fielding different responses, she acknowledged: "They discover things, sure. Maybe they try to make them better, yes. But mostly," she added, "they try to make sense of things." On another occasion, she

phrased things more directly, announcing to a group about to tour the NYBG's Native Plant Garden: "Today, you're going to be scientists. And scientists make *observations*."

As discussed at greater length in Chapter 2, contemporary museum education practice centers on inquiry-based observation of objects. Beyond this professional parallel, however, botanical garden educators fairly readily acknowledged the centrality of observation to the specific disciplines of art and science. For instance, when chatting one morning with a staff educator in the NYBG's Green School Programs, I asked her how, if at all, some of the better-known teaching pedagogies that emerged from art museums impacted the educator trainings she led. She thought about it for a moment and then shared that in a recent New York Museum Education Roundtable meeting, she'd come to realize how much her own emphasis on "claim, evidence, reasoning" (make a claim; look for evidence to support or challenge it; interpret the evidence to draw a conclusion) in garden teaching of plant science spanned across her work to that of her art museum colleagues.[218] A more extended reflection on this idea came from Elizabeth, the only educator I met during my research with teaching experience in both art museums and botanical gardens. When asked to compare her work in these institutions, she interwove her personal history into reflections on the similarities between art and science:

> My father is a teacher, but my father is a science teacher. He now teaches anatomy and botany; he teaches at a junior college level. When I was a little girl, on Saturdays and Sundays, my mom would have a little break, and she would go out, and she would leave us with my dad. And my brother and I loved those times, because my dad worked a lot and he worked night school, and he wasn't around very much. He teaches at the Community College of Rhode Island; he still teaches there.
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> But my dad would often take us to the Rhode Island School of Design Museum, and my dad didn't know anything about art. He just would take us there. But as I thought about it,

[218] NYCMer (the New York Museum Education Roundtable), founded in 1979, is a professional development group for museum education professionals based in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. "NYC Museum Educators Roundtable | Mission + Beliefs," NYCMer.org, accessed July 31, 2016, http://www.nycmer.org/index.php?section=about-nycmer.

> and I've since talked to him a lot about this, he would ask us questions like a scientist. He would kind of do scientific theory with us. He would ask us well, what did we notice? What did we see? What did we think about that? And so, it was really scientific method, how he was asking us.
>
> And that's really what we do. Isn't that really what we do as museum educators? We're asking these children to look. To gather visual data. To make a hypothesis about that data. And then, to interpret the data that we've gathered to defend that hypothesis, that we then present to the group. And that's scientific method, right there. That's it.
>
> And my dad, whether he meant to or didn't mean to or whatever, I realized looking back that's how I approached teaching art. Or really, teaching whatever. Rooting things in observation. Which is what a scientist does. If you get put on a ship as a botanist, you get sent with Cortés, or you get sent with Napoleon: all you had was your notebooks, your observations, and the things you'd seen before to record whatever it is you see that's new, and to try to do your best to make some decisions about what this is and where you are, when you're in a totally different part of the world. My background was that, a long, long time ago, when I was little. But I understood that there might be a right answer. There might not be a right answer. But there would always be data, and we'd all interpret that data differently based on who we were, and that was really important.

Building upon Elizabeth's reference to scientific notebooks, one of the clearest examples of where art and science came together in the facilitation of observations regarded the role of sketching during programs. Many school programs across the CBG and NYBG included a sketching component, which educators again aligned with practicing science. For example, in a tour focused on how plants "use math," Elizabeth asked her students to fan out around the NYBG's Perennial Garden and select and sketch an example of "pattern, shape, or symmetry." After the students completed this and reassembled, looking down at and sharing their notebooks, Elizabeth began to explain:

> Having you guys make sketches is very much for plant scientists. Botanists – plant scientists who work with plants, and arborists, who study trees – they used to make sketches for themselves, and for others. Botanists, you might know, used to be brought on trips with explorers and they would make very detailed sketches of plants. This was important because they would often sketch things for people that no one had ever seen before, and they'd share them when they came back from their trip. So if you're a botanist, you have to sketch.

Along similar lines, on one of Pat's school programs led in the arid warm of the Desert Greenhouse, she encouraged students to spread out for "one minute" in the greenhouse's controlled microclimate and select something interesting to draw, adding: "A biologist – a scientist – always draws from observations." When she brought the group back together to discuss, the students flung their hands in the air, raising up their small booklets of graph paper enthusiastically in the warm, arid air to offer that they'd drawn (pointing) *that* cactus or *that* huge plant. In response, Pat responded: "OK, but now *describe* it." Various adjectives bubbled up from the students like popcorn, and Pat repeated them all back: "Long. Tall. Green, ok. Ah! Spiky! You keep bringing up those wonderful spikes! OK! Good job! But do all the spikes look the *same*? How *long* were the spikes?" After asking for one last volunteer, who offered that she'd focused on sketching leaves, Pat told her to hold her drawing up to the group: "And tell us about your leaves! Are they flat? Or curvy?" As she clarified to me later, the push here was to have the students think about what they were observing through comparison, contrasts, and inferences, instead of just "blindly drawing."

"Science just has to be hands-on"

Despite these parallels, however, facilitating observation of natural objects and environments in the galleries differed from observation of art objects in the galleries and these differences concerned the senses each process engaged. In part, this occurred because of the sensory affordances of the gardens' collections and environments, which lent themselves to different kinds of observational opportunities. (When ushering a group of school children from the NYBG's rainforest conservatory to its arid, dry desert environments, for example, Pat encouraged her school group to take a deep breath, stating: "We are now in the rainforest. Have you noticed it *smells* different?" After this, she added: "It smells sweeter because there are a lot

of epiphytes in bloom, or what you might know as orchids.") More so than this, however, tours – while the bread-and-butter of art museum programming – were in general a less common program format in the NYBG and CBG's education programs. Walking tours at each museum were run out of each institution's Visitor Services department and were unaffiliated with education staff who generally viewed them as a fairly limited vehicle through which to "teach science," or facilitate scientific observation.

This became clear to me in my first conversation with Helen at the CBG, who stressed the importance of teaching science to student visitors through a "hands-on" format. I first met Helen in the red trailer adjacent to the CBG's "Learning Campus" where she maintained her offices. At the time I was principally interested in identifying the differences across children's education programs in art museums and botanical gardens. Given their affinity with art museum's program structure, I explained I was particularly curious about the "tour" components of students' guided visits, which I'd read about on the CBG's Web site. At this point, Helen jumped in immediately, raising a hand to say: "OK, can I stop you right there?" in a friendly but firm voice. "I don't use the word tours," she said, adding she thought of them as "walk-and-talk," whereas all of her school programs involve some kind of activity that's "very hands-on." The only way one can learn about science, she added, "is by doing it." So even though there were some programs that involved "simply being in the garden and looking," it was always in ways that connected to the experiences the students had in the CBG's "activity rooms." "It's really about interacting in a way that you can't really on a walk-and-talk-tour," she stated, leaning back in her chair. "Science just has to be hands-on."

Practically, to insist science be "hands-on" meant that the children's programs I observed at the NYBG and CBG either began, concluded with, or integrated some kind of activity that

opened the "black box" on scientific process.[219] At the CBG and in the NYBG's Green School, this tended to involve pairing a tour of the garden's greenhouses or other designated garden space with an indoor activity held in the children's education center. The CBG's Propagation program for third-graders, for example, began indoors in the same red trailer where I first met Helen. After an inquiry-based assessment section called "What Do You Know?", the educator, Shannon, facilitated a card-matching activity entitled "How Many Ways Can We Produce New Plants?" where students paired definitions with words such as pairing "Cutting" with "Cutting or Removing the Leaf (then rooting it in soil"). In making their own "terrariums" to take home, the students then had the opportunity to experiment with different kinds of propagation, including leaf propagation with a dried jade leaf and stem propagation with a pilea plug. They then used their observation journals to walk through the CBG's green houses, observing and documenting signs of alternative propagation methods in specific plants. In her interview with me, Helen connected such hands-on "experience with the real object" to the unique learning environment botanical gardens provided:

> [In school] you can learn the parts of a plant by flipping to page 39 in your science textbook and looking at a diagram where leaf and stem are labeled. And then the function is, you know: there. And you can learn about plants this way. …[But the] hands-on component is the opportunity to have *real* plant material in front of you that you're looking at with a hand lens, or that you're pulling apart. Or that you're looking at maybe under a magnification [glass], so there's something you see that you can't see outside of class. And, this is more powerful and more meaningful than flipping to page 39 in the textbook... We [botanical garden educators] can show more examples. And, we can show how not every plant looks exactly like that thing on the page.

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[219] Richard D. Whitley, "Black boxism and the sociology of science: A discussion of the major developments in the field," in *The Sociology of Science*, ed. Paul Halmos (Keele, UK: University of Keele Press, 1972). Throughout my botanical garden fieldwork, I was regularly struck by the affinity between garden educators' emphasis on "doing" science, and the "practice turn" in science and technology studies that called for studying science not as a self-contained body of specialized knowledge but instead as a materially-mediated practice of work and talk (see also n. 19). For some early formulations of these ideas, see Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986) and Karin D. Knorr-Cetina, *The Manufacture of Knowledge: An Essay on the Constructivist and Contextual Nature of Science* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981).

Through such activities, the gardens further framed visitors' sensory faculties as scientific instruments: as tools for furthering observation, drawing contrasts, identifying comparisons, and testing ideas about how plants and the natural world worked. Consider the NYBG's Everett Children's Adventure Garden (ECAG), an indoor and outdoor interactive space that included a maze area, a climbing station, and explicit links between multi-sensory perception and scientific inquiry. According to the NYBG's Web site during my fieldwork, in ECAG "your eyes, ears, fingers, and nose are the keys to unlocking the mysteries of the plant world."[220] One sequence of interpretive materials toward the entrance of the garden was expressly dedicated to this idea, with separate signs focused on four different senses. Each — imperatively titled ("Look!" Sniff!" "Touch!" and "Shhhh! Listen!") — posed a question and a directive. "Sniff!", for example, paired "What do you smell in the garden today? Is it a minty leaf? A spicy or sweet smelling flowers?" with the encouraging: "Whenever you see the nose [on a label], take a good sniff!" At the end of the trail, a sign emblazoned with "Put it all together and think!" on the masthead noted: "Your senses are great tools. Use them and add your brain power to make cool discoveries about the amazing world of plants."

During ECAG programs, educators further affirmed this link between scientific inquiry and sensory exploration beyond the visual. In the first ECAG program I observed, for instance, the educator, Ashley, greeted the group of school children visiting on an unusually chill June day by saying: "Welcome to The Everett Children's Adventure Garden, an indoor-outdoor science museum you are going to explore today. Just like a school, you want to walk, and you want to follow directions. But you also want to investigate, using your senses: you want to explore." To

[220] "Everett Children's Adventure Garden | NYBG," NYBG.org, accessed June 12, 2014, http://www.nybg.org/gardens/.

the students' delighted cries, she pointed out a chipmunk darting across the path, then reasserting: "As scientists, we want to use our eyes, our ears, our noses, and our fingers as we investigate."

As part of the program, students participated in a "scavenger hunt" asking them to identify and sketch in their scientific "field journals" garden elements ranging from a "round, flat flower" to a "broad leaf" to a flower with a "sense of smell." Later, in a dissection activity focused on identifying the different parts of a plant, Ashley had the children examine their plant's stems. Here she encouraged students to rely on tactile perception as an observational faculty, specifically to prove stems carry water from the roots. "Now, let's look at this stem," she began. "It looks like it's doing a good job for the plant, but should we see? Let's see if there is water in our stem." Ashley began to hold her stem between her thumb and forefinger, directing the children to do the same with the plants they were holding, telling them "*squish* it," and then pulled her thumb away: "See if your thumb gets wet." Having accomplished this, she held up a thumb dampened by a sliver of wet, crowing: "I see it! Do you see it? Do you feel that? Did we just *prove* that there is water in stems?"

The Senses and Nature in Everyday Life

As Johnson argues, nature's multiple meanings have been variously emphasized by botanical gardens over time. Within the contemporary botanical gardens I studied, these accumulated constructions were available for educators to differently elaborate. This is significant insofar as not every education program in the botanical gardens focused on scientific inquiry. Borrowing from Corinne's phrasing, educators could customize programs to reflect more broadly on "the status of, and the role of plants, in [visitor's] lives." In so doing, garden

educators often facilitated hands-on and other interactions with nature beyond the visual not simply to foster appreciation and familiarity with science as process, but also to frame what I previously described in Chapter 1 as nature's instrumental value – in essence, how to *use* it – and, by extension, its role in everyday life.

The NYBG's Family Garden – soon to be renamed "The Edible Academy," as I was told regularly throughout my fieldwork – offers a helpful case study through which to begin exploring this idea. Like ECAG, the family garden is a space dedicated specifically to children and families, but is unusual in its singular focus on learning about nature through horticulture: the practice of gardening. Early in my interview with Jamie, I asked him to distinguish among the three areas of children's education he oversaw at the NYBG: The Green School, ECAG, and the Family Garden. In part, I was inspired by how educators working in these areas differently connected them to the garden's identity as a museum, as discussed in Chapter 1. In response to my question, Jamie noted that the Family Garden was distinctive in part because it was about "well, this is going to come across as something weird, but almost like how people *manipulate* plants. How we *use* plants… as edible crops."

More than a euphemism, Jamie's use of the word "manipulate" related directly to the kinds of experiences facilitated in the Family Garden. The space was designed to offer a fully immersive sensory experience: quite literally, an opportunity for visitors to dig in (and, as we shall soon see, eat up) through multi-session edible gardening programs, school programs, and drop-in planting, seeding, and potting programs for general visitors and most often, families. According to a web page on "Family Fun at NYBG," the Family Garden "provides hands-on

gardening activities from April through October, encouraging little ones and adults alike to play in the dirt."[221] Brent, a staff educator in the Family Garden, elaborated this idea in our interview:

> We're very much about the doing… Across the botanical garden, hands-on experiential learning [is important], but the Family Garden is relatively unique… in that it's two acres set aside for kids to come and garden. And so all of our programs really kind of use that, as our driving goal is to make sure that we provide opportunities – authentic, real opportunities – to be a part of the process of planting and tending and learning in a garden setting.

Consider one of my earliest visits to the Family Garden on a sunny June day, during which I observed the Graduation Day and final session of the spring's Sprouts and Crafters programs. The Family Garden's Children's Gardening Program – more than 60 years old at the time of my research – offers six-session programs for 3- to 5-year-old Garden "Sprouts" and 12-session courses for 6- to 12-year-old Garden "Crafters." On that day, enjoying a nice, sporadic breeze and a cloudless blue sky, the children were preparing dishes to enjoy with their family members by first harvesting vegetables from their cultivated garden plots. I took in the list of tasks for Crafters written on a large white board propped at the garden's entrance. In addition to #1 – "Prepare your dishes" – there was #2, "WEED as much as possible" and #3, "Harvest all you can, including mesclun" with an additional side note: "if your lettuces are bolting, or about to, harvest from SPROUTS beds instead."

At some point I approached Pat, who stood with her group of Crafters in their rectangular garden plot, encouraging everyone to harvest as much as possible. "Those are bolted," she was saying as I approached, while gesturing to the lettuce beds and nodding. "And if they're bolted, put them to the side." Across from her, squatting and looking down, a young African-American boy in an Edible Academy T-shirt said: "So if it's sour, we know it's bad?" Yeah, Pat said,

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[221] "Family Fun At NYBG | NYBG," NYBG.org, 2016, accessed September 28, 2016, http://www.nybg.org/visit/families/.

nodding. “Go ahead, taste it.” He ripped off a small piece from the leaf, looking up at her carefully as he placed it in his mouth and began to chew. Immediately, he pronounced: “*Bleh*. It’s *really* sour,” shaking his head as he made a face. “That’s how you know it’s bolted,” she said, with another nod. “You can pull it [up]. Leave it off to the side.” After this interaction, I asked Pat in an aside what “bolted” meant. She clarified that lettuce was a “cold-weather” crop. With heat like New York had experienced in the past week, “what happens is that the lettuce rises up high, and very quickly.” “You can tell,” she added: “It’s not low to the ground. That’s a sign that it’s past its prime. So it’ll be very sour, or bitter. You can have them taste it.”

Pat’s student sampling the bolted lettuce underscores how the family garden bridged visual, tactile, and gustatory ways of knowing. However, the interaction also highlights how museum staff reframed objects in the Family Garden as more than sacred museum objects to contemplate and specifically, as food. (Along similar lines, some time later in spring session’s Graduation Day, I watched a separate group of Sprouts wash in big plastic tubs the lettuce harvested from their garden, while seated on their knees in the grass by the raised gardening beds along the garden’s posterior wall. One young boy looked up at the high school intern beside him, pointing, and said: ”Look at the broccoli flower on the ground! Can I have it?” “Sure,” the intern responded, with a smile. As they both looked down at the grass, the intern added: “Maybe wash it first.”) Beyond its gardening programs, the Family Garden furthered its focus on plants as food by facilitating live cooking demonstrations, as well as evening family dinners featuring curated menus from famous local New York chefs. Both program formats incorporated plants harvested from the garden itself: here again, representing a departure from traditional treatment of plant “collections.” One mid-September day, Brent invited me to join a dinner prepared live and emceed by Matt Abdoo and Brooks Headley of New York’s upscale Italian restaurant Del Posto.

I arrived early enough that I could circulate among the interactive stations designed to help families make Italian salad dressing, pot their own basil plants, and design their own aprons (all for taking home). After a meal of *fior de latte*, pesto pasta salad, and a pecorino romano cake with candied sundried tomatoes for dessert, the friend I'd invited to join me leaned across the red-and-white gingham tablecloth to whisper enthusiastically: "Great job picking a dissertation where you get to eat fresh mozzarella for free!"

His comment – highlighting the unfettered pleasure of the whole affair – stuck with me long after the event, in part because it contrasted with the ostensibly negative valences of plant science garden educators felt they needed to manage by teaching science as a set of inquiry-based skills. To be sure, not every Family Garden program included a three-course gourmet dinner (which, it bears note, were not free for the non-ethnographers who attended). Further, those at the CBG and NYBG with whom I discussed on-site gardening programs also at times described the transferrable skills associated with gardening, and particular multi-session, collaborative gardening programs. As Jamie noted, the Family Programs were not just about planting vegetables "but it's actually about working as a team, looking at and identifying problems with those plants, cleaning your tools at the end of the day… in the end, you do get this wonderful reward: a tomato. But, it's not just for the tomato's sake. It's actually educationally meant to be much, much more than that."

When pushed to compare programs focused on gardening to those focused on plant science, however, botanical garden staff acknowledged the latter more readily mapped onto (borrowing from Corinne's earlier discussion of botanical gardens' mission) cultural understandings of nature's "role" in everyday life and how people otherwise valued it. For instance, at some point in our conversations, I shared with Jamie my observation that educators

in both The Green School and ECAG tended to favor hands-on science activities in classroom spaces, while educators in the Family Garden tended to focus more on gardening. He leaned back in his chair, stating: "You know, if I'm pushed to it, I certainly view my programs almost in that dichotomy as well. There's sort of the gardening side and there's the science side." And yet he hedged, noting that Family Garden staff like Brent would insist they were "absolutely" teaching plant science, and again affirming that the NYBG's approach to teaching children science was overall a holistic one scaled to a given audience's abilities:

> …the littlest kids are learning the earliest skills: maybe observation, and just asking questions. When we get to kids like middle-schoolers and high-schoolers, we're definitely try to make sure that they understand that science just doesn't happen in a lab with DNA, or something like that. It can actually happen outdoors. And, there's a whole branch called field science, which is in my opinion, underrepresented when science education is taught. So, it's in many respects, again in my opinion, harder [in that case] because the world is complex, and you can't control variables, and you don't have a control…
>
> Like, we're building on layers of complexity here. When you start to dabble in the realm of ecology field science, you really are starting to border on the levels of complex science here. And how do I find a way to take that [content] – which is very complicated – and boil it down so it's easy for a middle-schooler, so they can still participate but not get overwhelmed in some way, shape, or form?

After this, I asked him how this process of translating levels of complex content played out in the Family Garden. A beat, and then he responded: "Well, when it comes to edible gardening, that's an easier message, because I think most people get that. Most people have an attachment to wanting to grow plants so that you get tomatoes."

The idea of the Family Garden's "easier message" is more broadly significant insofar as it reveals how botanical garden educators could (and did) build on the myriad ways people relied upon or valued nature in their everyday lives. As we have seen, educators felt visitors might perceive plant science as dull, complicated, or intimidating, and in this way, they faced challenges similar to those of their art museum colleagues when facilitating programs. But these

educators also knew visitors brought varying associations of nature to the gardens that weren't always as prohibitive as science. Or, returning to Chapter 2's discussion of constructivist philosophy – the effort to create experiences that build on familiar categories – botanical garden educators regularly drew on particular affordances of nature to foster visitors' appreciation of it in ways the art museum educators could not. This could happen in more traditional "walk-and-talk" tours. For example, coming full circle to the training led for James and Selena's volunteer tour guides, one NYBG staff member praised a potential "ethnobotany" tour – focused on the relationship of different cultures and their uses of plants – by stating to volunteers: "There's nothing that brings people together like an ethnobotany tour because we all use plants for food. We all use plants for shelter, for cosmetics. All of us." But the idea that "we all use plants" was also quite often and readily accompanied by hands-on opportunities to "manipulate" them. See for instance this quote from a CBG family programs educator discussing how a weekend family class on pizza-making aimed to create connections between visitors' experiences and their use of nature in their daily lives:

> When we talk about the family programs that I do, we try to do a lot of learning about how plants affect your life and how they're involved in your life and you don't even realize it, especially when we talk about spices and herbs and fruits and vegetables. When they say they like to eat pizza, they don't like vegetables because they only like pizza, well, tomatoes are in there. We talk about oregano, parsley. The crust comes from wheat and the cheese comes from a cow, and cows eat grass. Well, they're supposed to, but they don't really eat grass anymore. But, so we talk about how plants, even if you only like pizza or chicken nuggets … well, stuff like that is affected by plants and how you have to have a lot of plants.

Or consider that both the NYBG and CBG offered adult certificate programs coupling academic coursework with practical components. These included more conventional nature-based curriculum – such as science-based classes, horticulture, or garden design – but also botanical arts illustration, landscape design, photography, wellness and fitness, and other more

idiosyncratic courses, such one CBG class on fermenting entitled "Fizzy Drinks." When I met with a manager of adult education at the CBG, I asked her about this pluralistic view of "nature," and she responded: "Well, I think any time we can reach out to a student and get a connection with them, to have them think about nature in any aspect — whether it's learning how to make dyes out of plant-based materials or learning what kind of plants you can eat — any time we connect them to a plant or the environment, then it's been a success." Later, she elaborated: "Why do people come to a botanic garden? It's because they want to connect with their view of nature. And we [as educators] provide that. So, these classes are just another facet of it."

The Senses, Accessibility, and Therapy

In analyzing botanical garden's science-based programs, I have shown how educators engage multiple senses to further visitors' understanding of how plants work and to highlight how scientific process is based in observation and doing. I have further argued gardening programs are an effective case study for examining how botanical gardens connect nature's use value to visitors' everyday experience and interests. While exploring educators' framings of nature as science and horticulture has addressed program models for students, families, teens, and adults, omitted from the discussion thus far has been the museum-going experiences of visitors with disabilities – people like Jan – who both fall within these audience categories and constitute an audience in and of themselves. In what follows, I trace how garden staff working with visitors with disabilities emphasize a third frame – nature's aesthetics – as both particularly valuable and, "therapeutic" for this audience group.

Sensory Gardens

As described throughout this chapter, botanical garden staff members often led programs within garden spaces designed for specific nature-based experiences. Programs for people with disabilities were no exception. Consider the CBG's Buehler Enabling Garden, which was constructed in 1997 as an update to the CBG's original Garden for the Learning Disabled.[222] Buehler included and expanded its predecessor's technologies to model accessible garden design for visitors with various physical disabilities. A sign at the garden's entrance proclaims Buehler a site encouraging "Gardening for People of All Abilities," further noting: "No matter what your age or physical ability, gardening doesn't have to be a challenge. This garden shows you that in a well-planned space, anyone can garden. Inside you'll find ideas that make gardening easier for everyone." Among its features are tactile beds organized into metal grids for blind or partially-sighted visitors who might garden by touch, as well as raised gardening beds with space underneath for gardeners seated in wheelchairs to park as they clipped, pruned, and dead-headed (or removed dead flower heads from a plant to promote further blooming). The garden also has a small outdoor pavilion where it regularly hosts groups – visitors and staff – from social service agencies, facilities, clubs, and schools for gardening and other nature-based activities through its horticultural therapy program.

Buehler, further, is a space specifically designed for visitors to use all of their senses. In a schematic layout of the garden's accessible features provided in "Garden Guide" brochure Alicia gave me during my fieldwork, a description of "Plants for the Senses" was paired with blurbs highlighting the garden's accessible tool shed, hanging baskets, tactile bed, and shallow pans.

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[222] The space, formerly an active working garden akin to the NYBG's Family Garden, was originally founded and financed in the mid-1970s by Elsie Sutter, a longtime member of the Chicago Horticultural Society. J.P. Reedy, ed., *It's Fun To Remember, Book II: A Story about the Women's Board of the Chicago Horticultural Society and Other Kindred Events 1975 - July 1990* (1990), 60-61, accessed in the Chicago Horticultural Society archives, managed by the Lenhardt Library of the Chicago Botanic Garden.

"Many of the plants throughout this garden appeal to the senses," the text reads. "Discover plants with bright colors, pleasant fragrances and interesting textures." In good weather, Buehler was never without its "sensory cart" and the sign atop it announcing: "our five senses… help us understand the world around us." The cart included a rotating selection of objects curated by Buehler volunteers, such as the "pineapple mint" plant to the thick, firm, flat leaves of the paddle plant, as well as a Stevia plant people could taste. When Alicia (Coordinator of the Buehler Enabling Garden) and Barb (Alicia's boss, and the Director of Horticultural Therapy Services) led a tour of Buehler for a group of teachers participating in the CBG's annual School Gardening Conference, they further highlighted the garden's diverse assemblage of aural, olfactory, and visual plants and features. These included the thick sheets of water rushing playfully from a water wall tucked in a shaded corner of the diamond-shaped Buehler pavilion; hollyhocks for hummingbirds and bushes to draw butterflies; and chocolate mint-scented geraniums and jasmine for visitors to touch and to smell.

While some sensory elements of the garden's design – such as the tactile beds and water walls – were permanent installations, others ("plants for the senses") shifted along with the changing seasons. In one of my first conversations with Alicia, during a hot June day in the early years of my fieldwork, I learned her position at the CBG was equal parts curatorial and educational. She both led programs in Buehler and, every fall, spring, and summer, selected which plants filled its gardening beds and the large rust-red pots in its container courts. In our initial chat, I asked Alicia how she went about selecting Buehler's plants, and she immediately told me plants there had to be "functional." Buehler, she noted, was a "programming" garden, insofar as it relied on its collections to facilitate activities. Thus "functional" plants included those she could use for activities and workshops led in Buehler's pavilion. Among these were

different varieties of coleus – a houseplant native to Southeast Asia that propagates easily – or herbs that could be harvested and used in dips and other cooking projects. Perhaps most significantly, functional plants also included "sensory" flora with bright colors, distinctive textures, and interesting smells that she described as both crucial to visitors' overall experience of the space and to fostering engagement with the space. As Alicia elaborated in a follow-up interview:

> So [I] just kind of make a design that's really colorful, that [includes] non-toxic plants, that you can use to interact with the publics and programming… you know, stuff I can harvest and things that are interactive. Just examples of plants that are really interactive. Like the nasturtium, those are those flowers right there, those orange flowers. You can eat those. Stuff that smells nice, or is just very sensory. It has to be a sensory plant in order to be in this garden. Whether it has a bright color or a texture of some sort. So a mixture: a balance and a mixture of all of the senses, stuff that smells good, tastes good, looks good and feels good, has textural elements. That's the criteria.

This initial conversation in Buehler with Alicia was the first of many times in my ensuing botanical garden fieldwork that educators and horticultural therapists in the gardens implicitly, and at times explicitly, connected the museum-going needs of visitors with disabilities to unmediated sensory interactions with plants. At the NYBG, for example, I asked a staff member in the Family Garden how she and the facilitators she trained adapted their program models for children with disabilities. As part of her response, she gestured to an "herb wall" I had not yet observed in use on programs, stating: "You know, that's always good for them, the sensory." Among its diverse program offerings, NYBG's Green School also offered a "Sensory Walk." On my first day shadowing Pat, I shared my interest in this particular program, and she offered to walk me through a "mock" tour. As we wound from the Herb Garden through the Perennial Garden, discussing the color matching game she facilitated and how she taught children the proper ways to touch "museum plants," Pat noted that "a lot of what we [educators] do here [in the sensory tour], we do for special ed" groups more broadly. Then she elaborated: "We

especially do it for those that are, well, *very* special ed. I mean, we do a lot with the tactile. And we'll try to pot with something fragrant, you know, rosemary, mint."

Compared to the other multi-sensory experiences facilitated in programs across the two botanical gardens I studied, the kinds of interactions staff facilitated for visitors with disabilities were unusual in that they most overtly bucked the botanical gardens' modal – if loosely policed – sensory conventions of "look, don't touch." As discussed, the NYBG's Family Garden allowed visitors to "manipulate," harvest, and even eat the plants growing there, but that was because they framed such plants as food: not collection objects. During tours facilitated as part of the CBG's and NYBG's science-learning curriculum, it was further incumbent on educators to enforce the distinction between the raw plant materials of their "hands-on" classroom activities and the sacred nature of museum collections. As a consequence, these educators were conflicted about offering opportunities for tactile engagement, even if they could better customize visitors' experiences. Educators' internal dilemmas extended beyond school programs to any initiatives focused on collection objects in the broader garden. On one public tour at the NYBG I observed, for example, the volunteer guide – having cheerfully engaged me in conversation before the tour, and thus having discovered my interests in sensory strategies for museum teaching – adapted a walk through the Perennial Garden to give my tour companion and me many opportunities to touch the collections and compare plant textures. However, she continually punctuated her encouragement with side comments including "we're not really supposed to touch," "go ahead, I'll take the blame," and "ok, this is not every tour, but today is sensory."

This kind of guilt was notably absent in Buehler and in other sensory spaces originally, or specifically, designed for visitors with disabilities. Such spaces included the Sensory Gardens in the CBG and NYBG, both of which had strong historical and programmatic connections to the

blind and people who are partially-sighted. James Vickers, for example, discussed "Helen's Garden for the Senses" in his presentation on accessibility for tour guides in training, while elaborating his broader call for volunteers to "adapt your tours for people of all abilities [by making] a multi-sensory experience [for them]." In particular, he noted the garden was a "place in the [NYBG] where visitors are invited to see, touch, smell, and listen to the multi-sensory experience of this garden," and that it had an accompanying audio tour offering both "informational commentary, as well as more descriptive commentary for visually-impaired visitors." The CBG's correspondent Sensory Garden was adjacent to Buehler and overall more centrally located than Helen's Garden, thus received more visitor traffic. Originally conceived for the blind and partially-sighted, the CBG broadened its scope early in the garden's develop to focus on promoting sensory encounters for all visitors. The current guide, and interpretive signage installed in the garden, both underscores, and challenges, the CBG's modal visual aesthetic in stating (emphasis mine):

> Even though we experience gardens through our senses, *many of us limit our enjoyment to what we see*. The William T. Bacon Sensory Garden is designed to be *a beautiful garden that appeals to more than just the eyes*. It is a great place to awaken your other senses and experience beauty in a whole new way.

Throughout the garden itself, signage both encourages and justifies visitors' direct sensory engagement with plants installed. In the designated "Touch Garden," for example, a sign often nestled alongside the fuzzy, ridged waves of red, hot pink, and yellow celosia cockscomb acknowledges that "one of the most enjoyable ways to experience a garden is through your sense of touch." Another smaller, adjacent sign, discussing the "aroma of leaves," notes that in some plants, fragrance is found in the leaves and stems rather than the flowers, thereby not only encouraging, but necessitating, touch: "The leaves of many plants need to be rubbed or crushed

to give off their full aroma. Gently rub the leaves of the plants in order to discover their unusual scents."

Broadening Modes of Aesthetic Perception

Descriptions of the CBG's Sensory Garden as a "beautiful" garden that "appeals to more than just the eyes" – through which one can "experience beauty in a whole new way" – foreground another important way botanical garden spaces specifically designated as "sensory" were unique. Specifically, such spaces offered opportunities for unmediated contact with collections that were singularly focused on sensory stimulation. To be sure, Alicia used plants in Buehler as materials for her programs in ways somewhat akin to how visitors used plants in the NYBG's Family Garden. However, many of visitors' sensory encounters with plants in Buehler – as with those for self-guided visitors encouraged by the CBG and NYBG's Sensory Gardens – were unconnected to these activities. During scheduled workshops, for example, Alicia typically began by guiding visitors through Buehler, encouraging them to explore using all of their senses. At times, this required recalibrating visitors' expectations about museum-going conventions (working with one group, Alicia laughed as an adult woman raised her hand to, and then dropped, and then raised her hand again to a feathery red celosia plant, standing narrow and wispy out of a round planter. "Touch it! I know you want to," Alicia encouraged.) Alicia prompted visitors, for example, to rub the hairy, velvety softness of the lamb's ear adjacent to the garden's raised pools, or encouraged them to smell lavender growing tall and thick out of the rich brown dirt in its red-brick ground planters. Ultimately, sensory plants selected specifically to entice sensory interactions had the ostensibly simple goal, as Alicia described it to me in our first conversation, of "smelling good, tasting good, looking good, and feeling good."

Arguably, this approach was innovative not simply because it departed from the garden's sensory conventions. More broadly, sensory gardens expanded the botanical garden's modal definitions of aesthetics as visual beauty – "how" things look – to include other senses. To this point, Alicia often contrasted her selection process for Buehler with the broader curatorial conventions of the CBG. The contrasts were particularly evident to her, she explained, because Buehler was the only programming garden included in the CBG's 26 main display gardens and thus differed, say, from both the original Garden for the Learning Disabled – located by the CBG's employee entrance on Dundee Road – and the contemporary Children's Growing Garden, located adjacent to Helen's office trailer in what the CBG terms the "Learning Campus." As Alicia saw it, Buehler's emphasis on "functional" plants distinguished it from other areas of the main garden primarily favoring plants that she described as "botanically interesting [rare] or beautiful." (To punctuate this statement, she gestured to a 2-foot tall white cage of tomatoes installed in Buehler, telling me with a grin that the director of the garden recently described these to her as "more Home Depot than Chicago Botanic Garden.")

Alicia's contrasting "sensory" with "beautiful" again underscores how often the garden's aesthetics was defined in terms of sight. And yet, when Alicia described sensory plants as "stuff that smells good, tastes good… and feels good," in addition to stuff that "looks good," she revealed how her curatorial practice and programs actually *extended* the botanical gardens' definition of aesthetics as unmediated, sensory pleasure. Embedded in her description of "sensory plants" is the idea that when a body meets a (carefully chosen) plant, the overall impression is "good," and, further, that such pleasures are not reducible to visual experience.

This approach further resonated, notably, with the verbiage on the signage in the CBG's Sensory Garden next door, and with the history of that particular garden. As stated, while the

Sensory Garden was originally designed for blind and partially-sighted visitors, the CBG decided to broaden its focus on the recommendation of Dr. Robert Winn, a special education administrator and then-director of the Hadley School who was himself blind. As he wrote in prepared remarks for a CBG committee meeting (emphasis mine):[223]

> *…in so many areas in the aesthetic world of the arts, plants – you are not allowed to touch.* You're only allowed to see… What happens in early childhood, and you've seen this in stores where the mother slaps the hand of the child and says "do not touch." If a child picks up a vegetable in the grocery store and starts smelling, you slap the hand – "do not smell." You're only supposed to look at things. *I think your Sensory Garden offers an opportunity for many adults as well as children to gain that aspect of appreciation which in our society we tend to train out those people at a very young age.*

Given the ideas explored in Chapter 4, one can see how expanding aesthetic "appreciation" of botanical gardens' beauty to include senses beyond the visual resonated with these institutions' broader efforts toward accessibility. In the art museums, as I argued in Chapter 4, educators reframed touch as a tool that could further visitors' interpretation of art. In the gardens, staff connected touch, smell, and to a lesser extent, taste and sound, to botanical gardens' beauty. In both cases, doing so aimed to broaden the types of embodied perception deemed legitimate for aesthetic experiences across the gardens and galleries.

Therapeutic Landscapes

Despite their shared innovations in modes of aesthetic perception, however, program for visitors with disabilities regardless differed in two substantial ways across the gardens and galleries. First – and more broadly – while art museum educators focused on facilitating aesthetic interpretation for *all* visitors, botanical garden program staff (as we have seen) drew on myriad

[223] (Dr.) Robert Winn, Hadley School for the Blind, "Botanic Garden Committee Meeting on November 21, 1985," accessed in the Chicago Horticultural Society archives, managed by the Lenhardt Library of the Chicago Botanic Garden, box 51B, folder 11.

framings of nature when working across visitor groups. It was only in programs for visitors with disabilities that botanical garden staff focused primarily on elaborating the aesthetic logic of their institutions. Second, art museum educators constructed themselves as an "obligatory passage point" for their visitors' aesthetic experiences, believing they often needed to mediate, or assist with, visitors' interpretation in order for such experiences to be fully realized. [224] But in the botanical gardens, educators and horticultural therapists assigned aesthetic agency to the plants themselves, and the broader garden environments in which those plants were installed. This is what Alicia meant by defining "sensory" as a "functional" characteristic of plants (or what it meant to list "plants for the senses" among Buehler's accessible features). In the botanical gardens, plants – even when ostensibly doing nothing – are understood by virtue of their sensory affordances to be doing *something*: something, as Jan described it where this chapter began, "on a gut level."

At the CBG in particular, what they were doing was framed as therapeutic: Alicia – and Barb – enrolled plants in the task of therapeutic work.[225] Buehler's established and seasonal sensory designs contributed to its broader construction as a "therapeutic landscape," defined by medical geographers as "places that have achieved lasting reputations for providing physical, mental, and spiritual healing" and that demonstrate the relationship of health to place.[226] In

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[224] Originally defined by Callon, an obligatory passage point in this case can be best understood as a situation that has to occur in order for both actors in a given context to satisfy their mutual interests: specifically, how museum educators and visitors satisfy their objectives for the art museum encounter, defined by educators as a process of aesthetic interpretation. Michel Callon, "Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St Brieux Bay," in *Power, Action, and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?*, ed. John Law (Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 196-233

[225] My use of the world "enrollment" again relies on Callon's formulation of agency as assigned to objects through interaction. In this view, objects may alternately fulfill, or resist, the roles assigned to them and thereby fulfill the interests of those doing the assigning.

[226] Robin A. Kearns and William M. Gesler, "Introduction," in *Putting health into place: landscape, identity and well being*, ed. Robin A. Kearns and William M. Gesler (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press), 8. For original formulations of the concept of therapeutic landscapes, see William M. Gesler, "Therapeutic Landscapes: Medical Issues in Light of the New Cultural Geography," *Social Science & Medicine* 34, no. 7 (April 1992), 735-46. For a

elaborating this idea, horticultural therapists had at their disposal botanical garden's longstanding historical connections, as well as their enduring commitments, to promoting well-being. Both the NYBG and CBG, for example, had public programs dedicated to "wellness," a capacious category including meditation courses, yoga, running, and other exercise courses led outside, along with classes on the preparation of herbs to make homemade health remedies (here, remembering Johnson, an extension of botanical garden's institutional origins as study centers for medicinal plants). The NYBG's "Wellness" Programs in Fall 2015 included, for example, "Tai chi for Peace of Mind and Body," "Intro to Aromatherapy," and a session on how "How to Relax Profoundly, not Temporarily." In my exploration of the professional literature on horticultural therapy, I found it often relied on similar naturalizing metaphors of gardens as therapeutic landscapes, with one author in a comprehensive edited handbook noting the first recorded use of horticulture in a treatment context occurred in ancient Egypt, "when court physicians prescribed walks in palace gardens for royalty who were mentally disturbed…"[227] As he writes:[228]

> Although horticultural therapy is a comparatively young profession, the concepts upon which the profession is built are as ancient as the pyramids. These concepts were evolved many centuries ago simply because they made good sense. Each of us who has marveled at the perfect flower, taken pride in growing the perfect plant, or felt excitingly renewed upon discovering the first blooms of spring has experienced these founding principles which gave rise to the profession of horticultural therapy….

This particular quote – focused, as it is, on the shared and ostensibly universal pleasures people enjoy in nature – further informs understanding of the types of activities facilitated in

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more recent review, Fiona Smyth, "Medical Geography: Therapeutic Places, Spaces and Networks," *Progress in Human Geography* 29, no. 4 (August 2005), 488-95. As Lupton has argued, the work of medical geographers contributes to broader studies of science, technologies, place, and space that are informing recent work in medical sociology. Deborah Lupton, *Medicine as Culture: Illness, Disease, and the Body in Western Society* (London, UK: Sage, 2012), 16-19.

[227] Steven Davis, "Development of the Profession of Horticultural Therapy," in *Horticulture as Therapy: Principles and Practice*, ed. Sharon P. Simson and Martha C. Straus (Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press), 3.

[228] Ibid.

Buehler. In particular, such activities tended to align with botanical gardens' broader focus on people's common understandings of nature, its use as a tool in everyday life, and its "easier messages." In horticultural therapy programs, staff did not, notably, appeal overtly to participants' scientific identities. Throughout my fieldwork in Buehler, I observed a broad range of gardening, craft, and culinary workshops for groups including, but not limited to, those in stroke rehabilitation programs; schools serving children on the autism spectrum; people with dementia; and individuals recovering from substance abuse. In addition to the coleus propagation activities and the preparations of vegetable dips and other dishes, I observed people from a residential community for the blind and partially-sighted create pebble-based dish gardens with thick, fleshy succulents, and a group of veterans create garden "memorial stones" with brightly colored glass marbles one day and flower arrangements with dahlias and sunflowers the next.

A spirit of relaxed informality characterized these initiatives throughout. Alicia rarely worked with lesson plans, in contrast to the otherwise carefully crafted objectives and outlines for school and family programs I observed at the CBG (acknowledging, of course, people more often than not departed from these in practice). For the memorial stones project, she had printed out some information and background from the Internet, and when giving directions to the group several times expressed her lack of familiarity with the program format by joking, with a smile, "remember guys, it's amateur hour here." One day, I asked Alicia how she felt about being located in the Garden's education department, and if she considered herself an educator. She paused as though she had not thought of this before, and shared that she thought of her programs as more similar to "enrichment." A pause and then, as though trying to sort it out for herself aloud, she added: "But I do teach…"

"But How to Bridge [Aesthetics] with Therapy?"

Given the deconstructed meaning of Buehler's "therapeutic" dimension – in essence, its grounding in nature's sensory pleasures – why wouldn't the horticultural therapists simply acknowledge the success of their programs rested largely on botanical gardens' beauty? Overall, and perhaps surprisingly, this aesthetic logic often fell short as a justification for programs. For one, recalling some of the comments botanical garden staff made about nature's aesthetics that I cite in Chapter 1, staff members particularly invested in advancing the garden's scientific mission or who otherwise wanted to frame botanical gardens as educational museums felt the garden's aesthetic dimension could be a distraction. Consider the NYBG's Green School's "Sensory Walk" lesson plan for educators, which states that its intended objective is for students to use their "eyes, ears, noses, and fingers" to "deepen their observational skills" (thereby in keeping with the inquiry-based philosophy of science teaching in botanical gardens). However, Pat made clear to me during the mock Sensory Tour that there was often a decoupling of theory and practice, not once but twice describing the program (and its lesson plan) as particularly "touchy-feely." As she used it, the term had double meaning, referring both to the execution of a program in which people were encouraged to "touch" and "feel" and, her continued connection of this term to the needs and experiences of "special ed" students.

Ultimately, framing the garden's sensory environments in the language of therapy afforded them worth of greater prestige. In this regard, staff's emphasis on identifying the specific therapeutic benefits of nature through horticultural therapy research was particularly telling. This was an ongoing objective for the horticultural therapists at the CBG and particularly, Barb. According to Corinne, when Barb was hired to replace Gene Rothert, Corinne selected her in large part because she saw the former occupational therapist as "someone who was interested

in research, who was willing to do the legwork to reach out to potential partners, and who [herself] had a very strong sort of therapeutic background." Similarly, in my interview with Helen, she spoke enthusiastically about Barb's hire, sharing that she had never quite understood how the program's "therapeutic goals" were defined and measured and also felt when she had asked staff about them previously, people had "danced around" the question. She added that it was her impression that horticultural therapy programs led by those without "a background in any kind of medical therapy" could often be "Loosey Goosey" (conceptually linked to, if still distinct from, "touchy-feely.")

Of course, the "Loosey Goosey" approach to horticultural therapy in botanical gardens stemmed in no small part from the institutional constraints faced by those leading programs. As discussed in Part 2, the episodic nature of programs and the lack of advance information staff received about visitors' needs and background constrained any accomplishment of medically-defined "therapy" in the museum setting. This was something Alicia and Barb were quite cognizant of. From my earliest interactions with them, they regularly referenced definitions from a position paper published by the American Horticultural Therapy Association that distinguished between "horticultural therapy" and "therapeutic horticulture," in order to explain to me that their programs fell into the second camp.[229] As the paper states, while horticultural therapy requires a client, a trained therapist, and "specific and documented treatment goals;" therapeutic horticulture "is a process that uses plants and plant-related activities through which participants strive to improve their well-being through active or passive involvement. In a therapeutic

[229] "American Horticultural Therapy Association Definitions and Positions," American Horticultural Therapy Association, 2012, accessed September 27, 2016, http://ahta.org/sites/default/files/DefinitionsandPositions.pdf.

horticulture program, goals are not clinically defined and documented but the leader will have training in the use of horticulture as a medium for human well-being."[230]

What Helen described as "Loosey Goosey" could also, however, be attributed to the fact that while the shared consensus on the "good" of nature's sensorial pleasures was something everyone in the botanical gardens could agree on, commensurating it as therapeutic was much more of a challenge. Given this task primarily fell on Barb, she was the one who was most candid with me about these difficulties. In particular, she shared how in her capacity as Director of Horticultural Therapy services she often felt she was reliving the professionalization challenges she had faced at the beginning of her career as an occupational therapist. For example, in our first interview in 2010 (shortly after she was hired at the CBG), she shared the following story about her early years working as an occupational therapist in a Veterans Administration hospital:

> One of the psychiatrists, during Grand Rounds – which is in front of everybody – we were discussing a patient. And he started to move on. And I said: "Well, wait a minute. I want to tell you what he's doing in OT." And he just kind of rolls his eyes and looks at me and says, "Well, we don't really care." In front of everybody! And I said, "Wait a minute, you can't tell me that if he [the patient] sits up in the day room, smokes" – which they were allowed to do in hospitals back then – "watches daytime TV, and drinks coffee it'll be the same as if he comes to [OT]." Because [the patients] had OT, and exercise therapy, and recreation therapy: they had five hours of therapies during the days. "You can't tell me that it's equivalent!"
>
> He said [in response], "It absolutely is. [The patient] has to wait three or four days for the medicine to kick in and it really doesn't matter what he does during those three or four days." I said: "You're kidding me." He said: "I dare you. You can't show me one bit of evidence that it makes any bit of difference." So I looked, and I couldn't. There wasn't any. OT was very much where HT is now. There was nothing. No research. It was intuitively a great thing to do, but there was nothing to back it up.

Later that fall, I attended a research symposium of presentations for people enrolled in the Chicago Botanic Garden's horticultural therapy certificate program, in which Barb and Alicia

[230] Ibid., unpaginated.

were also participating that year. Tasked with providing a "state of the field" of research on horticultural therapy, the wide range of interdisciplinary scholarship participants presented on the healing power of nature was simultaneously compelling and dizzying. The sources they discussed included, but were not limited to, Roger Ulrich's work on nature and theories of sensory overload, arousal, and pain; the geographer and landscape architect Clare Cooper Marcus's research on the history of gardens in healthcare; the psychologists Rachel and Stephen Kaplan's Attention Restoration Theory, which describes why people concentrate better after spending time in nature; case studies published in the American Horticultural Therapy Association's own *Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture*; and articles on nature's benefits and impact in journals ranging from *Urban Ecology* to *Psychological Science* to *Environment and Behavior*.[231] Barb's presentation that day was more measured. In her conclusion, she addressed what had otherwise not been said: that no research on horticultural therapy was being published in major medical journals and that, more generally, that "what is being published is just beginning to rise to the level of scientific research."

Two years later, when Barb and I met for a follow-up interview, I asked her how, if at all, her feelings about the research on horticultural therapy had evolved. Her response reflected her enduring belief in the good of nature, and her acknowledgment that it was difficult to identify its therapeutic benefits using the standards of biomedicine. She stated without hesitation that HT's biggest contribution to healthcare professionals was in how it could get them to "think more systematically about the role of environment." After a pause, she added that in her years as an

[231] See, in particular, Claire Cooper Marcus and Naomi A. Sachs, *Therapeutic Landscapes: An Evidence-Based Approach to Designing Healing Gardens and Restorative Outdoor Spaces* (New York: Wiley, 2013) and Rachel and Stephen Kaplan, *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 1989). Roger Ulrich's work regularly came up in conversations with horticultural therapists, though they most often brought up his finding that surgical patients with a window view of natural settings had shorter postoperative stays in the hospital than those without. See Roger S. Ulrich, "View through a Window May Influence Recovery from Surgery," *Science* 224, no. 4647 (April 1984), 420-421.

occupational therapist, she'd worked in hospital basements, in bare conference rooms under fluorescent lights, and in windowless rooms the size of supply closets. Wide-eyed, she asked me: "I mean, how can we imagine that surroundings mean no difference in the success of these [medical] programs, these practices?," adding later: "What would you rather be doing: having someone push on your shoulders in a hospital basement, or sitting in a bench in a garden?" After a pause, she raised her hands in the air. "But how to bridge that with the therapy… I don't know."

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how botanical gardens develop programs for visitors that engage multiple senses, extending Chapter 4's investigation of similar practices in art museums. Compared to art museum educators, I find garden educators more often develop programs incorporating "hands-on" activities, including when framing observation as an embodied process of "doing" science. Further, in leading botanical garden education programs, staff often build upon visitors' associations with nature's diverse meanings and roles in everyday life; these "easier messages" often allow staff members to expand beyond the often dull or esoteric associations of plant science they believe visitors bring to programs.

When working with visitors with disabilities, I have argued botanical garden staff tend to focus more overtly on nature's aesthetics, commonly understood within these institutions to be the "easiest message" of all. In contrast to the aesthetic interpretation art museum educators facilitate in the galleries, staff assign nature aesthetic agency – presuming its beauty *acts upon* bodies in a pleasing way – and design spaces and programs foregrounding how nature's beauty spans beyond visual perception. However, nature's aesthetic dimension is not in itself a

justification for programs. In particular, I have suggested horticultural therapists at the CBG reframe nature's commonly agreed upon aesthetic "good" through a therapeutic lens, despite the ongoing challenges of commensurating its aesthetic value in their institutions and its therapeutic value in contemporary biomedicine.

Addressing the implications of these findings requires returning to where this chapter began: to the participants – like Jan – who partook of such programs. Throughout my research, I spoke with 12 participants in the CBG's horticultural therapy program, and all – again like Jan – described Buehler's virtues and goals in ways notably aligned with the horticultural therapists. In particular, they spoke to me at great length, and with relish, about the beauty of the garden, as well as its sensory pleasures. I chatted, for example, with Gabrielle, who participated in CBG gardening programs through a recreational day program serving adults with developmental disabilities. Gabrielle lives in a group home in the Chicago suburbs, works in a school "serving people lunch, and giving mail to the teachers," and shared with me her love for *Clean Eating* magazine and its tofu recipes. When I asked her what she liked about her program's trips to Buehler, she told me: "It's gorgeous… beautiful. Like, just, like, how natural everything is, and how beautiful nature can be." This included both the view of the lake she liked to admire from the back of Buehler and "the flowers and the plants: they smell good. They're very pleasant." When I asked another participant in the day program, Derron, how, if at all, if he found the botanical garden therapeutic, he told me he did because: "It's just like, outdoors. It's fresh. The fresh wind blowing with the grass, and the leaves… and you just smell the roses and be like, ahhhh. The roses smell good." Participants I spoke with also echoed horticultural therapists' understanding that aesthetic criteria spanned across modes of sensory perception. For instance, when I interviewed Renata – who told me, at the outset of our interview, that she was blind and

deaf in one ear – about her experiences visiting Buehler, I asked her what plants in the garden she found beautiful. She took a deep breath in, and stated with feeling:

> Oh my *gosh*, the most beautiful plant, I think I saw it [in Buehler]. It's the most *softest* plant. It feels like the African Violet, but it's not. You had it hanging, or felt like it was hanging like a soft, felt lying there in the garden. To me, it was so sultry. And then you had another one that felt like the fur of a rabbit's tail. Those two plants embody beautifulness to me.

In other ways, however, visitors' experiences of the garden contrasted with staff members' focus on the inherent value of natural environment's therapeutic affordances. One particular vivid example of this finding emerged from my conversation with Cameron, who attended CBG programs along with Renata. Cameron was an affable jokester, a former fashion photographer, and a self-described shameless flirt. He prided himself on his vision being good enough that he could take pictures throughout the horticultural therapy programs he attended and then describe them later to residents of the group home who couldn't join that day. (Sometimes the pictures were even of me. As he told me in our interview, his planned description for the most recent one was: "This is Gemma. She's really intense, always, and talking, always, and strolling down the walkway. And there's beautiful flowers on both sides of her and, she looks like a goddess.") Cameron, like all other program participants from the CBG I spoke with, described the horticultural therapy programs quite favorably and the garden as beautiful. But he was nevertheless willing to engage my question about what, if anything, the CBG could do differently. For one, he told me he wished his group would get to explore other areas of the garden other than Buehler. But he also wished that the programs focused a bit more on content:

> Well, I've been [going] there four years now, at the botanic gardens. I'm at a level now that taking dirt and putting it into a pot and sticking flowers in it, that's not a challenge at all. So we need to expand our educational aspect of it. I don't know what there is if we're in a short-bus group or what. I would think that they would have more higher-level of education there. And I'm sure there is. Right? Not everybody just goes there and starts clipping flowers off.

Here it bears repeating that unlike the art museum educators discussed in Chapter 4, the sensory practices horticultural therapists developed for visitors with disabilities were not "one extra tool in the kit" but rather the sum total of experience. As I argued in Chapter 3, therapists leading programs for visitors with disabilities were less likely to adapt program formats and their associated sensory practices in order to focus on achieving "therapeutic" outcomes, however defined. In the case of the botanical gardens, they were defined as exposure to carefully curated, explicitly sensory gardens – of which there were not all that many – and, excepting some more vocationally-focused volunteer garden work, "enrichment" workshops.[232] Cameron's discussion of the "short-bus" – a pejorative reference to the kinds of public transportation associated with special education students – reveals his perception that the programs offered to him differed from those offered to visitors without disabilities, a perception that was not entirely false. More broadly, it underscores that while visitors I spoke with and observed demonstrably enjoyed their visits to the garden and its natural beauty, this did not preclude the finding that for some, diversification in program structure would have been an asset.

I thought of Cameron on the last day of my fieldwork at the CBG, during which I observed a program led for a small group of women with partial vision. The CBG was again collaborating with The Hadley School for the Blind to develop a book of "best practices" for

[232] Because Buehler was located on the main island, gardening programs tended to be either confined to self-contained activities in the pavilion or focused on upkeep, including sweeping or pruning Buehler's collections. In this way, unlike the NYBG's Family Garden, Buehler was not intended to function as a working farm. One long-time program supervisor of Sandell Place, an assisted living center for the blind and partially-sighted, made this contrast emphatically in her interview when juxtaposing Buehler with its predecessor, noting there had been far more regular gardening activity in the Garden for the Learning Disabled. Regardless, some visitors affirmed horticultural therapists' privileging of the unmediated pleasures of natural environments by contrasting it to the often difficult (and not otherwise entirely "therapeutic") work of gardening. As Gabrielle told me: "Sometimes, it can be kind of tiring sweeping up all the stuff, and your hand gets kind of sore. You have to alternate between hands. And, you know, so it gets tiring after a while." Later she said: "I really like to just see the gardens themselves but except - not volunteer so much. Just look at the gardens." Another participant in her day program, Amir, stated it even more bluntly: "I don't like it when it's dirty 'cause you have to clean it up after... I have to clean myself up."

gardening programs geared toward blind and partially-sighted visitors. As part of this project, Alicia had led several pilot workshops with participants to collect their feedback on specific program formats and strategies. The format that day was ikebana – the "Japanese art of flower arrangements" – which Alicia announced, reading off a sheet of paper on the table. She explained to the group they'd be working with "three flowers, and one foliage stem." The particular type of flower arranging they'd be doing was the "moribana" style, kind of like, "piled-up flowers." It was a "symbolic" arrangement, she stated, glancing at her information sheet, which meant the different flowers represented different ideas: "So it's kind of educational, in addition to just making something pretty." "Good," said one participant, Ethel, with emphasis in her voice as she slightly leaned forward. "We need that." The briefest of pauses and then she repeated it again. "We need that."

Conclusion

Making Sense of Things

> "How to see? Where to see from? What limits to vision? What to see for? Whom to see with? Who gets to have more than one point of view? Who gets blinkered? Who wears blinkers? Who interprets the visual field? What other sensory powers do we wish to cultivate besides vision?... Struggles over what will count as rational accounts of the world are struggles over how to see."
>
> –Donna Haraway, *Situated Knowledges*[233]

> "...it is [the teacher's] business to be on the alert to see what attitudes and habitual tendencies are being created. In this direction he must, if he is an educator, be able to judge what attitudes are actually conducive to continued growth and what are detrimental. He must, in addition, have that sympathetic understanding of individuals as individuals which gives him an idea of what is actually going on in the minds of those who are learning. It is, among other things, the need for these abilities... which makes a system of education based upon living experience a more difficult affair to conduct successfully than it is to follow the patterns of traditional education."
>
> –John Dewey, *Experience and Education*[234]

This project has examined museums' therapeutic initiatives for visitors with disabilities, acknowledging such programs are part of both an increasing trend in museum outreach and responsive to a contemporary climate of accountability in which museums are called upon to justify their worth. It has done so to investigate how people frame the value of museum-going and thereby the existence of museums, and with what effects. Inherited explanations would predict the diffusion of such health programs across the organizational field or, resistance to them as people within art worlds strive to preserve their autonomy and protect their interests. In explaining how botanical gardens and art museums have differently negotiated what I have called museums' "therapeutic turn," I have instead argued for attention to the multiple (and often

[233] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988) 587-88.
[234] Dewey, *Education as Experience*, 39.

competing) justifications that shape the legitimation of aesthetic worlds. I have done so by explaining how such therapeutic meanings are *made*: in essence, tracing how people in contemporary museums "make sense" of things. My analysis highlights how aesthetics and health come together in museums at the level of sensory experience, and the organizational, interactional, and material conditions mediating therapeutic justifications.

This conclusion traces for scholars and practitioners the opportunities, and the unintended consequences, of the therapeutic turn in cultural policy. I organize it into two sections focused on key contributions and implications from my analysis. The first summarizes my findings on aesthetic justifications and sensory practice to consider how they may contribute to sociological research on interpretation, embodiment, and knowledge. The second revisits my introductory discussion of ideals of the "social good" across the domains of culture and health to position museums as sites for the creation of therapeutic citizens. I conclude with perspectives from my key informants on how things have changed since the completion of my fieldwork and as they continue to "make sense" of this dynamic moment in the contemporary cultural sector.

Aesthetic Justifications, Sensory Practice, and Body Politics

Acknowledging that external conditions shape museums' efforts toward legitimacy, comparing the internal cultures of art museums and botanical gardens nevertheless reveals how people negotiate aesthetic meanings at the local level. In particular, differing aesthetic constructions of art and nature bear upon how museum staff frame programs across these domains as therapeutically valuable. In art museums, educators frame aesthetic experience as a process of interpretation – how *to* look – and work hard to democratize a process they acknowledge is easier for some visitors than others. In botanical gardens, a greater consensus on

the generalized "good" of nature's sensory pleasures – how *things* look – and the agency afforded them aligns with the assumedly universal social benefits often associated with health interventions. Yet even within the gardens, aesthetic justifications have limits. This is not only because their benefits cannot be easily measured by the standards of biomedicine, but also because they are decoupled from the educational experiences associated with botanical gardens' scientific programming (and notably, also aesthetic interpretation in the galleries). At best, many botanical garden staff view nature's aesthetics as pleasantly value-added; at worst, as low-hanging fruit.

All of this is somewhat ironic, given that participants in programs across the gardens and galleries – whom such programs purportedly aim to serve – primarily enjoy art and nature for the very aesthetic experiences about which professionals in these institutions often have anxiety. Of course, these visitors are exempt from the broader challenge of justifying what Boltanski and Thévenot have termed "inspired worlds" privileging "feelings and passions," and operating within what Claudio Benzecry terms "affective regimes of value."[235] The task is not an easy one, for as Boltanski and Thévenot note: "All the things that support and outfit equivalence in the other worlds, such as measures, rules, money, hierarchy, and laws, are missing here… The inspired world has to confront the paradox of a worth that eludes measure and a form of equivalence that privileges particularity."[236] Given the inevitable tensions between the call for generalized accountability facing contemporary museums – and the enduring incommensurability of aesthetics worth – this project has undertaken the necessary task of

[235] Boltanski and Thévenot, 159; Benzecry, 3.
[236] Boltanski and Thévenot, 159.

tracing how people in museums negotiate between their internally conflicting institutional missions and among different "worlds" of justification.[237]

This approach has purchase not only for illuminating how museums define their programs' therapeutic value, but also why they might choose to *resist* such justifications. In particular, the longstanding democratic logic of American museums – flagged in my introduction as an important variable for this study, and principally fulfilled by museum educators – bears significantly on art museum educators' opposition to medicalization and associated emphasis on a social model of disability committed to inclusion. In this formulation, providing access is a civic responsibility, and access in itself a right: educators primarily work to break down barriers to participation because museums are "for" the people. In contrast, botanical gardens somewhat inconsistently lay claim to the museum identity. This is in part because their institutional origins (as medicinal and scientific institutions) differ from the art museums,' and in part because they continually balance substantive and instrumental constructions of nature's value that challenge the sensory conventions designed to protect sacred museum objects. Coupling this with the aesthetic meanings of nature described above, one can ultimately conceive more readily of botanical garden staff's compromise between aesthetic and utilitarian logics of practice, and within the latter, health: the idea that museums are "good for" people.

When considering implications of these findings, this study on the one hand suggests the push toward museums' accountability can engender favorable innovation within cultural institutions, particularly as regards the modes of sensory perception staff incorporate into

[237] Throughout this project, I have at times discussed institutional logics and orders of worth in concert. I have done so because both constructs usefully explain how museum professionals negotiate conflicts among ostensibly opposed goals and values. My conflation of these terms has some precedent (see, most recently, Emily Barman, *Caring Capitalism: The Meaning and Measure of Social Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, 8)), though I do make some analytic distinctions between them. In particular, I have focused more on the historical features of institutional logics specific to organizational cultures while considering "worlds of worth" as ideal types organized around shared understandings (see n. 23 and n. 66).

aesthetic experiences.[238] Throughout this project, I have traced how educators across the gardens and the galleries adapt the primarily visual conventions characteristic of the contemporary museum to serve visitors who may not experience or understand the world in primarily visual ways. Such innovations both reveal and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about the "standard" modes of aesthetic experience for museums. Some of these assumptions were already on educators' radar; in a manner of speaking, they have internalized the implications of Bourdieusian theories on cultural capital. They work hard to make comfortable those visitors who, most often due to lack of exposure, were uncomfortable with art (and, in the botanical gardens, science).

Because of this, however, educators' attention to social inequalities centered primarily around class and not on the differences among bodies we know as disability. Work with access audiences tested the limits of educators' adaptive expertise because such differences are not always as evident – or information on them as readily available – as differences in cultural capital (or, for that matter, mood or personality). However, many educators were also limited by their *own* lack of exposure: specifically, to visitors with disabilities. The contemporary mandate to diversify museum outreach may thus positively contribute to a rising number of educators comfortable with access audiences, the diffusion of multimodal teaching strategies like those employed by many Met educators working across audiences, and overall, opportunities for museums to continue developing practices that can serve the broadest array of visitors.

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[238] As Wendy Espeland has argued – extending Weber's typology of instrumental and substantive rational action – "attempts to impose and objectify instrumental rationality [can] generate new claims, new strategies, and new interpretations of substantive values." Wendy Espeland, *The Struggle for Water: Politics, Rationality, and Identity in the American Southwest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 41 and Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 24-25.

Understanding how sensory practices structure aesthetic experience can not only benefit cultural institutions, but also further sociological research on culture, art, and knowledge. In particular, cultural sociologists have tended to theorize people's interpretation of art by drawing on three primary and related constructs: context (the idea that where you are matters); presuppositions (the idea that who you are matters); and conventions (the idea that shared understandings, or rules structuring collective activity, matter).[239] These cognitive tools through which people categorize and locate art's meanings have been diversified by cultural sociologists' growing interest in materiality, inspired by work in science and technology studies (STS) and focused on the idea that objects matter.[240] In tracing how sensory experience structures aesthetic interpretation across social groups and through materially-mediated practice, I have aimed to underscore, quite simply, that *bodies* matter, and thus that cultural sociologists ought not to take them for granted when theorizing social hermeneutics.[241]

Bodies matter, I suggest, because differences in sensory faculties are constitutive of differences shaping interpretation among social groups, and because they mediate access to the material affordances of objects and environments. Further – and importantly – they reveal the politics of aesthetic interpretation customarily understood as visual by highlighting how such assumptions favor particular types of embodied capacities. This project's investigation of the senses contributes to a rich body of research arguing that sensory perception is fundamentally social. Much of this has focused on sensory hierarchies – the types of senses and sensory

[239] Griswold, Mangione, and McDonnell, 346.
[240] Ibid. See also Acord and DeNora; Domínguez Rubio; and McDonnell.
[241] "…sociologists, though dealing with human (inter)actions which are irreducibly embodied, have tended to foreground other aspects of those (inter)actions than their embodiment…" Nick Crossley, "Research embodiment by way of 'body techniques,' " *The Sociological Review* 55, no. 1 (May 2007): 81.

experiences that people privilege – with anthropologists describing how these hierarchies vary across cultures and historians tracing how they vary over time.[242]

However, sociologists studying sensory experience can show, as I have done here, how such status orders vary across institutions and differently structure interactions. Across the gardens and the galleries, for example, I find people afford differential status to aesthetic ways of seeing in art and nature. In the botanical gardens, aesthetic experiences decoupled from interpretation are often seen as frivolous, whereas observation-based science programs are afforded higher status. Nevertheless, vision is still the privileged sensory faculty in aesthetic interpretation, in no small part underscored by the fact that in museums, hands-on program formats and opportunities to touch, smell, and taste are primarily focused on children and people with disabilities: audiences in themselves all too often constructed as lower status. Given this, studies of how sensory practices reproduce symbolic boundaries can connect with broader literatures focused on the politics of knowledge. Returning to the Haraway quote with which this epigraph began, such research can aid in theorizing debates over "how to see," "who gets to interpret the visual field," and most importantly, whose perceptual accounts of the world matter.

Greater attention to sensory practice in sociology and cultural organizations can promote innovation and challenge fundamental assumptions underlying social inequalities. This finding does not, however, preclude asking what may be lost in demanding more instrumental accounts of aesthetic value, or of justifications from "inspired worlds" more broadly. Until recently, sociologists have focused little on the struggles people face accounting for the worth of aesthetics or "affective regimes of evaluation." As Benzecry suggests, this oversight is in part

[242] Howes and Classen, 1-13.

due to a vibrant body of sociological scholarship associating aesthetics with a taste for high culture that serves as a mark of elite status.[243]

In part by acknowledging the structural conditions insulating elites from market pressures have changed dramatically over the last half-century and the particular context of the American museum, this project challenges sociologists to instead consider aesthetics as a substantive value construction. So doing highlights the very real problems people face commensurating it, and further suggest efforts to do so may distort what is substantively meaningful about people's experiences of beauty, pleasure, emotions, and ideas. This is what Barb meant, for example, when she said redefining horticultural therapy to meet the standards of health insurance companies would lose the "joy, pleasure, and fun" associated with nature, as I discuss in my introduction.[244] It is what Alicia was gesturing to when I asked if they had ever measured visitors' stress levels through cardiac monitors and she smiled, acknowledging, "That would kind of miss the point." In the case of visitors with disabilities, there may further be unintended consequences in pushing toward the commensuration of experiences that are restorative and therefore, valuable, in ways not captured by modern biomedicine. The art encounters facilitated for people with dementia and their caregivers are particularly instructive here: moments like those discussed in Chapter 4 by participants like Judith, wherein her husband Otto was "so

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[243] Benzecry, 3.

[244] Wiese et. al suggest that incorporating non-medical practices into mainstream medicine ultimately distorts them. Marlene Wiese, Candice Oster and Jan Pincombe, "Understanding the emerging relationship between complementary medicine and mainstream health care: A review of the literature," *Health (London)* 14, no. 3 (May 2010), 326. This finding is further consistent with literature emphasizing how evaluation can often shape the very thing being evaluated. Wendy Nelson Espeland and Michael Sauder, "Rankings and Reactivity: How Public Measures Recreate Social Worlds," *American Journal of Sociology* 113, no. 1 (July 2007): 1-40); Chris Shore and Susan Wright, "Coercive Accountability: The Rise of Audit Culture in Higher Education," in *Audit Cultures,* ed. Marilyn Strathern (Routledge, 2000).

astute," "so profound," and "so on target" in his comments about art at the Met that she had to walk away and cry.

Art, Medicine, and Therapeutic Citizenship

Drawing such a strict contrast between allopathic and aesthetic standards of program success, however, somewhat mutes this project's emphasis on the interplay of culture and health (and, to a somewhat lesser extent, art and science). It may thus seem strange to so strongly juxtapose art and medicine when discussing the limits of aesthetic justifications, given that sociologists also have a long history of breaking down ostensibly fundamental differences across knowledge domains.[245] As Simon Carmel writes, health practice straddles the world of science and art by functioning like "craft:" it encompasses both "technical skills and manual dexterity" and "insightful judgements and interpretation," and in its practice "the material world is generally altered, repaired or improved in some way"[246] This formulation is consonant with my argument that sensory practices link aesthetic and therapeutic justifications, and my finding that therapists across the gardens and galleries are more likely to frame "hands-on" activities (like gardening and art-making) as therapeutic modalities.

However, an even more significant parallel between culture and health – first discussed in my introduction, and worth returning to here – concerns how these domains are often governed by elites strongly committed to promoting particular social and moral values of "living well."

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[245] The earliest formulations of Richard Peterson's now-foundational production-of-culture perspective in cultural sociology asserted any differences in the content of art, science, religion, and law could be accounted for by differences in production among these domains. See in particular Richard A. Peterson, "The production of culture: a prolegomenon," *American Behavioral Scientist* 19, no. 6 (July 1976): 669-684. In practice, "the production perspective denies that there is something essentially unique about fine art, constitutional law and theology." Richard A. Peterson and N. Anand, "The Production of Culture Perspective," *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (2004): 326-327.

[246] Simon Carmel, "The craft of intensive care medicine," *Sociology of Health & Illness* 35, no. 5 (June 2013): 743.

Museum history reveals how these institutions have continually sponsored humanitarian projects advanced in the name of cultivating "good citizens," a project often framed by class politics: getting workers from the pub to the museum, indoctrinating them into norms of genteel behavior associated with high culture, and facilitating exposure to (in the words of the English poet Matthew Arnold) the "best that has been thought and known."[247] Access to culture may thus be a right – museums may indeed be "for" the people – but perceptions of social difference often shape what resources and opportunities should be conferred as a right of citizenship.[248] This body of research aligns with Dewey's acknowledgment that a system of education "based upon [understanding] living experiences" (and thus largely executed, as I have argued, through adaptive expertise) is particularly challenging: it requires teachers sensitively and accurately assess a student's point of reference without reifying social stereotypes. Citizenship studies further offers an important framework for explaining why therapeutic pathways to inclusion in museums are focused on visitors with disabilities, whose needs and interests are often viewed through a medical frame and who may thus be constructed as "therapeutic citizens."[249]

Moments of resistance expressed in participant interviews and occurring in programs reveal both this process of subject formation and its consequences. Lisa's experience of Art in

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[247] Matthew Arnold, "Culture and anarchy: an essay in political and social criticism (1867–9)," *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings,* ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 79.

[248] For investigations of this idea, see Charles L. Briggs and Clara Mantini-Briggs, *Stories in Times of Cholera: Racial Profiling During a Medical Nightmare* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003); Nikolas Rose and Carlos Novas, "Biological Citizenship," in *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems,* ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier (Malden, MA: Blackwell), 439-463; and Nicole Charles, "Mobilizing the Self-Governance of Pre-Damaged Bodies: Neoliberal Biological Citizenship and HPV Vaccination Promotion in Canada," *Citizenship Studies* 17, no. 6-7 (November 2013): 770-784. As regards this project, Charles engages Rose and Novas in a useful debate about the limits of models of citizenship organized around embodied, and particularly biological, differences.

[249] The medical anthropologist Vinh-Kim Nguyen defines "therapeutic citizenship" as "… a form of stateless citizenship whereby claims are made on a global order on the basis of one's biomedical condition, and responsibilities worked out in the context of local moral economies." Vinh-Kim Nguyen, "Antiretroviral Globalism, Biopolitics, and Therapeutic Citizenship," in *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politic, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems,* ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 142.

the Moment that I discuss in Chapter 3 offers the most explicit example. In particular, Lucas and Deb's decision to focus on open-ended questions and hands-on art-making during Art in the Moment conflicted with Lisa's self-concept: her cultural capital, and her belief that no one needed to "dumb things down" just because she was older. Accordingly, she challenged a therapeutic program model assuming participants with therapeutic needs to push for a conversation about the art that incorporated more content. Cameron's comments about the lack of challenge in "taking dirt, and putting it into a pot, and sticking flowers in it" throughout his repeat visits to the CBG – or Ethel's insistence that she and her friends "needed" a program focused on learning, and not just on making something pretty – similarly reveal the assumptions about what's "best" for visitors that museum professionals often employ when leading therapeutic initiatives. They further highlight – again returning to cultural sociologists' tools for studying interpretation – how visitors bring their own set of expectations (presuppositions) to museums, and that their being in a museum (context) matters. Specifically, in museums, and art museums particularly, participants often expected to learn, they certainly did not expect therapy, and they could thus be sensitive to any experiences that set them apart as different.

Fundamental to the model of adaptive expertise is the idea that the worth of museum-going is situational, and necessitates attention to visitors' expectations and context. Against charges of relativism on this point, it here bears note that tracing differences across the gardens and the galleries reveals the *specificity* of sensory practices across the domains of art and nature (which, importantly, constrain some interpretations while enabling others). To consider the worth of museum-going as situational is not to empty it of its meaning, but simply to underscore what sociologists, and museum educators, know well: that it varies across social groups and individuals, and can be differently structured through interactions mediated by institutional

conventions. The "therapeutic" worth of museum-going is thus similarly context-dependent. Here it is worth acknowledging that Lisa certainly did not like the Art in the Moment tour format, but she worked hard on her drawing in the studio and enjoyed talking at length with her seatmate about the childhood memories she depicted (and notably, in pre- and post- program evaluations focused on assessing her mood, she both times described it as "sanguine.") Further, in the botanical gardens, people continually acknowledged the broader "therapeutic" potential of the outdoors and framed it (even if, in the case of staff, at times begrudgingly) as a prime motivator of visitor attendance. Therapeutic program strategies were not useful or meaningful to everyone in the same way that the multimodal teaching strategies I discuss in Chapter 4 were not useful or meaningful to everyone. But neither was inherently worthless.

Ultimately, while museums can for some or even many serve as sites for healing, they don't universally serve as such sites, and this is in large part why organizing the experiences of visitors with disabilities through a therapeutic frame has significant limits. For cultural practitioners, a more appropriate model of wellness programming in the cultural sector might thus instead be organized around choice. Some institutions have already begun to experiment with this idea. As I discuss in Chapter 4, art-making was a required component of the Art in the Moment programs, in part because, as art therapists explained, one could never have an art therapy program without an associated art-making component. In contrast, the Met offered participants the option to sign up for Met Escapes gallery tours, art-making workshops, or touch tour programs that still balanced educators' own objectives to continually encourage people to try new ways to experience the art (through making) with visitor preferences (overwhelmingly

for tours).[250] Or consider the NYBG and CBG's yoga, tai chi, and fitness walks, which are available to all adult visitors through the institution's "wellness" programs. These do not replace, but are offered in addition to, a broader slate of classes focused on plant science and horticulture.

Insofar as context matters, it is further worth asking what happens when aesthetic and allopathic domains get flipped: that is, how modalities like art and horticultural therapy can contribute to innovations in health meanings, and not just art worlds. As Howes and Classen note, "when one thinks of the senses in a medical context, the first topic that comes to mind is that of sensory disorders and how they may be treated;" more often overlooked is their role as "avenues for medical knowledge and healing processes."[251] Robust literatures in medical sociology addressing jurisdictional struggles in complementary and alternative medicine, standardization, and expertise can aid in theorizing the challenges Barb, and horticultural therapists more broadly, can and do face in their struggles for credibility. As I have noted, they can also predict the unintended consequences of their medicalization.[252]

Medical sociologists presently have less to say, however, about the sociological significance of the idea that environments matter for healing (that a garden affords a different therapeutic experience than a bare, fluorescent-lit basement) or, returning to Carmel, the idea the

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[250] Having discovered through a recent evaluation that in-gallery sketching was participants' least favorite part of tours, educators at the meeting noted that many visitors said they did not like to sketch because they "couldn't draw." Ultimately, they decided to add a question to intake forms asking if either the caregivers or participants themselves had ever made art, so as to establish a baseline for visitors' comfort level with the exercise. During this conversation I was reminded of Dewey's charge to educators, again captured in this conclusion's epigraph, to "be able to judge what attitudes are actually conducive to continued growth and what are detrimental."

[251] Howes and Classen, 37.

[252] See, for example, Epstein 1996; Stefan Timmermans and Steven Epstein, "A World of Standards but not a Standard World: Toward a Sociology of Standards and Standardization," *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010: 69-89; Stefan Timmermans and Marc Berg, *The Gold Standard: The Challenge of Evidence-Based Medicine and Standardization in Health Care* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003); Wiese et. al; and Terri A. Winnick, "From Quackery to 'Complementary' Medicine: The American Medical Profession Confronts Alternative Therapies," in *The Sociology of Health and Illness: Critical Perspectives, 8th ed*, ed. Peter Conrad (New York: Worth, 261-77).

ameliorative potential of "craft" can be mediated by more mundane objects.[253] As Richard Klein has suggested, "present-day American is so strongly 'in the clutches' of biomedical definitions of health that it loses sight of alternative approaches to well-being, namely those that emphasize the centrality of pleasure."[254] A sociology of the senses focused on their role in "medical knowledge and healing processes" may thus diversify sociological study of the material practices and environments constitutive of experiences of wellness and, delivery of health care.

Toward a Philosophy of Intentional Practice

Early in my fieldwork at the Met, Rebecca began encouraging me to attend the Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability (LEAD) conference organized by The John F. Kennedy Center for the Arts in Washington, D.C. She attended annually, along with James at the NYBG and, beginning shortly after my fieldwork concluded, Lucas. Given my interests in examining cultural accessibility across institutional contexts, Rebecca felt my going to LEAD would provide me a broader perspective on the field and the challenges faced by different organizations within it. The first LEAD I attended was in Chicago in 2014, and that's where I also first met Betty Siegel: theater enthusiast, accessibility advocate, lawyer, and then 16-year manager of accessibility at the Kennedy Center.

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[253] For several decades now, and largely influenced by science studies scholars and actor-network theorists, medical sociologists have taken seriously the role of material things in health services, and their impact on those giving and receiving care. (For a history of the subfield's "material turn," see Stefan Timmermans and Marc Berg, "The Practice of Medical Technology," *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 25, no. 3 (2003): 97-114). However, as DeNora has noted in her studies of musical therapies, investigations of how external materials (medications, prosthetics) interface with bodily processes to cause or ameliorate illness and disease have tended to overshadow those "more mundane things standing outside specific individuals." Tia DeNora, 2013, *Music Asylums: Wellbeing Through Music in Everyday Life* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013), 28-29; see also her work on music therapy in Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*. Medical sociologists' recent engagement with the work of medical geographers, discussed in Chapter 5, offers a promising exception to this overall trend: see previously cited Lupton, 16-19.

[254] Metzl and Kirkland, 7.

A fast-talking, quippy woman invariably donning a brightly-colored scarf, Betty welcomed conference attendees with the same presentation every year, never wanting to assume a group of insiders. At LEAD in 2016, she described how she first got involved in accessibility (a humorous anecdote about bathroom accommodations at the Kennedy Center) and then transitioned shortly afterward to a slide discussing why cultural institutions should care about access. As she acknowledged, it was important to cover the basic justifications (it's the law!; it can increase your visitor and donor base!) for any skeptical stakeholders. Then, she triumphantly read aloud the final bullet point on the slide, in chorus with many participants in the room: "*Because it's the right thing to do*!"

I interviewed Betty in December 2014, over a cup of tea in the Kennedy Center's cafeteria. At one point I asked her how she thought practitioners working in cultural accessibility felt about wellness programs for visitors with disabilities. Her response, promptly: "I don't think they think about it at all." When I asked why, she explained it wasn't the way arts professionals were "trained to think," adding: "You know, if you're an education person in the museum, you don't have a medical background. You don't have a therapy background, necessarily." I pressed her, noting that the most recent leadership initiatives out of the NEA had been focused on health issues, and mentioning the AAM report about "Museums on Call." In response, she blew a loud raspberry. After absorbing that for a moment, I told her it would be an impossible sound to transcribe. "Sorry," she said, as we both laughed, before she began stating at a fast clip:

> Look, I think that what happens a lot of times in the arts is during different cycles we have to justify our existence, more or less, right? So, sometimes it's enough just to say we are doing art, and people are like, "Ok, we'll give you money." Sometimes you have to say: "Oh, we're giving you art, and art has this positive social benefit. If you have a theatre in your community, then it brings economic development. If a theatre pops up in the neighborhood, then it tends to bring economic development around the theatre." So, we justify our existence by the fact that by having a theatre here in this community, little restaurants spring up and more coffeehouses and then more people come and they feel

> safer, and then more businesses move in. And all of a sudden there's this huge economic benefit that the arts bring to a community.
>
> In education, sometimes we have to say – for example, arts education – well, it's not enough that we just teach the kid arts. Arts have to be used to teach science. So, we're big into arts integration, and that's now how we justify teaching kids art, is because if I teach - if I use the arts to teach science, then that has value. So, if there's any type of a push in terms of arts and healthcare issues, I think for many people – and this is a little bit cynical – it's coming out of this kind of, we have to justify our existence.

Betty's comments provide a helpful way to situate a contemporary moment in the American cultural sector this dissertation has used as a launching pad for its main questions. She highlights, most saliently, both the pressures arts organizations face to "justify [their] existence" and how these shape the varying ways practitioners justify the worth of what they do (as aesthetic; as economic; as scientific). As she further describes, educators in arts organizations don't "think [about health] at all" unless they're forced during certain periods to account for what they're doing; otherwise, they're just happy to keep doing what they're doing because art, in itself, is the justification.

Throughout this project, I have in contrast argued it is worthwhile for people to think quite a bit about therapeutic programs in museums. I have done so by explaining how such programs connect to more generalizable themes including the effects of market pressures on organizational practice, but also definitional contests over the rights of different groups of people, and ideas about cultural objects and the proper ways to experience them. I have argued that these broader issues are negotiated at the level of sensory practice and shown how such practices structure organizational conventions, promote innovation, shape interpretation (of art, nature, and well-being), and reinforce or challenge boundaries among social groups.

Most importantly, for sociologists and cultural practitioners alike, I have tried to push against the perceived and often frustrating dichotomy of embracing instrumental policy trends

versus protecting "art for art's sake" that is often taken for granted both in the literature and in professional practice. As this project has suggested, Betty, for her part, has contributed more than she realizes to debates over museums' therapeutic turn by annually hosting a conference where hundreds of professionals come together to discuss why facilitating access in museums is "the right thing to do" and why it may be different than promoting health. Attention to contemporary practice in institutions within the broader field reveals museum professionals leading programs work within substantial (economic; organizational; professional) constraints, but I have shown they still make choices that draw variously on the broader institutional, civic, and cultural values available to them as they "make sense" of things during these unsettled times. My hope is that this research, in highlighting the larger social issues and processes at play in museums and their broader environments, can promote clarity about those choices by showing people the results of their actions.[255]

Research for this project, spanning five years, has endeavored to document patterns of change and continuity across my four field sites, and I conclude by giving my key informants the last word. Taken together, their reflections highlight the dynamism of contemporary museum practice, both within individual institutions and across the broader field. When I asked Barb Kreski and Alicia Green in May 2016 how things were going at the CBG, Alicia immediately brought up the horticultural therapy program's partnership with the Thresholds Veterans Project. She really enjoyed it and felt it was working well, she told me, in large part because it consisted of regularly scheduled three-hour group sessions each month. The unusual frequency and regularity of these programs had allowed Alicia to deepen her familiarity and rapport with the participants, many of whom had come to Thresholds after a diagnosis with post-traumatic stress

[255] Max Weber, "Science as Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and eds. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946).

disorder. She also got to diversify the garden spaces they visited beyond Buehler, speaking enthusiastically about a session she'd facilitated on "meditative gardening" that included a visit to the CBG's Japanese Garden. Most recently, Barb and Alicia had served as the primary consultants for one of the United States' Botanical Garden's most recent exhibits, "Flourish Inside and Out," designed to investigate "how nature can improve human health and wellbeing."[256] In addition to soliciting the CBG's feedback on interpretive materials, the USBG had chosen to incorporate some accessible features (raised beds, an interactive sensory garden) modeled on those in Buehler, and staffed volunteers leading horticultural therapy-based activities whom the CBG staff helped train.

I last saw James Vickers at LEAD in August 2016. He affirmed the conference was always inspiring for him, and had in addition substantially impacted his tour guide training. He includes in his session on accessibility verbal description exercises, discussions of handling materials, and other strategies he says he became familiar with during his years attending the conference. Nevertheless, he acknowledged there was substantial work to be done thinking through how readily these approaches translate to botanical garden settings, and what additional adaptations might be necessary. James felt the NYBG's upcoming Dale Chihuly show, where the artist's glass sculptures will be installed around the garden, was an ideal time to develop tours of the show that integrated strategies from art museum and botanical garden teaching.

This fall, Lucas shared with me his promotion to the Assistant Director of Accessibility and Lifelong Learning Programs. The department had a new director who valued access and wanted to acknowledge his many years straddling two different, albeit related, program areas. He attended his first LEAD conference in 2016 and gave a lecture on a new initiative at the AIC

[256] "Exhibits | United States Botanic Garden," USBG.gov, accessed September 28, 2016, https://www.usbg.gov/exhibits.

funded by The Institute of Museums and Library Services and focused on incorporating "3-D printing into museum programming for audiences of all ages and demographics [to] see if 3-D printing can help our audiences connect better with works of art across the collections." In the talk, he said the initiative was particularly meaningful to him due to its potential to connect program strategies across visitor groups. Here he added: "My education department has about 25 or 30 people. It's so big we often feel like different departments, not always knowing what the folks across the tracks … are doing." His particular IMLS-funded program, "Hands On," incorporated 3-D replicas of decorative objects into "multisensory tours" for people with Alzheimer's and people with blindness and low vision, acknowledging "touch is a primary way we learn, from cradle to grave." With a sigh, and almost as an afterthought, he added that given this, the question remained: "Why don't we have Braille and large-print labels everywhere? Well, sometimes it's an uphill battle." After the talk, he shared with me that Deb was also now leading the guided tour portion of Art in the Moment, and that she seemed to be enjoying it.

Shortly after I completed my fieldwork at the Met in 2014, Deborah Jaffe retired. She was replaced by a former Met intern, Simone, who had worked for years with Art Beyond Sight and like Rebecca, was partially-sighted. Most recently, Simone has turned the access program's attention to the power of smell. I had the opportunity to attend a pilot Met Escapes program wherein educators incorporated scents designed by a contracted perfumer to enhance discussion of art objects selected for the tour, such as "fresh air" scents for an oil painting by Claude Monet and "grasses" for a Japanese scroll depicting a simple nature scene. Afterwards, participants experimented with different scents in a scent-making activity. When I interviewed Simone, she shared her feelings that smell could offer something distinctive to Met access, either to "teach something" or "create a context," additionally noting it was "the only sense that directly

connected to the memory center." Most importantly, she felt people's often subjective experiences of smells aligned nicely with "the diversity of the experiences that we can have with art," and its multiple interpretations. After this she paused, and then smiled. "You know? I think there is a lot of possibilities."

Appendix A

The Ethnographer in the Museum

Reflexivity situating the ethnographer vis-à-vis her research is important insofar as it allows readers to reflect on how a scholar's social location shapes knowledge production.[257] What follows is a brief statement on how my being a former museum educator, social scientist, and person without a sense of smell both impacted my data collection and relates to this dissertation's broader themes.

In 2008, I was working as an assistant program coordinator in the Education Department of The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. That spring, I attended a conference held at MoMA, designed for staff interested in developing a version of "Meet Me at MoMA," the museum's program for visitors with Alzheimer's and their caregivers I discuss in Chapter 3. Later that day, I reported my conference notes to my supervisor. Shortly after I finished, she stated such programs would not come to the Whitney any time soon, in large part because "we are not social workers." I was surprised first by her firmness and then, as our conversation progressed, her professed belief that it was inappropriate for museum educators to develop resources for people experiencing illness. This was the conversation that led me to apply to graduate programs in sociology and in many ways, to later develop a dissertation focused on therapeutic museum programs for people with disabilities. While my supervisor's comments initially unsettled me, I understood on some level even as she was saying them that there were bigger things going on than categorical disdain for "social work." Identifying and explaining these was the initial motivation behind this project.

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[257] I am indebted to Miliann Kang's brief but eloquent case for this approach. Miliann Kang, *The Managed Hand: Race, Gender, and the Body in Beauty Service Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2010), 24.

My background as a museum educator not only inspired this dissertation, but also carried into my fieldwork. For example, certain local norms (the episodic nature of museum teaching) and jargon ("inquiry-based" learning) within my field sites were already familiar to me, as was much of the content covered in art museum programs. I knew from my prior work the appropriate people to contact at both the AIC and the Met when I was negotiating access, even if I had not personally met them. I was open about my professional background while in the field, most often because it helped me explain my interests in cultural accessibility to others who asked. At times during my research, educators (particularly in the art museums) would say in response to my questions some version of "well, you taught in museums, so you know." To clarify the nature of their comments, I typically asked them to explain themselves as they would to someone who had little familiarity with the profession.

For the most part, however, educators across my research sites were most likely to treat me as an evaluator after they found out I was studying sociology. Initially, I found this amusing, assuring people repeatedly I was not, in fact, evaluating them. However, as my fieldwork progressed, I realized this assigned identity only underscored the pervasive context of accountability motivating many of the programs I was studying. For instance, senior staff – those tasked with grant-writing and fundraising – welcomed me and my project with great enthusiasm, often under the (mistaken and often corrected) assumption my research was focused on identifying program benefits.[258] On my first day of fieldwork at the Met on July 7, 2010, I attended a meeting with professionals from the National Gallery of Canada also observing the

[258] The "hook" through which I negotiated access varied and capturing the evolving themes and argument of the project, though in all initial overtures I mentioned both my doctoral work and my prior work as a museum educator. It bears note that at the CBG, I initially met with Gene Rothert for an informational interview, and he referred me to Barb, who welcomed my project and me to the garden enthusiastically, even before our first meeting. As she shared later, it was partly because she had been hired to bolster research on the museum's horticultural therapy program.

day's tour. They peppered Rebecca with questions about Met Escapes, among them how the museum evaluated the program and particularly, its impact. In response, Rebecca said she was interested in doing more systematic research on the programs, before gesturing to me and stating: "Like Gemma, who will be doing research here this summer." Staff also at times distinguished the authority of my research and my associated skills from the background and interests of their colleagues. In my first conversation with Barb Kreski two months after my first day at the Met, she told me that many people working in museums "really love the work they do with people" and thus did typically not have the interest nor the aptitude to undertake research that would keep them accountable to funders or the audiences they served. Afterwards, she thanked me for being interested in doing such research.

Perceptions of me as an evaluator impacted contractual and freelance staff less favorably. While observing programs across my sites, I regularly took notes.[259] Given the educational setting of the museum, my note-taking was not particularly unusual, especially considering tours are often accompanied by visiting colleagues (like those from the National Gallery) and educators or students in training. When asked directly about my role, I identified as either a graduate student or a volunteer (and indeed, often did assist with program set-up, clean-up, and other duties). This sufficed for program participants, but freelance educators – often after commenting on my note-taking – would regardless ask me eagerly, and at times apprehensively, "What do you think?" or "How did you think that went?" at the end of their programs.[260] Other educators went so far as to apologize to me for aspects of their programs about which they were embarrassed or dissatisfied, or account for why such things had happened. I took such apologies

[259] I did, however, typically refrain from doing so when it was a small group, and my writing would have detracted from the intimacy of the conversation and the group experience

[260] This was most common among younger educators, or educators I was observing for the first time to whom I had not otherwise been introduced.

as an opportunity to ask them what they felt had been more or less successful, in order to keep conversation focused on their goals and objectives. On occasion, full-time staff assisted me in putting educators at ease. On my first day following a verbal description tour at the Art Institute in January 2013, I asked the two volunteer educators if I could take notes. The more senior guide stopped short of giving a definite yes, stating, with a slight smile: "Young as you are, I don't worry about you." The other, perhaps only half-jokingly, said I could take notes as long as I shared them with her afterwards. This second comment prompted Lucas to state, in a knowing and pleasant tone: "She's not evaluating you."

Beyond the impact of my role as a former educator and as a presumed evaluator, one additional role in my field sites further informed my research: that of a person born without a sense of smell. This disability was essentially unavoidable in the botanical gardens. I was not, for example, the appropriate volunteer to sort cut herbs by their smell, though Alicia on occasion forgot and asked me to do so anyway. I regularly had to ask people to describe smells for me, most often in the botanical gardens when people offered more general proclamations of: "This smells *great*." (I swiftly discovered describing smells was extremely difficult for people, even for museum staff trained in the art of thick description). Throughout my research, I coded how informants described smells the way I did any other finding. Uncited descriptions of smells (such as, for example, my discussion of roses at the CBG in Chapter 1) reflect the most robust "trends" from this descriptive data.

Two key moments in my research as an anosmic sociologist of the senses aligned with broader conclusions from this project. The first occurred during one summer 2014 conference workshop on multi-sensory teaching strategies led for arts professionals in the field of accessibility. The three facilitators – two of whom were partially-sighted – asked those in

attendance to individually share their favorite smell as an icebreaker. The question gave me pause, most immediately underscoring how often people take for granted sameness among bodies. I felt it might be productive to politely challenge this, but further noted I didn't quite feel like announcing my anosmia to a room full of strangers and also didn't want to make the educators feel badly for accidentally forcing me to. This internal conflict was useful insofar as it pushed me to analyze and write about why many of the blind and partially-sighted museum visitors I had observed and interviewed often lied on tours about their degree of vision.

A second particularly memorable moment from my fieldwork revealing how particular assumptions or biases structure the social organization of sensory experience happened during my interview with Renata in August 2013. Quite early in the interview, she shared that she was both blind and largely deaf (she used hearing aids, and had limited hearing in her right ear only). We spent a good portion of the ensuing conversation talking about her reliance on touch and smell to navigate the CBG and life beyond the garden. At one point, she asked me if I had ever used a scratch-and-sniff book, in reference to another smell she was describing. I did not disclose my being anosmic to interviewees unless asked directly, so in this case told Renata simply that I was born without a sense of smell. She responded immediately, her voice heavy with sadness: "Okaaaay. You've lost a lot. You've lost a great sense." She went on to acknowledge: "But, you can still see. But if you had [a sense of smell], you would be tied into your *whole life*." Despite being a person with multiple disabilities, it did not occur to her that I might not welcome her pity, or that I might not want to be reminded of the virtues of a sense I did not have. More generally, it was an excellent data point for an argument that sensory hierarchies are subjective and therefore, profoundly social.

Appendix B

Index of Key Informants[261]

From Project Field Sites

James (Jamie) Boyer, Stavros Niarchos Foundation Vice President of Children's Education, New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, New York

Deborah (Deb) DelSignore, Art Therapist and Affiliated Faculty at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago Art Therapy Department, Chicago, Illinois

Alicia Green, Coordinator, Buehler Enabling Garden, Chicago Botanic Garden, Glencoe, Illinois

Deborah Jaffe, Associate Museum Educator, Access and Community Programs, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York

Barbara Kreski, Director of Horticultural Therapy Services, Chicago Botanic Garden, Glencoe, Illinois

Lucas Livingston, Assistant Director, Senior Programs, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois

Rebecca McGinnis, Senior Museum Educator, Access and Community Programs, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York

James Vickers, Director of Volunteer Services & Administration, New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, New York

Other Named Informants

Rika Burnham, Head of Education, The Frick Collection, New York, New York

Janice Majewski, Director, Inclusive Cultural and Educational Projects at the Institute for Human Centered Design, Boston, Massachusetts

Bonnie Pitman, Distinguished Scholar in Residence, The University of Texas at Dallas, Dallas, Texas

Betty Siegel, Director of VSA and Accessibility, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, District of Columbia

Beth Ziebarth, Director, Accessibility Program, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, District of Columbia

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[261] I list the titles informants held at the time of their interviews.

Appendix C

Institutional Prevalence Across Three Research Journals

C1.) Keyword Searches of Three Museum Practitioner Journals to Assess Volume of Research on Botanical Gardens, Art Museums, and Education Across Fields (Conducted July 16, 2015)

	"Art Museum"	**"Art Museum Education"**	**"Botanic* Garden"**	**"Botanic* Garden Education"**	**"Nature Education"**	**"Nature-Based Education"**
Journal of Museum Education	310	38	15	0	2	0
Curator	516	25	95	0	4[262]	0
Visitor[263] Studies	7	0	2	0	0	0

[262] Only one of these articles focused on botanical gardens; the other three focused on aquariums or zoos.

[263] The relatively low results for this journal reflect *Visitor Studies*' concentration on evaluation methodology and practice for museums, rather than empirical research on museums.

C2.) Keyword Searches of Three Museum Practitioner Journals to Assess Volume of Research on Botanical Gardens, Art Museums, Science Museums, and Education Across Fields (Conducted July 16, 2015)

	"Art Museum"	**"Art Museum Education"**	**"Botanic* Garden"**	**"Botanic* Garden Education"**	**"Nature Education"**	**"Botanic* Garden Education"**	**"Science Museum*"**	**"Science and Technology Center"**	**"Science Education"**
Journal of Museum Education	310	38	15	0	2	0	152	6	26
Curator	516	25	95	0	4	0	368	35	182
Visitor Studies	7	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0