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## Observational Study

### Brooklyn Museum – Brooklyn Public Library (Central Branch)

The Brooklyn Museum and Brooklyn Public Library serve their users in a variety of ways. Although aspects of what these places provide are similar, they can look very different. The following essay offers a first-person observational analysis on some issues of these institutions' respective methodologies. The empirical evidence gathered here was recorded on-site on the afternoon of Friday, February 28, 2020, by David I. Griess, the author of this document.

Brooklyn Museum 200 Eastern Parkway is less than a mile east from the Brooklyn Public Library. It is the first site I visit at 2:10 pm EST. Immediately you are confronted with the scale of the building. I enter through the revolving doors into a large atrium filled with people. I count 18 strollers with caregivers and various other visitors seated in



*Fig 1.* – Left: Brooklyn Museum - Right: Brooklyn Public Library (Central Branch).  
Photos by David I. Griess. 2020.

individual chairs and on benches. Many people appear to be taking a break from the cold as they sit in the sunlight. As I walk further into the building, two security officers greet me, and one checks my bag. I have a water bottle, pen, and paper. At this point, I am taking notes with my smartphone in a Google document. Just past the guards are a gift shop and a coat check. I keep walking towards the ticket table where two staff members station themselves behind a desk and a security guard is off to the left side by a set of double doors. I wait briefly for a couple in front of two other individuals who are being helped by the ticket staff and me. I walk up to the table at a motion from a free staff member and show them my student ID because I see that students have a reduced ticket price from a flat-screen monitor displaying the cost of admission. They tell me that the museum is free to NYU students, and the museum is suggested donation with exception to special exhibits. Since I know the Brooklyn Museum as primarily a space for art exhibitions, so I ask what moving image work is currently on display. The staff member points to a set of doors with bright yellow vinyl and the words "JR" in black text. The white wall next to the entry has "CHRONICLES" on it, also in black font. Before I go through the yellow doors, I see through the doors that the security guard is standing next. I walk through them and down the hallway to find a restaurant called The Norm and a small café separate from the white tablecloth restaurant. People occupy both of these spaces. I walk back and head into the exhibition.

I see large scale wall vinyl, videos, photos, and text about collective graffiti in public spaces. Video monitors mounted with headphones of snippets of video documenting street art. Immediately I am drawn to a black room where I can see the glow of a few monitors in a grid arrangement. As I get closer, I can see that the entire wall has 48 looping monitors covering it. It is visually stimulating and overwhelming. There is a bench stationed on the opposite wall in a semi-narrow hallway, which acts as a transition space. I take a seat to observe and survey

visitors. With my smartphone as a stopwatch and my notepad as my documentation, I take notes. I note when people stop with two feet on the ground for a 1-second minimum to look at the screens<sup>1</sup>When they walk through space and how fast, or when guests sit to watch and maintain eye contact with art. Thirty-six seconds someone stands in the same spot. Then 41 seconds, as



Fig 2. – *INSIDE OUT*, JR, [2011- Ongoing]. [www.insideoutproject.net](http://www.insideoutproject.net). Photo by David I. Griess. 2020.

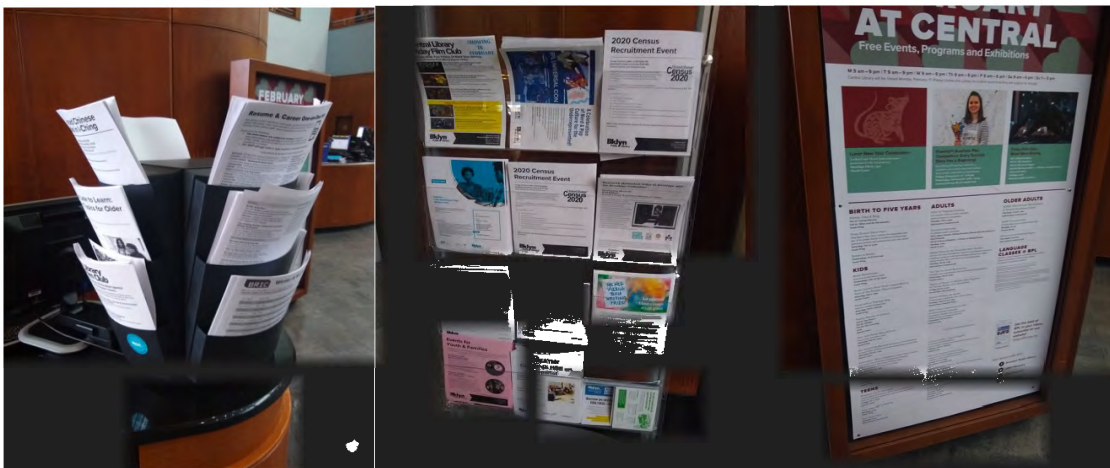
another user walks through the exhibit with their head turned to view the content. 11-second speed walk. Ten seconds (stop and watch) look down at a phone and leave. Then come back in for 7 seconds to step out of the way they originally came in. A security guard comes in, looks down the corridor, and walks back out. A few people look at the monitors and then at their cell phones. The largest group of people in the space is no more than five at a time. Then someone comes in and sits down for 20 minutes and 36 seconds. They pause briefly to look at their cell phone. This exhibition has a lot of wall vinyl to tell the visitors a story, which makes it very much a learning and interactive presentation. QR codes are placed throughout the show to encourage phone engagement. The people visiting the museum on a Friday afternoon appear to be caregivers and students from what I can gather. When I arrived, there seemed to be a school group gathered at the coat check. The Brooklyn Museum appears to be well funded and well-

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<sup>1</sup> Gyllenhaal, D. Eric. "Communicating Behind-the-Scenes Research to Museum Visitors: Evaluations of Temporary Exhibitions at The Field Museum." *Current Trends in Audience Research and Evaluation* (vol. II) (AAM Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation: LA, May 1998): 17.

staffed. The exhibitions are very nicely prepared, with many objects residing in pristine marble-floored spaces. After 45 minutes, I left and head for the library. Door to door the walk takes me 4 minutes and 15 seconds.

I arrive at the Brooklyn Library, 10 Grand Army Plaza, at 2:59 pm EST. I walk in and snap a few quick photos of three or four people standing in line for NYC IDs. I see a sign for a passport service center, but no one is inline. After those offices, I am greeted by leaflets with various services, programs, and events throughout Brooklyn. There is a signboard of specific events and exhibitions happening at this central branch location. At 3:02 pm, I am asked by a staff member if I need help I which I reply that I am looking to renew my expired library card.



*Fig 3. – Various information about services and events. Photo by David I. Griess. 2020.*

I am directed to the checkout desk to complete this transaction, which only requires me to show a valid ID because I had already shown proof of residency the previous time. To occupy and use the library itself is free. While some of its services, checking out books or other materials, requires a card that requires a permanent address. Like the Brooklyn Museum, there is an atrium, filled with people at round tables. Several computers line the back edge of a circular wall. There are a few strollers and a few shopping carts and a small café in this space. Along with two to

three staff members each at information, returns, and check out desks. There are two or three security guards, none of which ask to check my bag.

There help desk located in the Information Commons, which connects to the atrium. 25 – 30 computers and seven private coworking rooms line the back of the commons. This space and the atrium are some of the busy areas in the library at this time. I see a sign that reads "Assistive Technology Devices" at BPL in a plastic stand on a table. The poster lists everything from a Scanner with text-to-audio output to left-handed scissors. There are lots of people on their laptops as well. Eventually, I run into people reading books once I enter specific rooms housing stacks of collections. I move upstairs using the escalators and begin to take a few more photos of the space around me and the area below. At 3:15 pm security guard sees me and tells me that video is not allowed. I tell them I am taking photos. Then I am told the images are only okay if patrons are not present in them. I continue to move throughout space, and I did not sit to observe nearly as long as I had at the Brooklyn Museum. I go to the A/V collection and look at the small selection of optical discs, both in audio and video form. A few people mingle around the stack areas. Behind the shelves is a wall label that reads "conference room." I peak in, and there are chairs and a projector set up as users watch an afternoon movie.

I conclude that on a weekday afternoon, an older segment of the city uses both the museum and the library. Student populations are using the spaces for observation as well as a place to meet and study. Sometimes spaces were also used because people just needed a place to stay warm. The library had social services and assisted learning devices, whereas the museum appeared to be for users that could support themselves. The Brooklyn Museum's site does list access and amenities<sup>2</sup> like listening devices, ASL tours, and verbal description/touching tours. In

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<sup>2</sup> "Brooklyn Museum" Visitors with Disabilities" <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/education/access>.

my opinion, there are more similarities than there are differences. Even if things are done in their own institutional ways. They are both attempting to provide welcoming and accessible spaces to their users. To attempt to make efforts to remain relevant sites to access history, past, and present. By utilizing the help of updates in technology and dedicated staff.