New perspectives on the role of cultural intermediaries in social inclusion in the UK

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Based on interviews with arts administrators responsible for addressing targeted groups labelled “socially excluded,” this paper highlights new understandings of the term “cultural intermediary” (Featherstone 1991; Bourdieu 2000) within art galleries and art centres. It considers the unique role of such figures in crossing the exclusion/inclusion boundary within the arts and developing more personal approaches to marketing activities in their institutions through relationship building. While it is acknowledged here that such workers find themselves in a privileged position in being able to shape questions of taste and particular consumerist dispositions to understanding the art world, little, if not no, effort has been made to understand this process. As such, there remains a void between the cultural policy-oriented conception of social inclusion, which implies a version of repairing the “flawed consumer” (Bauman 2005), and the way in which such policy is played out on the ground.

**Keywords:** cultural intermediary; social inclusion; consumption; art gallery

The British government’s Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, now the Social Exclusion Task Force [SETF]) defines social exclusion as “what can happen when people or areas face a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown.” Meanwhile, policy directives, such as those presented by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (1999, 2000, 2005, 2007), argue that increased access to art galleries and centres can boost a person’s self-confidence and self-esteem, which can, in turn, lead to a greater chance of employment, educational attainment, social networks and life enjoyment, and thus promote social inclusion. From this point of view, inclusion is attainable through the consumer’s engagement with social, cultural and economic institutions. The aim of this paper is to consider the impact of changing conceptions of art, and the relationship between art consumption and “cultural intermediaries” as a means of rethinking the role of the market as an arbiter of arts consumption within the context of social inclusion policy.

Marketing plays a key role within arts institutions in attracting wider audiences as a response to the social inclusion agenda within British cultural policy. Based on research utilizing semi-structured interviews with arts administrators responsible for addressing audiences labelled as “socially excluded” in Liverpool, England, the contention here is that the impact of this agenda has produced a new form of marketing that on the one hand reinvents approaches to art in such a way that it makes

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cultural institutions accessible, but on the other, retains the exclusivity of the art itself. This new form of marketing is one that is dependent upon a personalized approach that promotes dialogue, trust and relationship building and is maintained by cultural intermediaries who act as gatekeepers entrusted with the task of attracting “socially excluded” individuals into arts institutions. The focus here is on two aspects: how this approach is carried out by cultural intermediaries, and how these individuals are uniquely suited to carry out that role by their ability to traverse the boundary of exclusion and inclusion within the arts. In particular, this article addresses the efforts of cultural intermediaries to include “flawed consumers” (Bauman 2005), those consumers who are subjected to a world that defines citizenship through consumption, but who simply do not have sufficient cultural or financial capital to “belong.” As Bauman notes, consumer choice is highly contradictory. It is both imagined and real; it liberates some and exacerbates the oppression of others. According to Bauman (2005), those people who are excluded from making the choices available to them are automatically disenfranchised and oppressed, and as such, it would appear to follow that the rigid notions of what is and is not art, and apparent efforts to sustain elitist views of what art is and how it should be preserved, create a situation in which the consumers of art are especially flawed. The real debate here is whether or not cultural intermediaries are able to in any way offset the effects of a form of social exclusion that appears to be so well entrenched.

The production of exclusion

Art galleries and centres have traditionally stood as elitist institutions. In their study of museum visitors in European museums during the early 1960s, Bourdieu and Darbel (1991, 112) explained that art museums “reinforce for some the feeling of belonging and for others the feeling of exclusion.” They argue that arts institutions are truly accessible only to those individuals who hold the appropriate cultural, social and economic capital and that those individuals who do not possess this capital feel such institutions are “not for the likes of us” (Bourdieu 1980, 56). The very foundations of public institutions after the period of the French Revolution, and particularly those of the arts, have indeed been based on and organized by the wealth and knowledge of an elite whose private art and anthropological collections were obtained for the establishment of public museums (Macdonald 1998). European museums, such as London’s National Portrait Gallery and the Louvre in Paris, and later, North American galleries, presenting the “best” art of society or exotic artefacts collected from “other” societies, stood as representations of national power and pride as well as political virtue (Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2005). Duncan (1995) has explained that during this time, public art galleries were products of a government that claimed it was serving the needs of its people. Those in power who possessed enough cultural capital and distinctive taste to truly appreciate art (Bourdieu and Darbel 1991; Bourdieu 2000) seemed to believe that art museums could express the goodness of a state or the civic-mindedness of its chief citizens who donated objects, art or even funds towards the construction of galleries (Moore 2004). In turn, it was argued that through the passive consumption of the objects, or the objectified ideals, held within these institutions, the masses would benefit socially and morally (Arnold [1867–69]1993; Cole 1884). Similar arguments regarding the benefits of the passive consumption of galleries for socially excluded individuals have been made more recently by the DCMS (2000, 2005; Long and Bramham 2006). The message is a
consistent one: through the individual’s consumption of culture, society at large may benefit, morally, socially and economically. In effect then, art galleries are defining and politicizing institutions (Hooper-Greenhill 1988; Whitehead 2005). The gallery exerts control over consumers through the way in which objects are placed throughout its environs and the activities constructed for enjoyment or education, as well as in the way one is expected to behave inside the building (Hooper-Greenhill 1988).

Galleries typically imply that the visitor should bring their own ideas and associations to their visiting experience (Josefowitz 1996); they should be actively endowing meaning in the art they “consume.” Whitehead (2005) and Mason (2005) have pointed out that this is problematic. They explain that many gallery visitors believe art can be clearly defined, thus fostering the idea that if one knows little about art, one has little to contribute to or discover from a gallery-going experience (Mason 2005; Whitehead 2005): a consumer without the appropriate cultural capital is an essentially flawed one. In this context, it is not surprising that the dichotomized relationship of galleries as national or local elitist status symbols and public institutions, which in some cases have been charged with “improving” society morally, socially, and potentially economically and politically, has cultivated a debate as to how open the public’s access to the objects held within them can be.

**Social inclusion and art**

In light of Labour’s social inclusion policy, recent debates around accessibility and thus the consumption of the arts in the UK have typically been framed around questions of social inclusion. The term originated in France in 1974 to describe an underclass that fell outside the state’s social insurance policies (Silver 1995), and the idea entered the UK in 1979 with Townsend’s (1979) publication *Poverty in the United Kingdom*. Where a focus on questions of social justice would address a lack of material resources that aids one’s participation in society, social exclusion is argued to be a more thorough definition of the process of being kept out of the political, social, economic and cultural structures that govern one’s integration into society (Walker and Walker 1997).

Social exclusion is not a linear process, but a cyclical one that can be passed through generations (SETF 2006). The issue of process is inherent in government and academic descriptions of social exclusion. More specifically, it is often seen as a breakdown between individual, society and the state (Levitas 2005), and ultimately the implication is that it is the individual consumer’s responsibility to repair such a situation: the flawed consumer must be included. Yet, it is the responsibility of state-funded organizations, such as art galleries, to provide the appropriate opportunities for inclusion. In this context, Sandell (1998) identifies four dimensions of social exclusion: first, economic; second, social, thus highlighting the importance of social participation; third, political, including issues of citizenship; and finally, cultural, involving issues of access to cultural organizations and activities. It is in the context of culture where the arts can be seen more clearly to play a role; however, it is claimed by policymakers that the arts play a role in all four dimensions (DCMS 1999, 2000).

Since the establishment of the SEU by the Labour government in Britain in 1997, cultural policy has played a role in addressing the issue of social inclusion, notably through the 1998 report *Bringing Britain Together*, in which the SEU identified the problems of social exclusion and subsequently formulated policies for these problems based on the establishment of 18 Policy Action Teams (PATs). In PAT 10, the DCMS
considered the possible role of museums and galleries in tackling issues of social exclusion and the national action plan *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal* (2001). At a more rhetorical level the Labour government argues that celebratory urban labels such as the title of European Capital of Culture and institutions like art galleries, can help combat social exclusion through economic capital, the creation of jobs through tourism (Garcia 2004; Jones and Wilks-Heeg 2004). Further, it is argued that as public spaces for the consumption of culture, galleries can serve as democratic and open forums in which socially excluded audiences can access cultural capital (DCMS 2000; Bourdieu 2000) and participate in mainstream activities, thus becoming socially “included” (Jones and Wilks-Heeg 2004). Long and Bramham (2006) and others (Newman and McLean 2004; West and Smith 2005) have problematized the use of culture for promoting inclusion, as they do not believe that an inversion of exclusion necessarily promotes inclusion (Long and Bramham 2006), and there is a lack of clarity among the arts field (defined by Harris [2006] as the interconnected elements concerned with art production, commercial exchange, exhibition and critical interpretation) as to how to address social exclusion (Group for Large Local Authority Museums [GLLAM] 2000; Resource 2000; Mason 2004). Nevertheless, DCMS annual reports make explicit references to widening access and participation to culture (DCMS 1999, 2000) and combating social exclusion was not only addressed in the directive *Centres for Social Change: Museums, Galleries, and Archives for All* (DCMS 2000), but it also now forms part of two of DCMS’s 2001 six objectives (Creigh-Tyte and Stiven 2001). The explicit aim of such policies, at least at a governmental level, is to be socially inclusive; however, this presents problems regarding the capacity of arts institutions, which are by their very nature exclusive, to be inclusive to atypical audiences. As a result, the initial and thus implicit aim of arts institutions in delivering social inclusion becomes access (Kawashima 2006). The role of cultural intermediaries in accomplishing this aim is understood here as crucial. Moreover, the means by which this is attempted may increase access, whilst simultaneously reinforcing aspects of exclusivity.

The nature of the above exclusivity is best understood through the lens of consumption and thus is concerned with the marketization of art galleries. The evolution of art galleries in the UK since the 1970s has been motivated by a desire for widening participation. But such participation has come to be emphasized in consumerist terms, rather than in the notions of democracy that were debated in the 1960s and 1970s (McGuigan 1996). In 1984, the Arts Council produced *The Glory of the Garden* policy document and funded new gallery education posts, aiming to further develop and market the leisure services of the arts. Art galleries were reinvented as spaces for consumption. Visitor surveys were taken up, gallery cafés, blockbuster exhibitions and gift shops were introduced, and major exhibitions were promoted (Kawashima 1997).

These changes did not come without controversy and accusations of a “dumbing down” of the arts to the lowest common consumer. Some scholars have viewed the attempt to invite in a new kind of visitor through Disney-style attractions or through more diversified and ethnicity-focused exhibitions, as a new kind of “edutainment,” which Hannigan (1998) defines as the binding of cultural and educational activities with the commerce and technology of entertainment. Similarly, it can be linked to the emergence of a “culture of spectacle” (Prior 2003) in spaces of entertainment that have been designed to promote habits of consumption (Deleuze and Guattari 1988; Featherstone 1991; Prior 2003). Whether this phenomenon has more to do with the changing ideologies of the profession, the new opportunities (and competition) that
technology provides or pressures from government policy, the change in the way that art institutions have marketed themselves to new audiences is apparent. Art galleries were no longer standing in wait for visitors to come to them; rather, staff had actively begun to promote these institutions as places of fun and learning, where traditions of passive consumption of art began to be challenged.

**The role of cultural intermediaries in “combating” social exclusion**

Cultural intermediaries are mediators of the new consumption of the arts. In his original definition, Bourdieu (2000, 359) refers to a new section of middle-class professionals whose work involves the “presentation and representation...[of], and in, all institutions providing symbolic goods and services.” This may include such occupations as marketing, public relations, fashion, decoration, radio and TV producers, and magazine journalists. Bourdieu (2000) describes these individuals as having a lower level of education than average individuals of higher-class origin, but having more cultural and social capital than the average middle-class member. As they rest somewhere in the midst of the middle class and among more diverse judgments of taste, appreciating and consuming both forms of high and popular culture and taking on quite new approaches to work and leisure activities, they blur traditional lines of class, taste and capital. Negus summarizes Bourdieu’s (2000) and later Featherstone’s (1991) interpretation of the cultural intermediary as implying a “point of connection between the disaffected, educated, bohemian middle class and the upwardly mobile, newly educated working class” (Negus 2002, 503).

The attachment of the social inclusion agenda to cultural policy makes room for new ways of examining these initial interpretations of cultural intermediaries as providing a bridge between the market and culture. In referring to cultural intermediaries who work in advertising imagery, marketing and promotional techniques, Negus (2002, 503) has explained that cultural intermediaries “continually engage in forming a point of connection or articulation between production and consumption.” He explains that individuals who do this work make identity connections between products and potential consumers. In the case of this article, the product is the arts and the consumer is the socially excluded individual. This paper will argue that the cultural intermediaries discussed here, arts administrators who work directly with audiences labelled in policy as “socially excluded,” market identity connections between the arts and those consumers through relationship building (Conway and Whitelock 2005).

The concern here is that the arena of the arts illustrates the limited and sometimes illusory freedoms that consumption appears to allow. In a world in which the nature of cultural capital is defined so tightly by elites, the nature of “belonging” in the arts is in danger of being tightly prescribed. From such a position, it would appear to follow that the rigid notions of what is and is not art, and apparent efforts to sustain elitist views of what art is and how it should be preserved, create a situation in which the consumers of art are especially “flawed” (Bauman 2005). “Socially excluded” consumers are therefore subjected to a particular version of art that is articulated through the social inclusion agenda, which may in turn simultaneously reinforce the idea of the “flawed consumer” that is currently implied in cultural policy documents regarding social inclusion (DCMS 2005; Long and Bramham 2006). What does nevertheless unfold is a degree of potential for change in the perception of the arts as exclusive (Powell and Gilbert 2007). Cultural intermediaries play a key role in mediating the above processes.
This paper will discuss three key aspects with relation to analysing particular “types” of arts administrators as cultural intermediaries, specifically the “types” that work directly with excluded audiences: those in education, outreach and participation positions within galleries and art centres. First, via discussions around their interpretation of “inclusion” within their practice, these individuals can be seen to have an “empathy of exclusion” for their target audience. Second, this empathy appears to allow these arts administrators to promote their institutions’ model of arts consumption in the context of social inclusion. As a result, their role can be seen to constitute a bridge between the market and culture as far as the social inclusion agenda implies as much; however, the way in which this is described to be carried out in practice is by means of relationship building, establishing some of the identity connections Negus (2002) has explained cultural intermediaries can often create between product and consumer. Third, from their positions within galleries and art centres, these cultural intermediaries are able to exercise certain amounts of cultural authority over audiences of socially excluded individuals, thus still serving as shapers of taste (Bourdieu 2000). In this context, however, the flawed consumer remains flawed insofar it is not in the interests of the arts field to make art entirely inclusive.

Research method and sample

The findings presented here are based on semi-structured interviews carried out with 22 individuals from 10 different arts organizations, both galleries and art centres, in Liverpool, England. As a city, Liverpool boasts internationally recognized arts institutions as well as a vast offering of grassroots and locally based arts organizations. The interview sample was selected from both mainstream and traditional-style art galleries and centres as well as from key, longer-established grassroots organizations within the city. Grassroots organizations, of which four are represented in this research, constitute those organizations that are run by very few staff members and the funding of which is less assured compared to the relative stability of the key cultural institutions in the city. Further, their aims tend to be based on, rather than responding to, ideas of social activism via the arts. Six more traditional galleries and art centres are represented in the sample. These organizations consist of national art galleries with permanent collections as well as contemporary art centres and festivals that commission new artwork and are thus more highly dependent on or subject to changes and trends in the international art market than grassroots arts organizations might arguably be. Most of these organizations receive local as well as national arts and social funding. The reason for representing both types of organizations in this research sample was in order to fully represent the breadth of work present in the city and examine whether the notion of such cultural intermediaries as “shapers of taste” varies between them.

Fifteen of the total of 22 individuals interviewed hold positions that involve direct engagement with socially excluded audiences. The remaining seven held positions of a senior nature: these individuals oversee the strategies and policies of the organizations in question. In the case of the grassroots organizations, seven (from the 15 who work directly with audiences) work not only as senior staff, but also as programme coordinators. Their roles are thus twofold: they shape the policies and strategies of their organizations, as well as engage directly with the delivery of those policies and strategies. Further, individuals who engage directly with these excluded audiences
hold positions labelled as “educator,” “community programmes coordinator,” “outreach coordinator” and “participation coordinator.” Though the specific job titles may differ, the rationale behind these roles is the same: an emphasis on learning, interpretation, outreach, and engagement with and participation in the arts. We interviewed senior staff, whom we refer to as “intermediaries,” in order to examine whether the intermediaries in question differ in any way from those shapers of taste that direct the ethos, strategies and policies of the institutions in which they sit. We hoped to assess the degree of variation between those responsible for social-inclusion strategy and those implementing it as a matter of routine.

### Identifying with the excluded through personal experience

Almost without exception, the administrators interviewed at all levels in Liverpool arts institutions interpret the term “social inclusion” as providing access to culture. From this point of view, the provision of access to individuals specifically labelled “socially excluded” is not necessarily deemed to be key. In fact, it is about providing access to a broader range of consumers who may not be socially or economically excluded but who simply do not feel comfortable in an arts setting. For example, one administrator commented: “[The events] we provide…are not seen as something [individuals] can readily approach or access.” Another stated that it is helping “people [feel] comfortable coming to [the gallery] and accessing all areas of it and not feeling that because of anything about themselves that they can’t.”

Social inclusion is interpreted as making accessible a socially engaging form of arts practice. In fact, a number of individuals felt uncomfortable even using the term “social inclusion” whilst recognizing the value of a highly personalized approach to such work, such as breaking down barriers and establishing contact and dialogue as a key means for providing access. These approaches combine professional perspectives on the meaning of inclusion with personal experiences of exclusion from and inclusion within the arts. As one senior staff member working in a grassroots organization put it: “A great deal of what one does comes from one’s own history.” He went on to illustrate how his personal history, his perspective on inclusion and the arts, is one of transition:

I grew up in a family where it would have been unusual or unlikely for members of my family to visit a theatre or an art gallery or a concert hall … so in a way [I] wanted to invent an arts centre … where [my] own family would feel comfortable. And that immediately means that you are seeking to involve people who are outside the charmed circle of those people who are involved in the arts.

This individual’s experience of barriers to inclusion therefore informed his practice and his organization’s understanding of the nature of the barriers that the arts can hold, or be perceived to hold, for people. The perceived understanding he feels is shared in the descriptions many interviewees, particularly those in grassroots organizations or those working in education, outreach and participation positions in more traditional organizations, gave of their own experiences with the arts and how that experience has shaped their career choices as well as their interpretations of inclusion:

I went to art college and studied art, [to get] a fine art degree and failed it, which I find quite amusing. … Part of the reason I failed is because I had this idea that art shouldn’t be elitist and it should be something that everyone could do.
Her education and subsequent career in the arts provides her with the knowledge and capital to work within the field, yet her explanation of why she may not have excelled in her fine art degree gives her ability to identify with those that may not feel included within that field. Another arts administrator explains his situation, which is the reverse of the previous administrator:

I didn’t know anything about art or literature cause I [was] brought up in a very ordinary working class [family]. I played football everyday in the street with my friends but I had a secret life. I couldn’t say [the name] Monet … I didn’t go to art school or anything. I had little books.

He goes on to explain that he spent a great deal of time reading about artists in books that he took from the library, articulating that he had gained the capital to discuss artists in a manner informed by the art history canon. Such knowledge placed him in a higher position in the arts than those who may be less knowledgeable of the canon. He explains with regards to a museum visit in Italy:

When I was in front of Primavera just a year ago I was standing in front of it thinking, “you won’t get a chance to see it, it will be so busy.” But the painting was empty and there were 40 people bending over [the museum label] and they want to know that [information], but they don’t want to look at the paintings, which is a sad state of affairs.

From his past experience of having to lead a “secret life” appreciating the arts as a working class child, to one who is working within the arts, teaching others of the “great artists” of the past, his position sits both within and without the exclusive nature of the arts. In fact, the knowledge of the field that he has gained places him in a position to perpetuate the accepted tastes of that field, as can be seen in the way he expresses “sadness” at the inability of others in the gallery he visited to really “look” at such a great masterpiece.

The transformative role of the arts was a common theme throughout the research, particularly with those who work directly with excluded audiences. One individual explained:

Arts changed my life. Going to the theatre made me realize there was something different out there, really, so the arts impeded in my life and suddenly I started to invest in me through art, through going to the theatre, through reading, you know suddenly I became, I suppose, illuminated.

This sense of illumination was expressed by nearly all of the individuals who work directly with excluded audiences. One stated:

There’s something really lovely in work that just takes you away from life, and I always hope that my groups will begin to think of the gallery as somewhere they can come … just kind of escape from [what’s going on in their lives] for a little while and that kind of potential of art to take you somewhere else and allow your imagination to roam is, um, quality time that people don’t often find in their own lives.

In the above context, cultural intermediaries are often sympathetic to the audiences (or non-audiences) to which Mason (2004) and Whitehead (2005) refer, who otherwise feel it is “not for the likes of us” (Bourdieu 1980, 56). One administrator illuminates this point further:
I don’t think [the arts] is something that only certain people can do. I think it’s broken down a lot but there’s always been that separation of “oh this is an artist and aren’t they special?” I think that everybody has that in them. The difference is who chooses to do that but also who chooses to put that label on those things. I think because that [labeling has] happened it makes it really difficult then … people that say, “oh I don’t understand that and I don’t know anything about that,” and they look to other people to give them meanings or interpretations of work when actually everyone can go and do that themselves.

Cultural intermediaries appear to usurp traditional misconceptions of art and its consumption. Whilst senior staff in the arts tend to emphasize the social work aspects that the social inclusion agenda implies, the cultural intermediaries described here tend to stress notions that “everyone is an artist” and “everyone is creative.” Their articulated desire is to break down the barriers that oppose such notions. In this sense, their ambition is more fundamental than the organizations for which they work. They aspire to uphold an inclusive form of arts consumption, but as we will go on to argue, they are ultimately constrained by arts organizations that wish to keep these “flawed consumers” at arms’ length. There is a fissure between institutional definitions of the arts and how the arts are played out in the everyday. The autonomy of the arts as an exclusive field is challenged in this context, but any practical efforts to make the arts genuinely inclusive are inevitably partial. Cultural intermediaries may aspire to a world in which everyone can be an artist, but the institutions in which they work propagate against this version of reality.

**The role of cultural intermediaries in marketing culture**

Given their experience of exclusion from the arts, cultural intermediaries appear uniquely placed to market activities within a gallery setting to socially excluded audiences. The new audience of consumers is given access to the institutions of the art world through cultural intermediaries, whose job is to interpret institutional definitions of art and thereby determine which art socially excluded consumers are exposed to and therefore the degree of access that is deemed appropriate to new forms of cultural capital. These individuals help to create identity connections between the consumer and the product. However, the extent to which they can actually offer access to art itself is debatable insofar as these institutions may prioritize art as a domain to be exhibited and preserved as opposed to one in which freedom of access should be complete, as one administrator explained:

If the money was cut, it would be very interesting to see… what would take priority [the participation projects or exhibitions]. …Where does the balance lie? Because without the high quality contemporary arts experience provided by the gallery … what are you getting?

It is the cultural intermediary who must negotiate the terms of inclusion. For example, one administrator (not from a grassroots organization) explained the difficulty of this negotiation with regards to a participatory art project that was to go on display:

People … produce something and … I feel that we come in and say this is how you have to show it off and … I might be so concerned with how it’s going to be seen and how it fits in with everything else that somehow it changes the whole meaning of the project and what they’re doing.
The constraints of the organization and the way it sits in the field of the arts affects the level of inclusion permitted by the cultural intermediary. This difficulty is especially evident with respect to issues of the “value” not only of artwork created by professional artists versus “excluded” consumers but also the differing levels of value placed on the two. One senior staff member who criticizes these notions explains: “A lot of people… don’t actually want to see [art] democratized. They do not want to see what they would regard as the great unwashed turning up in large numbers.”

One cultural intermediary admitted the privileged position that exists in this role in “bringing people into [the art] world” and another by explaining: “You have that special background information [and]… giving people that behind-the-scenes look at things is good.” In this way, the role of the cultural intermediary as a shaper of taste or arbiter of citizenship can be inferred, which further illuminates the “flawed” nature of the targeted audience. Cultural intermediaries are able to negotiate a gateway into the consumption of the arts, through their facilitation and manoeuvring of the confines of the arts field. Yet, this role is not necessarily one of manipulation. In fact, these cultural intermediaries emphasize choice and opportunity with regards to activities geared towards social inclusion. Another administrator explains that social inclusion

should be about giving people … opportunities and making them feel comfortable about them, but not forcing people to do them or thinking that they have to do them because some people might be quite happy in their lives having never been to the [gallery].

The realization that the arts and perhaps visiting a gallery may not be an activity desirable to all consumers may appear problematic. In fact, the degree of choice available to consumers, particularly when the consumers under discussion are those typically excluded from mainstream society and the levels of consumption that might accompany that, further highlights that these kinds of cultural intermediaries are themselves best placed to market activities for and to excluded individuals. They are interpreters, as one administrator explained: “Being able to speak the language of the different people involved [both within the arts and within socially excluded groups], I think is a major role. I think it is kind of interpretation in a way.” Indeed, as Powell and Gilbert (2007) suggest, relationships can provide a foundation for genuine change. The concern here however is that the resultant field is by its very nature a partial one that offers a degree of inclusion, but which is simultaneously so bound up with historical and institutional definitions of art that the socially excluded consumer will inevitably always be, at least to some extent, “flawed” (Bauman 2005). Participation in the arts can never be entirely free from the constraints of cultural capital. One senior staff member illustrates the difficulty:

The arts should be inclusive. Um, but I think there’s a sort of black and white position, isn’t there. It’s either elitist or it’s populist and actually it can be popular, but not by dumbing down. That’s what I think a good arts centre or art venue should do…is not compromise the work, but to find the ways through interpretation, through participation that you make it accessible. And the thing is you don’t always get that right, but that’s…you know, why shouldn’t people from any background you know have access to the best quality ideas, even if they’re difficult and awkward and problematic? You know, why make it so easy that actually you bleach out the problematic of the work? There’s always art that’s going to be awkward and ambiguous and the meaning isn’t as obvious.

Connecting those excluded from the arts, and aspects of mainstream society more generally to “awkward” and “ambiguous” meanings inherent in some art works, then,
becomes a difficult terrain to negotiate. The way in which cultural intermediaries, as empathetic members of the art world, carry out their roles as marketers of those works and of that elite world, is through relationship marketing: relationship building offers something of a bridge between the market and the culture of the arts.

**Marketing through relationship building**

Relationship building is not a new marketing technique in the arts (Conway and Whitelock 2005). Indeed, Boorsma (2006) argues that art production and consumption are essentially communicative acts: artistic values emerging as a product of this interaction. As Boorsma (2006, 76) suggests:

> The philosophical turn to the relational view of art implies that the art consumer has changed from a passive recipient into an active participant. … Arts consumers provide a valuable contribution to the achievement of the artistic objectives. … The audience take part in the co-production of artistic value.

Similarly, Conway and Whitelock (2005) explain that “relationship marketing” involves the development of continuous and usually long-term relationships between parties. To be successful, these relationships must be two-way, unlike the one-way relationship that exists in the form of gallery buildings and displays, and may revolve around issues such as customer empathy/orientation, experience/satisfaction and trust/commitment.

The qualitative interviews undertaken for this study demonstrate that cultural intermediaries, as defined here, are key to the role of marketing the arts, and that relationship building underpins their work in this area. One senior staff member explained: “In our case we use the education staff as the sort of storm troopers to bring those contacts about.” Aspects of relationship building include understanding barriers through dialogue and providing access; face-to-face meetings, either through outreach or at the gallery, and establishing trust; and the nurturing of relationships. For example, when a group is identified as socially excluded, cultural intermediaries explain that acknowledging and understanding perceived barriers to accessing cultural activity must first be achieved before a relationship can be pursued. One administrator explains:

> [First] I think maybe we look to see what those barriers might be and … We ask people why they don’t go to [art events] or what may make them feel uncomfortable about it and try to change those things.

This process is about listening to and actively addressing the experience of exclusion those targeted audiences perceive. The value of dialogue and understanding is further explained:

> It’s really important to talk to the people who are excluded [from the arts] and ask them why and to work with them to develop the tools to include them. It’s also about sensitivity and … thinking about what sort of thing might make people feel uncomfortable.

Another states:

> A lot of the time it’s about people who have no understanding of contemporary art or have, despite the fact that they might have come in touch with it, may not have been
aware that they had and … breaking down those boundaries. Making it feel like it’s fun, it’s I don’t know, it’s safe, and approachable.

Face-to-face meetings designed to promote personal relationships through trust are also key to breaking down barriers and marketing activities for galleries and art centres, implying a kind of identity connection not so much between product and consumer, but rather via cultural intermediaries themselves. Trust is perceived to be incredibly important, and in being so, cultural intermediaries see their marketing roles as quite personal ones: “It’s…to be someone that people can go to if they have a problem.” One administrator explains: “We do things like try to break down barriers between the community and artist by getting the community to meet with the artist.” Activities designed for excluded groups usually occur through two methods: they may involve a group working directly with an artist in the creation of something or they may involve the group being in dialogue with one another regarding an extant work of art. These may occur out in the community, in the form of outreach (Kawashima 2006) or in the gallery itself. This interpersonal form of marketing is stressed over more traditional forms:

I think receiving a package in the post is not going to do it and certainly not going to do it with a new audience. I think, you know, you get far greater investment from the people you want to work with if you actually put in the investment yourself. People recognize that.

Often the intention is to offer the freedom and flexibility to allow participants to shape the experiences that are being marketed to them: “We always plan in such a flexible way. … There’s always the option for the participants to change things to make the project theirs more.” Such flexibility may allow an opportunity for individuals to consume in a way appropriate to their needs; an opportunity that implies the inherent flawed nature of such “excluded” consumers.

This form of marketing emphasizes engagement on a personal level and builds on the trust established through conversations about perceptions of inaccessibility. Further, these techniques take individual experiences and circumstances into account. In an analysis of social inclusion work through sport, Crabbe (2007, 36) has argued that the individuals charged with delivering these activities for and with socially excluded groups are intermediaries who provide gateways between what are typically seen as “alien and mutually intimidating worlds.” Similarly, as individuals who can empathize with the seeming irrelevance of the arts in the lives of socially excluded individuals, cultural intermediaries, who define social exclusion in their practice as a lack of opportunity to take place in cultural activity, attempt to serve as go-betweens or interpreters for socially excluded individuals. This is accomplished through relationship building and, as Crabbe (2007) explains, working with such groups as well as identifying and targeting them constitutes an essential component of the marketing mix.

The individual connections perceived to be made between the cultural intermediary and “excluded” the consumer are critical. One cultural intermediary explained the results: “So I think by [the consumers]…meeting people running the project and seeing that we’re just normal people as well, [they discover] stuff that they can get involved with.” The cultural intermediary offers a means of co-producing artistic value (see Boorsma 2006), “creating dialogue” and “bringing people through the whole creative process,” but he or she inevitably does so in a context in which the
meaning attached to such production remains largely at the behest of the host institution insofar as the cultural intermediary is employed to maintain meanings within a predefined institutional arena. One explained: “Inclusion is...also making sure that that does fit with [our organization’s] values and with our vision. So it’s kind of finding the good balance but not going against anything we stand for.” This tension of shaping taste yet promoting one’s creative potential via engaging in art galleries is illustrated by this cultural intermediary, who works in an organization that both exhibits and commissions artwork as well as curates a participation programme of collaborative work between local people and international and local artists:

It’s our responsibility [as human beings] to re-dream the world around us, and my role is to facilitate my team to do creative things with artists and people to enable them to think critically about the world that they’re in, to think differently about their own potential, and to be, become creative participants in the universe. … Our job is not just to be a passive receptacle for … art content but to provide a platform for people and artists to think about that stuff and to think about the world and make responses to it.

While this individual stresses a kind of empowerment of people through art (and her role as a facilitator between the arts and life, the market and culture) she simultaneously states her authoritative position in doing so:

We would never justify putting content out in to a public domain by the fact that it was the first [work] that that person had ever made. We would put it out into the public domain if it was good.

Another administrator from a grassroots organization that also organizes participatory art projects and the subsequent exhibition of work created expressed a similar opinion to that above: “I think there can be a point where you go too far with democracy and you reduce the quality [of the artwork].” We can certainly identify an imbalance of power here. A more genuine means of inclusion through the arts should not be overly dependent upon field-based definitions of what it means to belong, as expressed through implicit and exclusive definitions of the value of art. The arts consumer cannot be “included” entirely in the way in which cultural intermediaries aspire that they should; they cannot be “repaired” because the flexibility to which they aspire is predetermined by the context of the field in which they operate. Nonetheless it is important to recognize that identity connection is via the cultural intermediary rather than the product, as Negus (2002) suggests. The process of relationship building creates bridges, but cultural intermediaries help to shape the taste of arts consumers and thereby inadvertently reinforce the lines of demarcation that determine who is and isn’t included in the world of the arts in which they work.

Regardless of the above tensions, long-term commitment to communication and relationship building is also part of marketing and carrying out social inclusion activities for galleries and art centres. One administrator who participated in the research criticized activities that did not continue to nurture relationships with groups, but rather worked with groups on one-off projects and then moved on. She explained: “People on the ground, the very people they’re talking about including resent that deeply, you know.” Her role as a cultural intermediary places her in a position where she feels she can articulate a deeper understanding of audiences, she goes on to explain her deep commitment to the individuals she works with:
It’s incredibly difficult to invest in a group of people, you know, and to let go or to hand over that work and to feel comfortable about doing that because you know these are real people with real feelings and who will express themselves – whether they feel good or bad about something.

Personal relationships develop through this work. Long-term commitment to a group is expressed by some cultural intermediaries as a way in which socially excluded groups can become more familiar with the creative process and become further developed as art audiences. One individual explains:

You make them realize that you don’t have to say, you know grand things about work, it can just be a real gut reaction that then you can actually get them into the gallery space and they still might not like what they see … but at least they feel comfortable in saying why and you know, hopefully they feel a greater appreciation of the processes involved that the artist has gone through. … They can at least think, oh right, so it’s about ideas and that’s the main thing is communicating to people that it’s about ideas, it’s not about making something look like something.

**Conclusion**

Although, as one respondent suggested, the arts “have a fence around them,” cultural intermediaries find themselves in a position in which they can help foster a greater potential for change in how the arts are perceived through the flexibility that relationships provide (Powell and Gilbert 2007). In this sense, arts marketing is about negotiating boundaries. Cultural intermediaries are situated in places that at once sit outside the arts, being able to actually identify with the kind of exclusion the field promotes, whilst to an extent being implicated by it themselves. This creates a conflicting sense of elitism, authority and taste upheld by the field, which in turn further implies that some consumers of art, particularly those that are labelled “socially excluded” may always remain in some sense “flawed.”

There appears to be a strong case for arguing that socially excluded consumers are subjected to particular opportunities to participate in “the arts,” which are articulated through the social inclusion agenda, and which may in turn simultaneously reinforce the idea of the “flawed consumer” currently implied in the discourse of social inclusion (DCMS 2005; Long and Bramham 2006). The policy emphasis on social inclusion offers a partial solution to the problem of social exclusion. Cultural intermediaries offer up arts as an arena with which consumers can engage, but whether they can do so sufficiently to offset the social injustice caused by the unequal distribution of resources, and the implications of this in terms of an individual’s connectedness to social groups and formations, remains debatable, even amongst the practitioners themselves. This research highlights the need to explore further the nature of the relationships between the consumption of arts and issues of social justice; specifically from the perspectives of the “excluded” individuals as there has thus far been a serious lack of focus on how targeted consumers relate both to art itself and to the broader philosophy of social inclusion through art. The challenge now is to account for the complexity of the relationships between consumers and producers of the arts, whilst recognizing the parameters of the field within which these relationships operate. A key concern here should be the degree to which a cultural intermediary’s institutional seniority influences the way in which social inclusion policy is played out, and thus the extent to which he or she reinforces a definition of the arts...
that is inherently elitist. Cultural intermediaries will inevitably play a key role if consumers are able to climb over the fences and unlock the gates that continue to block entry to the contemporary world of the arts.

Note
1. www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force/

References


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