

## Explicit and Tacit Exclusionism

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## Explicit and Tacit Exclusionism: PARSE

Dr Deborah Jackson

I'm going to begin this talk, about explicit and tacit exclusionism in Higher Education (HE) art institutions, by reading a short extract from a very timely joint statement that was released by four of the shortlisted nominees for the National Gallery Prize in Berlin last week.<sup>1</sup> The statement was issued by the nominees to highlight and recommend changes to what they say are problematic aspects of the prize. The concerns they raised are closely related to the subject of my talk today. The nominees wrote:

...we have been troubled by the constant emphasis, in press releases and public speeches, on our gender and nationalities, rather than on the content of our work. It is clear to us that in a more egalitarian world, the fact of our gender and national origin would be barely noticed. Having it constantly emphasized can only be indicative of how far we are from such an egalitarian world. Furthermore, the self-congratulatory use of diversity as a public-relations tool risks masking the very serious systemic inequalities that continue to persist at all levels of our field. We would like to stress that commitments to diversity in gender, race, and experience need to be built into the everyday operations of institutions and organizations rather than celebrated occasionally at high-profile events.

These issues outlined are indicative of broader and growing trends in the artworld and they chime with a number of points I want to talk about today in relation to our contemporary art institutions.<sup>2</sup>

Firstly, the nominee's statement charges **contemporary art institutions with exploiting diversity as an organisational commodity that has exchange value**. In doing so their statement emphasises the important differentiation between diversity and inclusion. Diversity is representation, which is not the same as inclusion; **Diversity is quantitative and inclusion is qualitative**. In other words, inclusion puts the concept and practice of diversity into action. This is an important distinction, because if we think of inclusion as being related to experience and meaning – qualitative – it also becomes clear that **it is not transformative or even sufficient to merely include those who are excluded into the dominant structures**. This is because, as Michel Foucault's writings signal, inclusion can quickly become subsumption that ultimately serves the dominant power structures. In their statement the nominees also acknowledge that any pride in progress towards diversity and inclusion should be accompanied by an awareness of how much progress still needs to be made. Significantly, they identify that **material change in organisational actions must be integrated into organisational structures, processes and strategies**.

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<sup>1</sup> Statement by the Shortlisted Nominees of the 2017 Preis der Nationalgalerie <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/statement-by-the-shortlisted-nominees-of-the-2017-preis-der-nationalgalerie/7315>

<sup>2</sup> The term 'art institutions' generally refers to the socio-economic conglomerate of galleries, foundations, museums, institutes, educational facilities, magazines and councils that constitute the basis of the dominating understanding of art in a society (Jakobsen, J. 2006). Practically, the term institution describes an organisation that participates in the discourse of contemporary art. Larger museums and galleries are typically described this way, though smaller organisations, such as artist-run initiatives, can also be described as institutions. The term is a means of describing the whole of the organisation, rather than a single component (e.g. a building, the organisation's personnel, or the organisation's governance structure). On a conceptual basis, the term institution refers to the organisation as it is inscribed by structures of power. The concept of institutional critique is of particular relevance in terms of this definition. The central conceit of institutional critique is that established institutions are motivated by political, social, economic and aesthetic hierarchies.

Of course none of this is new, it's long been apparent to artists and scholars working in the field, and particularly academic feminism engaged with institutional change. Yet patterns of under-representation within art pedagogy persist, and consequently inequalities within the field of cultural labour remain intact.

The purpose of this talk then is to open up a discursive framework to develop these ideas, in order to confront the systemic organisational structures and institutional normalisation within HE art institutions. The aim then is to transform the institutional orthodoxies that exacerbate inequalities and impoverish educational culture and professional cultural production.

But first we have to understand why, despite the increased attention given to inclusion, the economies of exclusion remain intact.<sup>3</sup> This is important because it's of great importance in answering the question of **who gets to make our cultural products?**

Key to understanding this is explicit and tacit exclusionism. In his paper, *Cultural Exclusion, Normativity, and the Definition of Art*,<sup>4</sup> Paul Crowther usefully defines these two modes of exclusion:

Explicit exclusion he writes **“involves practices that affirm the superiority of one cultural group over others and either excludes those others from full and equal participation in society or allows inclusion only to the degree that the participants give up the practices that are basic to their identity in favor of those of the ruling culture.”** Crowther goes on to explain that tacit exclusion involves the same criteria as explicit exclusion “but as much **broader attitudes embedded within institutions and practices.**” He says that **“Often they will be neither recognised nor intended as exclusionist, and may even sometimes take themselves to be of multicultural significance.”**

These definitions are useful when trying to determine the mechanisms of conformity that reproduce patterns of privilege, which in turn play a role in controlling access to HE art institutions. As Pierre Bourdieu's work identifies, it is generally those who possess privileged epistemological perspectives, through their accumulated cultural capital,<sup>5</sup> who are able to decode and access educational opportunities. Those who do not possess sufficient or 'appropriate' cultural capital have been castigated, according to the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's terminology, as “flawed consumers”.<sup>6</sup>

This view is supported by a report from 2009, *Art for a Few: Exclusion and Misrecognition in Art and Design Higher Education Admissions*. This report “highlights how **the structural conditions that underpin admissions policy and practice in arts higher education impact student access in more indirect but just as equally consequential ways**”.

Of particular significance in this report is the recognition of “the over-emphasis on particular ‘attributes’” in the admissions framework “that serves to exclude those groups traditionally

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<sup>3</sup> And here I'm talking about systemic, cultural, and symbolic exclusion from our institutions of contemporary art.

<sup>4</sup> (2003)

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Bourdieu's thesis on taste and cultural inclusion/exclusion identified that the cultural capital that is acquired through being part of a particular social class, for instance skills, tastes, knowledge and so on, is an important source of social inequality since some forms of cultural capital are valued over others.

<sup>6</sup> Bauman, Zygmunt. *Work, Consumerism And The New Poor*

under-represented...” and this, the authors write, was caused by “...**deeply embedded, institutionalised class and ethnically biased notions of a highly idealised student**” against whom applicants are measured. For example, the report cites an instance of an admission interview for a candidate they describe as a “Black working class young woman from a poor inner city area”. In the interview the student cited Black hip-hop culture as one of her influences and the report clearly evidences that the panel didn’t recognize this as a legitimate subject within an HE art institution, and this was a contributing factor in the decision to reject the student’s application.

As this example shows, although art pedagogy makes claims to democratic inclusion it remains accessible only to very specific segments of society. This is because it favours those attributes that are acquired through access to what are seen as valid and legitimate forms of cultural and social capital.<sup>7</sup> This case study also raises additional questions about access to HE arts institutions, not least, whether the challenge is that of attracting diverse applicants or if the issue is whether or not those students are admitted (and when they are, are they retained)?<sup>8</sup>

The *Art for a Few* report also contests the myth of meritocracy that has long been espoused by those who argue that individual achievement is the most important principle determining access and success in HE. The fundamental problem with this is that a meritocratic system sees exclusion as deriving from within the student and ignores external structures of power and dominance. In doing so meritocracy discounts intersectional axes of race, gender, class and so on, which means in reality that the opportunity to succeed is not necessarily open to all according to talent and ability.<sup>9</sup>

To oppose these economies of inequality we should continue to challenge what Michel Foucault terms as the “rules of exclusion”, that is to say, the patriarchal structures that generate inequality and exclusion in our institutions.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> (Bourdieu. 1986).

<sup>8</sup> I’d also expand this inquiry beyond recruiting students, it’s also about retaining students. Here it is relevant to consider the extent to which those students who are generally underrepresented that do enter our HE art institutions are oppressed or hindered in their ability to effectively navigate and complete their degree.

<sup>9</sup> From David Osa Amadasun’s ethnographic study that stated *Black people don’t go to galleries*; to Nyla Ahmad’s project at Glasgow’s Women’s Library that examined *Why women of colour still aren’t represented in the arts – and how we can break the cycle*; as well as a succession of articles that asked questions such as *Can Only Rich Kids Afford to Work in the Art World?* Or critiques that challenge the dominant structures of traditionally elitist institutions, for instance Stella Duffy’s protestation that *Excellence in the arts should not be defined by the metropolitan elite*.

<sup>10</sup> Renewed saliency in the question of inequality and access to cultural production comes at a time when HE art institutions have increasingly become sites of selectivity, marketization and competitiveness. Since the 1980s academic capitalism has been in the ascendancy in our HE institutions in parallel with neoliberal globalization. As a consequence, there has been an increase in the number of art schools that have amalgamated with universities, which was generally an economic decision in order to survive. The effects of this has been a realignment of values and perspectives, by those who make decisions about who will gain access, towards the over-academicisation of the subject in order to relocate the arts within the research and assessment culture of the university. Whilst it is important to state that inequality is more than just economics, it’s also unavoidable to mention that we are also in an era of increased student fees and student debt. Successive UK governments, most notably since the Blair administration, have called for greater diversity at universities while introducing policies that propagate the opposite effect through exclusionary methods such as the introduction of tuition fees, that have risen to £9,250 this year (since the introduction of tuition fees in the UK in 1998 of £1,000 a year, trebling to £3,000 in 2003, trebling again to £9,000 in 2010 and rising to £9,250 this year). As a result of the economic shifts in educational funding HE institutions have been accused

To do this **intersectionality** can be applied as a guiding framework for educators to rethink existing practices. Intersectionality is crucial because it denotes the ways in which **structures of power and domination are interconnected and co-constitutive**. And it is a mechanism to consider how both explicit and tacit exclusion is socially constructed and reinforced. Intersectionality considers how **the categories of race, ethnicity, culture, nation, gender etc. not only intersect but are mutually constituted, formed, and transformed within dominant social structures, including European imperialism and colonialism, neoliberal globalization, and so on.**

And here it is important to acknowledge that the power relations in the wider social and political field are mediated through institutional practices. This means that the dominant set of values and perceptions come to be institutionalised, so that they are reflected in the formal structures, social norms and organisation of art institutions. That is to say, **historical and contemporary manifestations of identity, difference, and disadvantage continue to shape cultural production.**

Since the term intersectionality was first coined by legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 intersectionality theory has eclipsed critiques of patriarchy and is gaining currency in a number of educational contexts.<sup>11</sup> One of the key concepts of **an intersectionality-inspired pedagogy is that it requires an emphasis on power in order to build a more just and inclusive institution.**

Intersectional pedagogy also undertake, as a matter of urgency, **encouraging and valuing alternative ways of being** in relation to arts production, control, selection, organization, distribution and so on. The necessity to do so is outlined in the essay *Your Pedagogy Might be More Aligned with Colonialism than You Realize*. In this essay Jamila Lyiscott, explores the intersections of language, race, and social justice specifically within educational institutions. She challenges educators to interrogate the origins of the standards that we

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of being responsible for the reproduction and maintenance of inequality, rather than being a tool of social mobility. In line with academic capitalism HE institutions have focused their attention on recruiting international students, which not only increases the fees that can be charged, but also increases the diversity of their demographic. Whilst internationalisation is laudable it is also in danger of simply being capitalized by the power dynamics of the institution. The principles of inclusion must also be embraced by “affirming students’ identities rather than just avoiding discrimination”(Gurin, P., Dey, E., Hurtado, S. and Gurin, G. (2002) Diversity and higher education: theory and impact on educational outcomes. Harvard Educational Review 72(3): 330–367. One meaningful way to do this is for the institutions to avoid reflecting the values of the dominant group in society and therefore reproducing patterns of privilege. Whilst it should of course be recognised that contemporary higher art education is often fuelled by progressive ideas and critical pedagogy it must also be acknowledged that tacit exclusionism operates pervasively to create barriers that are often less tangible yet are institutionally entrenched. For instance, whilst the declared intentions of the official curriculum may be holistic and integrative this is undermined by the insidious influences that emanate from the everyday climate and structures of the institution, such as, the relationship between tutor and student (in terms of the power dynamic or perceived power dynamic), the layout of the studio and offices (symbolic conditioning), the way the institution is managed, the system of evaluation and learning outcomes, and so on. These unwritten norms, values, and expectations that unofficially and implicitly govern the interactions that are formative in the development of a students’ socialisation process; the process of instilling the social relations necessary to maintain capitalism, such as competition and evaluation, hierarchical divisions of labor, bureaucratic authority, and compliance.

<sup>11</sup> *Intersectional Pedagogy: Complicating identity and Social Justice; Feminist Pedagogy in Higher Education: Critical Theory and Practice*

uphold as being “superior to other ways of knowing our world?” and asks whether we are complicit in upholding attitudes that are rooted in discrimination?<sup>12</sup>

This recognises that HE art institutions are informed and constructed by a number of external factors and influences, but it also echoes the statement by Andrea Fraser<sup>13</sup> in her essay, *From Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique* (2005). In this essay Fraser states that **“We are the institution”** and in doing so highlights our agency in the reproduction or transformation of the systems of power and value within the organizational structures and activities of arts institutions.

Fraser’s thesis provokes self-reflection and a number of questions that I will conclude this talk with: **How as academics, artists, and cultural workers, can we work within and with institutions to challenge existing inequalities, and how can we encourage alternative pedagogical and organisational frameworks that contest the politics of access.** In other words, **how do we radically open up our institutions in order to render them decolonial and anti-patriarchal?**

If as Fraser claims “we are the institution” then it is our responsibility to adopt pedagogy and practices that will transform our institutions and inequality.

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<sup>12</sup> This is underpinned by the findings of the report *Art for a Few* that defines the conventions surrounding language and the production of student academic texts as being ideologically inscribed. This, the authors state “serves to exclude working-class and Black and ethnic groups” and this they argue is “profoundly connected to the legitimisation of particular forms of cultural capital and ‘taste’ as well as forms of linguistic capital”.

<sup>13</sup> Andrea Fraser takes us beyond the Institutional Critique of the 1960s and New Institutionalism of the 1990s since both been successfully distilled by art institutions.