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The Quest for Economic and Social Inclusion: a response from culture and aesthetics

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ABSTRACT

Although it is not new, the quest for economic and social inclusion has become a commonplace feature in political programmes in recent years. The language of inclusion has become ingrained in much political, civil, and everyday discourse, and the ideal of 'inclusion' and 'inclusivity' has been readily accepted by many public and private organizations and institutions. Particularly in recent years, much has been made of the important role of cities in realizing the ideal of economic and social inclusion. At the level of urban governance – and this can be seen reinforced in the UK government's 'levelling up agenda' – urban (re)development as an engine of economic and social revitalization is seen to be especially significant in both promoting urban growth and pursuing economic and social inclusion. Much of this redevelopment has focused particularly on the role of culture – of cultural amenities, a cultural landscape, and a cultural 'presence' for cities – in urban revitalization projects, which promise, or, some have suggested, ought to promise, an economically and socially 'inclusive' future.

This paper takes a critical look at the idea of economic and social inclusion from the perspective of culture and aesthetics. I argue that culture is a crucial, but often unacknowledged, companion of economic and social inclusion. I further suggest that this cultural perspective – or what I call here the 'view from aesthetics' – raises some important issues about the approach to economic and social inclusion and its potential, particularly in the context of urban regeneration.

INTRODUCTION

I gave a paper at the first FES Staff Research Conference entitled *Against Inclusivity*, in which I argued that the idea of inclusion is actually opposed to that of diversity and difference.[1] In thinking of what to present at this year's conference – which obviously takes the issue of inclusivity, or inclusion, as its

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[1] Durey, M.J. (2019) *Against Inclusivity: Barriers, Bad Concepts, and why we should resist Universalization*, Boundary Breaking - Faculty of Education and Society First Annual Staff Research Conference, 4th June 2019, University of Sunderland, UK. (Available: https://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/id/eprint/13187/).

theme – I was in two minds about whether to continue with my slightly provocative critical stance and present a paper *against economic and social inclusion*, or to take a different approach and highlight aspects of work I've done where ideas concerned with economic and social inclusion have been successful. In the end, I've decided to do a bit of both; and that raises a very important point that is worth acknowledging. Because, while we often see criticism as something negative, that seeks to tear down rather than to build up (and there's no doubt that some so-called critical perspectives validate this image), criticism as I understand it, when it is done in the scientific spirit, the spirit of careful and cautious improvement through rigorous examination, through testing, and trial and error, is actually an integral and crucial aspect of the production of knowledge. Moreover, it is, I think, incumbent upon us as academic researchers, working in universities – which, if they are to mean anything at all, must be places of unbounded inquiry, of challenge, critique, and argument – to hold concepts of all kinds up to scrutiny. This is perhaps most especially true of ideas that might be taken for granted, or which seem beyond question. If only to make them stronger and our thinking about them clearer as a result. In fact, when we consider the contribution that universities and academic research and scholarship can, and certainly ought, to make to practical changes in the world through knowledge-exchange, and the evaluation of systems, services, and policy and its impacts, I would certainly argue one of our greatest strengths is that capacity for critique that is a by-product of the open, independent, questioning, and at times irreverent nature of academic inquiry. So, and I mean this at least partly to offset the potential of forever being unfairly labelled a contrarian and malcontent, by taking a critical stance to the concept of economic and social inclusion, I would like to make it clear that I am not attacking an idea that I see as inherently objectionable, but rather trying to remove the objectionable from that which is worthy.

So, with that in mind, what is economic and social inclusion, and what is wrong with it?

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The language of economic and social inclusion is a relatively recent creation – associated particularly, in the UK, with the New Labour governments between 1997 and 2010. The idea of economic and social inclusion itself, however, has been around for a long time. It can be found, in some form or another, in all the post-war UK governments, and can be found, in spirit at least, back to the liberal reformers of the 18th and 19th centuries. Nevertheless, the quest for economic and social inclusion has certainly changed. It has reached new heights and scope, becoming almost ubiquitous, acquiring something of a cloak of irreproachability. This leaves it vulnerable to many abuses. Most obviously

tokenism: it is easy to describe something as being 'inclusive', without necessarily changing anything of consequence. Secondly, and more seriously, however, is that the demand for inclusivity is so ubiquitous, that it can be used as a *carte blanche*, allowing any number of perhaps questionable policies and reforms to be enacted because they can be justified as being 'inclusive', or promoting some, perhaps rather cryptic or ephemeral, idea of an 'inclusive society'. The idea of 'inclusivity' itself can even be wielded as a shield to prevent criticism of past or future actions.

Like a lot of concepts that cross scholarly, scientific, as well as political and everyday discourse, reliable definitions of economic and social inclusion are hard to come by. But let's take three examples. According to which, social inclusion is:

> *'the process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are disadvantaged, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights.'* (UN)[2]

> *'the process by which efforts are made to ensure that everyone, regardless of their experiences and circumstances, can achieve their potential in life. To achieve inclusion income and employment are necessary but not sufficient. An inclusive society is also characterised by a striving for reduced inequality, a balance between individuals' rights and duties and increased social cohesion.'* (Oxfordshire County Council)[3]

> *'the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity.'* (World Bank)[4]

Between these and other definitions I think can be identified the essence or the spirit of economic and social inclusion, which, as I see it at least, is the idea that there is – or ought to be – a basis which allows for diverse individuals and groups to participate in, and belong to, the economic and civil life of society.

It's probably no great stretch to suggest that the majority of people would agree with this quite laudable notion – and I would count myself amongst them. As all those definitions indicate, however, inclusion is typically seen not as a condition, but as a process; and laudable as the notion of inclusion might be, that in itself does not mean that attempts to achieve or support it are necessarily effective or beneficial in consequence.

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[2] UN (2016) *Leaving no one behind: the imperative of inclusive development*. UN, p.17
[3] OCC (2007) Social Inclusion Strategy, Oxfordshire County Council, p.2 (Available: https://www2.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/aboutyourcouncil/plansperformancepolicy/equality/socialinclusionstrategy.pdf)
[4] World Bank (2013) *Inclusion Matters: The Foundation for Shared Prosperity*. Washington, D.C., pp.3-4

In the second part of this paper, I'm going to say something about what I think might inform a good understanding of the idea of economic and social inclusion; but first I want to pre-empt that by briefly suggesting two interrelated problems with the what seems to me to be the prevailing understanding of economic and social inclusion, and I'm going to do that by drawing two comparisons: firstly, between the idea of inclusion and that of exclusion, and, secondly, between inclusion and integration.

Inclusion and exclusion

As I mentioned, the policy language of economic and social inclusion, in the UK context, comes from the New Labour governments of the start of the century. But it was the idea of *exclusion*, not *inclusion*, that informed the New Labour policy programme. Exclusion, as it was understood, was the removal or marginalization of individuals or groups through concrete, specific processes or conditions, for instance of access to public transport, to digital infrastructure, to employment. These factors of exclusion – what might have been easily recognizable throughout much of the 20th century as social disadvantages – were things that could be identified, measured, and importantly, addressed (at least in principle) through specific policy interventions. They were concrete, practical concerns. According to some definitions, social inclusion refers merely to the condition or state of being absent any factors of exclusion. This, if it were understood as only this, would be unproblematic as a definition, if a bit linguistically redundant. However, inclusion now is rarely, if ever, understood simply as the absence of specific factors of exclusion, it is – as the definitions before suggested – understood as something attached to all manner of other ostensibly desirable conditions: freedom for people to 'be themselves', improve their opportunity and dignity, or achieve their potential, for instance. Often, in practice, inclusion in this sense is quite removed from any specific, recognizable barriers to participation, and refers instead to quite unspecific and nebulous ideas that are deeply problematic as targets of policy or practical interventions.

These issues relate to the second problem, which is that inclusion as a concept, and certainly in practice, does not actually rest upon and support the diversity it purports to defend, but quite actively undermines it.

Diversity is difference; it acknowledges the surely irresistible truth that life and the world around us is composed of distinct and varied things – ourselves included – and that the course of living in that world necessarily involves attending to these differences. Social life, then, is necessarily particular and contingent. The idea of exclusion is an inference from the fact that *different* people, in *different*

circumstances, experience *different* kinds of disadvantage that can prevent them from participating in society. To seek to *include*, however, is, on at least some level, to treat things as the same. In fact, most often it quite explicitly refers to treating things that *are in fact not* the same *as if they are* the same; to put different things together so that they may be considered as if they are the same. But to treat things which are in some important respect different *as if* they are the same necessarily, on some level, denies that difference. It suggests that either in general or in certain specific ways those differences are not important, or that they can effectively be disregarded or magicked away. This is perhaps most evident when those imprecise and nebulous ideas that the concept of inclusion moves us toward take the form of the more insidious notion of *inclusivity* – the insistence that in any given circumstance everyone has *a right to be included*, or that *everything* in society *ought* to be inclusive of *everyone*. The corollary of which is that nothing may be particular, separate, discrete, or exceptional; and that such things, where they manifestly exist (and of course they do), are seen to be morally egregious and should be challenged. This perhaps seems innocuous, or a merely semantic point, but it is a significant logical leap that moves the issue of economic and social inclusion a long way from its original purpose and raises any number of conceptual and practical problems.

I think this can be seen when we compare inclusion to integration.

Inclusion and integration

Before the language of economic and social inclusion became the *lingua franca*, social science had long recognized the idea of *social integration* as a fundamental dimension of a healthy and functioning society. This was a central concern of early sociological greats like Montesquieu and Durkheim,[5] as well as informing debates central to the development of sociology throughout the 20th century (for instance in Parsons,[6] Lockwood,[7] and Giddens[8]). Social integration refers to the way, or the extent to which, individuals are related to the social whole. It was a key concept for early social scientists seeking to understand how societies maintained cohesion when faced with significant and rapid social change. Durkheim made the argument that in complex modern societies social integration took on a particular character because of the advanced division of labour. Specifically, Durkheim noted that our relationships to one another, and to society as a whole, were underpinned by the diversity of capacities and activities carried out in highly differentiated societies. As individuals

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[5] Durkheim, E. (2013[1893]) *The Division of Labour in Society* (Trans. G.Simpson), USA: Digireads.
[6] Parsons, T. (1951) *The Social System*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
[7] Lockwood, D. (1964) Social integration and system integration, in: G.K. Zollschan and W. Hirsh (eds.) *Explorations in Social Change*, London: Routledge.
[8] Giddens, A. (1984) *The Constitution of Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

within a social system, we were bound together by our mutual reliance: 'the different parts of the aggregate, because they fulfil different functions,' he suggested, 'cannot easily be separated.'[9] The consequence being that individuals are interdependent on one another.

Rather than implying 'that individuals resemble each other,' Durkheim tells us, social integration of this kind 'presumes their difference.'[10] It is because we carry out different tasks, and therefore relate to, and participate in, the world in different ways – indeed, because the modern form of society is the result of, and requires, difference – that we are all part of a social whole that would not be possible without that difference; we are integrated because of those differences that enable society to function and to evolve, and we, in contingent ways, with it. This integration is possible because the capacity of the collective to regulate the consciousness of individuals is reduced; there is, Durkheim suggests, a greater capacity and significance for 'a sphere of action which is peculiar' to each individual personality.[11]

Quite distinct from the image of inclusion, which depends on – and quite erroneously assumes – our sameness, integration recognizes and requires difference. The integration of diverse people, with diverse interests, conditions, and competencies is promoted by a society that does not seek to control individuals mechanically, by insisting on – and seeking the regulate – an (unrealistic) sense of sameness that permits little divergence on the part of individuals from the collective mindset, but which extends in itself the integration that results from the liberty of independent, diverse, individuals. In such condition, 'the individuality of all grows at the same time as that of its parts', and consequently is capable of evolving and growing in 'collective movement'.[12] Social integration, then, is an open-ended process. Because it makes no assumption about the form which society takes, or of what manner of social goals might be achieved *by* integration, it is concerned only with furthering the stability of society itself.

Compare this with inclusion, and we see that the very thing Durkheim saw as promoting integration is undermined by the idea of inclusion, which implies a pregiven (if unspecifiable and unrealizable) goal – indeed, an *end-point* – of an 'inclusive' society, to which individuals must accommodate themselves.

Abstraction

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9 Durkheim, *op cit*. p.102.
10 *Ibid.* p.91.
11 *Ibid*.
12 *Ibid*.

Both problems are the result of abstraction from the very real, particular, and specific conditions of life to detached, speculative, and universal conceptual ideas: from particular barriers to participation to an abstract ideal of inclusion; and from the real conditions and experience of difference to abstract and artificial ideas of *sameness*.

There is a further issue of abstraction that is important and worth acknowledging, and that concerns how economic and social inclusion relates to participation.

We might understand economic inclusion as having a job, perhaps, or having financial means enough to be part of the economic system (although I suspect we might struggle to agree a definition of exactly what that means). Alternatively, someone might be deemed socially included if they are involved in various groups or communities, or are perhaps politically involved. But these things tell us nothing about something crucial about participation, about civil life, and that is the significance of meaning and value. In and of itself, to be 'included' in ways such as those mentioned, tells us nothing about what these things mean for people, or what motivates them to participate. It tells us nothing about what the phenomenologists call the *lifeworld*, which is concerned with the everyday realm of meaning, interests, and motivation – both individual and collective. Understanding economic and social inclusion in this way is blind to the significance of culture and of values.

This issue was well understood – in the context of social integration – by Durkheim, who, of course, was writing of societies emerging from the great upheavals of early modern industrialism and urbanization. For Durkheim, social integration (and, indeed, the division of labour which underpinned it) was a profoundly moral – and not merely economic or practical – phenomenon. He recognized that societies characterized by great differentiation in terms of people's circumstances, experiences and outlooks, were unstable – pathological, in fact – and that it was necessary for societies to sustain themselves through integration: to ensure that people recognized in society, and in their fellow citizens, a shared sense of belonging, of purpose, of morality, that was relatable through the institutions and rituals of social life.[13] What we might in other words call everyday culture.

CULTURE AND THE VIEW FROM AESTHETICS

The importance of the cultural dimension of life – of the lifeworld – for economic and social inclusion is enough to suggest that culture-informed ideas ought to be central to the way we understand and

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[13] Durkheim, *op cit*.

approach it, but there is another compelling reason to make the argument for the importance of culture, and that is the crucial role that has been given to culture – and to cultural and creative work and industries especially – in the way in which cities and urban development can foster and promote economic and social inclusion.

Culture, cities, and inclusion

There has been much said about the potential of culture, of cultural and creative industries, cultural institutions, and other features of the cultural landscapes of cities to foster economic development and promote social inclusion. In recent decades there has been a much-documented trend in postindustrial urban development associated with a number of seminal texts – particularly those by Richard Florida[14] and Charles Landry[15] – that have argued for the importance of attracting cultural and creative industries and workers to cities in order to secure economic growth. This has led to a familiar programme – perhaps even an obsession – with culture-led urban regeneration and revitalization, for which I have a great deal of sympathy but also trepidation. It is undoubtedly true that cultural industries and organizations are powerful catalysts to successful urban renewal and motors for urban economies. It is also true that they can perform a powerful role in building and sustaining social inclusion and civic participation. I cannot but agree, however, that, when viewed from a purely economic standpoint, these programmes are readily side-tracked (or should I perhaps say hijacked) into familiar patterns of what Peck described as neoliberal urbanism,[16] in which investment intended for cultural renewal quickly ends up propping up private capital, typically through the valorization of land capital (or the realization of underdeveloped property value), with little concern for truly cultural outcomes. Nor should we ignore the arguments from Dekker and Morea, that highlight the inadequacies of seeing culture as a *means* to achieving other ends – either economically, or as instruments to promote social inclusion.[17] This is a vast topic, and I can't do more than touch upon it here. I want simply to highlight that culture is at the forefront of debates of how economic and social inclusion are implemented in urban governance, and so the cultural perspective is both pertinent and necessary.

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[14] Florida, R. (2003) *Cities and the Creative Class*, Oxford: Routledge and Florida, R. (2011) *The Rise of the Creative Class: Revisited*, New York: Basic Books.

[15] Landry, C. (2000) *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*, London: Comedia.

[16] Peck, N. (2005) 'Struggling with the Creative Class' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29(4), pp.740-770.

[17] Dekker, E. and Morea, V. (2023) *Realizing the Values of Art: Making Space for Cultural Civil Society*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature. See also Durey, M.J. (forthcoming) *Art Work: Cities, Identities, and Cultural Work*, London: Palgrave.

I want to turn the tables on the typical view of this issue, which tends to view culture as an instrument through which to generate growth, or social inclusion, and look at it instead from a cultural perspective; to consider what culture itself might contribute to the understanding of economic and social inclusion. Specifically, I want to approach it from the view from aesthetics.

The view from aesthetics

Aesthetics is generally associated with the domain of art and high culture, and I think there's much of value and importance to be derived from this rarefied field in regard to the importance of culture in social life; but the insights from aesthetics have broader relevance to understanding economic and social inclusion, and it's that relevance to which I wish to draw attention.

Aesthetics is concerned with the appreciation of information derived from the senses, and aesthetic understanding, therefore, is rooted in our experience, and in the immediacy – and particularity – of that experience. I can try to explain to you the effect of an experience – say of viewing a beautiful painting or listening to a live music performance – but you can never have knowledge of those things from my report of the experience alone: to share it you would have to witness these things yourselves, directly. But while it is rooted in immediacy and subjective experience, aesthetics is not concerned with the merely affective. This is because the view from aesthetics is necessarily evaluative. It involves judgement. And this judgement, for it to be possible, must be based on the qualities of the object or experience itself, and not merely a person's subjective *feelings about it*. I cannot attempt to explain, let alone justify, an aesthetic judgement – to myself, let alone another person – without presenting my experience in ways that are (at least in principle) communicable and understandable by another person, about which it is possible to reason, and which therefore refer to and depend upon aspects of the object about which shared understanding is possible.

This shared understanding is possible because there are reference points and frameworks of understanding, which include those things that make up human meaning and motivation, that are established beyond us as individual valuing/judging beings, which are social and historical in origin, upon which our individual meanings and values depend and with which they are in dialogue. This dialogue is culture. It is cultural history: the collective understanding of generations of individuals sharing diverse experience and establishing community in particular places; and it is present in everyday activity just as much as it is in the appreciation of high art. When we engage in aesthetic judgement, when we take the view from aesthetics, we are entering into that conversation and putting it into practice. We are linking our individual impressions, grounded in direct experience,

with those shared cultural ideas, understandings, and values that comprise the social whole. Culture, understood in this way, describes a relationship between the individual and society that emerges from the idea of aesthetic judgement.

This idea of aesthetic judgement comes from the view advanced by Kant.[18] For Kant, the aesthetic judgement was intimately connected with the idea of autonomy and its implications for morality. At the risk of grossly oversimplifying, Kant suggested that the aesthetic view was *disinterested*. Which is not the same as being uninterested, in the sense of not seeing something as being of interest or important. Being disinterested, means to appreciate, and contemplate, something in its own terms, unadulterated by our *personal* interests or objectives. Scruton describes it as follows:

> The act of [disinterested] contemplation involves attending to the object not as an instance of a universal (or concept), but as the particular thing that it is. The individual object is isolated in aesthetic judgement and considered 'for its own sake'.[19]

The object of the aesthetic view, then, is seen as having value in its own right – not value only in terms of our personal interests, or what purpose we can put them to. To view something aesthetically, then, is to view it as autonomous. Moreover, it is autonomous in the same way that Kant argued people are (or ought to be understood as) autonomous: that is, of intrinsic value as *ends in themselves* rather than merely as *means* to another's ends.[20]

This is echoed in the view of culture as conversation as I have just described it, for at no point does this conversation imply necessary agreement – certainly not in any definitive sense. While we may seek to persuade others of the cogency of our judgements, by forming these judgements as *arguments* we recognize that others may see the world differently – have different criteria of judgement, different *values* – and we treat each other as autonomous when we seek to persuade, through conversation and argument, and not to merely seek to force them, as mere means to our ends, into agreement. Nor does it imply purpose, in the sense that there is no overarching, total, purpose in light of which all objects must be evaluated, or to which judgements must accord.

This conversation, this culture, is the result of, and thrives upon, difference; different judgements coming together, drawing on, and reproducing, a shared cultural resource, and creating the conditions, and the experience, of a social world in which genuine social integration can take place.

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[18] Kant, I. (1953/1790) *The Critique of Judgement* (Trans. J.C. Meredith), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[19] Scruton, R. (2001) *Kant: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.103

[20] Kant, I. (2012/1785) *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (revised edition)* (Translated and edited by M. Gregor and J. Timmermann), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Not because our judgements are the same, or even that all judgements must be considered equal, or be included, but because by being able to make those judgements, we participate the cultural conversation, and can work out the relationship between our particular values and the social whole through an engagement with culture and cultural history.

This is, I think, quite apparent when we consider the notion of cities as sites of social inclusion.

Cities that have made strong use of culture and culture-led regeneration to achieve economic growth and foster inclusion have very often followed a predictable formula: using cultural organizations to regenerate deindustrialized spaces and deprived – or *excluded* – neighbourhoods and communities, creating cultural institutions, and commissioning public art.[21] This has often been a very top-down process, with city authorities seeking to 'create' a singular cultural landscape and a cultural 'brand' for cities[22], with the goal that this cultural provision will attract investment, improve the desirability of cities as dwellings, and foster economically and socially-inclusive environments. In this sense, the city, like the idea of inclusion, is seen in general, abstract, and instrumental terms. The landscape of cities, and their cultures, are seen not as ends in themselves, not as achievements of the diverse, meaningful, and particular engagements of diverse and autonomous agents through the conversation of culture, but as *means*, dependent for their meaning on their *uses*, which must be deployed in the service of other things: of economic growth, neighbourhood renewal, or social inclusion.

This is an abstraction far removed from what cities and their cultures *mean* to those who live and work in them. Cities which are repositories of memory, of community, of cultural history written in the landscapes and architecture – and in institutions and public art – where belonging is a very particular and personal sense of the relationship between an individual and the history and culture of place. A city in which everyone can feel a sense of belonging, in which they can participate in ways that are personally meaningful, and within which they can recognize, through aesthetic judgement, the connections between their particular, everyday experiences and the cultural history through which the social whole can be understood and made relatable. In short, a city in which people can integrate. This is quite different to the idea of the city as a space in which everything must be the same, or where everything must, in some nebulous and insipid way, be *for everyone*, or *inclusive*. An individual need not judge all parts of the city as directly *for them*, or 'inclusive' of people like them,

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[21] See, for instance, Gospodini, A. (2001) Urban waterfront redevelopment in Greek cities; A framework for redesigning space, *Cities* 18(5), pp.285–296, and Markusen, A. and Schrock, G. (2009) Consumption-Driven Urban Development, *Urban Geography* 30(4), pp.344-367.
[22] Gibson, T. (2005) Selling city living: Urban branding campaigns, class power and the civic good, *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8(3), pp.259–280.

in order to recognize themselves in the city, when their view of the city, while personal *to them*, is nevertheless *disinterested*, because their judgements about the city depend upon and engage with its shared, objective, cultural character. Their experiences form part of a shared cultural history, which is recognizable not only in the material landscape, but in the fact that, because their view does not see 'the city', or other inhabitants, merely as means to their own ends – tokens to be understood, moved, and manipulated in the service of their interests – they can appreciate the complex, manifold, and diverse landscape of the city *in its own terms*, of value in its own right, and *in that view* can recognize both their own autonomy and that of others, and recognize the city itself as a place of shared understanding and of *culture* that goes beyond merely individual interests.

This then is the image of society understood culturally from the position of aesthetics. An image which takes diversity, particularity, and the objective character of shared culture as its starting point and understands the idea of aesthetic judgement as the means through which different, interdependent, individuals can be meaningfully integrated, and from which participation, belonging, and a moral community can organically emerge and evolve.

CONCLUSIONS

I began with an appeal to the critical stance and its importance for advancing issues such as economic and social exclusion. I mean very importantly to distinguish the stance I advocate – which might perhaps be described as a kind of critical rationalism, or a sceptical realism – from the kind of cynical vandalism that sees criticism in-and-of-itself as the objective. In concluding, I would like to highlight a few points – sceptical, perhaps, but nevertheless intended as a positive contribution – about what the idea of economic and social inclusion would – and I think *should* – look like when considered from the view from aesthetics.

The first, quite simply, is that culture matters. If our intention is to pursue what I have taken here to be the central idea behind economic and social inclusion – that is, a basis which allows for diverse individuals and communities to participate in and belong to the civil and economic life of society – then we must acknowledge that an instrumental, abstract understanding of inclusion alone is insufficient. Economic and social inclusion must be seen to be a matter of meaning and value, which resonates in, and is part of, the *lifeworld* of often everyday meaning and value. But more than this, culture in its objective sense, as the representation of human achievement, and the history and value of human community, is crucial. In this regard there is something very important in the claim that cities are a crucial vessel for economic and social inclusion. Cities are distinctly cultural landscapes,

not just in the sense that they are landscapes encountered and negotiated as part of everyday living by a typically large and diverse population, and therefore rich in cultural meaning, but because cities are sites of a tremendous amount of objective culture in the form of cultural work, cultural institutions, art, and so on. They are also powerful cultural objects in themselves that stand as great symbols for the history of human community and settlement. Understood as such, they are well suited to the promotion of the kinds of aesthetic engagement that underpins the kind of moral inclusion I am arguing for here.

The importance of culture, however, underscores the second point, which is that the term inclusion is itself problematic and liable to set us down the wrong path. It depends on abstractions: from the particularity and diversity of empirical actuality (of which culture is a part) to insubstantial and ephemeral ideas of sameness. I made this point by comparing inclusion first with exclusion and then with integration. In both cases, this abstraction is accompanied by a diminution of the concept's practical relevance, for this abstraction is intractably difficult to define in any cogent and reliable way, and inevitably dismisses those particular and – in the case of cities – the typically *local* factors that are essential to culture, cultural history, and a sense of place and belonging, and that are very often crucial factors in the success of policy applications and interventions. In practice, these abstractions, combined with the tendency toward an imagined endpoint – albeit an abstract and ill-defined one – not only displace sensible and particular engagements with issues of exclusion, but by warping into demands for 'inclusivity', come to deny the importance, and the reality, of diversity and particularity that is central to social integration.

Finally, we must be modest, perhaps even cautious, about the scope of our goals. The current incarnation of the quest for economic and social inclusion, in the sense I outlined at the beginning, is an extreme version of what has already proved difficult to achieve. I believe this is because the concept of inclusion leads us away from what is real and everyday, and which offers sensible objectives for policy, toward the abstract and utopian ideas of a never-properly-defined *inclusive society* in which any number of social ills – both real and imagined – are vanquished. This speculative endpoint, however, if it ever could be realized, would lay waste to culture and diversity, and thoroughly undermine the kind of social integration that is built on the meaningful participation of diverse individuals and promoted by an aesthetic and moral disinterestedness, in which diversity and culture can flourish. We should, therefore, divest ourselves of the danger of destroying the very thing we seek to promote by being more modest and grounded in our objectives. The view from aesthetics reminds us that life is a moral endeavour, concerned with values, and carried out in the realm of culture. This culture is a 'conversation', a negotiation between different – and at times competing –

values, in which diverse individuals and communities can nevertheless find meaning and belonging in shared cultural understandings through disinterested judgement. Through social integration, we can form a moral community and move toward collective goals, by fostering the stability, sustainability, and compromise that comes from the interdependence of difference. To such a community, utopianism and abstraction are always threats, which, if they creep into the realms of policy and governance, should be considered hazardous material, and treated accordingly.

When we consider the intended outcomes of our efforts to promote economic and social inclusion – and, as I said at the beginning, universities, by virtue of their unique capacity for critical engagement, have a particularly crucial role to play in this regard – we should be sensitive to these limitations, and, indeed, to the dangers, inherent in the concept of inclusion; and perhaps particularly to the tendency to see things through the demand for inclusion – as things which must be (or become) *inclusive*, or turned into an instrument for achieving it. Culture particularly has become a popular commodity in the quest for economic and social inclusion, and not without good reason; but the view from aesthetics reminds us that we should treat culture *as culture* – of value in itself and not as means to other ends. Indeed, therein lies its value; for it is in this sense – of disinterested engagement – that culture, and an appreciation for shared cultural history, provides the milieux for genuinely diverse participation, for individuals and communities to recognize themselves and the everyday in the cultural whole, and for integration with the moral community that is the basis for economic and social inclusion that is meaningful, particular, and grounded.