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## **“ARTS MARKETING” IS WHAT YOU CAN GET AWAY WITH**

Definitional work is an ongoing feature of scholarship in many areas of marketing, for example integrated marketing communications (Kliatchko 2005), social marketing (Smith 2008) and critical marketing (Saren, Maclaran Goulding and Elliott 2007). In this paper, we are interested in exploring ways of defining the field of arts marketing, and we reflect on recent definitions and art, and relate these to marketing and to arts marketing.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In their paper presented at the Academy of Marketing conference in 2005 Michael Macaulay and Noel Dennis, looking at the jazz scene in the UK, attempted to answer the question “how can we market a product that we cannot define?” If marketing jazz is problematic because of definitional problems, then, surely, so, too, is the marketing of art. Definitional work is an ongoing feature of scholarship in many areas of marketing, for example integrated marketing communications (Kliatchko 2005), social marketing (Smith 2008) and critical marketing (Saren, Maclaran, Goulding and Elliott 2007). In this paper, we are interested in exploring ways of defining the field of arts marketing, and we reflect on recent definitions of art, and relate these to marketing and to arts marketing.

### **2. MARKETING**

While marketing is undoubtedly a much younger concept than art, it has evolved throughout the last hundred years, changing its character and nature. Tadajewski (2009), tracing the history of marketing thought, suggests that the term ‘marketing’ was used for the first time at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, though the exact context remains unsure. One thing we know, Tadajewski tells us, is that it was used to describe a variety of buying and selling activities. Since its early developments, the philosophy of marketing has undergone several significant changes, from product-, selling- and production-oriented managerial activities, through broadening the concept of marketing (Kotler and Levy 1969), to the more socially and politically motivated consumer-centred research agenda of the Association for Consumer Research. The American Marketing Association defines

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marketing as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large” (AMA 2009). This definition was updated in 2007 to include broader impact of marketing on a society as a whole, following a long critique from the academic circles disapproving the managerial character of its earlier versions. In the United Kingdom on the other hand, the Chartered Institute of Marketing’s official definition of marketing as “the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably” (CIM 2009) has been criticised for its exclusive focus on profit as the only marketing outcome.

Despite the critique and all those changes the understanding of marketing as selling is still very common amongst marketing practitioners and consumers. However, Kotler and Keller (2009: 45) quote Peter Drucker saying that: “the aim of marketing is to make selling superfluous. The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well that the product or service fits him and sells itself. Ideally, marketing should result in a customer who is ready to buy. All that should be needed then is to make the product or service available.”

Drucker’s view clearly subscribes to so-called marketing concept, which relies on knowing customers needs and want so well to deliver products satisfying their need better than anyone else. While this remains a popular approach to marketing, it was criticised by Hirschman (1983), who believed that it is not applicable to two classes of producers – one of which are artists. She argues that due to the higher value being placed by artists on their internal needs and fellow artists’ opinions, as product-centred marketers, they often ignore the needs and wants of larger audience. As a result of the different character of artistic work, marketing as a concept and a set of activities should be adapted to the unique features of art as a product.

### 3. ARTS MARKETING

Given the contested nature of ‘marketing’, it can be no surprise that there is disagreement about what is ‘arts marketing’ (Rentschler 1998). Rentschler and Wood (2001) reviewed 128 articles in the arts marketing literature and suggested three periods in the development of the field, reflecting the changing understanding of marketing as an academic discipline. At the very beginning, the focus of research activities was predominantly on education of audiences, organizational awareness and the impact the arts could make on a community (Foundation Period 1975-1984). It was then followed by the dominance of studies into the applicability of the marketing concept to non-profit arts organizations (Professionalization Period 1985-1994). Finally came a period dominated by studies using the methodologies of the behavioural and social sciences, with emphasis on the commercial success in the arts market (Discovery Period 1995-2001). Many of those studies focused on museums and different venues within performing arts (e.g. music and theatre), and to a lesser extent on still relatively under-researched film marketing (see for example Kerrigan et al. 2004). Since the end of the third period, the marketing of the arts and heritage has drawn increasingly on other strands of market-related work, including branding, relationship marketing, services marketing, and consumer studies.

More recently, the ESRC series entitled ‘Rethinking Arts Marketing’ broached a number of themes including active audiences, creative methods of inquiry in arts marketing, creative audience development, creativity and the art enterprise, and social arts

marketing. One of the conclusions from this series was that rethinking arts marketing meant connecting it to a wide range of perspectives and disciplines, including museum studies, media studies, leisure studies, tourism studies, cultural economics, anthropology of art, sociology of the arts, cultural studies, and fandom theory. Following this logic would open up arts marketing to a wide range of influences and seem to make a simple managerial definition of arts marketing more difficult.

Currently we may broadly distinguish two approaches to arts marketing. The first one, more concerned with an organisational view of arts marketing as a managerial tool, locates it within the domain of cultural intermediaries (Venkatesh and Meamber 2006). It positions the marketing mix as a method used by artists and arts organizations to promote cultural goods in a very competitive arts market. Hill, O’Sullivan and O’Sullivan (2003: 1), for example, define arts marketing as “an integrated management process which sees mutually satisfying exchange relationships with customers as the route to achieving organizational and artistic objectives”. This approach to arts marketing has as many supporters as opponents, and has been for many years popular in arts marketing education, research and practice. The majority of work in this stream has focused on the application of various elements of marketing strategy in the arts, building loyalty through subscriptions and other loyalty programmes, and quantitative marketing research tools and techniques (e.g. surveys) (see for example Kotler and Scheff 1997).

While the above definition emphasises managerial activities, in the second approach, marketing is an integral element of artistic production. It argues that what is needed in the arts marketing is not better understanding of marketing principles (which most experienced arts marketers already have), but more critical and broad analysis of “the arts as a context for marketing” (Butler 2000: 345). Butler, for example, identified fifteen distinctive structural and process characteristics of arts marketing (cultural domain, human performance, location as identity, role of the artist, clash of commerce and culture, art networks, resource base, diversity of audience, influence of critics, source of value definition, discovery of new art, education and development of artists, education and development of audiences, access and pricing), all of which should be considered by arts marketers. His perception of art is indeed broad, and therefore in the remaining part of this paper we would like to concentrate on what a better understanding of art as a concept can offer to arts marketers.

Of course, discourse about the relationship between art and the marketplace is not the prerogative of marketers alone. One could readily, for example, use cultural studies concepts to construct art as a human signifying practice, whereby a historically situated artist, working from his/her lived inner and outer experiences, and from his/her creative imagination, selects and configures material and symbolic resources – including ideas, images, sounds, smells, tastes, actions and gestures – in accordance with certain art-generic ideas, and arranges them in an expressive text which refers to different dimensions of human experience. The meanings of a work of art are construed within the broad constraints of the cultural codes which apply contextually, of the signifiers encoded in the work of art, and of the socio-economico-political positions of its interpreters. One could go on to argue that the market is incidental to this primary artistic work, which has fundamentally to do with meaning, rather than money.

#### 4. ART

Throughout over two thousand years, many have attempted to answer the question: what is art? In consequence, definitions of art have been conditioned by their authors' aesthetic preferences, culture, current debates and the development of art itself. Thus countless of these definitions have failed the test of time. One of the first attempts to describe the unique characteristics of art was Socrates' view of "art as mirror held up to nature" (Danto 1964: 571). Those early conceptualisations of art, stretching from Greek philosophers to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Post-Impressionists, were concerned mostly with distinctive features of artworks. They can be broadly divided into two main streams: representational and expressive definitions.

One example of the former, focusing on the visual appearance of objects, is Kant's philosophy (1790), which describes art as "a mode of representation which is intrinsically final, and which, although devoid of an end, has the effect of advancing the culture of the mental powers in the interests of social communication". The same representational character of the art was uniquely employed by Zhdanov, Stalin's cultural commissar, in creation of what later became known as socialist realism. In the Statute of the Union of Soviet Writers, presented by Zhdanov to the Soviet Writer's Congress in 1934, he demanded of the artists "the truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development", subjecting the arts to the laws of political propaganda (Wikipedia 2009). Through the "truthfulness and historical concreteness" of artistic efforts of "engineers of human soul", the arts' main task was to educate masses and transform them in the spirit of socialist ideology (Zhdanov 1992). One of the more popular examples of expressive definitions, commonly associated with the 18<sup>th</sup> century Romantic movement, is on the other hand Tolstoy's understanding of art as "infectious communication of emotions" (Knox 1930: 65). He described it as "a human activity, consisting in this, that one person consciously, by certain external signs, conveys to others feelings he has experienced, and other people are affected by these feelings and live them over in themselves". Music in that sense, has been inseparable from people throughout the ages, and for hundreds of years has been used to warn about danger, wars, herald animal hunting or to make rain; it has also been an intrinsic element on social occasions such as coronations, weddings, funerals, and banquets.

Nonetheless, the development of art in the Western world in the 20th century was followed by the dominant view amongst theorists that it became impossible to define art, as it progressed into a concept devoid of any common functions or essential and unique characteristics. Morris Weitz claimed that art cannot be defined as it is an open concept. Similar arguments were used by Wolff (1983), who, rejecting earlier essentialist definitions of art, argued that the social history of art proved some artefacts or activities became art accidentally; hence, we cannot identify any features or characteristics which differentiate them from other, similar works. Therefore, over the past few decades we can observe the growing popularity of non-essentialist definitions of art, moving away from formalistic discussion about physical characteristics of artworks. One of these, the so-called institutional definition of art, put forward by Georg Dickie in 1969 and based on Arthur Danto's original concept of the 'artworld' (1964), has significantly influenced our contemporary thinking about art. Criticised by many philosophers for its vagueness, it was later revised in 1984 (Torres and Kamhi 2000: 96) to read: "a work of art is an artefact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public".

Several later attempts to define art also circled around Dickie's approach and added very little to his definition. Recently, Danto's definition of art was stretched to its limits by Carey (2005: 29), who provocatively argued that "a work of art is anything that anyone has ever considered a work of art, though it may be a work of art only for that one person". And while in the institutional theory of art recognition by a member of the artworld is what gives the work of art aesthetic value, Binkley (1992) argued that that member should be the artist him-/herself, deciding and specifying what the artwork is. Indeed, Andy Warhol once said that "art is what you can get away with".

### 5. A WAY FORWARD?

We have started this paper with a question posed at the AM conference four years ago by Michael Macaulay and Noel Dennis: "how can we market a product that we cannot define?" Given the diversity of opinion about 'art', 'marketing' and 'arts marketing', one might be tempted to ask: why bother with a definition of 'arts marketing'? Definitions are reductive, overly simplistic, and doomed to failure. On the other hand, they offer a useful illusion of clarity in the classroom, academic paper, textbook, or arts marketing presentation. They are a form of discursive currency which can be exchanged for professional or disciplinary capital in social situations and part of the arts marketer's stock-in-trade.

Butler (2000) accused marketers of not engaging sufficiently in "understanding the arts as a distinctive marketing context", what in his view should improve conceptualisation in the field of arts marketing. However, while his characteristics of arts marketing capture the unique and essential characteristics of the "design-production-delivery" process, the growing popularity of non-essentialist definitions of 'art' may suggest arts marketers should be also moving beyond essentialist definitions of arts marketing. As much as it is impossible to identify any physical characteristics of artworks, arts marketing evolves with the changing role of arts in society.

As 'arts marketing', its methods, and attitudes to the use of marketing tools and techniques on the arts, have been evolving over the last thirty years (Rentschler and Wood 2001), so has 'art' as a concept over the last two thousand years. We suggest it is time to move to a more open definition of 'arts marketing'.

This approach involves turning to recent writing in cultural studies, a move which is arguably appropriate because we are talking here about culture. Barker (2004: xiv), for example, asserts that "cultural studies is not an object ... is not one thing that can be accurately represented, but rather is constituted by a number of ways of looking at the world which are motivated by different purposes and values." Similarly Hall (1997: 6), cited in Barker (2004) suggests that cultural studies is a kind of discourse. We might, then, following this kind of approach, similarly regard 'art' as a discursive element which is contextually and strategically mobilized by individuals and/or social groups to refer to a particular kind of human signifying practice, and 'arts marketing' as a language game, a discourse, engaged in by people who wish to talk about the relationship between 'art' and 'the market'. Another example of this kind of approach is that of Fonarow's approach to defining indie music as discourse (2006: 25).

In support of a more open definition, we can cite e.g. Tadajewski and Brownlie's considered statement (2008: 20) that "critical marketing can never be easily defined, as some would like to do". The disadvantage of this kind of open definition is that it appears

to offer little to those students who wish to know, or to those scholars and practitioners who believe they already know, what arts marketing really is in its purest essence. Its advantage is that it permits the co-existence of many different versions or accounts of arts marketing which can be mobilised, discussed, negotiated and contested. Arts marketing then becomes, in Warhol's phrase, what the speaker can get away with in any discursive context, in other words, what s/he can persuade others to accept.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper has argued that, given the open definition of art which appears to pertain at present, and given the indeterminacy of what arts marketing "really is", it seems sensible to adopt an open definition of arts marketing, namely as a set of discourses.

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## MARKETING W SZTUCE – COŚ, CZEGO MOŻNA UNIKNAĆ

### Streszczenie

Rozważania nad sposobami zdefiniowania różnych poddziedzin marketingu zdominowały dyskusję nad takimi kwestiami, jak zintegrowana komunikacja marketingowa (Kliatchko 2005), marketing społeczny (Smith 2008), czy tzw. „critical marketing” (Saren, Maclaran, Goulding and Elliott 2007). W niniejszym artykule autorzy podejmują próbę dyskusji na temat definicji marketingu w sztuce, opierając swoje rozważania na refleksjach dotyczących współczesnych definicji sztuki, odnosząc je do marketingu i jego roli w sztuce.

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