Producing and Consuming Inequality: A Cultural Sociology of the Cultural Industries. Kim Allen, Sam Friedman, Dave O'Brien, and Anamik Saha

"I've been saying that Tarell and I are that kid in the film, and that kid does not grow up to make a piece of art that gets eight Academy Award nominations. It's a dream I never allowed myself to have. When we were sitting there, and that dream of winning didn't come true, I took it off the table. But then I had to very quickly get back into that place."

Barry Jenkins

Chaos and confusion marked the award for best picture at the 2017 Oscar ceremony. Moonlight, a film made by a black filmmaker that placed at its centre the normally marginalised experiences of black gay men, was initially not announced as the winner. Rather, due to an error by the consultancy tasked with organising the envelopes, La La Land, a tribute to a bygone age of Hollywood musicals, was initially presented with the award. In the quotation above, Moonlight's director Barry Jenkins narrates his sense of disorientation at the announcement. His words also betray a sense of being out of place or in a dream at the idea of winning Academy Awards for a marginalised story by a filmmaker from a marginalised sector of the American population. That moment distils many of the themes of our special issue, which looks at the exclusions and inequalities within the cultural and creative industries, and how these inequalities relate to broader social divisions.

"If you can't see it, you can't be it". This well-worn phrase has underpinned a flurry of recent controversies around the cultural industries that have become persistent and wide ranging across almost every part of the sector. There are numerous examples: outrage at the stubborn racial and gender inequalities in the cinema and video games industries, captured by #oscarssowhite and #gamergate; the media and online debates over accusations of whitewashing of leading Asian characters in blockbuster films *Dr Strange* and *Ghost in the Shell*; Kim Gordon's comments on the two steps forward, one step back experience of women in the popular music industry; the controversial resignation of Emma Rice from the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London; and the assertions and counter claims as to

the benefits, particularly over pay rates and access to parts, of privileged backgrounds for those working in British theatre.

In this context there is opportunity and responsibility for sociologists to respond to these controversies and debates, and to inform research agendas to support progressive social values in the cultural industries. Whilst questions of getting in and getting on are common to professions across nations in the Global North, they are particularly pressing in those occupations and industrial sectors involved in producing culture. This is because cultural industries are crucial to creating representations of individuals, communities and nation states.

However, the production of representations, and their subsequent consumption, is socially patterned. Thus there is a profoundly sociological element to debates and discussions such as #oscarssowhite, 'class ceilings' in acting, and sexism in the music industry. Here it is vital to develop the existing body of sociological work grappling with the social patterning and social inequality in production, representation and consumption of culture.

Connecting Production, Consumption and Representation

Sociological engagements with these issues begin more broadly than the specifics of the cultural industries. We can see in Wilkinson and Pickett (2009), Stiglitz *et al* (2009), Dorling (2014) and Piketty (2014) a reorientation within social science towards social patterns of inequality and the variety of consequences stemming from unequal modes of social organisation. The academic discussion generated by this type of work, in particular by Piketty's *Capital*, has stressed the need for perspectives on gender, ethnicity and social class, beyond inequalities of income or wealth (Piachaud 2014). Here culture is implicated as both an explanatory factor and a site for the replication of social inequality, highlighting the importance of connecting those occupations 'making' culture and broader questions of inequality. The intersection of making and consuming is an especially important site for research interest.

Cultural consumption is well established as an area of social division, reflecting broader patterns of inequality (Bennett et al. 2009; Chan and Goldthorpe

2007, Taylor 2016). Recent international debates concerning cultural consumption have revolved around the potentially democratising shift toward cultural 'omnivorousness'. This thesis, originating in work on American music taste, argues that the contemporary privileged middle and upper classes no longer consume only legitimate culture but are better characterised as 'omnivores', happy to graze on both high and low culture (Peterson and Kern 1996).

Attendant to this eclecticism is also, in some versions of the argument, a more general ethos of cultural 'openness' and 'tolerance' that is seen to threaten Bourdieusian processes of cultural distinction. However, as Lizardo and Skiles (2012) have argued, such expressions of omnivorousness are entirely compatible with Bourdieusian thinking and may simply represent the transfer of the 'aesthetic disposition' to cultural objects not originally produced with an aesthetic intention. Following in this vein, several researchers have pointed to new forms of distinction even within the seemingly 'democratised' cultural landscapes of the United States and the UK (Prieur and Savage 2013; Savage et al 2015, Friedman et al, 2015)). Consumption is thus still a stage for the expression – and maintenance - of social divisions.

Production and consumption are most commonly connected by studying the brokers or intermediaries shaping tastes and ensuring the operation and function of cultural markets. Contemporary cultural practices invariably require a complex process of mediation between producers and consumers. A sociological literature is now well established to understand this 'boundary spanning position' (Hirsch, 1972), normally in reference to a set of distinct cultural brokers (DiMaggio, 1987) or cultural intermediaries (Bourdieu, 1984, Maguire and Matthews, 2012). The notion of brokerage is rooted in the production of culture perspective, which focuses on the organizational practices of cultural mediators, explaining the ways in which their decision-making is influenced by particular institutional logics.

Theoretical work on cultural gatekeeping is not just confined to neo-institutional theory, however. The work of Bourdieu (1984; 1993), for example, also addressed this area of cultural work, albeit conceptualizing such boundary-spanners less as brokers and more as 'cultural intermediaries'. Work in this tradition tends to stress that intermediaries are key ''tastemakers'' (Mears, 2011; Friedman, 2014) that

play a pivotal role in ''framing'' fields of cultural consumption by shaping what forms of culture are available to certain audiences (Maguire and Matthews, 2012). An important aspect of their job, to paraphrase Entwistle (2006), is to 'matchmake' artists with the tastes of appropriate audiences. Yet as many have noted, intermediaries rarely have completely reliable knowledge about audiences (Havens 2006; Bielby and Harrington, 2004) and therefore most must make brokering selections based on 'imagined audiences', on 'gut' instincts about the fit between types of culture and types of audiences (Blaszczyk, 2008; Kuipers, 2012).

Research around tastemaking and the construction of audiences offers a hinge between the literatures of consumption and production, with implications for cultural representation. In terms of production there has been an extensive literature detailing the inequalities and divisions that characterise the cultural workforce. This literature covers the standard sociological categories of gender (Conor et al 2015), ethnicity (Yuen 2016, Malik 2002, 2008, 2013, Saha 2012), class (Allen et al 2013, Friedman et al 2016, O'Brien et al 2016) and disability (Ellis 2015, Kuppers 2014), with a smaller literature associated with sexuality (Christian 2011, Martin 2015).

The existing work across the three research areas, of consumption, intermediaries, and production notwithstanding, research that directly connects questions of production and consumption has, to date, been underrepresented in the literature. Indeed, Oakley and O'Brien (2015) have recently argued that more work is needed to determine the exact nature of this relationship between inequalities of production, inequalities of consumption and inequalities of representation. Indeed, they note (2015:3) 'how this relationship *functions* ….is still yet to find its definitive research project.' Without an understanding of this relationship the exact role of culture in the reproduction of social inequality, alongside the ability to challenge, change or resist that role, will be limited. We are at an important intersection of a gap in the literature and a question of social and perhaps cultural justice.

This special issue aims to address this gap in the literature, offering a contribution to the academic agendas that are situated in close proximity to the public concerns that opened this introduction. The special issue - composed of five distinct but complementary papers - makes this contribution by addressing three key

themes: the demographics of inequality; the epistemological effects of how production, representation and consumption are structured and organised; and the questions of complicity and resistance. Below we introduce these themes and how they are developed through the special issue. The papers engage with these themes through analyses that cover a range of cultural sectors including popular and classical music, television, and theatre, and inequalities including race and ethnicity, social class, gender and region. The five papers draw on British case studies however the analysis have international implications and relevance. Conditions, naturalisations, and epistemological effects are common concerns in French (e.g. Dubois 2015), American (Mayer 2011) and Australian (Ellis 2015) research on the shape of cultural workforces and the implications for consumption practices. The grounding in British examples and research gives the special issue a coherence that can be used as a starting point for comparative research. Moreover, given the central role the UK has played in disseminating narratives of the social and economic potential of cultural industries (O'Brien 2015), the influence of the UK on social and urban policies associated with the arts (O'Brien 2014), and the influence of British scholarship on cultural labour (Conor et al 2015), cultural policy and, more recently, on debates surrounding consumption, omnivorousness and cultural stratification (Bennett et al 2009), the UK represents an important site for research on these issues.

The academic context here is a relative lack of work that connects issues of production with consumption, let alone research that then also factors in the vector of representation. Du Gay et al's (1997) famous model of the 'circuit of culture' is an important exception, and is implicit in each of these papers within this special issue that tackle different relations between the spheres of production, consumption, regulation, representation or signification, and identity. In contrast to that original work however, the contributors place the issue of inequality at the core of their analysis.

Moving Beyond a 'Demography and Representation' Approach

Within this broad arc, the first theme of this special issue is a critique of particular policy approaches to inequality, often framed in terms of 'cultural diversity' or 'creative diversity' (Malik 2013). What is being challenged here is what

Gray (2016) calls the 'demography and representation' approach that underpins such policy interventions. Here, targets are set for the recruitment of women, people from racial and ethnic minorities, or with working class backgrounds (traditionally the groups that have been most marginalised within the cultural industries), based on attaining proportional parity with their number in society as a whole. Underlining this approach is an assumption that a more socially representative workforce will positively impact cultural representations, and will in turn benefit audiences. This approach continues to have significant purchase within industry and public debates including the contemporary high-profile examples that opened this introduction.

However focusing solely on the composition of the cultural workforce – that is who makes culture - is not sufficient to understand or address inequalities and power imbalances in cultural representation and consumption. As demonstrated in this special issue – and elsewhere (Oakley and O'Brien 2015) - a more diverse workforce does not necessarily translate into more diverse representations. Neither does this, by consequence, have a straightforward impact on practices of consumption since the range of representations on offer remain limited and problematic, recycling familiar stereotypes which are embedded in racialised and classed systems of value and oppression. The papers in the issue are united by showing that even when workers from these 'minority' backgrounds enter the cultural industries they are not afforded the same creative freedom as their white, male, middle-class counterparts. Often those from outside the narrow definition of the 'default male' find their practice constrained by those who continue to inhabit the upper echelons of the cultural industries, who consider the productions that foreground issues of marginality or minority experience a risky investment.

Epistemological Effects

This brings us onto the second theme of the special issue: how inequalities in cultural production produce damaging 'epistemological effects' (Saha 2012), leading to the production of a limited and problematic repertoire of representations of ethnicity, class, gender and regional identity. Once again, this also needs to be

understood in terms of consumption. Of significance here is Keith Negus' (1997) stress on the 'cultures of production' within the cultural industries, which he argues are a part of broader social divisions – wider inequalities in society that manifest within production itself. This appears an obvious point, but is one that is nonetheless neglected, especially in the 'production of culture' literatures discussed earlier. In other words producers and audiences are not independent from each other. Where this special issue builds on Negus' argument is to suggest also that common sense, societal-held ideas around gender, class, race and so on are embedded within the logics of capitalism governing cultural production. This explains how minorities in the cultural workforce become complicit in the reproduction of certain reductive tropes around particular minority groups. In a nutshell, the collection demonstrates that it is not simply a matter of a skewed and unrepresentative cultural workforce, but rather how the practices and structures of cultural production inform and direct how difference is represented and thus consumed and understood by audiences and 'publics'.

Complicity and Resistance

The third key theme running through all the articles in this Special Issue is how cultural workers themselves make sense of, and respond to, the inequalities they encounter, experience and sustain in their working lives. In one sense, the papers all highlight the *complicity* of respondents in replicating these processes. Across the papers we therefore see how the everyday, often mundane, practices of individuals and institutions - whether making commissioning decisions, expressing aesthetic preferences, or implementing funding agendas - are implicated in reproducing inequalities of production and consumption.

Yet while complicity is certainly a key theme, this does not mean that cultural workers are necessarily unaware or unconcerned by the 'othering' processes at work in their respective fields. Indeed there is a danger that, as sociologists, we read the epistemological effects of inequality 'over the heads' of our subjects. In this way, it is important to stress that there is strong evidence throughout the Special Issue that cultural workers are grappling with these concerns themselves, but find themselves

constrained in how far they can resist or challenge the conditions through which inequalities are reproduced.

Resistance, Demographics and Epistemological Effects: Understanding Cultural and Creative Industries

Having outlined the key themes uniting the papers, we turn to the essays themselves. A useful starting point, drawing on the tensions between complicity and resistance, is where arbitrary logics of cultural value or legitimacy are often left unquestioned. This is most evident in Bull and Scharff's paper on classical music, where advantages of middle-class musicians – in terms of familiarity, knowledge and styles of appreciation – are largely 'naturalised' by respondents from both middle-class *and* working-class backgrounds. However, instances of reflexivity and resistance are achieved by their participants. For example there is a sense that musicians from working-class origins are aware that seemingly 'natural' understandings of classical music are rooted in inequalities of class origin.

The complexity of resistance and complicity runs alongside the demographics and the effects of the interconnected practices of music production and consumption. In this instance the outcome is the reproduction of class inequalities. Bull and Scharff demonstrate how class background plays an important role in shaping classical musicians' relation to their profession and the genre in question, including their consumption practices. Social class shaped musicians' understanding of, and comfort within, the field of classical music. Of course this has implications for their musical ability, their education and their access to advanced training and parental support. Class inequalities also manifest in their interviewees' music tastes and consumption practices, and Bull and Scharff identify how musicians' practices of distinguishing between musical genres was informed by powerful but largely invisible classed value judgements and hierarchies. Their paper suggests that the uncontested nature of this value attribution sustains, and may intensify, inequalities in classical music production and consumption.

Saha looks at the relation between production and consumption (and representation) through critiquing a particular policy approach in the case of British

theatre that has attempted to address inequalities through an emphasis on attracting 'new audiences'. 'New audiences' refers to communities who do not typically go to the theatre, in this case working class South Asian audiences. Those involved in the distribution of Asian theatre in the UK must respond to particular 'arts funding governmentalities' that direct them, under the auspices of engaging 'new audiences', toward reproducing reductive representations of race. Through focusing on 'cultural distribution' as the interface between production and consumption, Saha demonstrates how the logics of capitalism drive what representations of Asianness are permitted in British theatre. He illustrates that representations of difference are constrained to those which are deemed to have a commercial utility, even in this heavily subsidised cultural sector. Here there is a complex interplay of commercial or market logic, public funding, and representations of race. The frustrations of Asian playwrights and producers, that counter-narratives of difference are relegated to the margins by the aesthetic restrictions imposed by the 'new audiences' funding agenda, are clear. However, challenging this relegation is an especially difficult process.

The difficulty of challenging, along with the interplay of markets and public funding, is an important element in how inequality is reproduced in cultural activity. A number of papers in this special issue underline the power of the commercial or policy logics underpinning cultural production, and how these compel cultural workers toward reproducing skewed forms of representation. This emerges in Milward, Widdop and Halpin's paper which interrogates the disconnect between the powerful yet caricatured media discourse on Britpop, which narrated an ongoing 'class-war' between 'North' and 'South' strands of the scene, and the more heterogeneous reality of participants' actual class origins. Here the authors use Social Network Analysis (SNA) to highlight the powerful role played by certain intermediaries, such as the journalists John Harris and Simon Williams, in actively constructing these classed stereotypes, and how this in turn acted to fuel a sensationalist (and commercially profitable) narrative in the music press. Moreover, by applying a specific method, SNA, to a well reported and much discussed music scene, Milward *et al* are able to offer both a 'sociological' reading in terms of classed

inequalities, as well as giving new insights. Notably their focus on particular individuals, such as Harris and Williams, returns to both the axis of complicity and resistance (despite the aestheticisation of class in much of the lyrics and representations of Briptop) and the epistemological effects of how cultural production, in this case a music scene, is organised.

Continuing with these two themes, De Benedictis, Allen and Jensen's paper examines the controversial genre of British Factual Welfare Television (FWT) that has emerged against a backdrop of post-crisis austerity. Departing from media scholarship which has examined these programmes as texts or though audience reception, their paper locates the programmes and their class politics within their industry context. They demonstrate how intensifying commercial logics and precarious labour conditions governing broadcasting push broadcasters, production companies and individual cultural workers towards making sensationalist and provocative content. De Benedictis et al argue that the profitability and popularity of these programmes is not only due to the low production and labour costs historically associated with reality television, but to the expanded opportunities for value accumulation they afford to a proliferation of media sites and agents including broadcasters, newspapers, and social media companies. Locating factual welfare television as a cultural form that intervenes into the social and shapes class relations, they argue that attending to the conditions of capitalist media production is essential to understanding the cultural politics of austerity and intensifying anti-welfare common sense.

The pernicious logics of production, and the consequences for the complicity of cultural workers in reproducing inequality is nakedly illustrated by the senior TV industry personnel that feature heavily in De Benedicits et al's paper. The authors locate this collusion partly in terms of a seeming unwillingness of senior TV personnel to interrogate critically how the privileged nature of the television workforce – at least within the higher echelons of the industry - may skew the representations they commission and produce. However, they also insist that the issue is only partially about the social composition of cultural workers themselves. Instead they stress that the commercial imperative of contemporary TV production,

with its relentless search for 'buzz', acts to strongly 'constrain and direct' programme makers and undermine commitments to more progressive and empathetic representations of those experiencing poverty. Accordingly they emphasise the broader political economy of contemporary media in understanding why and how fundamentally inaccurate representations of poverty and welfare have proved so valuable and stubbornly persistent.

Registering discursive contestation, as in Saha, Millward et al, and Scharff and Bull's examples (and refused by De Benedicits et al's television personnel) is a different matter to staging effective 'resistance'. This is perhaps most aptly illustrated in Friedman and O'Brien's analysis of typecasting in acting. Attending to the experiences of British actors, Friedman and O'Brien's argue that typecasting establishes a 'somatic norm' (Puwar 2004) in British acting which privileges white, male, middle-class actors, whilst designating those outside of this as 'somatic others'. Their analysis reveals how the effects of typecasting are unequally distributed and experienced. While those actors who readily embody acting's somatic norm experience a competitive advantage and greater choice of roles, actors from minority backgrounds were offered a limited repertoires of caricatured classed, gendered and racialised roles. Their analysis then considers how social class affects how minority actors are positioned to respond to, and resist, the imposition of a particular 'type'. Not only does their paper reveal the pernicious effects of typecasting on the career trajectories of actors from minority backgrounds, thereby illuminating how casting decisions and processes contribute to inequities in the composition of the cultural workforce. In locating typecasting as a 'labour market process which plays a pivotal role in determining the nature of outputs offered for cultural consumption', their analysis also points to how typecasting is implicated in the ways in which audiences may come to understand society including class, race, gender relations and identities.

Friedman and O'Brien's paper closes the collection as an attempt to draw together questions of demographic representation, resistance and complicity, and epistemological effects; for example, they find that, among actors who deviate from the somatic norm, there is widespread opposition to the constricting and often

offensive 'necklace of labels' (Ahmed 2016) that constitutes their 'type'. However, the ability to translate this discontent into meaningful resistance – often via choosing work that subverts the somatic norm - is highly contingent on possessing economic, cultural and social resources that are rooted in a privileged class origin. To return to the opening themes of the introduction, the emphasis on the need for *intersectional* understandings is paramount in future research.

Production, Consumption and Representation: Towards a New Research Agenda

The special issue addresses questions that, as detailed above, are usually separated in the study of consumption and production. For example, how do taste and social class interact to reproduce specific social inequalities? How does this compare across different cultural forms with different logics of funding and production? What sorts of difference and diversity are seen as 'of value', in terms of what is represented, produced and consumed? And, crucially, who is empowered to decide and who is excluded? These papers, taken as a whole, have gestured towards answers across the three common, uniting, themes we have discussed.

However, they represent a starting point for a new agenda, which in part returns to older work. Du Gay et al's 'circuits of culture', with the attendant connections between modes of cultural production, patterns of cultural consumption, and forms of representation, is an important approach we have highlighted. However, even the good work done within that tradition never fully connected up these three elements crucial to understanding social inequality. By contrast the British (although not the American or Dutch) research tradition has glossed over the representations and the modes of production underpinning patterns of consumption. These latter elements are missing from the great debates over consumption, whether concepts such as emerging cultural capital, arguments as to homology, status, or class as dominant explanatory frameworks, or the figure of the omnivore. Finally, the wealth of cultural and media studies research connecting modes of production to representations are yet to definitively settle accounts as to how consumption is socially pattered. There is certainly no easy way to overcome the theoretical and methodological issues associated with connecting

production, consumption and representation. The papers here each pick on specific relations and points of focus, for example focusing on production logics as in De Benetictis *et al*; on how existing class relations are inscribed onto production as in Friedman and O'Brien and Scharff and Bull; on cultural intermediaries and networks in Millward *et al*; or audience development in Saha's paper. Therefore we can see the papers in the collection as signposts or indicators on the way to this more fully rounded research agenda.

We are left with two immediate tasks that should form the next steps in any emerging agenda around production, representation, and consumption in the context of inequality as a core concern for sociology. These are methodological innovation and an underlying theory. To deal with the latter, as our comments above have noted, a 'unifying theory', grounded in a relationship between all the empirical evidence associated with production, representation, and consumption is a daunting, but potentially rewarding and exhilarating task. It may be prime territory for future agendas, special issues, conferences, and research funder interventions and support. Methods are a more straightforward subject, whereby eclecticism is only to be encouraged. As we have shown with the inclusion of a paper, Millward *et al*, using methods from relational sociology that have yet to find a mainstream position in cultural or media studies, there is rich potential for the emerging practices of sociology, for example big data approaches (Daniels *et al* 2016, Beer and Taylor 2014), or experiments (Reeves *et al* 2015), to contribute much to our understanding. We are hopeful that by drawing attention to the need to link production, consumption and representation scholars versed in these practices will add to the intersectional understanding we seek.

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