



**TOM** Hi everyone, and welcome back to the Chorus Project Podcast. It's been a little while since we last put an episode out, and the biggest reason for that is we've been really busy making the theatre side of the Chorus project! Upstart Theatre's part of the project, a new interactive show called *Beneath the City*, was performed at the REP Theatre in Birmingham in January this year; and Pathos Muenchen's part of the project is in rehearsals right now for its opening in a few months' time. And we're also in the middle of putting plans together to present all four of our shows across Europe this autumn.

So, to bring us all back to our Arts and Democracy podcast, we've got a bit of a treat. This is a live episode, which we recorded at DARE Festival in London back in October. I interviewed Dr. David O'Brien, of the University of Edinburgh, about *Panic! It's an Arts Emergency*, a groundbreaking academic study of social class, taste and inequality in the creative and cultural industries in the UK.

The Chorus Project is all about the relationship between theatre and democracy. And, like democracy, theatre has some really serious problems around access. Whose voices get heard, and whose get left out? And are the people who are making the decisions – the ones inside the 'magic circle' – really representative of the rest of the community? Dave and his colleagues have been looking at the answers to those questions and, to be honest, they don't look pretty. They made some challenging discoveries and it was really great to hear Dave talk about some of those with us.

Before we get into it, I should say that because it's a live episode, the audio quality isn't always super-high. We weren't able to get mics on the audience, so towards the end I'm going to be cutting in and out of the live feed to sum up the questions people were asking.

Do stick with us though, because what Dave is saying is vitally important. It's a snapshot of the current state of the arts here in one small European country, and I'd love to hear what you all think about it, and how it reflects the reality on the ground where you're working. So without further ado, here we go:

**TOM** Awesome. So, thank you so much, everyone, for coming and joining us. I'm Tom Mansfield, artistic director of Upstart Theatre, and I'm here with Dr. David O'Brien from the University of Edinburgh, who is one of the co-authors of Panic! It's an Arts Emergency, a 2018 report about social class, taste, and inequalities in the creative industries. Dave, thanks so much for coming down.

**DAVE** No thanks, thanks for inviting me.

**TOM** It's a pleasure to have you here. So we're gonna chat for about half an hour, and then open questions out to everybody else. So if and if any point, if anyone wants to jump in with a question, just wave, because I can see you. We've got lights on and everything is lovely. We're recording this live at DARE Festival 2019. And yeah, really excited to be here. So, Dave, if I can start off. Welcome to the podcast. And. Yeah. Can you tell us a little bit about how, how the Panic! report came to be written?

**DAVE** Yeah, sure thing. So it it appeared almost kind of randomly when Create London, who I guess are a kind of artistic commissioning agency housed in the Barbican, were in touch with Goldsmiths where I was working in 2015. And they sort of asked, 'we'd like to do this thing about inequality in the arts. We think social mobility has kind of collapsed into arts jobs. We're really keen to do a sort of artistic commission and a research project.' And almost exactly the same time, myself and three of my colleagues were working on a paper looking at patterns of both the class, race and gender in creative industries jobs. That conversation about, you know, what kind of research project could we do, how would you, sort of, build some artistic commissions, was where it started.

So they had, I guess, was kind of Create and the Barbican had a set of events. There was an artistic commission. There was a big kind of poster campaign around London, based on some of the findings that we got from some survey data and also some some academic research. And at the same time, a few of us started a conversation with Arts Emergency, who some of you might know are a charity interested in trying to kind of challenge inequalities in the arts. And they sort of describe themselves a social justice, not as social mobility organisation. And that led to this Arts and Humanities Research Council bid, which was awarded, which was very good, and we're very grateful to AHRC for support in that, which gave us two years of both kind of research, work interviews, planning events and artistic commissions with Create, Barbican, and Arts Emergency.

**TOM** Great. And so how did you go about the research process?

**DAVE** Yeah, so. I think we're very well-served around kind of creative occupations, creative industries by lots of sector specific bits of work, so people working on the music industry and music industry organizations, writers organizations. I think it was either ALCS or the Writers Guild published some stuff about writers' earnings earlier this year. There's lots of stuff say. Independent Theaters Trust, I can't remember what they're called.

**TOM** That would be the ITC, the Independent Theatre Council.

**DAVE** Yeah, ITC. Yeah. They did stuff on like parenting, and on skills as well. So we figured actually, you know, we don't need to do much on kind of individual subsectors or art forms. But what hasn't been done is looking at kind of administrative or government dataset. So things like the Office for National Statistics Labour Force survey, the ONS' Longitudinal Survey, which is the census kind of linked together, or a sample of the census linked together since 1971, things like British Social Attitudes survey data. And at the same time, you don't tend to get a lot of kind of cross comparative work. So we were interested in trying to do the kind of things that artforms would do for themselves comparatively and linking it to these administrative, these kind of bigger picture datasets.

**TOM** Right. So you spent from 2015 to 2018, pulling the research together.

**DAVE** Yeah. I mean, like, obviously I was like teaching and doing other stuff. And Daniel Lorrison and Sam Friedman, who are the co-authors of this book called *The Class Ceiling - Why it Pays to be Privileged*. They were involved, but they ended up doing work that was more in kind of traditional professions like accountancy and law and this kind of stuff. Andrew Miles is at the University of Manchester, was doing stuff around that kind of participation in culture. But myself, and Mark Taylor and Orian Brook, who came on board in 2016, I think. And then our colleague Siobhan McAndrew at Bristol. We were sort of fairly consistently working on different bits of the project.

I think there's a very, in some ways in a really good moment for research, because there's lots of interest in this area, but it shows you how bad the inequalities are. That now academics with different sets of interests like: Siobhan is very interested in social attitudes. Orian's basically a geographer and a kind of quantitative analyst. Mark looks at patterns of cultural consumption. The fact that three very different researchers would be keen to look at culture and creative industries kind of tells you something about: there are big problems here.

**TOM** Right. And that brings us onto, I think, the findings in the report, which - I don't know how many people here have read it - it makes for some quite challenging and difficult reading at times. But you organize it into, you've got four parts to your report. And the first one is about belief in meritocracy.

**DAVE** We were interested in, I suppose, two things. One is what the kind of general attitudes are in the sector, which we talk about later in the report, but also in whether people think there's a problem or not. We know that, you know, almost kind of every day, certainly every week in the media, there's a discussion of some inequality issue in a particular art form or a particular area of cultural production. And we were kind of interested in whether cultural workers thought this was an issue. And one things you find when you look at kind of general social surveys - so in the US, there's a long tradition of asking people whether they think society's kind of fair or not - is that people tend

to be quite bad at, like, understanding their sort of position in society, and patterns of inequality in society as well.

So as part of some work, we were lucky enough to get The Guardian to host a web survey for us as part of some work we were doing, with like two and a half thousand creative workers who responded to the survey. We asked them, basically, like: 'What do you think drives success in your particular cultural occupation? Is it what we might think of as kind of like meritocracy? So is it if you're talented, hardworking, you'll make it? Or is it what we as social scientists refer to as social reproduction? So actually, is it like your class, your gender, your ethnicity, your family wealth that underpins success?

And we found - basically one of the problems with this is that, you're about to hear me here over and over again: 'we found what we expected to find'. But we found what we expected to find, which was that all of our two and half thousand respondents skewed towards some version of meritocracy. And this is completely logical. There would be no point at all working in the arts, if you thought that only, you know, kind of a particular ethnicity, a particular gender, a particular social class would make it. Maybe if you were that gender, race or class, you might say, yeah, I've made it because I've got these characteristics. But again, it's very rare you'll find anyone who say that without some qualifications, and without maybe a sense of, kind of, knowing irony as well.

And what we found were, the respondents tended to skew towards some version of being hardworking and talented, explains success, which again is logical, but the people we we sort of picked out, and the people we were we were worried about, were the people who are most likely to be committed to meritocracy, so were most likely to tell us that hard work and talent explain success, were the people who are best paid. Which kind of set off a few alarm bells for us, because it suggested that the people who tend to be at the top of whether it's kind of artistic commissioning, or maybe success as actors or musicians, are the ones who were least likely recognize or observe structural problems in their industries.

**TOM** Right. And so, people who are less well-paid and sort of not at the top of what I'm going to laughingly refer to as like, the ladder of the arts. They're less committed to the idea that theatre - the arts in general, sorry, it's not a theatre-specific study - but the cultural sector is a less meritocratic setup?

**DAVE** Well, they had more of a mix, so they were likely to tell us some version of you've got to be hardworking, talented, but also your race, your class, your gender, matter for being successful. Which, I mean, those people are correct. You know, it is important that we don't just say that like only posh white men make it. You know, many posh white men who make it are clearly incredibly hardworking and talented. But at the same time, there is that kind of clear sense that things aren't fair.

So when we put this in the context of the second part of the report, which looks at how patterns work in the labour market, we can see that particular occupations are dominated by specific

social groups. So film tends to be very male. Publishing, writing is very, very middle-class. The museum sector, galleries etc. are very, very white. There's a real kind of absence of ethnic minorities in that labour force. And again, you know, we can see the way that it's logical to think you've got to be talented and hardworking to make it. It's logical to observe, you know, structural barriers. But there is this kind of sense that if that's the way the, you know, the sector works, then maybe we won't need to change or maybe nothing will change.

**TOM** Right. And in terms of that change, one of the things that you go on to explore in the second part of the report is how people from working-class backgrounds are, and have been historically, excluded from senior positions in the creative sector. How has that changed over time?

**DAVE** So that is a really difficult question. We were very motivated by trying to think through whether I suppose people's perceptions of class and the arts, whether it's film, theatre, visual arts, were correct. So if you look at people who are, say, successful actors in their 50s or in their 60s, they will talk about a particular golden age. I mean, successful actors who are now in their late 70s and 80s will talk about the 60s and the early 70s as being this kind of golden age of the sort of insurrectionary working-class coming into film and television, and into the theatre as well. Actors in their sort of late 40s, early 50s, will talk about the early 1980s as being this, you know, kind of crucially important time, particularly for, I suppose, you know, forms of class politics and resistance to political changes that were happening in the early 1980s.

And I mean, like at no point were we, like, 'those people are lying and we have to prove it'. But we were interested in the way that academic social science, that studies social mobility, suggests that there's been a remarkable amount of stability in terms of working-class access to professions. Often, we don't think about the arts as like professions in the way that law and medicine are. But actually they're, you know, it's important to see that they are different kinds of jobs compared with, say, being a cleaner, a bus driver, being a manual labourer or this kind of stuff.

And so we looked at this collection of, it's a sample of the census that's linked together, the Office of National Statistics Longitudinal Study. And what we found was that people entering the labour market in the early 1980s, there was this kind of difference between the chances of someone who is from a middle-class background making it as compared to someone from a working-class background. And those, I suppose, odds were about four to one. So you're four times more likely to make it if you're from a middle-class background. When we look in 2011, we see the same odds about 4 to 1. And there are lots of different complex explanations for this, which is to do with the way that, essentially, kind of working-class manual labour jobs - the kinds of industrial production, mining, these kind of occupations have shrunk - and office work, you know, kind of professional occupations, have expanded.

And, you know, we need to be attentive to the way that explanations for social change are often nothing to do with, you know, the kind of individual occupations we're interested in. But that story

of stability really struck with us because we were keen to kind of say, look, we shouldn't be talking about a decline or collapse of social mobility and we shouldn't really be thinking about, you know, what's gone wrong in the last 10 years or 20 years that's excluded working-class people, or made the chances of making it less when compared to their middle-class colleagues. Actually, what we should be doing is thinking about - these occupations have always been difficult to get into, for those from working-class occupations. And what is it about these jobs? What is it about these artforms, is it about these industries, that has meant that consistently working-class origin people making it have been outliers, have been unusual? Which prompts, I guess, a kind of a different set of both, you know, kind of stories and also policy prescriptions as well.

**TOM** Yeah. I mean, anecdotally, I think a lot of my experience. I don't know if that's true of other people here, but I'm in my late 30s and I spend a lot of time talking to an older generation of directors, particularly, and theatre makers. And yet I do sometimes get the sense that everything was great in about 1985. When, yeah, you know, there was mass unemployment, but there was the Arts Council and all this kind of stuff. And that sort of tracks on.

**DAVE** Yeah. And again, you know, it's important to make sure we don't lose those experiences, and those stories, because they actually tell us important things about, say, the social state in the early 1980s, the ability to access things like housing benefits, unemployment benefits. We now have a catastrophic housing crisis in London, and we have an unbelievably punitive and awful benefits system. And, you know, the idea that we'd say, you know, somehow like, oh, we should just forget about that. I mean, that's that's not the lesson here.

But at the same time, the stories of access to housing. Stories of, you know, being able to kind of sign on and also do some experimental theatre work at the same time. They tell us that, you know, these entry points into the theatre world, film and television world, the visual arts world, have always been precarious and they've always been low-paid. They've always been really kind of heavily dependent on being, in Britain at least, in a particular place, London; having particular kinds of networks. And, you know, the lessons there are to do with, actually shouldn't we be thinking about why are these things so low paid? Rather than saying 'if we just brought back access to cheap housing and benefits, then the problems of the arts would be solved'. Because they wouldn't.

**TOM** Can I just ask you a terminology question? You talked a couple of times just there about making it.

**DAVE** Yeah.

**TOM** What does 'making it' mean in this context?

**DAVE** Yeah, that's a really good question. And there's a couple of things going on. The first thing is, is basically 'making it' as being identified in either a census or a labour force survey as being,

working in a culture and creative job. And from the kind of, I suppose, social scientific work that myself and my colleagues do, we mean 'making it' by just having one of those jobs.

**TOM** Right.

**DAVE** These jobs are, you know, an important part of the British economy, but they're not a huge part compared to, say, working in the health service or working in education. In the early 1980s, you know, working in various bits of industry dwarfed working in the arts. So, there's that kind of level. Then, also, we're interested in career trajectory. So 'making it' in terms of not just kind of getting, like, in, but also getting on as well. And the ability to kind of have a sustained career and the ability to end up doing relatively senior positions is important as well. Because to an extent, in the current policy landscape, we see a lot of kind of interest and a lot of intervention on, I guess, what the social scientists mean by 'making it', which is how can we get people into being artists, being actors, being, you know, directors, being runners on film sets, being writers for television. There's less interest in: 'Well, hang on. Why is it that senior levels we have a very particular type of person in the middle and top of the BBC, in London's key theatre institutions, in our national museums', this type of thing.

**TOM** Right. So that sort of top level, the people who it feels like from where I sit, the people who kind of run the world.

**DAVE** Yeah.

**TOM** OK. This, kind of, I think will link on. The third part of the Panic! report, discuss the problem of unpaid labour within the arts. Can you tell us a little bit about that.

*(Laughter from the audience)*

**DAVE** Yeah. Like so everybody in this room like, yeah, you know 'insert laughter', like everybody experiences unpaid labour and I'm glad, you know, there's been nodding and laughter, because that actually tells us something about the problem.

So it's kind of trite to say that, whether it's formal forms of unpaid labour like unpaid internships, which are highly problematic, are illegal in some ways, or other kinds of unpaid labour, which are like working more hours or kind of helping out in a volunteer way, you know these kind of things. Unpaid labour is part of how the arts and also, you know, other creative industries operates. We were obviously keen to remind people about that, but we were keen to also unpack that a little and we made two points really that have a particular political consequence.

One is that the experiences of unpaid labour, when we were doing interviews with a couple of hundred creative workers, were differentiated by age and slightly by career stage. So, our older workers, or creative workers who were more established, would give us a story of unpaid labour

as being a kind of choice, as having a kind of an autonomy. Some of this, again, is to do with, say, how the benefits systems work in the 1980s. But also it was, as they were later in their careers, they had the kind of, they were well established enough to be able to say, 'well, I'd do that for free, but I'd never do something else for free'. You know, 'I would kind of help out with a reading, but of course, I'd never take a free commission'. You know, these kind of things. And there was a certain hostility to the idea that your labour would not be paid.

This is in contrast to younger workers, or workers that were less well established, were earlier in in their careers. Our younger workers were basically like 'you have to work for free. That's how the creative industries function, full stop'. But when we start to look at how that was patterned, we saw a clear distinction really based on social class. And this is social class conceived of in terms of people's kind of access to resources. So those people who had lots of kind of networks, who had family or, you know, kind of private wealth, they were able to see unpaid labour not as voluntary - they knew they had to work unpaid - but actually as something that was worth an investment, that would pay off. So, their stories were, you know, stories of taking some experimental work up to Edinburgh and losing a lot of money. Or they were doing a play or an exhibition totally unpaid around London's visual arts scene or its theatre scene, because it gave them a network which then paid off in a subsequent commission, this kind of thing. And they're also the day to day things like, you know, being able to ask family for money. So they didn't have to take a job in terms of like turning up ready for an audition versus someone who was working, say, you know, a long shift and didn't have time to practice, or something like that.

Their working-class counterparts, people without social and economic resources or capital, as some social scientists call money and friends. They would tell the stories basically of unpaid work going nowhere. You know, crap student films, promises of headshots that never arrived, and a kind of sense of like sort of desperation, a sense that, you know, 'I'd just be willing to do anything. It doesn't matter if I get paid or not.' You know, 'I just kind of just want to get a lucky break.'

And when you sort compare these stories - both our older workers and their kind of autonomy or voluntarism, and the class distinctions with our younger workers - you see a story of basically a fake kind of social solidarity around unpaid work. If it's the case that everybody is like 'you just have to work for free if you want to make it in the arts', that means that it's really hard to say, 'well, actually, some people are working for free in a very different way. That pays off in a very different way.' And it's very hard to build kind of forms of resistance if your more affluent, your more well-connected colleagues are telling you these kind of similar stories of social struggle, which actually are very, very different to your own.

**TOM** Yeah. It makes me think a little bit about the commissioning model we run here. I think maybe that's something we could come back to in a few minutes, if that's all right, because I did want to structure this conversation around the Panic! report and I don't want to go too far off topic. And so, the fourth part that the three of you write about in the report is about the social attitudes in the

arts workforce. And it feels like there's a tension between the attitudes and values that people in the workforce seem to seem to hold, and the structure of the sector as a whole.

**DAVE** Yeah. So I mention this a little bit when we're talking about meritocracy. So, working with Siobhan McAndrew from Bristol, Mark, Orian and I looked at how British Social Attitudes data gives you a sense of what different occupations' kind of politics and values are. And what you see is that arts occupations, creative workers, tend to be the most liberal, the most left wing, the most kind of pro sort of welfare interventions, of any set of occupations. And I mean, this is terrible radio, but the kind of gradient runs from sort of plumbers, miners, manual workers, who tend to have more what we might think of as like right-wing views, through the education and health sector, to the arts. And that's great, because basically they're my views. And it's awesome that, you know, the people producing culture share my politics. That's really good. For me. It's sort of less good in a couple of ways. One is this question about how the structural problems in the workforce are going to be recognized, when seemingly the kind of, I suppose, prevailing story from the attitudes of creative workers is that 'we're the good guys'. You know, 'we're the most progressive, we're the most committed to social change'. And that sort of worries us a bit in terms of recognizing problems.

There's also, I guess, another question, and we supplement this by looking at the taste patterns of creative workers used in the government's, or at least England's, Taking Part data. We see that our kind of big outliers in terms of tastes are creative workers. Creative workers are, you know, the people who are likely to go to the theatre, they're likely to turn up to exhibitions. Even kind of well-educated professionals, like people who are like architects, lawyers, et cetera. They look sort of like the rest of the population in terms of their taste patterns. But our creative workers are like the most committed to turning up to the arts, which again is totally logical.

But it made us wonder whether there's a bit of a distance in terms of representation. And I try to be really careful about this because at no point do you want to ever side with hateful kind of right wing, you know, 'metropolitan elites', you know, this sort of nonsense discourse. But I do think there is an issue about the role that our creative work force kind of plays in representing individuals, communities and the nation, when in some ways they are very, very distant or different from many individuals in Britain, many communities in Britain and in some ways, you know, kind of our sort of national sense of ourselves as well. And it's tricky this because, you know, on the one hand, maybe it's brilliant that the most progressive political attitudes are found in the people who are responsible for making culture. But it also makes you sort of wonder why is it that we have, you know, potentially if we think about something like immigration, such reactionary views on television, in parts of the media, this kind of thing. So, these bigger like, I guess, you know, political economy of culture questions come from that as well.

**TOM** Yeah, I'm just trying to write a note on my phone. Which is, um, does that - I don't know if your data goes into this, but do you have a sense of how attitudes in senior leadership roles in the culture sector might be? At those. Do you have any information on whether the attitudes of those

people in terms of politics is different to the attitudes of people working at more grassroots or early career?

**DAVE** Yes. There's two answers to that. We don't put this in there in the report cos it's kind of technical. But in the paper that underpins the social attitudes work, we did actually divide kind of managerial and non-managerial arts occupations, and you see similar patterns basically. We also looked at British election study data to try and double-check if we were right. But Mark, Orian and I have also just published a paper in the European Journal of Cultural Studies, where we looked at a sub-sample of our interviewees who were senior men making decisions. So obviously it's all anonymous and not attributable, but they were basically kind of men running either major regional or major London-based arts organizations across film, theatre, museums, visual arts. And it was interesting because what we sort of expected to find were like clueless, unreconstructed, like, you know, the kind of man that I guess my Twitter feed is constantly kind of moaning about in the arts. You know, what we expected were like, you know, kind of mansplaining for each interview.

And actually what we found were that our senior men shared the same kind of progressive politics, and the same kind of progressive, I suppose, like, project for arts and culture as we found in the kind of broader social patterns. The problem was that as we'd kind of drill down into the interviews, we saw a distance between that sense of, you know, progressive commitment, and indeed, you know, a slightly unusual recognition of what some of the issues facing the arts, workforce and audience are. And their stories about their hiring practices and also their own self perceptions as well. So this kind of commitment to progressive politics and political change didn't seem to be matched by a kind of self-awareness.

*Laughter from the audience.*

**TOM** Yeah, that's the laugh of recognition coming from the audience right there.

**DAVE** There's a real, this is off topic but...so the three of us have presented this paper in various different ways. The gender split in responses is fascinating. All of the women consistently in the audiences are like, 'oh, god, I know these men'. And there's always one or two men who are like, 'No, but you don't mean all men do you?' And it's like, come on. To the extent that, like, you'd think we'd planted these men as like illustrations of the problem. But anyway.

**TOM** Yeah, I hear that. You close the report with four questions, which I copied and pasted really quickly and awkwardly.

**DAVE** Yeah. And I wrote this, well three of us wrote this like a long time ago, so I can't actually remember all those four questions are!

**TOM** Shall I read them out?

**DAVE** Yeah, please do.

**TOM** Okay. And then, so.... “To what extent are cultural and creative occupations accessible and quote unquote meritocratic, if the demographics of its workers, their social origins and their networks are relatively homogeneous.” Which is a word I never know how to say, did I say that right?

**DAVE** Sounds right, yeah.

**TOM** Thanks. Question two was, “To what extent is the cultural and creative sector delivering on representing individuals, communities and the nation, if research suggests its tastes, values and attitudes are also relatively coherent? How would a sector with such different cultural engagement speak for the rest of a society for whom non-engagement is the norm? And, looking at our cultural and creative industries as a whole, who is missing from the picture?” And since publication of the report, obviously you've continued to work and think about all of these questions. Hearing those back now, do you have - are you able to give us a sense of what work is being done to, not to answer those questions, because they're all sort of unanswerable, aren't they? But, like, to move the dials in the right direction.

**DAVE** Yeah. There's maybe a couple of things to say, really. The first thing is it's really important to think about what is possible and what, maybe individual kind of artists, arts organizations should sort of say, actually, 'that's not on us'. And many of the problems that we talk about in the report are the direct responsibility - like hiring, commissioning, etc. But actually, many of them are not really to do with the arts. They're to do with the fact that Britain is a hugely unequal society, and it's likely that particular kinds of inequality are going to be further entrenched by policy decisions. So I mentioned this a couple of times. You know, the fact that London has a catastrophic housing crisis is not the responsibility of either the British Museum or the National Theatre. Or indeed the, you know, the DARE Festival, like. But that, almost more than anything else, is one of the key drivers for inequality in, you know, basic things like being able to afford to live near where the kind of key centre of creative production are, through to access to studio space, and the increasing kind of drive to use formerly kind of studio spaces for luxury flats, and this kind of stuff. And it's you know, it's really difficult. That's the first thing.

The second thing. So that's like pessimism one. Pessimism two is probably distilled quite usefully in the title of a book that myself, Mark and Orian are publishing in kind of April, May next year, which is just called *Culture is Bad For You*. And the book basically looks in much more detail at the issues that came up in the Panic! report. And going through particularly fieldwork data, we've gotten much kind of more depressed. Because it's possible to identify the dynamics underpinning the patterns that we found in the report. So we can, like, we've got some really good data on people's experiences of culture in childhood, and the relationship between exposure to culture and likelihood of working in creative occupations later in life. And it's just, it's just really grim, you know, that all of our creative workers were kind of foregrounding their cultural experiences. And

it's clear that, you know, access to culture as children is heavily related to social class patterns, which means that, you know, the kind of the class divide in our creative workers is likely to continue.

We've got really detailed data about women leaving the labour force because they're starting families, and their experiences of the relentless sexism that comes from theatre, from visual arts, from the film industry. Similarly, the experiences of socially mobile ethnic minority workers of supposedly progressive institutions that hire them, you know, to be the diversity hire and then are surprised when they leave after two years. You know, they gain important networks, they're able to set themselves up as freelancers. But their experiences are pretty horrible, actually, of institutions that, you know, you wouldn't say are institutionally racist because that carries a lot of kind of baggage with it. But are, you know, hostile environments for those who are not white, affluent origin, in some cases men. So, yeah, it's pretty depressing.

That said, though, one of the kind of flip sides to lots of social scientists kind of ploughing in to say 'this is all terrible and we can show you, you know, how and why it's terrible', is people like campaigning, you know, doing stuff that, you know, is kind of like changing at least individual lives. So, like, two examples that I've been working with and I've mentioned were, it was great to work with Create. Create have lots of problems. They've heard me say they've got lots of problems repeatedly to them and in public, but they've changed how they do commissioning and they're much more attentive to like, I suppose the kind of, the commissioning process. And one of the projects they're trying to do now is around housing and access to housing.

Arts Emergency, you know, are just brilliant and lovely and you know, theirs is a story of changing individual lives. Which, you know, may or may not have like this massive structural change, but they are doing something, and they are making individuals' lives better. Now, that sounds optimistic, but obviously like, you know, I'm sort of a sociologist, so like that, I would like to give a little bit more pessimism, in the sense that what worries me is always the kind of the sense that 'we've done something, so we've solved the problem'.

And going back to where I started, with the first kind of the first case for pessimism. If it is the case that we've got an unequal society that has, you know, the structural inequalities that are reflected in our cultural production and consumption systems, then we should kind of think that actually no one thing will solve these problems. And we always have to be doing things to deal with them, particularly in terms of how dynamic inequalities are. So I've been doing some some work in parliament, and in one of the hearings there was an interesting discussion of unconscious bias training, which one of the MPs was like 'unconscious bias training, companies should do that'. And one of our witnesses, Louise Ashley, who's up at Royal Holloway, was like, well, actually, the problem is, is that companies say we're going to do unconscious bias training for hiring and promotion decisions. And then organisations say, but we've done that, so we've solved the problem. And actually, that doesn't solve the problem. It's something that, you know, needs to be done. But loads more needs to be done as well.

**TOM** Right. Dave, thank you so much. It's been really, really fascinating. I said we were going to talk about this model that we run here very briefly. Just because I think it keys into some of what you were saying about the problem of unpaid and low-paid labour in the arts. Before we came in today, we were talking about, as you just said, the challenge of kind of continuing to, to try to fight against the unsolvable problems. And what we do with them.

The whole the whole thing [DARE Festival] costs about twenty-two thousand pounds to run, most of which comes from the Arts Council. And of that, from that we commission twelve groups of artists for a relatively small seed commission of five hundred pounds each. And that, when we started four years ago, that money was often used to leverage greater Arts Council income so people would have a production budget of eight grand, say, for whatever they're going to do, see and they'd use five hundred quid from us and a bunch of in-kind support to make it financially viable for them to put the work in.

As far as I know - and I know we've got a few of our artists in the room - but as far as I know, no one this year has had a successful Arts Council project grant. If you're the Arts Council, and you're listening, thank you very much for funding DARE Festival! But it's striking to me, that, because what we're therefore finding is that what we're asking artists to do is effectively more or less the same amount of work for significantly less money. And while at the same time we're, we've been very clear this year about earmarking commissions for people from historically disadvantaged groups, whether that's working-class people, people from black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds, and people from LGBTQ backgrounds. But we're still finding ourselves kind of trapped in a very challenging, economic vicious cycle. What's your - from the research that you've done - what's your experience of kind of smaller scale organizations and how are they successfully or otherwise dealing with some of the issues that you guys found?

**DAVE** It's a really difficult balance because on a really, you know, kind of like macro view, what you've got is, particularly from younger people, is a chronic oversupply of people entering artistic and cultural labour markets, which means that there's, you know, a kind of like an arms race. That's not an appropriate metaphor! But there will always be someone who's like, 'Well, you know, I'll do it for free. I'll do it for nothing.' It's difficult, because smaller organizations, the temptation is well, you know, 'We've got a small amount of money, and, you know, that might be enough to leverage', versus, 'We've got a small amount of money, an amount of money. And someone might be able to kind of work for free in a very sustained way.'

And you see this perfectly encapsulated in the Fringe up at Edinburgh, where on the one hand, what you've got is a story of lots and lots of tiny, you know, sometimes sole trader organisations that constitute one of the great kind of cultural markets, for want of a better word. But, you know, it's a crucial part of the cultural ecosystem in Britain. But when you start to kind of like ask questions about it, you find the several blog stories, you know, the discussions that happened this year and have gone on for a long time, which were to do with 'Hang on, you know, who is

benefiting from this?' And the thing is that there's no one right way of doing this. And, you know, you're confronted constantly with challenges of 'But, let's say we gave, you know, not twelve, but six a thousand pounds.' And, you know, would that be better or worse, I guess?

You know, the thing to say is: awareness is really key, of this. And, you know, being sort of conscious about the trade-offs is important. I'm working with Jerwood, various artistic development projects they've got, and we've been thinking about criteria of who gets in and who doesn't as really crucial here. Because, you know, the more your kind of understanding the problems and tailoring things, the problems, the better, really. And it's about, you know, being attentive. But again, these are massive social structural problems. And, you know, you as a small organization cannot solve them. You can make a difference. You can definitely do things that are bad. You know, will not help.

**TOM** Sure.

**DAVE** But equally like, I think there is a risk that everybody's like, 'Oh, it's all terrible and there's nothing we can do'. And the lesson from that, actually this comes back to something we found a couple of times with our senior man actually, was the really bad take in all of this is to say there's nothing I can do about how many people are willing to kind of volunteer, work for free, have got master's degrees and PhDs. That means I should hire the person who went to Oxford and got at PhD because they're the best person. That is like, literally the opposite of the lesson you should take. Rather, it's the question of, you know, what kind of things would benefit, what stages of career being, again, you know, attentive to how these problems work, rather than being attentive to how these problems work and saying 'there's nothing we can do'.

**TOM** There's always something, even if you're pulling it halfway up the mountain and all. Yeah, all of that. I think yeah, I feel quite strongly that what we are trying to do is hopefully not make things worse and make things a little bit better as we go along. I'm aware that we talked a little bit longer than we said we were going to, but we've probably got about five minutes. If anyone has any further questions for Dave. Hi.

**TOM** We kind of lose the audio here, but basically someone asks this question: Do you put the failures you've identified in the arts sector down to failures of strategy, or incompetent leadership?

**DAVE** Like, a bit of both. There are definitely... So as not to date the podcast, nor to say anything like, you know, moderately slanderous or whatever, like there are constant examples from London's cultural organizations of genuinely incompetent leadership decisions, which you can see coming. You're unsurprised when they happen. And, you know, it's it's like, tedious, how predictable the fallout is as well. So, you know, that that is a problem. And this is not just kind of within artistic organizations, but you can see this at a policy level as well. And, you know, we have a new Secretary of State for Culture. It's not entirely clear what her kind of cultural policies is going to be, whether she's there for a long time, or whatever. But there are certainly, you know, things

she's talked about in terms of arts education, in terms of equalities, where you think 'this this probably isn't going to be useful to address the problems.'

At the same time, though, there are definitely kind of, I suppose, broader strategic problems that are just really difficult for arts organisations to solve. It's a bit like: every year there's a really boring debate about who gets into Oxford and Cambridge. And it's boring because the action should be centred on what happens to kids before they're five years old. And I feel sorry for admissions tutors who are wheeled out every year to say, 'but you know, like many of these inequalities and nothing to do with us', which they're not. Equally like, you know, they make decisions that are appalling.

So, it's those two things, you know, like there are definitely things that arts organisations, I suppose, struggle with. But yeah, there are so many examples of incompetent leadership.

**TOM** And again we lose the audience here, but the next question is about, if there is an oversupply in the arts workforce in the UK, are there basically too many people studying drama at university or going through professional, vocational drama schools? And should, therefore, fewer people be given access to those training opportunities, especially given they have to pay to go through them?

**DAVE** So, yeah, so that I think, like that's one conclusion you can take. But actually, I'm occasionally sympathetic to the government. And one of my occasional bits of sympathy is the idea that these are potentially growing parts of the economy. And yet, you know, it's true that there are really obvious over-supplies in the labour market. At the same time, you know, these are industries that we would seek to grow. You know, they're in theory, like, better than making guns or coal mining. So, you know, like I think the kind of like, 'Ah, there are too many arts graduates, we should like stop people doing the arts', I think is a mistake.

The other side to that. And, you know, like growing these industries where, you know, we can definitely export forms of culture. You know, there are definitely, you know, sustainable jobs here that are well-paid, because it's clear that some people are getting well-paid out of them. And there's a relationship between innovation in creative industry sectors and the wider economy as well. You know, so I mean, that's like a full business story. And I know people in the arts hate it when academics talk about like business and stuff. But, you know, it's something to be considered when we talk about labour market oversupplies.

The other thing I'd say to what you've brought up is this question of, like, money is crucial, but also like so are networks. And so are particular kinds of exclusions that, like social scientists, we talk about cultural capital. You know, in terms of kind of having the right cues, knowing what to wear, like all of us here, like, you're very well-dressed sir. You're wearing a tie and a suit, I think. But everybody else is kind of casual, which is like how the arts world sort of looks. And these kinds of, you know, hard to sort of quantify, hard to find out behavioural cues are really, really crucial. And are ways that actually lots of people find exclusive, both in terms of audience and in

terms of access to work as well. So, money really matters. But irrespective of what happens politically, we're likely to see more money coming into the arts because the DCMS budget is going to go up under the Tories. A lot of it's going to be absorbed by the Commonwealth Games. But, you know, it's likely that Arts Council England are going to have more money to spend in England. And certainly, you know, Labour's manifesto is committed to more arts spending as well. As a thought experiment, from what the social science tells us is, that money will mean that basically the workforce, you know, there are maybe a few more working-class origin people, maybe middle-class ethnic minority representation expands. The audience will stay largely the same in terms of the relationship between class education and cultural consumption. So it's not just money. And if you want a concrete illustration, free museums is quite a nice example.

**TOM** We've got time for one more question, mainly because I know it's your show in here next. So if we run over, we're okay.

**TOM** At this point one of our DARE artists asked if, given his analysis of the problems in the sector, what advice would he give someone starting out on a career in the arts?

**DAVE** I mean, look, like if I answer it honestly, like, I'm an academic, like, you know, I can give you advice about how to pursue careers in academia, because that's, like, what I know about. But in terms of like, I can tell you what the structural problems you'll encounter are, but like in terms of like who you should speak to and stuff, I don't actually know. So I'd be slightly cautious about anything I'd say as advice.

**TOM** At this point someone asks a really interesting question about wills and legacies – basically asking if it'd be possible for the Arts Council to go to wealthy patrons and see if they'd be willing to leave money to the arts in their wills, or to get more money from things like the National Health Service.

**DAVE** Well, Arts Council England did try to develop philanthropy and kind of philanthropic giving about 10 years ago. And the basic problem is, is that wealthy donors tend not to be interested in kind of developmental work. It's a cliché, but they tend to be interested in, like, new wings of buildings. And the building problem is actually, you know, there's a danger of kind of having more buildings than artists, in the end. In terms of the relationship with health funding, the current government are very interested in social prescribing, and they're very interested in the relationship between arts participation and better mental and physical health outcomes. So actually, there is arts money from the NHS going in, which in some ways is great. But in other ways, I think we should be cautious, because it's not entirely clear that the government has done the work they need to do about who is delivering, and what kind of toll it takes to deliver arts programmes for health. The research on impact is very well advanced. The research on like, you know, deliverers for a better term is is not as well advanced.

**TOM** Unfortunately, I think that we're going to have to leave it there. Dave, thank you so much.

**DAVE** Thank you. Thanks for inviting me.

**TOM** Where can we find you on social media if you'd like to find out more?

**DAVE** Yeah, that's a good question. I tweet @DrDaveOBrien. And like the Panic! report is, I think there's a link on the Edinburgh home page. Certainly, on the Edinburgh home page, you can find all of the papers I've been referencing. Almost all of them are open access as well. So there's like no excuse for not reading eight thousand word academic papers.

**TOM** We'll link to it on our website and our show notes as well.

**DAVE** That's great. Thanks so much.

**TOM** Dr Dave O'Brien, thank you so much.

**DAVE** Cheers.

**TOM** And that's it for this episode! The book Dave talks about in this episode, *Culture is bad for you: Inequality and the cultural and creative industries* by Orian Brooke, Dave O'Brien and Mark Taylor, is going to be published this July by the University of Manchester Press. And we've linked to it, and to the *Panic!* Report, on our show notes, and on the Upstart Theatre website. Thanks for listening, and see you soon!