

STEVEN HADLEY Cultural democracy

The defining crisis of UK cultural policy has resulted from attempts to combine, articulate and actualise ideas associated with both democracy and culture. Issues of, definitions for and projects to address access, participation, engagement and inclusion abound. In this context, debate around the stratification of cultural consumption resulting from the Warwick Commission's report into cultural value (Neelands et al, 2015) and analysis of *Taking Part* data from DCMS (Taylor, 2016), alongside more recent work on social mobility in the cultural industries (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2018) has run concurrently with a renewed interest in the ideas and practices of cultural democracy and their potential to address longstanding issues of cultural policy (Wilson, Gross and Bull, 2017). The arguments about cultural democracy still resonate (Kelly, 2016).

Considered something of a *trahison des clercs* by Roy Shaw (former Secretary General of the Arts Council of Great Britain) and those of a certain intellectual disposition (see Shaw, 1987), the post-war history of cultural democracy is neither unproblematic nor uncontested. A small number of publications (see Braden, 1978; Kelly, 1984; Dickson, 1995) are testament to the complex ideological, political and social themes of the historical debate. From a cultural policy perspective, this imagined betrayal of artistic standards by writers, academics and practitioners within the Community Arts movement also had a distinctly anti-institutional and political agenda. The demand for cultural democracy, "is a revolutionary demand" (Kelly, 1984, p. 133).

A key focus of Kelly's work was a critique of cultural authority, particularly as regards the right to say what was, and was not, art. More specific was Kelly's (1985) attack on the idea of the 'Great Tradition of European Art' as being a hegemonic practice which "takes the taste of one (bourgeois) group of people and presents them as the natural taste of civilised people everywhere" (Kelly, 1985, p.3). The blindness of allegiance to the hierarchy of cultural value implicit in the democratisation of culture was not a simple matter of social origins or a lack of social mobility for, "There are many paths to an unquestioning adherence to 'a scale of values', which is neither justified nor conceived as of needing justification, and undoubtedly some of these paths start at chip shops" (Kelly, 1985, p.4).

Kelly (1985) argued not for an extension of the concept of 'the arts' to encompass more activities from more people in more places, but rather its replacement. This radical, political project called for "many localised scales of values, arising from within communities and applied by those communities to activities they individually or collectively undertake" (Kelly, 1985, p.6). In this sense, the impact of cultural democracy on cultural policy becomes an issue that is less of cultural valuation and more one of cultural animation and (self) representation.

An historically informed yet present- and future-oriented theoretical elaboration of cultural democracy for 21st century British culture and society would need to revise, regenerate and re-fashion a conceptual understanding of what 'cultural democracy' might mean and look like in the present historical moment. A politics of recognition sensitive to issues of class would be the necessary accompaniment to a politics of distribution in struggles for equality and fairness. There can be no true exploration of cultural democracy without the acknowledgement that hierarchies of cultural value have always been, and always will be, imbricated in questions of power and authority.