Jay Dunstan
Student Number: 2538758
March 2024

Walking Through Literature: Race, Symbolic Capital & Performativity

UEL PGR Seminar
University of East London

ORCID iD
Jay Dunstan https://orcid.org/0009-0007-5665-757X

Slide 1 Introduction

Good evening colleagues, welcome to the first talk of the PGR Seminar Series: Walking Through Literature: Race, Symbolic Capital and Performativity. I would like to thank Dr Caroline Watkinson for making this evening possible and I would like to thank Dr Andrew Branch, for his guidance and time.

Slide 2 Agenda

Just a quick Agenda, I will deliver a brief bio of myself, an overview of the research, a summary of my hypothesis and contention, then I will walk us through what the literature has provided and conclude with some final thoughts and a Q&A.

Slide 3 Cultural industries: entry - 1995 - 1999

I have worked across the CCI for over 25 years, in post-production facilities houses, as a First Assistant Film Editor, in broadcast television- delivering advertising commercials. I started as an unpaid Runner back in 1995/1996 at the tender age of 21 and worked successfully in this fascinating sector of the economy. It was a great time to be working in the post-production television industry based in Soho, in London at that period. Having hit the proverbial 'brown' glass ceiling, and seeing that the technology, the democratisation of technology was rendering editing no longer a highly secure domain of the glitterati (let alone myself) and having my interest in advertising peaked through working on commercials, I decided to leave broadcasting. After trying to transition into advertising with the help of my broadcasting contacts, my union BECTU at the time and NABS – the advertising, media and marketing charity. It was apparent after 6 months that the realm of advertising was gatekept – you needed a degree. Therefore, not intending to study beyond A-level, (which was against my parent's advice at that time) taking instead the opportunity job in broadcasting, I returned to study – enter UEL into the picture in 1999. Having loved the special nurturing environment of UEL and coming away with a 2.1, I continued my studies at Goldsmiths for an MA.

Slide 4 Biography Snapshot

After all of this, I was then equipped to enter into advertising. I secured a great job at an agency called Golley Slater Advertising, working straight away in Account Handling (bypassing the standard sales route). Over the years, I worked on some of the world's biggest FMCG's and well-known brands. After many years of equally fulfilling work, the financial crash happened and decimated the industry back in Q4 2007, Q1 2008. After a short spell in the 3rd Sector, never disheartened and with lots of academic knowledge and industry experience under my belt, I transitioned back to the client-oriented side, first in medical communications for a Hong-Kong based medical company and then as a global manager in marketing, for one of the world's largest engineering corporations – where I led a global team. After almost a decade, in this role, and with over a 20 year hiatus, I am back here again at UEL. A place that is very dear to me indeed. (T3:30)

Slide 5 Introduction

My research aims to understand, define, and explore the exponential rise in representation across mass communications media of minorities. The increase is a recent phenomenon and sits in stark binary opposition to prior understanding of the politics of representation. However, the current position is deeply problematical, for this new representational politics allows for the negation of questions of equality and their subsumption under the guise of greater visibility. Put simply, structural inequality is given symbolic capitalised legitimacy by the significant increase in minority representation. Therefore, formative issues and questions of equality and inclusion are, and remain, hidden by this phenomenon. The research develops this critique as a hypothesis and frames it under a new term – colourwashing.

Slide 6 What are the CCI?

As Hesmondhalgh (2013) and many others have noted, the cultural industries are difficult to fully define. It is possible to argue that all industries are cultural industries. However, the term 'cultural industries' is used in a much more restricted way, as a signifying system. In this usage, as set out by Raymond Williams (1981), social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored. They are institutions and organisations directly involved in the production of meaning, to communicate to an audience and to create textualised goods. Note also, that I am using the widest possible definition of the CCI as set out by David Hesmondhalgh (2013), who himself built upon the work of Raymond Williams, quote, 'The cultural industries are those activities which deal primarily in symbolic goods – goods whose primary economic value is derived from their cultural value.'

Slide 7 Over Representation?

Over the past half-decade, a number of important industry wide and industry specific reports have noted some interesting paradoxes in both the composition of the CCI and the representations produced and disseminated from the CCI. Let us take a quick look at those.

On the representation side of the issue, A very exhaustive and detailed study commissioned by Lloyds Banking Group (2018) titled, *Ethnicity in Advertising: Reflecting Modern Britain in 2018*?, has found that BAME groups are better represented within this media space than at any other period (Ohene, 2020). At least in terms of statistics, for example, between 2015 and 2018, representation of BAME groups rose from 12% to 25% within UK advertising, essentially doubling over this period (Lloyds Banking Group, 2018; Ohene, 2020). By any measure this represents a staggering increase in numbers over a relatively short period within the year-on-year lifecycle of this sector of the cultural economy. Indeed, in television, the *ITV Diversity Plan* from 2021 shows a staggering 33% increase on 'on-screen output' to use their terms of BAME groups across their network.

Slide 8 Employment within the CCI for minorities

Moving over to the representativeness of employment within the CCI. Looking at broadcasting, a recent report by BECTU (Broadcast, Entertainment, and Cinematographers Trade Union), dated from 2024 has found that BAME respondents were less likely to have worked at all over the period covered by the report than their white counterparts. This has historical precedence, in fact, a story by the Voice Newspaper from July 2022, with a follow up investigation from March 2023 had found that within the BBC an actual decline is in evidence also. Reporting 'the corporation had fewer employees of all diverse backgrounds compared to 2021, and that the trend in employment for minorities is declining here.' The BBC being the state broadcaster and employer of over 23,000 as of 2023.

Slide 9 The representational inflation paradox

This is a very interesting slide that I have put together. We could legitimately ask, there is greater representation than ever in terms of numbers, in front of screen if you will. However, in terms of employment the numbers are in decline – why is this? I call this, to borrow from Physics and Cosmology in particular, an area I am very interested in, 'the representational inflation paradox'. Note, that 'On-Screen' here means, front facing and applies to ads/print etc, - visibility.

This is a very telling piece of the puzzle mapped to a graphic, from 2005 representation was fairly low and has rapidly climbed, as shown by following the orange line. Conversely, this blue line shows a downward trajectory for 'off-screen' positions, employment behind the lens. The grey line is the baseline aggregate of the two – or what would we could expect to see – in a holistic organic model.

Slide 10 What is going on?

What is going on?

Slide 11 Colourwashing?

Colourwashing as a distinct term does not feature within the literature around questions of representation both within earlier works (c.f. Alexander, 1994) or within later papers (Smith, 2013; Adams-Bass, *et al.* 2014). It is also absent in current research debates (Hubbard, 2022), it remains undefined as a term, a critical descriptive term, a launched concept that is novel in its application.

This highlights the need for an accurate encompassing descriptive that will permit a more interconnected approach to critiquing the contemporary representational field of socio-cultural life (Lim, 2016). The critical application, conceptualisation and the understanding underpinning my creation of the term began to crystallise over a somewhat lengthy period and was brought to focus within the politically polemical work of Sarah Schulman (2012). Schulman is noted for studies and literature within the arena of queer politics, it is through this work that she coined and deployed the notion of 'pinkwashing' and the conceptual framework that underpins this critique. Engaging with this work was very much an eureka moment, finding a word that encapsulated the new axioms of representation in which we find ourselves. In comprehension, it was then a short leap to acknowledge that this notion of the word captured by Schulman could be redeployed to work with race, racial contemporary politics and representation. Through a process of substantiation, substituting 'pink' for 'colour' and thus realising with this simple word change, that this now new word, this term, would encompass entirely the conversations, thoughts and ideas; indeed, the landscape that this thesis is seeking to understand and engage with. This new term colourwashing affords contemplation; space is provided to make sense of the multifarious images, discourses, narratives and representations under critical investigation as mass communications within our shared contemporary environment – our habitus.

In a sentence. Colourwashing is the polemical critique of increased hyper representation without the requisite foundational employment to accompany it. Colourwashing is performative in substance only.

Slide 12 Research Questions

Indeed, in order to find out and comprehend what on Earth is going on, I have devised a series of questions. We will only (very broadly) discuss the top two questions related here this evening.

Click through Twice!
- Why after sustained and historic under-representation within the UK Contemporary Cultural Industries (CCI), is it now empirically evident that minority communities are 'over-represented' as output in what were once unrepresentative spaces?
- If diversity within the CCI is currently conceptually underpinned by racial capitalism theory, what are the limitations of this framing, what are the underlying politics?

Slide 13 Walking through the literature

In my efforts to interrogate the questions that form the basis for the study, my research of the literature has taken me down the following avenues that I have split into Parts 1 to 4.

Slide 14 Walking through the literature II

For our talk this evening we will concentrate on extracts from this section:
Part 2 (Precarity, Technologies of Precarity and The Underpinnings of Colourwashing

Slide 15 What was involved?

Over 200 books, articles, journals, papers and items of grey literature were consulted and referenced in order to explore the issues around the increase in the representation of minorities. Comprehensively, within the literature, the searching terms of race and ethnicity group as a set of

domains. These domains clustering (as highlighted in bold) as both resultant of policies and discursive practices intersecting in approaches to the topic, forming as structural composite variables of modern society which are reflected within the literature. Colloquially, questions, discussions and debates concerning race are increasingly complex and constraining, foremost being the difficulty in navigating the polarities that debates seem to occupy (recurrently) in contemporary popular discourse (van Dijk, 2000; Hamed, 2020; Saha & van Lente, 2022). As a note to this difficulty, my work is dispassionate, objective and resides in the ivory tower. I am going to walk you through a small section of my work.

Slide 16 Precarity

From my work, I want to highlight precarity, the notion of precariousness. To provide a background to the uncertainty of minority lives juxtaposed against the colourwashed diversity discourse. I argue that the phenomena of colourwashing is a type of neo-liberal propaganda that attempts to hide the failures, hypocrisy, discrimination and deliberate circumscription of minority life chances within contemporary UK society.

Slide 17 Precarity

Precarity theorists have noted the approach as a chronologically recent critical conceptualisation, closely aligned to economics and the casualisation of labour practices in post-Fordist economic models of society (Ettlinger, 2007). Notwithstanding, the theory of precarity has progressed beyond the confines of economics to encompass the idea of emergent groups of people, a polity, unable to access the security and protections hitherto bestowed and conferred by the organs of state, notably in Europe and the U.S. (Hill, 2017). As a reworking, precarity for theorists such as Judith Butler (2012), takes on a more nuanced complexity beyond just the presupposition of the economic. Her application advances the concept to encompass matrices of political and social interdependency aspects, to accord the existential insistence that all lives are lived in precarity (Butler, 2012). Remarking that some lives are more precarious than others. Butler (2012: 148) applies the conceptual reworking to those whose lives are articulated in a particular configuration, exposing what she terms as 'sociality', experienced and lived through an unequal distribution of deconstituting precarity. Substantively impacting those lives deemed 'already lost' and thus, in a sociological sense, further considered unworthy of protection and 'sustenance' (Butler, 2012: 148).

Slide 18 Precarity, the confirming circle

We have established that performatively, a cultural representational landscape has been created by the CCI; whereby, increased hyper-visibility of minorities is in evidence through media forms (Saha, & van Lente, 2022). However, two points forming my critique remain unaddressed one: the process mechanism of precarity and two: the material context of this new representational shift. Various contemporary thematics of race and ethnicity employed by the CCI are invariably underscored and scaffolded by social precariousness, of lives lived in uncertainty. As we shall see shortly. Let me talk you through this circle. In terms of process, unaddressed material circumstances form the basis of precarity which is present in society. Representations of lives are then mobilised as mass communicative encoded discourses. They are performed as attached to racialised bodies and decoded as precarious. This step racialises the person and the group, who are then re-employed as a technology, leading to the cycle again and again. Thus, creating symbolic cultural capital. In this view, CCI colourwashed output acts as a category of fungible currency in the form of symbolic cultural capital, commodified, exchanged and sequestered by and for the wider culture. As a mechanism, it is via this cyclical process that we end up with demeaning and limiting stereotypes circulating within society. In accord, representations are 'flat', one dimensional, repetitive and indeterminate of human difference and individuality - problematically reinforcing and disseminating canards.

Slide 19 Case study: Precarity as manifest

There exists a significant body of research that foregrounds precariousness, concerning those who undertook migration into the UK, post-1945. Such research focussing on what has popularly been termed the Windrush Generation, their lives and experiences (Ellis, 2001; Akala, 2018; Nobrega, 2020; Webber, 2022; Wimbush, 2023). The former colonial migrants have in many regards come to symbolise all ethnicities *outside* of the dominant hegemony (Wimbush, 2023) Despite this groups obvious contribution to the founding of modern multicultural/multi-ethnic Britain – in what was a paradigmatic shift in demographics and substantive economic growth for the country, their presence has come alongside governmentality problematisation. The year 2018 is commonly recognised as a key date both marking and memorialising several anniversaries regarding the presence of minorities in the UK, foremost amongst them being the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* (1948). In being the 70th anniversary of the arrival, this was marked by the UK State as an act of commemoration (see, Wimbush, 2023). Notwithstanding, commemoration can also obscure critical engagement and inquiry of the past and its complexities (Byrne, 2020). Or, as in the case of the Windrush generation; and the colloquially termed subsequent Windrush scandal, commemoration can ignore and deflect from official acknowledgement and expedient remedial implementation of lessons learned (Wimbush, 2023).

Slide 20 Precariousness in action

Of concern, the UK Government's hostile environment legislation - a cluster of policies set in motion in 2012 - tasked private sector banks, employers, landlords and the non-private sector NHS and various intra-and extra-governmental agencies in the enforcement of immigration controls (Akala, 2018; JCWI). This unquestionably resulted in unprecedented state sanctioned abuse of citizen rights (JCWI).[1] Research accords that the results of these policies were not an accident, but the inevitable consequence of political decisions (informing policy), designed to make life intolerable for those without 'official' sanctioned documentation (Akala, 2018; JCWI, 2023; Wimbush, 2023). It can also be observed that those whose contributions were deemed inconsequential were discounted and excluded - their Britishness denied. In essence, we can discern that those lives both were and are lived in precarity.

Slide 21 Colourwashing = precarity

We must remember that the state sanctioned 'hostile environment' that destroyed so many lives was started as we all were in the throes of the 2012 London Olympics. Where a great many minorities performed for their country as their grandparents, uncles, aunts and family were actively being detained and illegally deported. Let that sink in. Evaluatively, precarity is in evidence in the state, regardless of the mass communications performativity of paradoxical expressions of hegemonic solidarity. Irrespective too of the performativity that would seek to communicate and infer otherwise. Substantive for those precaritised, leading to the greater potential to move into poverty (Rubery, *et al.*, 2018). My interrogation of the literature and my own hypothesis suggests that an inverse law is in action within society. The greater the performativity of colourwashed artefacts and events, the greater the opposite is in actual occurrence within the polity, as has happened in 2012.

Slide 22 Technologies of Precarity: Employment, Deprivation and the Poverty Discourse

Slide 23 Precarity as a deployed technology of the CCI

Formatively, employment data is extensive and well documented (Buxton, Chapman, Temple, 1998) accompanying sufficient provision for questions of minority participation (see, Clark, & Shankley, 2020). Importantly, there is substantive academic accord between employment and under/unemployment, as a site of interrogation and study in the literature. Providing an intersection

---

[1] The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, (JCWI). Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20230125231903/https://www.jcwi.org.uk/windrush-scandal-explained.

from the fields of economics to the social sciences (see, Stewart, 2004; Parker, 2015; Edgell, Gottfried, & Granter, 2016; Prasad, 2023). The research area is also well represented in quantitative grey sources informing policy: *Department of Work & Pensions* (2022), and specific policy concerns, *Race Disparity Unit* (2023), (see, Clark, & Drinkwater, 2007; 2009). Further, there is alignment amongst the literature that employment is significant, for various aspects of life are dependent upon its presence or absence (Clark, & Drinkwater, 2007; 2009). Indeed, the absence of employment can (and habitually does), facilitate modes of deprivation and poverty (Kirby, *et al*., 2000; Clark, & Drinkwater, 2007; 2009).

In consideration, there is substantive evaluative evidence to suggest that poverty discourses are linked to racialised bodies in a correlative dynamic relationship reflected in discourse (see, Smith, & Welch, 1987; Clawson, & Trice, 2000; Orelus, 2013; Narayan, 2017). In this view, societal encodings of poverty also act as representational themes that minorities are presented as being afflicted with in mass communications media CCI output (see, Tukachinsky, Mastro, & Yarchi, 2015).

Slide 24 Failing state: increased CCI precarity
According to theorists such as Danny Dorling (2023) and organisations such as The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the UK is failing, across all metrics we are in decline. I argue that the society needs textualised representations that explain where we are. In this sense, the CCI fulfils its role as a medium, like a mirror, to reflect back to society.

Poverty has been theoretically conceptualised as a technology, operationalising within contemporary society, representationally conflating racialised bodies alongside reductive discourses encompassing: material poverty, intellectual poverty, moral poverty and so forth (Narayan, 2017; Gonzalez-Lesser, Hall, & Hughey, 2020). Thus, conceptually, representational aesthetics often depict/distill/encode and abstract to what seminal theorists posit as, 'reductio ad absurdum' (Gilroy, 2004: 37). Indeed, theorists have questioned this aesthetic, to assert that, the, 'public face of poverty in the U.S. is 'Black', where explanations of the widespread poverty of non-white groups focus on racist tropes' (Narayan, 2017: 2490). The above assertion is equally applicable to the UK, where facile detrimental tropes also fail to explore, interrogate or understand systemic and structuring edifices that genesis as problems forming precarity and latterly poverty (Parmar, & Rafique, 2022).

Characteristically, processes of discourse formation; informing the socio-cultural, have long been acknowledged as influential within scholarly critical theory (see, Fairclough, 1995; Mills, 1997; Burr, 20023; Wenden, 2008; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Extending this position, as Gilroy (2004) has argued, there is a process at work informing societies coding of both culture and the social as biology. Indeed, systematised preceding studies have found that precarity and poverty work through performativity and public discourse to offer society technologies of melancholia, attached to racialised bodies, providing a form of societal racialised 'grieving that is limitless and without end' (Bell, 1999: 171). The thesis contends that such representations of poverty are required by society to explain and explicate meaning to inequalities that are *de facto* aspects of contemporary neo-liberal capitalism. It is in this sense that bodies become racialised and deployed as vehicles to communicate what are in effect technologies of precarity and poverty. (T25:00).

Slide 25 Google search 'poverty'
Poverty does exist.
Poverty does affect the lives of minorities in disproportionate ways.
However, what remains undertheorised, is the manner in which society and as an adjunct of society, the CCI deploys and uses poverty as a technology to communicate both to itself and society.

Slide 26 Subtle depictions of the poverty discourse in CCI outputs

I have assembled a few images that illustrate my point, some are quite subtle, I have deliberately used the subtle 'everyday' images from my vast archive to communicate this technology as applied in our real world.

1. Top left is the HM Gov Money Helper site for eligibility for fee school meals
2. To the right is a remarkable young black female artist, who's start-up art business is described by the Telegraph Newspaper as a 'hustle'
3. Below an Amazon 'Save the date to save big' banner on Amazon.co.uk – the ad is working as a technology of precarity
4. Next is the Money Supermarket.com 'Compare credit cards for NO credit'
5. And finally, my energy supplier image on their OVO website offering 'support for your energy payments'

Discourses are developed, planned and utilised, as a *conscious exercised technology* by the CCI. Technologies that communicate via a circular reciprocal synchronous relationship, on socio-cultural aspects of society related to modes of poverty, deprivation, hierarchy, need and want. As depicted in the above innocuous texts as ways to save. Further, the absence of interrogation renders the racialised body inculpated for any want in material circumstances; re-racialising the individual and biologically essentialising those racialised bodies depicted dialogically. In summation, the racialised body is subsequently encoded alongside the reductive discourses of indigence whether solicited or unsolicited – argued by the thesis as one of the causal determinants enabling stratification and racialised colourwashed representations.

Slide 27 Underpinning Colourwashing: Racial Capitalism

Slide 28 Theoretical underpinning of colourwashing II
Critical investigations have undergone substantial transformations over the proceeding decades and have re-concentrated on the concept of racial capitalism to comprehend phenomena across multiple domains of activity (see, Prasad, 2023).

Configurations of the concept have paradoxically emphasised a value on nonwhiteness, a reification that sees the desirability of nonwhiteness as linked to the performativity of diversity – a mass communicative aesthetic act of symbolic social meaning according to theorists such as Nancy Leong, (2013). Of resonance in this application of the theory, there is a tacit acknowledgement that the discourses of diversity confer ideological value. They are for all intents and purposes commodified discourses as we saw in subtle examples of the preceding slides. Leong's (2013) reading is highly cynically dialectical, and custodies the outcomes of diversity to a transactional process, elaborating an instrumentalist view and one that the thesis is in sympathetic alignment to. The commodification value attached to diversity, represents a recent modern shift being 'performed' empirically across various societal domains. Advancing Leong's nuanced and considered argument, both articulates and affirms, that those who are racialised become vehicles to enable the attachment of discourses, via representations – often in the form of precarity of precariousness.

Slide 29 Racial capital, process
The research demonstrates agreement, which accords with the central hypothesis of the thesis, namely, that minority groups are systematically and consciously *racialised*. Furthermore, via these processes of racialisation, minorities are configured concomitantly as commodities, disbursed from the CCI to communicate ideologically driven symbolic capital in the form of colourwashing.

Slide 30 Racial capital to symbolic capital

In concluding, the instrumentalisation of racial capital is inherently reductionist and thus dangerous, for it 'inhibits efforts at genuine racial inclusiveness and cross-racial understanding' (Leong, 2013: 2155). This happens due to four aspects, first, (i) those deemed non-white are assigned a commodification value, and as concerning all forms of capital, the value of fungible commodities can go up and/or down. Additionally, (ii) the commodification of human beings is consequently de-humanising as an action in and of itself. As a third aspect, (iii) racial capitalism undermines questions and positions of identity, forcing those who are co-opted to 'perform' in a narrow bandwidth of human expression and representation – further entrenching and legitimising racialised tropes and racialised discourses. Fourth, (iv) the solemn and serious antidiscrimination work that is needed to move towards an equitable, socially just society and public sphere, is obfuscated by the displacing logic underlying the process (Leong, 2013). Finally, it could be argued that structural inequalities and racisms accrue symbolic 'justification' by the racial capitalism process and the consequential normalisation discourses thereby disseminated. The gravity of this final concern I will leave to hang with us.

Slide 31 In summary
What I have attempted to show this evening is a complex relationship between, minority communities, precarity, technologies of the poverty discourse, performativity, symbolic capital and colourwashing. Increased representation to stark disproportionate levels without employment to match is simply sophistry – colourwashing. Increased levels of CCI representation does not negate precarity for minorities. On the contrary, it increases it. Furthermore, the CCI as a pillar of neo-liberal capital both requires and needs bodies that are racialised as a consequence of the racial capital paradigm logics. As society becomes poorer, so representations of precaritised racialised bodies will increase. Reiterating the thesis concern that exponential increases in racialised representations are performative only; and are not, indicative of concrete, systemic, inclusive and equitable change/advancement.

Slide 32 Thank you
Again, I would very much like to thank Caroline, my supervisory team all of the support staff here at UEL and of course my PGR colleagues too. Any questions?
RUNNING TIME: 35m (Approx.)