

Earned and Unearned Privilege

Privilege can often be a result of happenstance, of time and place - e.g. when and where you were born or raised is often a big factor in your life chances. Another type of random chance that can hugely affect a person's prospects is 'being at the right place, at the right time' to come across / be offered / take advantage of opportunities that you may otherwise never have heard of or had access to.

When I think of the term 'privilege' in regards to class and the arts, I immediately think of the phrase:

'It's not what you know, it's who you know'

It's a phrase regularly used to explain away the privileges that a large subsection of the creative/cultural sectors have & use to further their careers.

For people without access to wealth, opportunities, networks and/or social connections (that the privileged subsection mentioned above often have), pursuing a career in the creative & cultural sectors often feels like a matter of complete luck rather than as a viable result of hard work, passion and dedication. No matter the many schemes and programmes run to redress the balance, the sectors are skewed to favour those with the means to take up unpaid development opportunities or self-fund passion projects.

Fortunately, the identification and acknowledgement of these earned and unearned privileges are beginning to be recognised in our societies, despite the vocal opposition of those steps forward. I can only hope that enough people are - and will be - working towards equity that significant change happens in my lifetime, or our future generations will be forced to contend with all the obstacles we currently face.