**Cultural Value Project: Case for Support**

**‘The Values of Cultural Work’**

**Rationale for Critical Review**

The coming to prominence of the cultural or creative industries[[1]](#footnote-1) has demanded that academics and policy-makers establish the ‘valued-added’ by these activities, most notably in terms of their contribution to the ‘creative economy’ (Bakhshi et al 2009; Throsby 2001; Towse 2010), but also in terms of their potential for generating various social and cultural benefits (Belfiore and Bennett 2007; Holden 2004). Yet, within this discussion there is very little attention paid either to the professional cultural work[[2]](#footnote-2) process (though see Banks 2007) , or to the cultural worker *herself*, the subject of cultural production who is not only an important source of the values outlined above, but a social subject embedded in relations of value that are both plural and complex.

The key question framing this **critical review** is *what is the value of cultural work to workers themselves?* By addressing the ways these reflective individuals understand their own personal values, situated within wider social contexts of production, the overall goal of this review is to provide the Cultural Value Project (CVP) with a better understanding of both the *components* of cultural value and the *experience* of value, utilising a (hitherto under-utilised) work-focussed perspective.

**Research Questions and Objectives**

The critical review has three objectives, each supported by a set of core research questions. The questions are presented as initial (rather than exhaustive) points of engagement with the extensive interdisciplinary literature on cultural and creative industries work:

***Objective 1: to identify the range of values which inform and shape the motives and activities of cultural workers;*** What values (understood here as particular *ethics, concerns, interests* and *motivations*) are in evidence in different kinds of professional cultural work; how do these values inform and shape processes of cultural industry production; how do these values inform wider discourses and understandings of cultural value?

***Objective 2; to challenge popular and polarised understandings of cultural workers as subjects motivated by (only) either ‘aesthetic’ or ‘economic’ values;*** how might these binary terms be redefined or challenged; might we conceive of a ‘post-binary’ regime of value that accounts for the *plurality* of ethical concerns and motivations present amongst contemporary cultural workers?

***Objective 3; to develop a preliminary model that might more fully integrate the experiences of cultural workers into wider measurements or assessments of cultural value;*** What are the implications (including for policy) in taking seriously the situated, value-laden experiences of cultural workers; how might knowledge of the value-laden aspects of cultural work inform an understanding of the *potentials* embedded in its processes – in terms of more finely elaborating cultural value or (say) for tackling inequalities, or enhancing public, civic or democratic value?

**Contribution to the Cultural Value Project**

The review contributes to the CVP by focussing on cultural workers as both **reflective individuals** and **ethically engaged citizens.** It identifies the views and sensibilities of cultural worker as one the diverse sources of the **components of cultural value**, and then seeks to explore the plurality and complexities ofvalue-laden **experience** brought to bear in the cultural industries workplace. Additionally, byfocussing on the interdisciplinary breadth of academic and policy studies of cultural work conducted empirically, *in situ,* the review aims to synthesise diverse **sources of evidence** for evaluating some of the plural origins and components of cultural value.

**Research Context and Innovation**

The propensity in studies of cultural value to focus mainly on the qualities of cultural objects, texts, goods and commodities – or how they are consumed - tends to obscure the cultural work processes which come first, ontologically and temporally. It is cultural work that locates both these objects and the worker-subjects whose own skills, ideas and values shape their material (or immaterial) form. Indeed, the work and the worker are at the very heart of the matter; without workers to produce cultural goods, there is nothing for publics and audiences to actually value.

Of course the idea that cultural workers produce things of value, which might have certain intrinsic or extrinsic benefits, is generally accepted, even if the precise character of such value remains hotly disputed (O’Brien, 2010). And while there remains a lack of understanding of the ways in which work and labour processes might shape the valuation process, by providing a set of identifications, discourses and practices that help frame public discussion and evaluation of culture, there is also an important *a priori* question, one which this review explicitly addresses – namely, what is the primary value of cultural work to workers *themselves*? Artists, musicians, designers and so on, not only draw from existing repertoires of value, but create value, and invest their work with purpose and meaning, which influences its circulation and consumption; yet they also undertake cultural work ‘for themselves’ for their own internal purposes, rewards and values. What might these be, precisely?

In this regard there is first scope to synthesise a range of literatures that deal with cultural workers and their relationships to aspects of value. These include (indicatively) perspectives drawn from cultural economics (Throsby 2001, Towse 2010), cultural studies and policy (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2002; Oakley 2009), philosophy (Zuidervaart 2011) social psychology (Taylor and Littleton 2008), sociology (Born 2004; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2012) and human geography (Pratt 2008). Governmental and extra-governmental policy literatures have also featured prominently (DCMS 2008; Work Foundation 2007). The wide range of this literature will be analysed and evaluated. However, within this general field, a certain emerging perspective also stands out. A body of interdisciplinary academic work on the plural value systems and ‘moral economies’ of cultural work has been a most prominent feature of the recent cultural industry literature – examples of which include work on new media and web-designers (Arvidsson and Peitersen 2012; Kennedy 2012), musicians (Banks 2012), television workers (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2012), arts and craft workers (Luckman 2012) and film-makers (Vail and Hollands 2012). Such work has variously revealed how – prior to, or in place of, purely aesthetic or economic concerns - desires for autonomy and self-actualization, personal well-being, obligations of family, kinship and community, and political commitments of a worldly nature, variously combine to influence significantly how the practice of cultural production takes place, *and then* how cultural goods actually emerge and become valued. This literature is both new and innovative. But it has not yet been synthetically assembled and evaluated – this review will be the first do so, thereby helping to meet Objective 1.

In this literature, value application and creation is closely linked to the idea that cultural workers are continually ‘striving for coherence’ (Taylor and Littleton 2008, p. 289) amidst many contingent social demands and imperatives, and not simply (just) balancing ‘art’ and ‘commerce’, crudely conceived. Moving beyond established dichotomies, and teasing out the embedded and often tacit values of worker *in situ* – the full range of theircultural experience- is therefore fundamental to the purpose of this review, and the target of Objective 2.

Finally, in meeting Objective 3, the review will look to the CVP objectives (and beyond), by seeking to develop a preliminary model of cultural value that more fully incorporates the value-laden perspectives of cultural workers. In doing so the potential for such a model to effect social change in areas of cultural policy will also be explored; how might a more pluralistic model of value help address issues of inequality, participation or representation in cultural value measures and creative industry policy in these transforming (post-recessional) times?

**Research Methods**

The work will require a critical and selective literature review of research undertaken (predominantly in the UK and Europe, in last 15 years, the period of significant emergence of a cultural work literature) drawn from cultural studies, cultural policy studies, sociology, economics, human geography, philosophy and other arts and humanities disciplines, as well as an extensive policy literature (notably within the DCMS, Arts Council, Sector Skills Councils, Nesta, British Council, UNESCO). The review will be led initially by the three objectives outlined.

**Description and Timetable**

The work will be spread over four months; in month 1 a project webpage will be designed by the applicant and hosted by the applicant’s research centre (CRESC[[3]](#footnote-3)) at The Open University in order to outline and promote the project; the critical review will take place in months 0-3; the report, including project findings and indicative articles, produced in month 4; a symposium on ‘The Values of Cultural Work’ will be organised for the February 2014 conclusion of the project, at The Open University.

**Project Management and Co-ordination**

The applicant will undertaken the review and manage the project; appropriate financial and administrative support will be provided by the OU Department of Sociology, CRESC and the social science Faculty.

**Outcomes and Outputs**

The main output will be a comprehensive critical synthesis of established and emergent literature on the plural values of cultural workers; this will be delivered via the project website; working papers and articles, a book proposal and in a one-day symposium – an event with invited academic/non-academic speakers on the theme of ‘The Values of Cultural Work’. The project report and wider outputs will also suggest some putative model or framework that can more fully integrate the *experiences* of cultural workers into wider measurements or assessments of cultural value. This innovation could form a vital building-block or component for future models or activities conducted under the auspices of the CVP, as well as inform wider uses and applications. In this respect the review aims to make a highly original and significant contribution to the Project.

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1. These terms are able to be differentiated, but are used here strategically as synonyms to describe the various forms of activity that involves the commercial or public-service production of objects, texts, goods and services that foreground their symbolic or aesthetic qualities. Given their widely varying use, it makes sense – for the purposes of a comprehensive review – to adopt an inclusive approach. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ‘Cultural work’ is a term I use to describe the processes of labour and production in the contexts of the cultural/creative industries, focussing specifically on the identified or designated ‘artistic’ or ‘creative’ worker and their characteristic practices (Banks 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The ESRC Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change [↑](#footnote-ref-3)