

Foreword

Professor Philip Schlesinger

It is a particular pleasure to write this Foreword. My work at the University of Glasgow's Centre for Cultural Policy Research (CCPR) has brought me into close contact with the work behind this report and, of course, with its author, Bob Last.

On 9 November 2015, CCPR ran a specially convened seminar to discuss *Creativity, Value and Money*.¹ These findings had never before been given a public airing, and I strongly felt there was a need to remedy this. Bob Last has posed a challenge because he critically interrogates some dominant approaches to creative industries policy. He also investigates, by way of detailed interviews, what those engaged in cultural work actually think about the relationship between their creative activity and economic value. Funded by the Scottish Government, his report was researched under the auspices of Cultural Enterprise Office (CEO), and happily, is finally in the public domain.

Our CCPR seminar brought together the worlds of politics, policy, cultural work and the academy from north and south of the border. It was an open-minded, robust and in many ways, quite a subtle discussion, free of the predictable and tedious grandstanding, axe-grinding and defensive position-taking that routinely characterises the plethora of events – often cynical money-spinners - on the creative economy. We do need more open debate and so I hope that this publication will engender it, and perhaps the contrarian discussion it provokes might even begin to affect the policy thinking of the Scottish Government – and maybe others furth of Scotland.

There is a back-story, of course, because *Creativity, Value and Money* underwent interesting mutations that speak to our times. Bob Last and I first discussed how to study creative micro-businesses in January 2012. He was then working on his research proposal, which focused on how such enterprises might access finance. I had just finished a study of dancers and musicians and was very aware of the tensions that

¹ For the seminar's programme and attendance list see:
http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/cca/research/ccpr/newsandevents/headline_434353_en.html.

existed between their need to earn a living and their creative concerns.² We were both very attuned to the challenges posed by precarious cultural work and the difficulties of devising the right kinds of intervention to support it.

Later that year, our paths crossed again, when I pursued a new research idea. At the time, Bob was chair of CEO's board. Along with Deborah Keogh, then CEO's Director, he was very receptive to CCPR undertaking a sociological study of how their organisation worked. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, this work began on 1 April 2013. My colleagues on the research team were Drs Melanie Selfe and Ealasaid Munro. Our project resulted in a book, *Curators of Cultural Enterprise*.³

Fortuitously, then, while Bob Last was researching and writing this report, the CCPR team was studying CEO. In a double take, while undertaking one study of support for creative businesses, I was asked to join the advisory board of another. What was especially interesting was to observe how the very process of research changed Bob Last's view of what was important.

Bob started his work in quite a conventional place, concerned about securing access to finance for 'creative micro businesses', these (according to the European Commission) being businesses with 10 employees or less than 2 million euros of turnover. 'I wish' is doubtless what many would say in that sector. The starting point was: 'Where could the finance come from and how could better support be devised to help the creative sector in Scotland?' The project moved quite a distance and in many ways can be read as first and foremost a study of the values at play in cultural work - accessed by way of 13 very interesting interviews.

This has resulted in grounded reflections on how these values and beliefs constitute strategies pursued in a 'cultural economy'. Bob Last's choice of this latter term is not

² Philip Schlesinger and Charlotte Waelde, 'Copyright and cultural work', *Innovation – The European Journal of Social Science Research* 25(1): 11-28.

³ Philip Schlesinger, Melanie Selfe and Ealasaid Munro, *Curators of Cultural Enterprise: A Critical Analysis of a Creative Business Intermediary*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. For a detailed discussion of Bob Last's research project, see pp.93-99.

accidental: it is intended to challenge the rote invocation of the ‘creative economy’ – which is a blockage to thought - and to push us to think harder about the non-economic relations that pertain in the sphere of cultural production.

Why is this report important? First, because it can help us to address what is presently a vacuum in policy thinking in Scotland. We have both a confusing landscape of support bodies and a need to articulate a clear vision for cultural policy, which seems increasingly likely to embrace further aspects of public service media. There is the potential, given Scotland’s scale, to do things differently from the rest of the UK, and more inventively. Because, under devolution, cultural policy is a fully autonomous competence of Scottish government, there is nothing to stop the invention of new models here and the trying out of distinctive approaches. The time has come to step away from a long term policy dependency on the orthodoxy of creative economy thinking minted in London some 20 years ago, which still really dominates the scene, both in the UK and internationally.

The broad parameters set by new Labour, and then shared by the coalition governments north and south of the border, are presently largely embraced by the Conservative government in London, and also substantially by the SNP government in Edinburgh. In lieu of wider cultural debate we are routinely bombarded with headline figures about employment and GVA – which are certainly important indicators of economic importance, but they are not the be all and end all. The effect of the overwhelmingly economic shaping of public discussion has been to crowd out more serious and rounded thinking about what goes on in the cultural space, the values of those who work in it, and by implication its valuation by the public. And that is precisely where Bob Last’s work is centred. Writing as a reader of his work, that is one of the central things I take from it.

Creativity, Value and Money was produced at a particular moment in CEO’s life. There was then a drive to engage in advocacy and research. Bodies such as CEO are extremely well placed to draw on their knowledge of how creative work is conducted, given their first hand engagement in practice, and under the right conditions, and with appropriate skills, they could to turn such know-how into research not otherwise available. This would offer something usefully distinct from the more formulaic work

of creative consultancy, which is set up to meet the needs of each passing client. Whether CEO, and bodies like it, can capitalise in future on a special knowledge base of how cultural work is conducted, remains a possibility to be pursued. There can be little doubt, however, that in part at least, the present report's insight derives from its author's own understanding, developed over many years, of what it takes to put deals and creative teams together and the kinds of trade-off such ventures entail.

In *Curators of Cultural Enterprise*, my colleagues and I have questioned the value of the creative industries as an idea. We need to think more in the round about cultural work, in ways that stress non-economic values while, at the same time, recognising, crucially, that people do have to make a living. Although he arrived there by his own route, Bob Last's work is aligned with a strand of academic literature that is concerned with precarious work and the uncertainties and risks of the creative sector. That line of argument is presently the minority report on the creative economy, and likely to be so for the foreseeable future, although there are some signs of an increasing international challenge to the creative economy orthodoxy.

At the CCPR seminar, there was considerable discussion of about language and meaning – some significant questioning of the dominant terms of reference, sometimes from surprising quarters. The responses made in our debate about *Creativity, Value and Money* showed, on the one hand, a concern with aesthetics, emotion, and intricate practice, and on the other hand, the need to deal realistically with what funders best understand, which is the measurement of outcomes. There is no ducking the need for accountability where public money is used to intervene in the public interest. But perhaps it is now time to open up a new debate on what are the most sensible terms for this exercise.

One resonant and recurrent line of discussion at our seminar concerned the potentialities and the particularities of Scotland. There was a repeated stress by many participants on how cultural endeavours might be made to work for a general interest. This means challenging the dominance of a conception of creativity that emphasises individualism and individual benefit – no small matter. Addressing this question might presage the start of some new thinking.

It is precisely to encourage such further debate that, in collaboration with CEO, this report is being published as a CREATE Working Paper. For the past four years, along with my principal work in CCPR, I have hung one of my academic hats in CREATE on whose behalf I welcome the chance to give an airing to this thoughtful report.

CREATE is a key, international locus for analytical work on the creative economy and self-evidently an appropriate intellectual home for Bob Last's work. Although his study is firmly grounded in creatives' experience of working in Scotland, readers will readily recognise that the issues he considers undoubtedly transcend national boundaries.

Bionote

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