



Key Issues in the Arts and Entertainment Industry

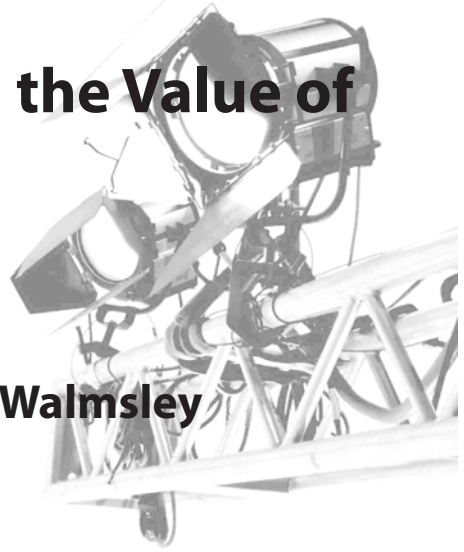
Edited by Ben Walmsley

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Assessing the Value of the Arts



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Introduction

Every art contributes to the greatest art of all, the art of living
(Bertolt Brecht, 1964)

This chapter presents a general introduction to the contemporary concern of public value in relation to the arts, and particularly how this relates to the concept of social impact – an issue that has dominated the public funding agenda for the arts in the UK and beyond since the 1990s. What follows is an analysis of how the public value of the arts has been framed and assessed in recent times, and how this reflects adaptations to changes in the political climate.

This analysis will be illustrated through a brief historical and conceptual overview of attempts to capture public value, followed by a review and critical evaluation of some models and frameworks that have attempted to capture the benefits of the arts. The challenges of assessing and measuring value will then be further discussed through a case study on the National Theatre of Scotland's production, *Black Watch*, to demonstrate the reductive nature of traditional models and point towards the need for developing more nuanced and reflexive approaches to assessing value, informed (and preferably led) by the practice of the art in question. We can call this a 'situational' approach to research.

The chapter therefore argues for approaches informed by these principles. Drawing parallels with themes from Performance Studies, it suggests that greater account needs to be given to *context* and the conditions of the context, including its social formation and relations, which requires reflexivity and

ethnographic analysis. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the dialectical conditions of value (as both instrumental *and* intrinsic), particularly emphasising the spatial dimension of practice, which emphasises that the arts are not just situated in a temporal context of ideological shifts, but are active players in the making of value as a practice of cultural production. This spatial dimension is brought into being as a practice of social relations through articulations of inter-subjective values, thereby broadening the dialogue on the subject of public value and considering the productive value of the arts as a wider practice of living.

Benefits or value?

‘[I]nstrumentalism’ should not be just be seen as a recent and unwelcome encroachment of politics in the aesthetic sphere. It should, perhaps, be seen more as a mode of understanding, which, far from being peripheral, has actually been central to the long, intellectual tradition that we have traced. ... The arts have been a tool to enforce and express power in social relations for as long as the arts themselves have been around.

(Belfiore and Bennett, 2008: 190, 194)

If you take a scan through an industry magazine such as *Arts Professional* (www.artsprofessional.co.uk), you will frequently find commentary or reportage on what the arts are good for (health, justice, social inclusion, and sometimes just sheer output or even making money). This is understandable in an industry magazine. But it is also representative of a defensive stance of advocacy imposed on the arts by tough (and increasingly tougher) funding regimes. Advocacy, then, is frequently about benefits and is actually a value judgement, depending on the value system by which we measure what is a ‘good’ outcome.

The point here is that the arts are very rarely measured in terms of anything other than a so-called ‘instrumental’ outcome (such as alignment with broader public policy aims including making money, which is often the most valued outcome). In their book *The Social Impact of the Arts*, Belfiore and Bennet (2008) present a robust scholarly argument on the intellectual history of the theme at large here. They conclude that there is something of a false dichotomy in the either/or debate on the instrumental and intrinsic value of the arts, and that instrumental arguments have always been made for the arts (citing Plato’s *Republic* as one of the first). The broad inference is that instrumental and intrinsic values are mutually informing and reflective of socio-cultural relations over time.

Chapter extract

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