NET WORK

ETHICS AND VALUES IN WEB DESIGN

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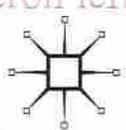
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spread beyond the web, they have been subjected to greater scrutiny. In this chapter, I examine web designers' responses to three forms of free labour/user activity which are widely debated and which elicit quite different responses: users producing content for the websites they visit, attempts to crowdsource web design through speculative work competitions, and pro bono work. I highlight the ethical characteristics of these divergent responses. In **Chapter 8: Narrow Fame: Micro-Celebrities Making Good of Conditions Not of their Own Making**, I focus on the reputation-building activities of web design's micro-celebrities, arguing that, whilst the encroachment of celebrity culture into web design does have some troubling consequences, such as the glamorization of a lifestyle which is out of reach of most ordinary designers, some celebrities put their self-brands to ethical use, through the promotion of web standards, accessible design and other practices that lead to a more inclusive web, and through additional forms of 'making good' which are discussed in the chapter. Thus, I argue that, at least some of the time, web design gurus make good of the conditions of hyper-promotionalism which are not of their own making.

The final chapter, entitled **Hope and the Ethical Future of Web Design**, reflects, as the title suggests, on the future ethics of the field. But, ahead of these empirical chapters, I continue to frame my discussion of the work of web designers, first with a theoretical and then with a historical chapter.

2
A Framework for Thinking about Web Design

'Invoked rhetorically ... but rarely studied': what do we know about the work of web designers?

Part design, part media production, web design rarely features in discussions of either field. Web designers do not surface much in debate about media work, nor do they make a regular appearance in studies of design, unless specifically about digital design (such as Leung, 2008). Despite being heralded as 'the poster boys and girls for the "Brave New World of work"' (Gill, 2007, p. 12), web designers and other new media workers are rarely studied, as the subtitle to this section, quoting Rosalind Gill's words (Gill, 2002), suggests.

However, although relatively little has been written about the work of web designers, ideas which are relevant to an analysis of web design work can be traced in different bodies of literature. Scholarship about working in the new media sector, which encompasses web design amongst other fields such as digital post-production, after-effects, animation and gaming and other kinds of web work is closest to the object of study of this book, and some of its conclusions speak to the experiences of web designers. Likewise, studies of the cultural, creative and media industries produce insight about the character of work in these fields that can be mapped onto web design. Finally and most broadly, scholarship on work in networked societies and knowledge economies is also relevant.

This chapter proceeds to map out a picture of web design work, drawing on these fields and pulling together what is known about the work of web designers from other research. Predominant themes include: the precarious character of (new) media work; the increasing importance of networks and networking in this field; the passionate

commitment to work articulated or demonstrated by Net workers and other cultural labourers; the instrumental significance of creativity in the 'new economy'; and the kinds of self-exploitation that result from these conditions. A small number of scholars have also attended to the inequalities and exclusions that can be traced in new media work (such as Gill, 2002, 2007, 2010). These themes have multiple interconnections, and there are many ways in which a discussion of them could be structured. In this chapter, I talk first about precarity and networking; then about passion, creativity and self-exploitation; and finally about inequalities.

The picture of precarious, networked and creative work and of impassioned and self-governing workers that emerges from this body of scholarship certainly pertains to web design. But, as I suggested in the Introduction, a little more is needed in order to address the ethics and values that underlie some aspects of web design work. In the previous chapter, I pointed out how three particular scholars of cultural work have begun to consider these issues – Banks (2006, 2007) and Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010). This chapter provides a more detailed overview of their work than was possible in the book's short Introduction. But the proposal that cultural workers bring ethical considerations and moral values into their labour processes takes us beyond cultural industries scholarship, to consider the work of other writers who have highlighted the ethical and moral character of a range of activities, only some of them work-related. These include, amongst others, Gibson-Graham (2006), O'Neill (1998), Sennett (2009) and Sayer (2004). I discuss their work in the second half of the chapter, in which I reflect on the contribution this literature can make to producing a framework for thinking about web design.

A portrait of web design

Networked precarity

In literature about new media work, the precariousness of such labour has been a dominant theme. Cultural workers of all kinds, and new media workers in particular, are said to embody the experience of precarity through their widespread experience of insecure portfolio work, low pay and long working hours. In the introduction to a special issue of *Theory, Culture and Society* on precarity and cultural work (2008), Gill and Pratt argue that artists, new media workers and other cultural labourers represent a 'precariat', a neologism conflating the terms precarity and proletariat (ibid., p. 3).

The notion of precarity has its roots in the converging fields of autonomous Marxist thought and *Operaismo* political activism (Gill and Pratt, 2008). The precarity movement emerged from the struggles of temporary and flexible workers in Continental Europe, as labourers in all forms of insecure, temporary, casual work came together in an attempt to identify commonalities through which to develop new political strategies. The concept of precarity was mobilized in order to provide an opportunity to move beyond individualized self-regulation and towards collective political action (Ehrenstein, 2007). In this sense, precarity is not only a problem – 'the oppressive face of post-Fordist capitalism' (Neilson and Rossiter, 2005, p. 1). It is also a possibility, 'offering the potential for new subjectivities, new socialities and new kinds of politics' (Gill and Pratt, 2008, p. 3).

Much of the writing about new media work focuses on the precarious conditions in this sector. Gill herself is one of few academics to study the new media workforce, and her research confirms that such work is indeed short-term, precarious and insecure (Gill, 2002, 2007, 2010). Precarity and insecurity manifest themselves in various material forms: in the preponderance of project-based and freelance work in the new media sector (Christopherson, 2004; Henniger and Gottschall, 2007); in other 'risky' conditions such as portfolio work patterns, international competition and foreshortened careers (Gottschall and Kroos, 2006; Neff *et al.*, 2005); in the alleged fast-changing skill set needed to work in this field and the difficulties workers subsequently face in keeping up (Kotamraju, 2002); and in the flexibility associated with the diverse roles that new media workers may be expected to carry out (Betzelt and Gottschall, 2004; Damarin, 2006). Very few studies contradict this depiction of new media work. Mayer-Ahuja and Wolf's (2007) case study of twelve German Internet companies, however, challenges this picture. Despite expectations of creative tasks and flexible employment relationships in the sector, Mayer-Ahuja and Wolf found that the reality is often more conventional: routine tasks, stable employment, and formal, hierarchical relationships of control were the norm in the companies they studied.

For some commentators, there is reason to be optimistic about precarious working patterns. Deuze, for example, drawing on the findings of Kalleberg (2000), proposes that many workers in high-skilled, knowledge-based sectors welcome precarity, associating it with autonomy, the ability to develop and be valued for wide and varied skills, and reduced dependence on a single employer (Deuze, 2007). Consequently, what Deuze describes as the contingency of work, dependent on a fluctuating

global economy, consumer behaviour and technological change, is not necessarily cause for pessimism or critique. Instead, he states, when the work runs out, 'we do not form or join unions any more, we simply move to a different area, city or country when we become dissatisfied with our working conditions' (ibid., p. 13).

Of course, precarity is not just a condition of new media work. All work – and indeed life – has become increasingly precarious, writers like Boltanski and Chiapello (2007), Ross (2009) and Sennett (1998, 2006) have argued. But unlike Deuze, these writers are critical of the consequences of precarious working conditions, as the title of Sennett's earlier book, *The Corrosion of Character: personal consequences of work in the new capitalism* (1998) makes clear. One of the things that Sennett laments about this precarious working culture is a decline in the value of deep-rooted skills, and a rise in the importance of surface skills. The increasing significance of adaptability and flexibility in the workplace is one embodiment of this shift, as these skills are essential for working in precarious times, replacing the deeper skills of the craftsperson, learnt and refined over long periods. Sennett questions the extent to which flexibility is the virtue it is proclaimed to be, failing to see how it could help to avert the corrosion of character. He writes:

> will flexibility with all the risks and uncertainties it entails in fact remedy the human evil it sets out to attack? Even supposing routine has a pacifying effect on character, just how is flexibility to make a more engaged human being? (Sennett, 2006, p. 45)

Clearly, for Sennett, surface skills like flexibility do not 'make a more engaged human being', and I say more about Sennett's views on skill later in this chapter. For now, I turn to one strategy for dealing with risk and uncertainty in flexible conditions, which Sennett also questions: networking. The argument that culture has become increasingly characterized by the network is well rehearsed (Castells, 1996) and networks are undoubtedly central to the labour of web design, but *networking* has also been identified as a core and sometimes problematic feature of new media work. In a widely cited article, Wittel (2001) identifies network sociality as a significant practice amongst new media workers, because networks provide a form of support in the intrinsically insecure new media industries. As Christopherson (2004) argues, networking has experienced such expansion *because of* the uncertainties of cultural labour. Network sociality is defined by Wittel as a matrix of fleeting and dynamic encounters, a response to the transient and

disembedded conditions of late capitalism, to be contrasted with the stability and embeddedness of community, or the durability of narrative sociality. Under network sociality, argues Wittel, 'working practices become increasingly networking practices' (2001, p. 53). Wittel draws on a broad range of resources to make these points, including: the work of other researchers; the elevation of networking and relationship-building in trade press; and his own empirical research, in which he witnessed a proliferation of networking events, and new media workers perceiving networking *as* work. Out of these empirical observations, he develops the concept of network sociality, 'based on individualization and deeply embedded in technology; [...] informational, ephemeral but intense, and [...] characterized by an assimilation of work and play' (2001, p. 71).

Wittel's analysis of the rising importance of networking is less pessimistic than Sennett's, for whom the growth of networks in the workplace is indicative of a number of ills at work today. According to Sennett (2006), this results in a series of losses: of institutional loyalty, of informal trust and of institutional knowledge, none of which are valued in flexible organizations. Other scholars, writing from a feminist perspective, point to another set of concerns relating to the proliferation of networking in new media industries (such as Gill, 2002, 2007, 2010; Gregg, 2008; Perrons, 2003). In much of her writing on new media labour, Gill points to the predominance of white men in the workforce, something that I also suggested was a prominent feature of web design in the previous chapter. Gill argues that the very characteristics of work in this sector that are celebrated by some writers result in gender inequalities. For example, securing the next project through existing, informal networks is likely to reproduce existing, unequal gender representation in the new media workforce. Likewise, Gregg problematizes the 'compulsory sociality' (Gregg, 2008) of Friday night drinks, informal networking events and the like, which are easier for single men to engage in than for women shouldering the usual unequal, gendered division of domestic labour. Given that the location of such networking activities is usually pubs, and pubs are very racialized spaces, such phenomena also have racial dimensions, as Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) point out (see also Christopherson, 2004).

For other writers, technologically connected networks contain the possibility of creative political action. Neilson and Rossiter state that, under precarious conditions, 'we find the logic of the network unleashed' (2005, p. 1) – the importance of relationships is foregrounded, and it becomes imperative to consider 'the operation of networks'. Thus,

networks, networking and network sociality are seen, on the one hand, as representative of the ills of working in the new economy – the corrosion of character, the erosion of deep knowledge, of craft, and the gendered and racialized dependence on pre-existing informal connections in order to secure work. On the other hand, they hold the potential for transformative action. Whilst such potential can, without doubt, be overstated, a particular version of the transformative potential of networks draws ethical individuals to web design, as I suggested in the Introduction. In the case of web design, this potential is embedded in the networked web technologies that are the tools of the trade and at web designers' fingertips daily.

Work 'you just can't help doing': passion, creativity or self-exploitation?

Another central theme in literature about (new) media work is the affective, emotional and impassioned character of such labour. Terranova was one of the first to note this, when, in 2000, she described the unpaid labour of AOL's army of volunteers as *wilfully* given and enjoyed (Terranova, 2000). A passionate commitment to Net technologies, culture and community, and to the transformative potential of networks discussed in the previous section, leads Net workers to give their labour willingly, whether it is paid or unpaid, so the argument goes. Charting the commitment to work that can be found in this sector, Ross's (2003) study identifies how the 'no collar' work mentality which emerged in Internet companies was strongly associated with the ideological origins of the web:

> The best of these companies grew out of the distinctive community of early Internet users, hackers, technohobbyists, and Web enthusiasts, each bound by a fierce loyalty to shareware, freedom of information, and the ethos of cooperation. (Ross, 2003, p. 12)

Such origins went hand-in-hand with libertarian anti-authoritarianism, which led to working conditions which Ross characterizes as 'the employment equivalent of the Big Rock Candy Mountain', including: good financial compensation and an accompanying range of benefits like stock options; permissive workplaces comprised of no collars, foosball tables and other emblems of nonconformity; self-management, autonomy and collegiality; work that was 'challenging, stimulating, almost irresistible'. This was a type of work which, to quote one of the participants in Ross's research, 'you just couldn't help doing' (ibid., p. 10).

Other writers have also noted the passionate commitment of the new media workforce to their labour. Gill's study of Dutch new media workers, for example, found an extraordinary degree of enthusiasm for work amongst its research subjects (Gill, 2007; see also Christopherson, 2004; Neff *et al.*, 2005). Web designers' passion for web design has also been noted in the large-scale surveys undertaken by AListApart. In each of the three years that the survey had been carried out at the time of writing, of the 30,000 or so respondents, close to 100 per cent say that they are excited by the field, with more than 40 per cent feeling like this very frequently, around 30 per cent frequently, and around 20 per cent once in a while (AListApart 2007, 2009, 2010). In 2007, only 1.4 per cent of participating web workers claimed that they were not excited by the field; in 2008, 1.6 per cent gave this answer; and in 2009, 2.5 per cent did.

The intense passion that web professionals feel for their work derives from a sense that this is 'good work', to use Hesmondhalgh and Baker's terminology (2010), as well as from their commitment to the potential of network culture. As Ross points out, new media work is frequently autonomous and stimulating, leading to interest, involvement and self-realization, all of which are components of Hesmondhalgh and Baker's model of good work. This is exemplified in the comments of participants in Gill's Dutch study, one of whom told her that new media work was 'like being paid for your hobby' (Gill, 2007, p. 14). But such views are not unique to web designers – throughout the creative and cultural industries, there is something of a disavowal that the activity of producing culture can be characterized as labour at all, because it is so playful and creative.

Indeed, creativity has assumed increasing importance in literature about the cultural industries and in related policy (Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009; Deuze, 2010; Florida, 2002, 2006). It is not just the work practices of creatives that have simultaneously been appropriated into mainstream economic activity and subjected to academic scrutiny, however, but also their lifestyles. In a process that Ross (2003) defines as 'the industrialization of bohemia', the rhythms of creative life have become the norm in new media companies like those he studied. Flexibility, adaptability and uneven, project-based working patterns, sometimes resulting in working eighty-hour weeks, are elements of creative life which have migrated seamlessly into new media work. Ross describes this phenomenon as follows:

> Many of those who formed the backbone of the Internet sector had training in the arts and brought [...] their experience of sacrificial

labour and therefore a willingness to work in low-grade office environments, solving creative problems for long and often unsocial hours in return for deferred rewards. This aptitude was easy to exploit in companies that operated on seventy-hour workweeks and offered compensation partly through stock options. Geeksploitation among programmers in the suburban information technology (IT) and software sectors soon found its urban new media match. (Ross, 2003, p. 10)

There are, then, hidden costs to the humane 'employment equivalent of the Big Rock Candy Mountain', some of which Ross hints at here: long working hours, few promotion opportunities, excessive individual shouldering of responsibility and risk and no real power, despite the illusion of it – the downside of the heterarchical working arrangements that Wittel *et al.* (2002) describe elsewhere. What's more, in sectors which trade in knowledge and creativity, all thought and inventiveness are subject to potential monetization: 'Perhaps the most insidious occupational hazard of no-collar work is that it can enlist employees' freest thoughts and impulses in the service of salaried time' (2003, p. 19), Ross writes. You quite literally cannot help dedicating your energies to this work, and you do it all of the time. Perhaps most seriously, Ross argues that feel-good, *humane* workplaces of the kind he encountered in his research appear to have won out over *just* workplaces, with the usual protections and securities that exist in organized workforces, or where there are clear boundaries between labour and not-labour.

No collar working conditions are managed individually – Ross argues that the creatives working in the Internet industries brought 'their own maverick brand of individualism' (2003, p. 10) to the field, as well as their self-sacrificing practices. The individual management of employment in the humane workplace is reflective of the increasing individualization of work, itself symptomatic of individualized life, which has been widely charted, for example by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) and Giddens (1991). Sennett illuminates the experience of individualization at work nicely with two narratives in *The Corrosion of Character* (Sennett, 1998). The first concerns the character Rico, who surfaces throughout the book to illustrate the changing nature of work, as his experiences in the information economy are contrasted with the more stable experiences of his father, who worked throughout his life at a bakery. Rico assumes individual responsibility for the unemployment he experiences as a result of company downsizing. He accepts the need for companies to make operations more efficient, and does not see the

point of fighting redundancy. According to Sennett, he 'treats uncertainty and risk-taking as challenges at work' (1998, p. 28). The second narrative is about a group of dismissed IBM workers and the stories that they, in turn, told themselves about the reasons for their dismissal. Sennett tracks how these narratives gradually became self-blaming. First, the workers talked about how the company had betrayed them. After some time, they, like Rico, came to see the company as the victim of external forces such as the globalization of the economy, compelled to make efficiency cuts. Finally, they (and again, Rico) assumed individual responsibility for their experiences at work, seeing their redundancy as their own doing: they could have done a better job of reskilling, or bailed out themselves and set up as entrepreneurs. The discursive repertoires that are mobilized here are illustrative of the individual assumption of responsibility for taking care of the conditions of work, and for failure at work.

There is an intimate relationship between individualization, self-blame and self-exploitation: the individual assumption of responsibility is a prerequisite for the latter two practices. Angela McRobbie applies this model to cultural workers in her article 'Clubs to Companies: notes on the decline of political culture in speeded up creative worlds' (McRobbie, 2002b), in which, as the title suggests, she adopts a pessimistic tone, stating that, in the speeded up cultural sector, individualization and looking out for the self have become intensified. As a result, there is 'little possibility of a politics of the workplace' (p. 519), in part because there is no fixed workplace – instead there is network sociality (Wittel, 2001). Workers can, therefore, only find individual ways of coping with structural difficulties. In these conditions, individualized self-government, at its most extreme, becomes either self-blame or self-exploitation, which is defined by Hesmondhalgh and Baker as a process 'whereby workers become so enamoured with their jobs that they push themselves to the limits of their physical and emotional endurance' (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010, p. 6). Neff *et al.* also see the new media workforce's passionate commitment to their work as the source of their self-exploitation: it is because work like web design is perceived as hip, cool, creative and desirable that the employees of the new media industries tolerate their exploitative working conditions and sometimes self-exploit (Neff *et al.*, 2005). This is Ross's argument – 'geeksploitation' is tolerated because of the passionate commitment to creative work that exists in the creative industries. To paraphrase him, new media workers recognize that their workstyles suck, yet simultaneously get a thrill out of them; they willingly give themselves over to such self-exploitation.

Likewise, Terranova's evocative terminology of 'NetSlaves' working in '24-7 electronic sweatshops' and feeling the 'pain of being burned by digital media' (Terranova, 2000, p. 33) is rich with the language of self-exploitation.

These writers make sense of (new) media workers' tolerance of their own exploitation through the passionate attachment to their work that cultural labourers avow. In my research, there has certainly been wide-spread confirmation of a fervent commitment to web design work of the kind that has been highlighted by other writers. But, whilst the creativity which sometimes characterizes web design helps to make it a pleasurable line of work, this does not fully explain web designers' intense emotional attachments to their work. I have suggested that this exists not only because of web design's coolness and creativity, but also because of an attachment to the idealized vision of the web as a democratic medium. Ross (2003) also recognizes this attachment, as does Gill (2007). This vision draws people interested in ethical production to work on the web, to engage in ethical web design practices, and to do so under conditions that some consider exploitative, but which might also be experienced as genuinely pleasurable. At the end of this chapter, I reflect more on ethical production practices and the pleasures they bring, but first I point to some of the inequalities and exclusions that have been highlighted in some of the literature on new media work.

Inequalities in web design

The literature discussed so far in this chapter tells us a lot about the working conditions of media workers, amongst whom web designers can be counted; indeed, some of it addresses web design directly. Drawing on her own extensive studies, as well as the research of others, Gill proposes that the following ten features can be said to characterize web design and other new media work:

1. Love of the work
2. Entrepreneurialism
3. Short-term, precarious, insecure work
4. Low pay
5. Long hours cultures
6. Keeping up
7. DIY learning
8. Informality
9. Exclusions and inequalities
10. No future (Gill, 2010).

Most of these characteristics have already been discussed: short-term and insecure work, long hours cultures, informality, the inability to imagine what work will be like in the future and an obsession with keeping up are all consequences of the precarious working conditions addressed above. The long hours culture is confirmed by AListApart's surveys, which have found that close to 70 per cent of respondents work more than forty hours per week (AListApart 2007, 2009, 2010). Love of the work has been discussed at some length as well, and is linked via creativity to entrepreneurialism, as the desire to innovate, create, pioneer and be autonomous leads some new media workers to go freelance, set up their own enterprises or otherwise work independently of an employer.

But some of the features of Gill's list deserve critical attention, especially where they hint at inequalities, such as the issue of pay. Gill argues that 'most people in new media work for very low pay' (Gill, 2010), although Ross (2003) and Batt *et al.* (2000), researching in the US, found the opposite to be true. Apparently high hourly rates do not reflect real income, Gill suggests, as freelancers often underestimate the amount of time required to complete a job, or reduce these rates in order to secure work for organizations with which their ethical sympathies lie, a practice significant to the argument of this book. However, a small-scale survey I carried out with forty-nine web designers in England in 2009 found that only 4.3 per cent earned less than £20,000, and 36.8 per cent earned £40,000 or more. This compares favourably with the Office of National Statistics Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, which found that, in the same year, the median annual gross earnings in the UK were £20,801 (Office of National Statistics, 2009). AListApart's most recent survey at the time of writing found that just under 40 per cent of respondents earned less than $40,000, 25 per cent earned $40,000–$59,999 and 35 per cent earned over $60,000, with a weighted average of just over $52,000 (AListApart, 2010). Again, this compares reasonably well with the national average wage index for the USA, which stood at $40,711.61 in 2009 (Social Security Online, 2009). Thus, the *perception* of low wage by web designers and other new media workers seems to say as much about the salary expectations of a well-educated middle class as they do about actual income, given that stated wages compare so reasonably with the lower-waged sectors of the workforce. This in turn suggests that web design is not necessarily a field with consistently low pay levels, as Gill proposes, although significant numbers of web workers do earn low incomes.

But, even if it cannot be argued that web designers are low-paid workers, there are other ways in which the field is marked by exclusions and

inequalities. Gill is one author who has repeatedly articulated these, as I pointed out in the Introduction; her concern about the exclusions that result from securing employment through informal networks has also been discussed in this chapter. In the article from which the above list is taken, she proposes that 'new media workplaces have turned out to be characterized by a number of entrenched and all too old-fashioned patterns of inequality relating to gender, age, race and ethnicity and disability' (Gill, 2010, p. 255). She also adds class to this list, arguing that the middle classes are much more likely to have the different kinds of capital necessary to take up cultural work. These include social, cultural and psychic capital and, most importantly, economic capital. The prerequisite need for certain basic economic and material conditions to be met before one can embark on a creative career is addressed nicely in the research of Kirsten Forkert, who asks this simple question: what material conditions make it possible to have a creative career? (Forkert, 2010).

Gill's claim about gender and racial inequalities in the new media industries is substantiated by Skillset's Creative Media Workforce Surveys for the UK. Figures for 2006, for example, point out that only 12 per cent of the computer games workforce are female and only 3 per cent are from ethnic minorities. The figures are a little better for digital content are from ethnic minorities. The figures are a little better for digital post-production, where 21 per cent are female and 7 per cent are from ethnic minority communities (Skillset, 2006). But of greater concern to Gill and to other writers are the ways in which the so-called autonomy, flexibility and informality of the sector reproduce existing inequalities in new ways. Informal hiring practice is one example of this. Another is the way that flexible, round-the-clock working excludes people with caring responsibilities, most likely to be women. Not surprisingly, Gill (2007) found that very few of the small numbers of women working in new media have children, and this has also been the case in my own research. (Other writers who explore gender inequalities in the new media sector include Gottschall and Kroos, 2006; Mayerhofer and Mokre, 2007; Perrons, 2003, 2007).

It is worth digressing from this literature review for a moment, as the biographical case study of Noori, the new media graduate whom I introduced in the previous chapter, is illustrative of the gender, class and racial inequalities that Gill discusses. After graduation with a good degree in new media in 2001, Noori's career path has been uneven – she has experienced periods of employment, self-employment and unemployment. She was a part-time lecturer for three years after graduating, after which she set up her own business as a web designer, offering

her services specifically to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) run by women and people from ethnic minority communities. At the time of embarking on this initiative, she described her experience of studying for a degree as a transformation 'from a stay at home Asian mother to a go-getting entrepreneur', comparing herself to the stages of a butterfly:

> while I studied [...] I was in the caterpillar stage, and while I was teaching I was at the chrysalis stage, and now I have opened my wings and am ready to fly to all the different flowers that I can. (Noori, email communication)

However, despite the optimism that this poignant analogy reveals, her web design business was not a success:

> I didn't make a huge success of it. I gave away my services for free, or those who paid couldn't afford much, so I charged them less than £300. The thing is that with the emergence of ecommerce, everyone wants a dynamic site, rather than a static one, which is where my skills lie. (Noori, email communication)

So Noori diversified, running courses to help the long-term unemployed start businesses. But her husband insisted that she should give up her part-time work to dedicate her energies to searching for a full-time job. Although she did not agree with him – 'My argument was that getting a full-time position was hard dressing the way I did and being one of the few Asian women who were applying for these types of jobs, and it was far better to stay in a place and work your way up' – she went along with his request. She was proven right, failing to secure full-time work and experiencing serious financial hardship along the way. The experience made her determined to follow her own instincts, and she immediately made contact with a women's business centre, which paid her for manipulating and uploading photographs to a website, and which continues to employ her to this day, on an occasional basis and in a range of capacities, some unrelated to web design.

Noori would be the first to admit that she is not the best web designer in the world and that this may account to some extent for her limited success in the field. She also argues that delivering self-development training courses at the women's business centre 'fits' her more than web design. But I would argue that structural inequalities which extend far beyond web design and other media industries mean that the door

to this career has always been partially closed to Noori. The particular gender relations that she lived at home did not provide her with the supportive conditions, material, social or psychic, that are needed to endure a period of instability and eventually establish a successful freelance career. There are many successful web designers with skills in 'static' web design – that is, HTML and CSS – who contract web developers to provide the programming skills necessary to develop dynamic websites. The combination of Noori's gender, racial and cultural 'difference', visible in the way she dresses, set her apart from the mainstream of London's emergent web design community, limiting her access to the pool of talent that would complement her skills. Consequently, it was difficult for her to survive as a web designer, even in the 'ghetto' of women's and ethnic minorities' SMEs. Thus, despite Noori's willingness to assume individual responsibility for her career path, I suggest there are other factors at play.

Noori's story reveals how the structural barriers to accessing creative careers are lived emotionally, sometimes in the intimate spaces of the home. It also points to the kinds of conditions which prohibit the take up of such careers. As such, it illustrates the arguments made by Gill, Perrons, Christopherson and others about the gender and racial inequalities that exist in the new media industries. But it also reveals another issue which is at the heart of this book: the ethical inflections of web design practice. Noori targeted her web design services at organizations established by and for people who sometimes experience marginalization: women and ethnic minorities. What's more, she gave away her services for free, or charged very little for them. Whilst this could be viewed as bad business sense, it could also be read as an ethical practice, deriving from Noori's commitment to doing what she could to enhance the digital inclusion of these marginal groups.

Indeed, one of the main purposes of this book is to add to Gill's list a consideration of the ethics and values that underpin web design, a specific area of new media work. The next section of this chapter provides an overview of some of the literature which highlights the ethical and moral character of practices in cultural production and beyond. It does not review whole histories or philosophical traditions in the fields of ethics and morality – I am neither philosopher nor historian, and such a project would be beyond the scope of this book. Rather, I bring into dialogue a number of writers who have emphasized the ethics and values that underlie a range of activities. First, I discuss those writers who have, in one way or another, drawn attention to the relationship between ethics and economies, in order to highlight the existence of

this relationship. Second, I discuss attempts to understand the roots of ethical practices in the cultural industries, as these serve to highlight the affective and emotional character of ethical action. Next, I point out how understandings of craft as a caring practice have much in common with conceptualizations of cultural work as underpinned by ethics and values. Finally I reflect on the rewards of cultural production, in order to propose that the attractions of cultural work do not always reflect an internalization of governmental control, but also sometimes derive from the possibility for ethical, moral action therein.

Ethics and values in cultural work

Ethical economies

In her opening keynote speech at the Crossroads Cultural Studies conference in Hong Kong in June 2010, Kathleen Gibson likened the scholar of culture to Tubby Passmore, the lead character from David Lodge's novel *Therapy* (2002). Despite having a good, well-paid job, a stable marriage, a fast car and other reasons to be contented, Passmore 'feels pretty depressed most of the time'. In Gibson's humorous comparison, despite an abundance of activities that should give the left-leaning academic some hope about the state of our world, such as World Social Forums, social movements from Reclaim the Streets to the Zapatista uprising in Mexico, and slum dweller and migrant worker initiatives in India, the culture scholar 'feels pretty critical most of the time'. Through this analogy Gibson named what some commentators consider to be a disease of left scholarship: extreme critique, characterized by the tendency to seek out the corrupting forces of capitalism behind every apparently moral or ethical action.

The comparison between Tubby Passmore and the left-leaning scholar is an entertaining embellishment of Gibson's argument in *A Postcapitalist Politics*, written collaboratively with Julie Graham under the pen name J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006). Against the deep-seated negativity of left scholarship, Gibson-Graham outline their argument for a more optimistic outlook in what they describe, in the first words of their preface, as 'a hopeful book'. The roots of their optimism lie in their witnessing of 'myriad projects of alternative economic activism' (ibid., p. xxi), which form the empirical heart of their book. These include a community partnering project in Australia, the Mondragon cooperative complex in Spain and collective community economies activities in the Philippines. Such projects are defined by Gibson-Graham as post-capitalist, in that they aim to build economies which differ from capitalist

models, to move beyond capitalism and 'take back the economy'. Post-capitalist economic activities are characterized by a diverse range of features, such as: alternative currencies; barter; in-kind payment; socially responsible firms; gift-giving; volunteering; cooperative and communal structures; self-provisioning (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Within economic projects which incorporate some of these features, the 'politics of possibility' which is at the heart of Gibson-Graham's vision emerges, as individual and formerly disempowered actors find new ways to exercise power, thus finding the grounds for a 'new political imaginary' (ibid., p. xxi).

According to Gibson-Graham, alternative economic models exist at the most microscopic levels:

> When a meal is cooked for a household of kids, when a cooperative sets its wage levels, when a food seller adjusts her price for one customer and not another, when a farmer allows gleaners access to his fields, when a green firm agrees to use higher-priced recycled paper, when a self-employed computer programmer takes public holidays off, when a not-for-profit enterprise commits to 'buying local', some recognition of economic co-implication, interdependency, and social connection is actively occurring. These practices involve ethical considerations and political decisions that constitute social and economic being. (Gibson-Graham, 2006, pp. 82–3)

Here, and in the more ambitious alternative economies projects that they describe, they point to the *ethics* that pervade such practices. For Gibson-Graham, ethics are defined as 'the continual exercising, in the face of the need to decide, of a choice to be/act/think in a certain way' (ibid., p. xxvii). Thus, the projects which cause Gibson-Graham to be hopeful represent ethical economic practices, in which individuals and groups choose actions which embody the belief, captured in the motto of the World Social Forum, that 'another world is possible'. After all, as Gibson-Graham note, 'the *freedom to act*... is at the core of a politics of possibility' (ibid., p. xxvi).

A number of other writers have also been concerned to highlight the ethical character of (some) economic activity. In a paper entitled 'Moral economy' (2004), Sayer uses the terms morals and ethics interchangeably, taking them to mean the 'norms (formal and informal), values and dispositions regarding behaviour that affect others, and they imply certain conceptions of the good' (ibid., p. 3). This concurs with Arvidsson

and Pietersen's definition of ethics, in Aristotelian terms, as 'obtaining the good life' (2009, p. 26):

> To behave ethically is to subordinate one's inclinations to a rational ethical rule: to do what we would all agree would be desirable for the good of human kind. (ibid.)

Proponents of the moral economy, like Sayer, assert that 'economic behaviour itself involves and depends on valuation, most obviously of use-values and exchange-values, but ethical and moral valuation is always also either present or latent' (2004, p. 4). Markets and associated economic behaviour 'both depend on and influence moral/ethical sentiments, norms and behaviours and have ethical implications', he writes (ibid., p. 2). The proposal that the economy is imbued with moral considerations is located in a tradition concerned with the relationship between the economic and the cultural, and between economic practices, moral order and social good. Taking a different approach, O'Neill argues that market economies are not constrained by ethical goals, but proceed independently of these, and are therefore amoral and 'ethically indefensible'. Non-market economies, by contrast, are constrained by social custom and need, and O'Neill's aim in *The Market: Ethics, Knowledge and Politics* is 'to defend non-market associations in a world increasingly dominated by market norms' (1998, p. 177). In market societies, a range of economic and non-economic practices play a role in economic life. The scientific community, for example, is a non-market community whose products are central to the economy, yet such practices rarely get acknowledged for the economic role they play. Arvidsson and Pietersen argue that the separation they believe previously existed between economics and ethics is becoming increasingly blurred as we move towards an ethical economy, characterized by a range of contemporary practices similar to those discussed by Gibson-Graham, such as growing concern with sustainable consumption, environmentalism and networked social production.

For many of these writers, there is a close relationship between affective and ethical practices. In ethical economies, write Arvidsson and Pietersen, 'what creates value is precisely what Aristotle described as the essence of ethics: the construction of affectively significant ties (of *philia*) that make – however temporary – productive community possible' (2009, p. 29). Arvidsson and Pietersen argue that ethics are constituted at least in part by the production of affective social relations;

productive activity which *affects* people's lives is ethical. Likewise, for Gibson-Graham, the ethical choice to 'be/act/think in a certain way' is also an affective and caring choice – ethical choices are made because people care. Similarly, Sayer draws on Nussbaum's (2003) understanding of emotions as 'highly discerning evaluative judgments regarding matters affecting or felt to be likely to affect actors' well being' (Sayer, 2004, p. 7) to point to the close relationship between cognition and emotion, and the coexistent economic and psychological dependence of human beings on each other.

Gibson-Graham's belief that post-capitalist economies are affective economies influences how they go about their action research, not least in the recognition that affects and emotions need to be mobilized for a post-capitalist politics. So they plead guilty to the accusation which has been levelled at them that their action research projects were 'engineered'. They admit that they wanted to make an intervention, to 'act on' their research participants, to mobilize them affectively, by identifying and facilitating openings and possibilities. They write that in their action research they 'were looking for two sorts of openings – the discursive "nonclosures" signalled by contradictory ways of thinking and speaking, and the ethical opening of persons to one another that conversation provokes and enables' (2006, p. 135). Such openings, they argue, form the foundations of a politics of possibility.

Whilst the writers discussed in this section differ in the extent to which they view markets and economies as ethical or moral, all are concerned with the relationship between, on the one hand, economic practices and, on the other, ethical and moral values. Even Booth, who is critical of the philosophical limitations of the moral economy argument, acknowledges the importance of highlighting the ethics and morality of the economy and the work done by the moral economists in drawing our attention to the value-based character of economic activity (Booth, 1994). The simple point of this section has been to highlight this important work, and through this to propose that productive activities undertaken in economic contexts may be marked by moral considerations, characterized by alternative economic arrangements, and not driven primarily by market concerns. In short, my aim has been to sketch a broad context in which this book's discussion of the ethics and values in web design can be located.

The origins of ethical action in cultural production

Whilst the writers discussed in the previous section highlight the breadth of moral and ethical economic activity that exists, others, as

I have already noted, have focused specifically on ethical practices in the realms of cultural production. Such projects include, according to Banks (2007), ethical fashion houses, socially responsible design agencies, community arts organizations, public access media, not-for-profit design companies and art collectives, and other political arts projects and forms of 'culture jamming' (Carducci, 2006). Hesmondhalgh and Baker's model of good and bad work identifies engagement in the creation of products which 'promote aspects of the common good' (2010, p. 36) as a feature of good work in the cultural industries – the ethics of such activities should be fairly clear.

But where do the ethical impulses to engage in this kind of cultural production come from? Banks attempts to account for the origins of activities that might be defined as post-capitalist by Gibson-Graham. Drawing on the work of a number of scholars of reflexive modernity, he argues that the individualization processes that are said to lead to self-exploitation (discussed earlier in this chapter) may in fact lead to an expansion of creative agency, individual self-expression and, subsequently, alternative production. Individualization *releases* 'individual creativity...under conditions of radical change' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. xxi) rather than diminishing it. For Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, under regimes of individualization, new frameworks of 'institutionalized individualization' are established, in which individuals, rather than being subsumed and passive, must assert themselves. Thus, Banks writes: 'a *renaissance* of alternative production may have occurred as a direct consequence of expanded opportunities for self-expressivity and biographical self-organizing amidst now demonstrably more individualized and "reflexive" social environments' (2007, p. 95). Banks argues that individualization has led to a revival of interest in the aesthetic, in cultural production as a search for meaning, not just for financial reward. '[A]venues of self-reflection and choice are opened up by detraditionalizing impulses and modernity's ambivalent effects,' he writes (Banks, 2007, p. 95). He goes on to observe that 'encouraging people to "be independent" and "think for themselves" runs the risk that one day they may actually do it – in ways unanticipated and unwelcomed by government' (ibid., p. 100).

Banks identifies three schematic forms of alternative cultural production, which he classifies as: artistic economies; practice-led economies; and ethical economies. For Banks, the primary motivation for cultural producers working across all of these forms is aesthetic. He writes that 'the "pure" aesthetic domain provides the *primary* refuge for those opposed to calculation and disinterested exchange' (ibid., p. 96). This

would seem to be a difficult claim to verify empirically, and there are many examples of alternative production which are driven primarily by ethical or political motives, such as media advocacy projects, which are much more concerned with the social benefits of media-making processes than the aesthetic qualities of finished media products. Banks himself admits that, in addition to these aesthetic motivations, 'cultural workers have also begun to hitch their artistic impulses to more evidently "social" or "political" economizing practices' (ibid., p. 96).

Concerned to identify the roots of such socio-political activities, and despite his own discussion of the possibilities for alternative cultural expression that conditions of reflexive modernity unleash, Banks is critical of Lash and Urry's prioritization of conditions (such as structures of information and communication) as the source of ethical impulses in cultural production (Lash and Urry, 1994), as I suggested in the Introduction (although he acknowledges that some conditions make alternative production more possible than others). He suggests that such structures may simply mobilize *already-existing* deep-rooted desires for social and ethical re-embedding amongst worker-subjects' (2007, p. 116). It is these desires, he proposes, that produce ethical activities in ethical economies. Similarly, sociality is a feature of Hesmondhalgh and Baker's model of good work, defined as 'the values of friendship, solidarity, co-operation and *shared* enjoyment and interest' (2010, p. 32). Thus, Banks argues that human subjects need to be understood not just as '*homo economicus*' (2007, p. 117), but as ethical and moral beings. In making this argument, he draws on O'Neill's assertion that social life 'requires serious commitments which are non-contractual in nature' (1998, p. 76). As a result of these non-contractual, non-market aspects of social life, examples of social, moral, ethical cultural production such as those listed above can be witnessed.

As I suggested in the previous chapter, ethical and moral actions in web design have their roots, in part, in the idealized origins of the web itself. Tim Berners-Lee's vision of the web as a universal, open, interoperable and accessible medium (Berners-Lee, 2003) orients web designers towards ethical practices and ethical individuals towards web design, I argued. The passionate commitment that web workers feel towards the web and their work on it, identified by writers such as Ross, Terranova and Gill, has its roots in this shared vision. In her study of website production, Damarin (2006) also identifies such attachments. In contradiction to the assumption in the field of occupation studies that affiliations of workers towards either employers or occupations are a prerequisite of stable workplace organization, she found that, in the case of the web,

workers freely move between both employers and occupations. Amongst web workers, primary attachments are not to particular employers or occupations, but to the web as a community. For many web workers, she writes, 'the first commitment is to the Web itself – to expanding it, improving it, and finding new uses for it – and to those undertaking similar efforts' (Damarin, 2006, p. 449). The enduring rhetoric of the web's promise, and a genuine belief in this promise, is behind such commitment, I suggest. Because of this commitment and these origins, the web design industry came to be ethical in structure, at least in part, as I argue in the rest of this book. Web design work, therefore, sometimes necessitates ethical practices, which arise not purely from individual altruistic motivations but also from these industrial conditions.

The intense affective attachment to the web's potential that web workers feel results in some of the ethical actions that I discuss later in this book. This intimate relationship between ethics and affect, although highlighted by Gibson-Graham, has rarely been identified by those writers keen to draw attention to the emotional attachment of creative workers to their labour. Yet at the heart of ethical practices, economic or non-economic, in the cultural industries or not, is a form of caring that is both affective and ethical in equal measure. The next section develops this notion of caring, building on literature which characterizes craft as a form of caring labour.

Caring craft

In *The Craftsman*, a book which identifies craft-like practices across a broad array of workers, from carpenters, lab technicians and orchestra conductors to open source software developers and medical staff in the British National Health Service (and which therefore displays an optimistic change of heart for its author), Sennett proposes that a core characteristic of craft is caring – about the quality of work done, and about doing a job well (Sennett, 2009). 'Craftsmanship names an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake' (ibid., p. 9), writes Sennett, drawing on a range of sources. These include Plato, who, as Sennett paraphrases him, argued that 'the aspiration for quality will drive a craftsman to improve, to get better rather than get by' (ibid., p. 24). Sennett also references C. Wright Mills's acknowledgement of the craftsperson's commitment to doing a job well:

The laborer with a sense of craft becomes engaged in the work in and for itself; the satisfactions of working are their own reward; the details of daily labor are connected in the worker's mind to the end

product; the worker can control his or her own actions at work; skill develops within the work process; work is connected to the freedom to experiment; finally, family, community, and politics are measured by the standards of inner satisfaction, coherence, and experiment in craft labor. (Wright Mills, 1951, p. 220, quoted in Sennett, 2009, p. 27)

As a result of caring about the quality of the craft process and product, craftspeople embody 'the special human condition of being *engaged*' (Sennett, 2009, p. 20). Engagement derives, in part, from the craftsperson's dedication 'to good work for its own sake' (ibid.). Engagement is also a feature of good work for Hesmondhalgh and Baker, although they use the terms interest and involvement. Hesmondhalgh and Baker draw on sociologist Robert Blauner's attempt to identify specific forms of alienation at work in order to develop their own model of what constitutes good and bad work. In response to Blauner's types of alienation, or what might constitute 'bad' work, they propose a number of opposites, which form the basis for their model of good work. Thus, for them, the opposite of the form of alienation that Blauner names meaninglessness is interest, involvement, absorption: terms which have much in common with Sennett's notion of engagement and Wright Mills's description of the craftsperson as absorbed in his or her work.

Hesmondhalgh and Baker's model includes another feature of good work which relates to this notion of being engaged and to Sennett's proposal that craft involves caring about quality: that is, the production of excellent products. Here, they propose that the pursuit of excellence is a kind of ethics. In Sayer's (2004) terms, the ethical practice of pursuing excellence through cultural work means behaving in a way that affects others, or increases human potential for 'obtaining the good life'. From Hesmondhalgh and Baker's perspective, 'the achievement of excellence can be a good thing for the whole community who participate in the practice because it enriches them' (2010, p. 38). Wright Mills's suggestion that a craftsperson extends his or her commitment to doing a job well to family, community and politics, and therefore to living life by the same standards that are applied to craft, also suggests that the wider society benefits (albeit in a different way from that proposed by Hesmondhalgh and Baker) from the pursuit of excellence that can be found in forms of craft and cultural work.

A further consequence of this commitment to quality, then, is that craft constitutes a way of life, not just a way of work, as Wright Mills suggests. For Sennett, craft (or craftsmanship, in his decidedly non-feminist

language) is ultimately a set of techniques for conducting life. '[P]eople can learn about themselves through the things they make [...] material culture matters' (2009, p. 8), he writes. This is reminiscent of Banks's proposal, discussed in the Introduction of this book, that the dissolved work/life boundary does not only have negative consequences, as is commonly assumed. Because Sennett sees craft practices as likely to produce caring and engaged ways of life, he is critical of what he sees as Western society's failure to encourage craft and craft-based ways of life and to acknowledge the intimate connection that exists between hand and head:

> History has drawn fault lines dividing practice and theory, technique and expression, craftsman and artist, maker and user; modern society suffers from this historical inheritance. But the past life of craft and craftsmen also suggests ways of using tools, organizing bodily movements, thinking about materials that remain alternative, viable proposals about how to conduct life with skill. (ibid., p. 11)

The caring character of craft resembles the affective qualities of alternative economic action as discussed by Gibson-Graham, and craft practices embody an ethical imperative to improve the quality of life and work. Conducting life with skill through craft practices produces rewards for the wider society and for the individual craftsperson, and many writers draw attention to the craft qualities of cultural work like web design, comparing cultural work with craft production, highlighting craft labour in the creative industries, or how craft values and modes of organization predominate in this sector (Banks, 2007, 2010; Becker, 1982; Hesmondhalgh, 2007; Ryan, 1992; Toynbee, 2003). This version of the appeal of cultural labour is rather different from the governmentality model, which sees workers as internalizing regimes of power. The next section elaborates further on these rewards.

The rewards of cultural production

Writers concerned to reflect on the ethics and values of cultural production have highlighted the different kinds of rewards that such labour entails. One such reward is autonomy. This is also a characteristic of craft work; Campbell, for example, defines the craftsperson as 'someone who exercises personal control over all the processes involved in the manufacture of the good in question' (Campbell, 2005, p. 27). Hesmondhalgh and Baker suggest that autonomy is a feature of 'good work' in the cultural industries, which can be contrasted with the form of alienation that Blauner characterizes as powerlessness (control

external to the self, or the inability to enact change). They argue that the daily exercise of autonomy is central to the working lives of professionals and craftspeople, two categories of workers who usually enjoy higher than average degrees of power, and amongst whom cultural workers can be counted.

Professionals and craft workers also enjoy higher than average degrees of job satisfaction, argue Hesmondhalgh and Baker. This is another reward of cultural production. Again Hesmondhalgh and Baker are responding to one of Blauner's forms of alienation, self-estrangement: 'a kind of depersonalized detachment rather than an immediate involvement or engrossment in the job tasks [which] does not express the unique abilities, potentialities, or personality of the worker' (Blauner, 1964, p. 26, cited in Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010, p. 29). The opposite of self-estrangement, for Hesmondhalgh and Baker, is self-realization. According to Banks (2007), self-realization is one of many rewards offered by cultural production. In making this claim he builds on MacIntyre's (1981) notion of a practice:

> any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that the human powers achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends of goods involved, are systematically extended. (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 175, cited in Banks, 2007, p. 109)

A practice involves the pursuit of excellence for its own sake, but this also has the effect of benefiting the whole community – both of these aspects of practices resonate with other writers' conceptualizations of craft. For MacIntyre, the internal rewards that result from practices are specific to the activity being practised, unlike external rewards, such as prestige, status, money, which are less practice-specific. This also sounds very much like the ideas of Sennett and others about craft – good work as its own recompense is a kind of internal reward. Banks summarizes MacIntyre's discussion of internal rewards thus:

> Internal rewards, then, are those unobtainable elsewhere; they are practice-specific. Moreover, they can only be fully realized through dedication and immersion; that is, when practitioners establish a knowledge and appreciation of a given practice's interior qualities,

and an intimacy with its specific demands, rhythms and routines – what we might call a true 'feel for the game'. Internal goods tend to derive from respect, perhaps even love, of the practice, and recognition of its fundamental virtue in providing an ethical centre and a culture of embedded moral sanctions. The practitioner who wishes to acquire internal goods must seek to reproduce the practice and serve the community of practitioners. (Banks, 2007, p. 110)

External rewards, by contrast, might include the features of good work which Hesmondhalgh and Baker identify as security, acceptable workloads and wages. When such conditions are secured, alongside internal rewards like engagement and self-realization, work in the cultural industries can be 'genuinely desirable' (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010, p. 43). Gregg also points to the genuine desirability of such work, in her recognition that 'professional work generates forms of pleasure and accomplishment that rival the markers of identity favoured in previous historical formations' (Gregg, 2011, p. 5). In making this assertion, a number of writers (Gregg, 2011; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010; also Gill and Pratt, 2008) speak out against the proposal that any form of satisfaction at work is always the result of the internalization of organizational values and mechanisms of control. As they all point out, workers do actually get some self-realization from work – this might be especially true for women, for example, for whom the 'life' half of the 'work–life' balance may be the more alienating (Gregg, 2011). As Gill and Pratt put it:

> Long hours and the takeover of life by labour *may* be dictated by punishing schedules and oppressive deadlines, and may be experienced as intensely exploitative, but they may also be the outcome of passionate engagement, creativity and self-expression. (Gill and Pratt, 2008, p. 18)

Pleasure, then, is a further reward of cultural work, deriving both from internal factors like dedication, immersion, self-expression and self-realization and from external factors like status, good wages and prestige. Web design clearly offers such pleasures to its workers. Significant numbers of web designers work under conditions over which they have reasonable degrees of control, resulting in considerable degrees of absorption and self-realization. Similarly, a number of web designers carry out their work in craft-like ways. Many web designers aspire to quality, to get better rather than get by. They demonstrate a commitment to doing

good work, like writing good HTML, both for its own sake and for the resulting common good. Thus, many of the features of craft and cultural work discussed in these last two sections apply to web design. This discussion of the pleasures offered by web design brings us back full circle to where the chapter started. The following section attempts to join up the beginning and end of the circle, bringing together the two halves of the chapter into a framework for thinking about web design.

'Making is thinking': the ethics and values of web design

The first half of this chapter highlighted key themes in scholarship about new media work to date. These include: the precarious conditions of work and networking strategies for dealing with such conditions; the passionate and sometimes self-exploitative commitment to work expressed by the new media workforce; and the persistence of familiar patterns of inequality and exclusion. Whilst these themes no doubt characterize the broader landscape of (new) media work, these have not been the most prominent issues to emerge in my engagement with web designers in recent years. Web design may be precarious compared with other, more stable, forms of employment, but web workers who have engaged in research with me have not talked much about the precarity of their work. On the contrary, a focus group participant who was about to embark on a career in web design said that one of the reasons he was attracted to this work was because there was plenty of it. On one of the research projects that I write about in this book, Inclusive New Media Design, none of the participants spoke about a fear that the supply of work and income would run out, but some talked about their anxieties about, and subsequent strategies for, keeping up. So, whilst new media remains precarious in that its workforce is often constituted by freelancers, such working conditions feel increasingly normal to those workers who have never known anything else, and precarity becomes less worthy of note. Furthermore, web designers are not all employed by 'the cultural industries' – local government, universities, and firms of all kinds employ web designers in relatively stable employment conditions, as Mayer-Ahuja and Wolf (2007) point out. In this sense, and without downplaying the serious consequences of the casualization of work in this sector, to put it simply, web designers sometimes worry about other things than their own precarity.

In contrast, networking, which I described as a technique for dealing with precarity, remains central to the work of web design. At a showcase event I organized for new media students and colleagues at the

university where I work whilst writing this chapter, I noted that *all* of the industry professionals who work as visiting lecturers attended the event, which one later described as a 'networking event' – clearly, networking is common practice. Networking is important not only because networked technologies are the tools of the trade, but also because, as Wittel suggests, networking is work. Akin to the network sociality that Wittel describes, based on transient and dynamic relations, networking constitutes a kind of informal, voluntary, professional, collective activity. Network sociality is not necessarily something to be bemoaned for its surface value, but, rather, a central feature of the collective character of Net work. And, whilst it is undoubtedly problematic that networks have replaced what Ross defines as more just forms of workplace organization like trade unions (see also Christopherson, 2004), it must also be acknowledged that 'the logic of the network' (Neilson and Rossiter, 2005, p. 1) is harnessed in the service of 'the good' by web designers, for example in the web standards movement, which is discussed in subsequent chapters. Indeed, the capacity of networks plays a vital role in the range of ethical and moral practices that I discuss in this book. In other words, some web designers make good of the networked conditions which are not of their own making, and of the networking tools which are. This is not to say that web designers are collectively on the brink of bringing down capitalism, as some critics might wish. Rather, it is to propose that the potential of networks, the 'what might be' of Net work (Levy, 2001), plays an important role in constituting the ethical practices of web designers.

Just as I point to the ethical enterprises to which web designers apply the logic of the network, so I propose that another widely acknowledged feature of new media work – that is, the emotional attachment that web designers feel for their work – also has ethical inflections. Few of the writers who have identified the intense passion of new media workers have proceeded to consider the values that might lie behind or result from such passion. This is surprising, given that, in its original use, the term 'affective labour' means *caring* labour, which produces particular affects (Hardt and Negri, 2001). Thus, in response to the critical wave of cultural industries scholarship which proposed that the passions and pleasures of cultural work represent an internalization of regimes of control which often lead to different forms of self-exploitation, it now seems timely to consider that pleasure might be genuinely pleasurable, and that it might have its roots in something other than the operation of neoliberal power from within the bodies of the cultural industries' workforce. Instead, it has been proposed that these pleasures might

derive from the psychological needs of individual cultural workers for 'social and ethical re-embedding' (Banks, 2007, p. 116). These deep-'social and ethical re-embedding' (Banks, 2007, p. 116). These deep-rooted, non-contractual and non-economic needs result in pleasures rooted, non-contractual and non-economic needs result in pleasures such as engagement and absorption, enjoyment in doing a job well, in the pursuit (and sometimes achievement) of excellence, and in the application of craft standards to all of life. Such pursuits can be seen as ethical because, as Hesmondhalgh and Baker suggest, pursuing high standards has wide-reaching benefits, enriching the individual practitioner and the broader community. Thus, pleasure in and emotional attachment to cultural work takes us somewhere ethical, if this line of thought is followed.

This ethical spin is also applied by Banks to the notion that the work/life boundary is now dissolved. As Banks suggests, and as Sennett argues, this dissolution could have positive consequences if it means that moral values developed outside work are applied in the workplace. For Sennett, such values permeate craftsmanship, which is characterized by caring about all sorts of things – about doing a job well, being ethical, or considering the needs of other people. Craftsmanship, therefore, is not a vanished way of life for which we should be nostalgic; rather, it is here, now. Sennett's guiding intuition in *The Craftsman* is that making is thinking; craft is about thinking and making things in equal measure, and doing both well and ethically. It is my contention throughout this book that, for web standardistas, web design is about making things well, and that this is a moral, ethical practice. This proposition runs throughout the empirical chapters of the book.

To date, discussion of inequalities in new media work has focused on the ways that the allegedly freeing work patterns in the knowledge economy reproduce the same old inequalities of gender, race and class, albeit in new and different ways. Noori's story highlights this. However, when thinking about the relationship between inequality and new media work, it is also important to consider the inequalities amongst web consumers that result from particular production practices. In relation to web design, approaches to web accessibility and efforts to minimize the exclusion of web users with disabilities are high on the agenda, yet the issue of disability is absent in scholarship on new media work. Nonetheless, concern with this particular inequality has spurred a number of ethical activities amongst web designers. In the case of web design, thinking about what ethical activities result from concern about inequality inevitably takes us to the issue of accessibility, which is the subject of Chapters 5 and 6 of this book.

In the second half of this chapter, I highlighted the relationship between ethics and a range of economic and non-economic productive activities. It should be clear by now that I propose that this body of literature complements existing thinking about new media work, because it helps us to identify the ethics and values that lie behind some kinds of cultural production. The idea that post-capitalist considerations drive some forms of cultural production is not new – Banks, Hesmondhalgh and Baker, in particular, have addressed this issue in a number of publications (such as Banks, 2006, 2007, 2010; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010). But this line of thought has not been widely pursued, and has not yet been exhausted. Nor has it been extensively explored in relation to web design. What's more, whereas the examples of ethical, socially motivated cultural production that Banks cites are mainly small-scale, independent and outside the albeit problematic 'mainstream', in the case of web design some activities within the mainstream of paid, professional work could also be described as ethical and socially motivated. Thus, in the rest of this book, I propose that some aspects of web design and some of the ways in which web designers approach their work can be seen as ethical. I use the terms ethics and values interchangeably, following Sayer (2004), to mean acting, thinking and *making* in certain ways which embody considerations of what might be in the common good.

Arvidsson and Pietersen argue that, in ethical economies, a new value of matter arises. 'People involved in social production, and the "stuff" that they create are evaluated on the basis of how much they directly *matter* to other people's lives,' they write (Arvidsson and Pietersen, 2009, p. 14). Examples of such 'stuff that matters' have been apparent in my observations of the web standards crowd – web standards, web accessibility, responses to crowdsourcing web design through speculative work competitions, field leaders' mobilization of their celebrity for ethical ends. Arvidsson and Pietersen define these activities as post-materialist, their version of Gibson-Graham's post-capitalism. For Arvidsson and Pietersen, post-materialism is 'a value structure that goes beyond material accumulation to emphasize self-realization, freedom, equality and respect for others' (ibid., p. 32). The rest of this book maps out post-materialist practices in web design. But first, to complete this 'framing' part of the book, the next chapter offers a potted history of the field.