

— Sebastian Olma

— Justin O'Connor

# COMMUNAL LUXURY

## An Introduction

### MOVING BEYOND CREATIVE GRIM

The privatisation of public assets and the hollowing out of public services via outsourcing, public-private partnerships, rentier monopolies and so on are part of the widely acknowledged repertoire of contemporary neoliberalism. Education, health, social services, essential infrastructures have all been fed into the machinery of “political capitalism,” a means of extracting profit via managed connections with politicians and public administration.<sup>1</sup>

Less acknowledged is the massive privatisation of culture that has taken place at the same time, often, indeed, as a vanguard of these wider neoliberal reforms. Whilst cuts to arts and culture budgets and the imposition of punitive “impact metrics” stole the headlines, the fact that the convergence of telecommunications, computation, and “content” took place almost exclusively within the highly constructed frameworks of the “free market” is taken as second nature. The dismantling of state broadcasting and the privatisation of the global public sphere were presented as part of the inevitable and welcome process of globalisation. This in turn built on a fundamental repositioning of culture not as a collective process of meaning making but as a consumer economy in which the aggregated individual preferences were the most efficient means of delivering cultural goods and services. In an age when hierarchies of taste had been

de-legitimated as effects of power, the democratic proliferation of culture – everything, everywhere, all at once – could only be organised by the massive calculation machine of the market.<sup>2</sup>



“But when it’s gone, leave the trails in the mindset.” While creative industries policies originated in the UK, their devastating consequences for culture and the arts can be felt across Europe

This shift reflected not only the dominant orthodoxy of neoliberal markets but also the very real expansion of cultural goods as profit-driven, productive enterprises. That is, the convergence of telecoms, computation and content opened up global markets with potentially massive – if fickle and volatile – returns on investment. The 1990s witnessed the transition of commercial culture away from the fiefdom of (what Bourdieu called) the “dominated section of the dominant class” – the cultural middle classes – and towards the centre of the political field. Media and commercial culture, dominated by large-scale

capital investment, were now part of the new ruling bloc, along with law, finance and political influence.

The creative economy was the name policy-makers gave to this expanded commercial sector, and used as a way of articulating small scale arts and cultural activities with this wider economy. It focused on empowering individual entrepreneurs and small businesses, encouraging them to scale up and seek new markets. Using standard neoliberal supply side techniques of providing space, skilled labour and access to finance, the creative economy script promoted an image of grassroots, democratic creativity seeking the promise of meaningful work and enhanced earning capacity in a sector set to replace a no longer viable manufacturing.

The collapse of the creative economy vision became increasingly apparent in the long decade following the global financial crisis leading up to the pandemic. As the system of cultural production and distribution became absorbed within a new platform capitalism, one in which the digital traces of all our most mundane activities could now be captured and monetised, the core mythos of the creative economy began to break down. This had been articulated by Richard Florida in his creative class thesis: “If workers control the means of production today that is because it is inside their heads; they *are* the means of production.”<sup>3</sup> This underpinned the definition of the creative industries in the original UK Labour definition, since reproduced by a million consultancy reports and student essays: “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.”

As it turned out, the creative workers did not own the means of creative production, just as, apparently, we did not own the digital traces that followed us across the internet, or through shopping malls, or paying our bills.

Central to the growing precarity of cultural workers – and increasingly the educated professional class writ large – was the separation of their creativity from the intellectual property it helped generate, and the accelerated application of algorithmic techniques to reduce the autonomy and distinct skills required in the creative process itself. In the meantime, the social and cultural infrastructures that had sustained commercial cultural production – the “cultural ecosystems,” Greg Sholette’s “dark matter” or Tony Negri’s “social factory” – slowly withered. For every creative hub there were ten “crap towns” where the cultural offer was as grim as the local social services. The problem was that whilst health, education, social services and basic infrastructure somehow hang on as a residual obligation for nation states, culture’s position has been marginalized.

Totally colonized by the language of creative economy, browbeaten by the demands for “impact metrics” which make barely any impact on policy decisions, culture has increasingly disappeared as a significant object of public policy. This certainly calls for a new kind of policy agenda, and we’ve done some first attempts at this elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> But ultimately this requires a new imaginary, and we immediately run into problems.

If culture presented itself as the key to the post-Stalinist “new left” at the end of the 1950s, a source of political and personal renewal in the 1960s, a site of contestation and resistance in the 1970s and indeed, a promise of post-industrial transformation in the 1980s – where is it now, in the interregnum that is upon us? Culture is mostly absent from the new socio-political and economic agendas. Worse, many post-growth theorists associate it with our consumerist fall. The multiple pleasures of art and popular culture seem to disappear in a new culture of restraint and constraint, and seem denuded of their power of delight, abandonment, and collective enthusiasm.<sup>5</sup>

**CULTURE AND COLLECTIVITY**

This issue of *Making and Breaking* sets out to re-imagine culture as a collective act, a process of communal meaning making. Kristin Ross recovered the idea of “communal luxury” from the shattered remains of the Paris Commune.<sup>6</sup> It evoked not just collective consumption (of services or infrastructures) but the possibility of a social fabric charged with aesthetic experience, with art and beauty for the many, not for the few. Different, if often patronising, versions of this collective consumption have animated a century and a half of public cultural spaces, in public housing and civic centres, schools and hospitals, parks, shopping and leisure centres. But also in those rambunctious spaces of music and film, dancing and socialising, in which so much of our “popular modernism” was nurtured. The loss of these spaces (in all their ambivalence) has been one of the culturally and politically most devastating consequences of neoliberal privatisation.

As the late Mark Fisher put it in his fragment on *Acid Communism*: “The past has to be continually re-narrated, and the political point of reactionary narratives is to suppress the potentials which still await, ready to be re-awakened, in older moments.”<sup>7</sup> Demonised and ridiculed after 1990, when creative entrepreneurship and start-up culture triumphed over the supposedly grey conformity of the public sector, what happened to collective popular culture? What happened to those ‘moral economies’ in which so much of that transformative popular culture emerged, before being subsumed into creative industries, with their hubs and clusters and networking events. Where are the open public spaces, the ambitious public luxury which framed them – railway stations, beaches and lidos, cinemas and parks, workers’ canteens, town halls and local markets? If we are to establish art and culture as something essential to democratic citizenship and human flourishing, then we have to take the risk of re-imagining the possibilities of collective culture.

For this issue of *Making & Breaking* we were looking for evocations of popular pleasures and collective consumption – memories from the past and intimations of the future. Our call resulted in an eclectic collection of contributions from an international range of scholars, activists, cultural producers and entrepreneurs. By no means do we provide here a balanced global representation of approaches to communal luxury – whatever that would actually mean. Rather, what we hope to achieve with this issue is to tickle the reader’s imagination by bringing together a variety of voices on different aspects of past, present and potential future forms of communal luxury. Sometimes they may sound somewhat familiar, emanating from practices and geographies that have built a certain experience in the development of local (and often temporary) alternatives to the an-aesthetic culture of neoliberal capitalism. In other instances, they articulate surprising fissures and openings in the fabric of contemporary social practice. Yet others appear to be variations of Fisher’s above quoted re-narrations that pose the question of how their “potentials which still await, ready to be re-awakened” might be changed or even mobilised by putting them in the context of communal luxury.

Together they form a disharmonic chorus, a miscellaneous yearning perhaps that we intend as no more or less than an invitation to think and act along a trajectory of collective cultural practices that would make meaningful aesthetic experiences a fundamental part of everyday life and, by doing so, could unleash the ubiquitous social imagination that successfully coping with the momentous challenges ahead requires.

**THE CONTRIBUTIONS**

We are delighted and honoured to present as the opening contribution of our collection a previously unpublished transcript of a talk by Mark Fisher entitled *Designer Communism*. It was delivered at the Luxury Communism conference in Weimar, Germany in late spring 2016. “Luxury communism” is a term that had

been popularized at the time by Novara Media co-founder Aaron Bastani<sup>8</sup> as a provocative antidote to the neoliberal utopias and dystopias on automation.<sup>9</sup> Both terms, “designer communism” and “luxury communism” are paradoxical, almost oxymoronic terms and as such, Fisher puts them forward as “emissaries from a world in which things are different... [giving] us a sense of what another world would look like.” The world whose contours Fisher tries to explore in his talk is one in which the collective creation and/or enjoyment of aesthetic experiences would be at the very heart of the project of progressive politics. Elsewhere, he’s referred to this in terms of an “unprecedented aestheticization of everyday life”<sup>10</sup> which captures the essence of what we mean by communal luxury with his typically dazzling evocativeness. What needs to be clear, however, is that the sense of luxury that is being evoked here has absolutely nothing to do with individual privilege based on scarcity (I can have this because you don’t!). Rather, it is a sense of cultural abundance, of luxuriating in practices of caring, sharing and enjoying together. The reason why currently there is so little of this, Fisher argues, is not a bug in an imperfect economic system but the central feature of the political project of neoliberalism. What he famously called “capitalist realism”, i.e., the idea that there is no alternative to reducing every social relation to a business transaction, only works as long as our social imagination is held in a state of “consciousness deflation”. Those in charge of such consciousness deflation are the “libidinal engineers” of the creative industries: designers, marketers, and artists who create the compulsive surfaces that cover the repetitive and boring world of underwhelming products and services. In *Designer Communism*, Fisher moves through a variety of examples of how such libidinal engineering works presently; from Ridley Scott’s awesome work of dream engineering in his “1984” Superbowl commercial for Apple to something as mundane as crocodile slippers or ridiculously overpriced sandwiches. In doing so, he exposes the achievement of today’s libidinal engineers as

that of producing an *an-aesthetic* that keeps the neoliberal zombie running.



“The founding moment of communicative capitalist realism was the Ridley Scott Superbowl commercial for Apple. It ... established the kind of libidinal architecture of the next 30 years. ... It is a genius work of dream engineering that establishes the case for the obsolescence of the Left while ostensibly pointing to the parallel obsolescence of a certain mode of capitalism.” Mark Fisher, *Designer Communism*

Simultaneously, he points to the fact that an effective political challenge to this increasingly undead system needs libidinal engineers willing and able to raise the collective consciousness to the rich potentialities of communal luxury.

In *Every day is a Saturday*, Kate Oakley demonstrates the importance of memory for such a practice of consciousness raising. Recalling her childhood experience of growing up on Liverpool’s Anfield Road, a block away from the famous football stadium, she reflects on the phenomenon known as ‘three-quarter time,’ i.e., “when halfway through the second half of the match the gates were open to let supporters out and, if you were close enough, and we were, you could go and watch the final quarter of the match for free.” As she beautifully shows, this memory interrupts the contemporary reality of the neoliberal everyday in two ways. First, it contests the normalcy of a fully commercialised world of professional sports by reminding us of the utter collective joy that even a partial suspension of market forces can bring to a neighbourhood and a city.<sup>11</sup> Second, it challenges the supposed class-based nature of leisure activities (football = working class, art and culture = middle class) by emphasising the aesthetic quality of

being a football fan: singing the songs, learning the chants, being part of a football culture. Of course, going to a football match will always remain an experience quite different from going to the museum or an art gallery. Nonetheless, what Oakley’s childhood memory invites us to do is imagine future aesthetic practices that might not care too much for such dichotomies.

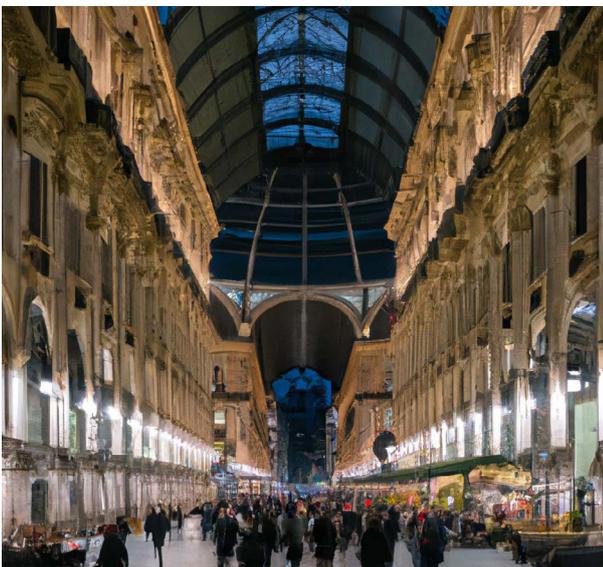
Greg Sholette’s contribution detects such improbable aesthetic practices already in our very present. In *Swampwall: Communal Luxury in Dark Matter Mode* he shares the memory of his late brother Patrick, who worked in a factory in Northeast Pennsylvania, where he and his co-workers “spent their work breaks attaching newspaper clippings, snapshots, spent soda cans, industrial debris, trashed food containers and similar bits and pieces of day-to-day detritus to one wall of the plant. After a few years this accumulated clutter covered most of the wall. The workers christened their impromptu collage the Swampwall.” According to Sholette, Swampwall should not be taken as the exceptional mannerism of an idiosyncratic group of factory workers. Invisibility, he argues, should not be confused with rarity. As he has argued at length in his *Dark Matter*, these more or less spontaneous expressions of non-traditional art are part of a wide range of aesthetic practices that sustain everyday life as well as the institutional art world.<sup>12</sup> Taken together, they form a kind of invisible commons, a “distorted shadow of the ‘real’ economy, a space in which informal modes of production, anti-production, cooperative networks of gift exchange, gossip, technology, and swapping, and the occasional instance of self-organized collectivism seek out the means of making life more bearable, sometimes under pitiless circumstances.” The question that emerges from his argument is what it would take to elevate such dark matter from a state of “commonplace invisibility” onto the well-lit planes of communal luxury.said ‘Solidarity Gear’.

That question also echoes in the old feminist

and union standard *Bread and Roses* whose recitation opens Emma Webb’s essay. She is the director of Vitalstatistix, an arts organisation based in Port Adelaide, South Australia. Since 1989, her organisation is the custodian of Waterside Workers Hall, a heritage-listed former union hall originally built in the 1920s by Port Adelaide Working Men’s Association/Waterside Workers Federation (WWF). In *Crying through Our Singing: A Union Hall, Communal Luxury and Cultural Activism* Webb reminds us that historically, the struggle for emancipation in all its different forms would have been unthinkable without its strong cultural dimension. Union halls were the places where the people’s culture was traditionally celebrated as part and parcel of the struggle. They formed the spatial nexus where the demand for bread was always already one for roses as well. It is from such a deep understanding of the entanglement of culture and emancipation that Vitalstatistix is turning this heritage site into a contemporary community space. According to Webb, these spaces “are the bricks and mortar of ‘communal luxury’ – places where people organise, access, and share culture and recreation together.” Translating a powerful heritage into a highly innovative future trajectory, her contribution provides a fascinating account of an organisation that has the ambition of being on the cutting edges of contemporary art practices while being truly embedded in the local community and committed to a radically progressive political agenda.

In Italy, the post war movement of community self-organisation has traditionally been strongly connected to the *centri sociali occupati autogestiti* or community-run squatted social centres. Having first emerged in the 1970s, they have recently acquired a new significance. According to the Milanese *Collettivo Sentiero Futuro Autoproduzioni*, a combination of disastrous economic policy by the EU and home-grown political corruption have left Italian society in a state of neoliberal desolation. Their contribution is entitled *From Individual Misery to Communal Luxury. Why Autogestione*

**Still Matters Today.** The individual misery they report on is that of a city that clings on the rhetoric of the creative city but whose reality amounts to no more than “an AI-generated picture of a thriving metropolis.” As they write, “wages in the creative sectors are particularly low on average, as employers take advantage of the endless supply of young aspiring creatives with little to no political consciousness — many of them supported by wealthy families — coming from all over the country and ready to work for nothing while waiting for things to be alright.” Although this description might sound rather familiar to observers in the “creative cities” of the North, the more desperate socio-economic context clearly aggravates the Italian situation.<sup>13</sup> And yet, the collective remains hopeful as they see the contours of a different city growing from the ruins of neo-liberal metropolis: “The range of self-managed projects you can find in a city like Milan is impressive: medical centres, sport clubs, practice spaces, art spaces, bicycles repair workshops, woodworking shops, soup kitchens, on-line platforms, after school services, housing projects, farmer’s markets, language classes...” The old social centres, it seems, have acquired a new role as hubs in a network of progressive de-commodification. Stepping into the breach left by a withdrawing welfare state, they organise practices of communal luxury that might as well turn out to be countercultural training grounds for alternative forms of urban life.



From Milan we move to Genoa. In June 2022, the Radical Film Network (RFN) organized their international festival in the North Italian city, making use of as well as stimulating the kind of urban infrastructure described by the *Collectivo*. RFN is not a formal organisation but rather a loose affiliation of individuals and organisations that includes film makers and film distributors, scholars, writers, curators, archivists and other culture workers. Originally, the Genoa festival had been planned for the summer of 2021, marking the 20th anniversary of the brutal police repression of the G8 protests and the role of video activism in documenting that violence. Due to Covid, the event was moved to June 2022. In their contribution, *A Machine with Many Legs. The Radical Film Network Festival/ Unconference in Genova*, the RFN describe the formula of their festival very much in terms of communal luxury: “free spaces + free films + free labour = free film culture.” One of the fascinating aspects of such an activist festival is the way it can unlock the (perhaps otherwise hidden) potential of local infrastructure by distributing its events across spaces that may otherwise not be natural partners, such as university and squats. From Laura Ager, Elena Boschi & Shaun Dey’s contribution, one gets a real sense of what can happen if 90 participants from all over the world descending on a city to share their passion for film in an act of genuine (non-commercial) engagement with that urban environment and its inhabitants. They seem to make something come true that project developers often promise but never deliver: an instance where the local and the global have a mutually enriching effect on one another. International communal luxury!

Letizia Chiappini’s contribution raises the question of the role of digital media for the emotional and aesthetic quality of our urban environments. Her *Collective Pleasure against Platform Dystopia* opens with a sneer at the hilarious attempt of a grocery delivery platform to expand their commercial care (read: market) by offering to add a sex toy to her bag of groceries. The place where this indecent

proposal occurs is Amsterdam, “a cosmopolitan techno-utopian hub where anything can be home-delivered.” Yet, what does it mean, Chiappini asks, that a delivery platform basically proposes to become my lover? Taking this question as her point of departure, she invites the reader on a rather intimate exploration of the intersection between urbanism, technology and (female) sexuality. What she discovers along the way is that the audacity of the delivery proposal rests on a general aesthetic impoverishment of our urban life world, driven in no small part by platform businesses. This begins with the literal eradication of urbanity through the installation of platform distribution centres (urban black holes) throughout the city and ends with the promotion of antisocial behaviour through the conscious cultivation of pathological individualism. Particularly in cities that are seen as economically rather successful, the enormous influx of real estate and tech capital has had a detrimental effect on the range and intensity of the aesthetic experience they have to offer. It’s almost as if the new business opportunities for platform entrepreneurs count on a further immiseration of our life world so that even the platform lover would become a sensible proposition. Luckily, there has been push back lately. Chiappini herself is a member of the feminist activist group Slutty Urbanism whose mission it is “to luxuriate collectively in thought and bodily activity as a way of thwarting off the encroachment of platform dystopia.”<sup>14</sup> There can be no doubt that a resilient culture of communal luxury needs to be sustained by such an attitude of tech-savvy belligerence.

Another type of savviness required for the effective spread of practices of communal luxury is that of the financial kind. What is true for the organisation of a festival (even a free one) surely applies to larger and more permanent projects. They need financing and their explicitly non-commercial orientation turns this often into an enormous challenge. In *Financing Non-Extractive Urban Planning – A Berlin Practise*, Andreas Krüger shares his experience

as a social entrepreneur and activist developer in the German capital. His contribution focuses on two concrete cases that he’s been involved in. The first case relates to the emergence of Berlin’s Moritzplatz as the now famous counter-project to the corporate depredation that resulted in developments such as Potsdamer Platz. The driver of the alternative strategy at Moritzplatz was the transformation of the old Bechstein piano factory into what today is Aufbauhaus/Planet Modulor. As initiator of the project, Krüger pulled the financial strings in this colourful mix of private equity, crowdfunding and subsidies which gave him the nickname of “mayor of Moritzplatz.” The second case concerns the ongoing transformation of a derelict electric power substation in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg into an area hosting culturally driven entrepreneurs, social projects, artists and involving the local community. Taking on such a large project involving a big chunk of potential prime real estate is seen by Krüger as “an opportunity to show that non-extractive urban development is possible on a larger scale if one finds a way of exiting the overheated commercial real estate market.” In both projects, it is striking to see how the realisation of non-corporate urban development hinges on the goodwill of enlightened private equity. Innovative combinations of alternative financing do play an important role but they tend to be enabled by old capital whose new owners who seem to subscribe to a meaningful understanding of sustainable investment. Apparently, overcoming the distance from corporate to communal luxury requires several intermediate steps when it comes to financing. One would hope that the realisation of a growing number of such non-extractive development projects would eventually lay the foundation for more democratic forms of financing as well.

Dan Hill’s contribution, *Harbinger. Sowing seeds amidst systems collapse in Australia*, makes the crucial connection between communal luxury and the question of how to stop environmental catastrophe. Listing some of the climate change related disasters that have

recently hit the Australian continent (bushfires, floods, extreme heat), Hill urges us to understand that “the climate crisis is the environmental ‘externality’ of a broader crisis of untrammelled capitalism, embedded in earlier colonialism, its patterns of inequality encompassing not only society, but global ecology.” The fact that Australia biodiversity is deteriorating has everything to do with its commitment to a neoliberal model of economic development. Zooming in on its area of expertise, urban development, Hill flags Shepparton, a mid-size town two hours north of Melbourne, as a particularly instructive case of avoidable neoliberal self-harm. Originally grown as a farming and manufacturing centre largely due to its extensive natural river system, it has recently become a primary casualty of climate crisis-exacerbated flooding. As Hill argues, the stubborn application of Australia’s model of low-density urban sprawl has led to a situation whereby the natural foundation of Shepparton’s initial welfare – the periodic flooding of the land that produces its richness and fertility – has been transformed into a natural disaster. The greatest causal factors of this developmental idiocy seem to be a deep colonialist disrespect for the ecosystem and an ideological doggedness that sees value exclusively in individual, private wealth. From his current post at the Melbourne School of Design, Hill and his students now work together with locals to develop initiatives that could help turn the tide in Shepparton. While these initiatives can profit from experiences generated by the current renaissance of cooperative and communal housing in Europe (including those experiments in collectivism mentioned above), their most important source of inspiration is the knowledge of and relationship with the land cultivated by First Nations. “By better understanding Indigenous Australian emphases on the profound kinship relationships bound up in the concept of Country,” Hill wonders, “perhaps we might open up newly complementary and constructive lines of inquiry between the ideas and practices of communal luxury and those embedded within indigenous knowledge systems?”



“In October 2022, widespread flooding led to 4000 properties isolated or inundated in Greater Shepparton, a focal point amidst the 35,000 homes damaged in the towns that punctuate the many rivers that define this part of Australia.” Dan Hill, Harbinger. *Sowing Seeds Amidst Systems Collapse in Australia*

### BREAD AND ROSES: A NEW CULTURAL IMAGINARY

This is an eclectic mix of cases and experiences, signs of discontents and new possibilities, growing out of the strange perma-crisis of the present. Hannah Arendt, looking back at 1914 in her book on totalitarianism, wrote:

*Only a few who lived [then] felt the inherent weakness of an obviously outmoded political structure which, despite all prophecies of doom, continued to function in spurious splendour and with inexplicable, monotonous stubbornness... This odd state of affairs lasted until precisely 1914 when, through the very fact of war, the confidence of the masses in the providential character of economic expansion fell apart.<sup>15</sup>*

We’re different. We’re already living the doom, the falling apart, even though it has not yet happened. Few believe in the providential character of economic expansion, other than – mostly – those social democrats who have turned out to be capitalism’s last, best hope. There’s politics to be done, undoubtedly. Struggles and overcomings and bare life survivals. But in the midst, we hold on to the mundane thought of something better being possible. Things that once existed, and things that have hung around, and new things that point the way.

There has been growing discontent with the three decades in which the traditional parties of the Left seem to have abandoned their working-class base, and the “educated middle class” emerged as the very index of progressive economic, moral and cultural development. The billionaire-funded Right calls out the metro-elites, who respond in turn by doubling down on their own righteous path on the correct side of history. In seeking to return us to the materialist foundations of the “social critique of capitalism,” a new Marxist Left takes aim at the Professional Managerial Class – “liquidate the PMC!” – responsible for replacing political economy by culture.<sup>16</sup> Whether culture acts as compensation for losing the fight against their neoliberal betters – for it is not Piketty’s PMC “Brahmins” but the financial “Merchants” who rule the roost after all – or indeed, as me-generation, anti-state narcissism it actually prepared the way for neoliberalism, it seems culture is not the order of the day.<sup>17</sup>

Matthew Huber even talks of culture as a “living space in the economy” for particular kinds of professionals “not wrapped up in necessary material production or surplus value production”.<sup>18</sup> An odd claim when Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet, Amazon, Meta and Louis Vuitton make up over half of the global top ten companies. The self-interested moralisms of the PMC are one thing, but it would be a grave mistake to dismiss culture as a “non-material” inessential in such a manner. The work of Michael Denning on the Popular Front in the 1930s, or the efforts of Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall to get the labour movement to engage with contemporary culture, and, of course, Ross’ own excavation of the Paris Commune’s vision for art and culture should warn us against this.<sup>19</sup>

As always, the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom are different but inseparable. We are never just material just as we are never pure spirit. “Bread and roses” is one way of putting it. Art has been a difficult, wayward, sometimes traitorous fellow-traveller to the

labour movement and struggles for emancipation in general. But often it has nurtured their deepest and most precious aspirations. A period of renewal and renegotiation is now urgent, as the creative economy and creative class drift into the past.



William Morris wrote of the separation between the “higher” and “lesser” arts, in which the first were associated with “useless luxury” and the latter with that “mass of shoddy, cheap goods” for the rest of us. The utopian promise that might animate a new cultural imaginary would have to involve a sense of shared social labour and pleasure in everyday production that makes society possible, and to which art and culture might contribute. As Kristin Ross had it, “senseless luxury, which Morris knew cannot exist without slavery of some kind, would be replaced by communal luxury, or equality in abundance,” a world “where everyone, instead, would have his or her share of the best.”<sup>22</sup>

#### REFERENCES

1. Weissman, Suzi (2019) “Behind the Economic turbulence. Interview with Robert Brenner” *Against the Current* 200 May/ June <https://againstthecurrent.org/>

- atc200/economic-turbulence/, see also: Mazzucato, Marina; Collington, Rosie (2023) *The Big Con: How the Consulting Industry Weakens our Businesses, Infantilizes our Governments and Warps our Economies*, New York: Allen Lane.
2. Jeffries, Stuart (2021) *Everything, All the Time, Everywhere. How We All Became Postmodern*, London: Verso.
  3. Florida, Richard (2012) *The Rise of the Creative Class, Revisited*, New York: Basic Books, p.25.
  4. O’Connor, Justin (2022) *Art, Culture and the Foundational Economy, Australia: Creative People, Products and Places*, University of South Australia, <https://resetartsandculture.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/CP3-Working-Paper-Art-Culture-and-the-Foundational-Economy-2022.pdf>. O’Connor, Justin (2020) *Reset: Een Nieuwe Start voor Kunst en Cultuur*, Amsterdam: Starfish Books.
  5. Banks, Mark (2022) “The Unanticipated Pleasures of the Future: Degrowth, Post-growth and Popular Cultural Economies”, *New Formations* 107/8, Winter: 12-29.
  6. Ross, Kristin (2015) *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*, London: Verso.
  7. Fisher, Mark (2018) *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004-2016)*, London: Repeater, p. 756.
  8. See: Merchant, Brian (2015) “Fully Automated Luxury Communism,” *The Guardian*, 18 March: <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2015/mar/18/fully-automated-luxury-communism-robots-employment>.
  9. For the ideological classic of Silicon Valley’s delirious tech-utopia see Kurzweil, Ray (2005) *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, New York: Viking. For a more moderate visionaries who used the threat of a dystopian future to advertise their own consulting services as the surefire way to reach utopia, see Brynjolfsson, Erik & McAfee, Andrew (2014) *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*, New York: Norton & Company.
  10. Fisher, Mark (2018) *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004-2016)*, London: Repeater, p. 758.
  11. It may be worth remembering that Woodstock turned legendary precisely at the moment when all market mechanisms collapsed under the sheer weight of the masses ready to collectively luxuriate in the moment. Compare this to the luxury scam of the 2017 Fyre festival that tried to simulate an exclusive party based on a pure marketing strategy.
  12. Sholette, Gregory (2011) *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, London: Pluto.
  13. See: <https://amsterdamalternative.nl/articles/10699/sorting-machine-amsterdam-should-i-stay-or-should-i-go>.
  14. See: <https://sluttyurbanism.art/>.
  15. Arendt, Hannah (1950) *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York: Harvest Books, p. 159.
  16. Liu, Catherine (2021) *Virtue Hoarders. The Case Against the Professional Managerial Class*, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.
  17. Piketty, Thomas (2020) *Capital and Ideology*, Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press.
  18. Huber, Matthew T. (2022) *Climate Change as Class War*, London: Verso, p. 113.
  19. Denning, Michael (2010) *The Cultural Front. The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, London: Verso.
  20. Ross, Kristin (2015) *Communal Luxury. The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*, London: Verso, p. 60-63.

### SEBASTIAN OLMA

Sebastian Olma is the founding editor of *Making and Breaking*. He holds the research chair for Cultural and Creative Industries at the Centre of Applied Research for Art, Design and Technology (Caradt) at Avans University of Applied Sciences. Alongside his academic work, he has advised policymakers throughout Europe on the facts and fictions of the creative economy. He lives in

Amsterdam, where he is involved in (sub) cultural projects such as OT301 and *Amsterdam Alternative*. His publications include *Art and Autonomy: Past, Present, Future* (2018, V2\_ Publishing) and *In Defence of Serendipity: For a Radical Politics of Innovation* (2016, Repeater Press).

### **JUSTIN O’CONNOR**

Justin O’Connor is Professor of Cultural Economy at the University of South Australia and visiting Professor in the School of Cultural Management, Shanghai Jiaotong University. Between 2012-18 he was part of the UNESCO ‘Expert Facility’, supporting the 2005 Convention on the ‘Protection and Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expressions’. He has co- edited *The Routledge Handbook of Cultural Industries* (2015); *Cultural Industries in Shanghai: Policy and Planning inside a Global City* (2018, Intellect); *Re-Imagining Creative Cities in 21st Century Asia* (2020, Palgrave Macmillan) and is co-author of *Red Creative: Culture and Modernity in China* (2020, Intellect). His *Reset: Een Nieuw Begin voor Kunst en Cultuur* was published by Starfish Books Amsterdam in 2023 and *Culture is Not an Industry* will come out with Manchester University Press in early 2024. His work with the Reset collective can be found at <https://resetartsandculture.com>.