

Art and Culture after Covid-19

Everyone seems to agree that the Covid-19 pandemic has a huge impact on the economy, social relations, politics, and culture. We're nowhere near through this crisis yet, and alternative futures are already being promoted, others wait to 'get back to normal', while most people are too busy coping with the emergency. In this ferment of events and contestation, it's valuable to be reminded of the bigger picture. This essay by Professor Justin O'Connor (University of South Australia) places the current situation of cultural organisations and workers in a historical context, reminding us of their developing relationship with the political economy of recent decades. It is also challenging because it asks what compromises have been made by cultural actors in pursuit of recognition and at what costs.

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The Experience of our generation: that Capitalism will die no natural death.
Walter Benjamin, 1935

Business as Usual?

All around we hear ‘let’s not go back to business as usual, after this crisis we must do things differently’. A ‘people’s war’, there is talk of 1945, Beverage and Attlee, Curtin and Chifley (Chalmers 2020), popular sacrifice making it impossible that we go back to what was before. We hear that ‘we are all in this together’, with Churchillian overtones from national leaders, though the absence of the US and Russia from the new global wartime coalition is telling. But underneath the war rhetoric (Meadway 2020), humanity united in the face of a common enemy, is a sense of deep systemic crisis, putting us more in mind of the Great Depression and the geopolitical catastrophe that followed. Business as Usual, the enemy vanquished, let’s get back to normal: if this is a systemic crisis, then C-19 is more than a test of our defences, it says something much more fundamental about who we are and where we are going.

Unlike the Spanish Flu, which appeared as a gratuitous death-bringer in an age already awash with slaughter and destruction, C-19 is much more central to this systemic crisis. There is evidence that the growing frequency of cross-species viral mutation (Vighi 2020) is closely correlated (“Social Contagion: Microbiological Class War in China” 2020) to intensive farming and concentrated population growth, as well as the specific socio-economic and environmental disruptions which have led, in this case, to the intensification of the hunting and storing of wild animals in South China ‘wet markets’ (Zhong, Crang and Zeng 2009). Intensified agribusiness, rapid urbanisation, accelerated interconnectedness of global mobility. This is the revenge of Gaia, a reminder of our dependency on a terrestrial life-support system (Latour 2018) that is not ours simply to ‘master’; this is a dress rehearsal (Latour 2020) for the challenges of climate change to come, a shot across the bow. The systemic crisis comes from the sense that it is the capacity of a whole social system (Harvey 2020) that is being probed, and that the enemy is within.

The crisis has highlighted a general reduction of the state’s own capacity for action, along with the public services (Badham 2020) it provides – a reduction damaging in the Global North but catastrophic in states of the Global South, systematically dismantled in the 1990s. The ‘small state’ thinking of neoliberalism is dead, we are told. At the same time, ‘bringing the state back in’ is also the ‘rediscovery of the social’. Boris Johnson, like Scott Morrison, announcing unprecedented stimulus/ survival packages, burns forty years of economic orthodoxy – ‘there is no alternative’, ‘there is no magic money tree’ – announcing (“There is such a thing as society, says Boris Johnson from bunker” 2020) that, after all, ‘there is such a thing as society’, thereby bringing to a close the period opened by Thatcher and Reagan in 1979-81. But though the Right squeal ‘socialism’ (Zitelmann 2020) – as they did during the New Deal and WWII (Mann 2012) – this is no reason to take it at face value. The return of the state (Phillips and Rozworski 2020) is not necessarily socialism,

nor even Keynesianism. Similar squeals also accompanied the bank bailouts that began in 2008, though not for long. Then, the state also came roaring back (Tooze 2019) in, the ‘free market’ now revealed as utterly dependent on it: but the result was a new accommodation between neoliberal financialisation, rising inequality, and the state. Not only did things not get better, they got worse. Whatever is happening now with the renationalised private hospitals, or airlines, or other ‘essential services’; with the underwriting, via employers, of wages and income; with the eviction freezes, free childcare, and expanded payments from Centrelink (itself undergoing some kind of re-nationalisation) – these need careful scrutiny. This frantic action by states (Tooze 2020), whose capacity to act has been compromised, might be delivered by emergency de-commodification – a ‘holiday for exchange value’ (Davies 2020) – but is likely to be skewed in its targeting and, through the corporate agents with which it works, entrench us more deeply in a malfunctioning Business as Usual.

So too, though we hear stories of human solidarity, rather than the Zombie apocalypse (Monbiot 2020) we constantly watch on Netflix, the ‘return of the social’ comes after forty years of arguing that this very ‘social’ – give or take the residual, grimly administered ‘safety net’ – was nothing but competitive market individualism. Old habits die hard, especially when the economic, cultural, institutional, and administrative fabric of that ‘social’ has not so much been allowed to go threadbare but is woven around other principles (Davies 2020). It is not at all clear that we know what this ‘social’ actually means anymore – or who is included in it, some leaders (think Trump, Bolsonaro, Orbán) tempted to set ‘the base’ against those ‘others’ suspected of bringing infection. After all, ‘social’ media is a highly ambiguous term, built on a networked view of society not just analogous to the cybernetic ‘information processing’ model of Hayek’s neoliberal market, but now, as ‘platform’ (Srnicsek 2017) or ‘surveillance’ (Zuboff 2019) capitalism, deeply enmeshed with it. In fact, since the shock of 2008, and the social discontent (amongst non-bankers) to which it gave rise, the neoliberal state has seen government as a kind of ‘platform’, where ‘nudges’ (Bacevic 2020), Big Data and algorithmic predictions (Andrejevic 2019) are now the stuff of public administration.

Before celebrating the return of state and social as a version of Polanyi’s ‘double movement’ (Polanyi 1944), a re-assertion of the human and the social against the fictitious and abstract ‘market’ (Jäger and Klein 2020), we should also remember that in his account we first had to go through the fires of totalitarian Communism and Fascism, and of world war, before we got to 1945. Since 2008, (financial) markets and the state have had a partial reconciliation (or interpenetration), and the post-austerity shift to ‘populism’ has brought back the ‘social nation’, the new Right flirting with nationalisation and protection of ‘our’ environment. If the social has crept back in, then any ‘left’ political consequences have been strongly policed. The Right have not only ramped up the culture wars, setting a popular nation against metro-cosmopolitan elites, stridently denouncing (O’Connor 2020) ‘globalisation’ along with any accommodation (Medcalf 2018) with Communist (now no longer ‘transitional’) China. As in the McCarthy era, an attack on an external Communist threat (Hartcher 2019, 25) serves to sever any resonances between that project (however degraded, or distorted) and transformative politics at

home. Expect calls for the repatriation of manufacturing, a National Capitalism to combat the global export of Communist State Capitalism that has been going on, 'under our noses', for a couple of decades. Underneath this rhetoric, and impelled by the viral emergency, the re-tooling of social governance around surveillance, big data, and algorithmic nudge – the social stripped of any sense of effective participatory democracy – is likely to go on apace (in both systems (Davies 2015, 431–450)), if left unchecked.

Responses to the crisis will be, inevitably, contested and multiple – strong state intervention, laissez-faire ('let it rip'), decommodification, mutual aid all in the mix (Mair 2020). States will learn things, ready for the next time, but how far this learning will go beyond enhanced crisis capability to address systemic issues, is an open question. Rather than waiting for neoliberal capitalism to die its natural death, state and society marching back in after markets and individuals, we need to think very clearly and urgently about what is systemic in this crisis and what needs to change at the end of it. This is not just about what the state needs to survive this crisis, nor only how it might re-think the principles of its organisation, but also what value does it represent for society and how might this be articulated. This systemic reckoning also demands we address how far art and culture have been deeply entangled with the system-in-crisis.

Art and culture?

It is perfectly understandable that the first response of the arts and cultural sector has been to seek state protection for its livelihood – income for the part-timers, casuals, recently laid-off and self-employed – and to secure on-going organisational capacity and business viability for the bigger companies and 'sector organisers'. Arts and cultural events and venues were amongst the first to be cancelled and closed, and no doubt, will be amongst the last to re-open. Other forms of cultural production – film and TV (Eltham 2020), regional newspapers (Meade 2020) – have been suspended along with the rest of 'non-essential' services. The sector has been the hardest hit (Coates, Mackey and Chen 2020); art and cultural workers are in dire need – *bare life* – and need support immediately and until the 'recovery' is well underway. This has been forthcoming (to various extents) in Australia, UK and across Europe. In Germany (Brown 2020) – at Federal and state (*Länder*) level – support has been made explicitly for arts and culture, 'essential to our democracy', at a time when their 'creative courage' is needed, artists being 'indispensable' and 'vital, especially now'. Australia cut their funding (Eltham 2020). For the rest, support for cultural workers seems to be delivered primarily as part of a general package for similarly affected workers. We can't yet give an assessment of how successful these various schemes are for the cultural sector, and they need to be closely monitored as they too will affect the post-virus landscape. What we can say, if anyone was still under any illusion, is that the widespread impact of the emergency on art and cultural workers has shown them neck-deep in the precarity of the 'gig economy' (Crouch 2019). After the crisis, many are asking if getting back to Business as Usual is what we need – especially as this crisis comes at the end of a long period of declining income and conditions.

Lead organisations from the cultural sector have made a case for immediate need – as with any group of vulnerable people – and for the wider importance of the sector. In some cases, this was a re-application of the arguments from the last twenty years – ‘the sector is worth \$xxx billion, compared to that one which is only worth \$xx billion, and thus we are deserving of support as an important industry.’ (O’Connor 2020) This argument, given decades of funding cuts (Eltham 2020), has failed to make any impact on most governments up until now; let’s hope this time it will fare better. Perhaps there will be a ‘creative industries’ argument, that the sector will be vital for our economic recovery; after the 2008 crisis we heard a lot about how the creative industries had proved to be amongst the most resilient sectors (Pratt 2009, 495–496), leading the rebound. I suspect that this time, ‘not going back to business as usual’ would have to mean that the accelerating precarity of the cultural sector – AKA ‘resilience’ – must be reversed. This would involve a whole set of new labour regulations – applicable to the ‘gig economy’ generally – and maybe a Universal Basic Income. But must we accept the inevitability of the ‘gig economy’, with its intensification of anxiety and fragmentation of work, and the complicity of the arts and cultural organisations, who have promoted and normalised it? As Bruno Latour (Latour 2020) suggests, once we begin to ask questions about how we might fix the things we think are broken, we get into the kind of radical territory of the New Deal and post-1945 settlement. Maybe more so...

The demands for immediate support, and the recognition of cultural workers’ shared material condition of precarity with other workers, previously marginalised and dismissed as ‘low-skilled’, is important. Health and aged care workers, cleaners, transport workers, farm labourers, supermarket shelf-stackers, delivery riders, all are now recognised as indispensable, at least for the duration of the silence left by the suspension of the rat race and its ‘bullshit jobs’ (Graeber 2013). But there are important caveats (Neilson and Rossiter 2006), as there always have been when ‘creatives’ are lumped into the general ‘precariat’, the self-employed illustrator with the hotel cleaner. Any effective sense of a shared fate, one which might help the arts and culture sector reposition itself after C-19, needs to register the differences as well as the similarities.

In the meantime, we hear that cultural workers, like these other devalued workers, also need better recognition and acknowledgement. ‘We in the cultural sector produce all those things – books, games, TV shows, music, streaming entertainment – that make life in and out of quarantine bearable, enjoyable; but we also provide a sense of belonging, of human connection, of social cohesion that will be crucial for a time after neoliberal competitive individualism.’ This social indispensability certainly means ‘decent wages and conditions’, and, as with Health for example, the state needs to reverse its ongoing funding cuts to culture. These cuts, as to Health, were symptomatic of the hollowing out of the state whose deleterious consequences we are now facing. In these claims culture is not just a victim of small state austerity, it also needs to be an essential part of any expanded ‘social state’ provision of collective services whose post-emergency retention, for many, would be the most beneficial outcome of the crisis. Not Business as Usual for arts and

culture would require a restoration and expansion of state funding for culture and, necessarily, a renewed acknowledgement, by government, of art and culture's importance for any liveable post-virus society.

Trouble ahead

Well, before we get to this, let me suggest that the cultural sector is not yet in any position to make these sorts of claims, on public funding or on a reinvigorated social purpose, until it has come to terms with its own complicities with the last twenty-five years of neoliberalism.

Let me start – more or less at random – with an ‘*Open Letter to the EU*’ from *Culture Action Europe* (“Open Letter to the EU Demanding Support for CCS during Covid-19” 2020), which argues that the EU emergency funding package should, under the ‘Cohesion and Values’ heading, be extended to arts and culture:

Culture is the foundation of who we are as human beings. It grounds our collective life, binding us together, nurturing our feeling of belonging. Without the explicit recognition of the European project's cultural dimension, the future of the European Union as a common endeavour is difficult to imagine.

This is laudable of course, but its claims are weakened if we acknowledge the current situation of Europe, where ‘cultures of belonging’ have also gone in a ‘blood and soil’ direction, and where the ‘culture of belonging’ to Europe and its ‘project’ is itself deeply compromised. Compromised, that is, by the EU's capture by the neoliberal project, one whose link to rising inequalities within and between member states is clear now for all to see – despite its other valuable progressive social, democratic, and environmental aspects. In short, to what, and in what ways, are we being asked to belong? This applies equally to calls for a national belonging: is it about social solidarity, or putting our collective backs into a national economic recovery, or maybe keeping the borders closed?

The call for a re-invigoration of culture's role is also compromised by how many in the cultural or ‘creative’ sector, especially at the leadership levels, whilst acknowledging the growing inequalities all around them, have failed to acknowledge how these inequalities are actually deeply entangled in their idea of ‘culture’. We have witnessed the shocked disbelief of many urban, educated ‘creatives’ – the majority of whom are by no means rich – when their compatriots or co-Europeans embrace blood and soil nationalism, and seek out other ‘retrograde’ ‘populist’ forms of cultural belonging. What we have seen, since 2008 certainly, but starting well before that in the 1980s, is a growing divergence, on multiple registers, between ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. The ‘cultural and creative sector’ may identify with the latter – ethically, politically, and sometimes materially through its own participation in precarious labour – but in significant ways it is aligned with the former.

This is not an argument about the ‘elitism’ of the arts, nor of the lack of representation – women, ethnic minorities, working class – within them, to be rectified by various forms of ‘positive discrimination’ and diversity programmes. I am suggesting that what the cultural sector sees as universal – the possibilities opened up by culture and creativity – is in fact highly circumscribed by class chances (intertwined with gender, ethnicity, and regionality). That is, it is no longer so much a question of the content of culture being ‘elitist’ – those battles fought by Cultural Studies, by Bourdieusians, by pop culture warriors – but that the chances of participating in cultural production or creative labour as a viable career path are now closely circumscribed by class, as refracted above all through education.

Over the last thirty years, the primary policy justification for the cultural sector has become an economic one. Beginning with ‘arts impact’ (Myerscough 1992, 1–13) studies in the 1980s, then its identification as ‘growth sector’ in the 1990s, culminating in its systematic integration as catalytic economic driver within a wider ‘creative economy’, culture, in the form of the ‘creative industries’, sought to move itself away from the periphery of ‘the arts’ and towards the powerful centres of economic development and innovation. This happened in Europe and Australia, extended across Africa and Asia, and is revving up in South America (“Everything you need to know about the Orange Economy” 2020). ‘Creative economy’ is now used by international agencies such as UNESCO (“Creative Industries” 2020) and UNCTAD (“Creative Economy Programme” 2020), as well as diplomatic agencies such as the British Council⁰¹ and the Goethe-Institut⁰², as the main legitimating discourse for the adoption of ‘modern’ cultural policies by governments, and ‘creative cities’⁰³, across the globe.

Clearly there are other strands, some older, some emergent, that weave their way through this, but it is indisputable that ‘creative industries’ or ‘creative economy’ has become the central organising concept for contemporary cultural policy in many areas of the Global North and Global South. It is not as simple as ‘economic impact’ and ‘multipliers’, a line used by art organisations from the 1980s. It is rooted in claims for a more epochal shift, where the practice of symbolic creation, of meaning-making, was to be part of a wider transition from an industrial Fordist to a post-industrial economy. The transformative potential of art and culture no longer lay in its complex symbolic, meaning-making function but, rather, in the possibilities it held out for meaningful work and the realisation of individual creative potential in a post-industrial world. This was set within an ‘imaginary’ of creative social (though mostly metropolitan) transformation which validated the aspirations of educated young people able to identify themselves with a viable and desirable future. This creative transformation would, in turn, be recouped by government gaining a ‘key economic driver’, expressed variously in increased GDP, innovation, soft power, development, modernisation, progress, and so on.

01 see: <https://creativeeconomy.britishcouncil.org>

02 see: <https://cultural-entrepreneurship.org>

03 see: <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/home>

This creative 'imaginary', I would suggest, was running out of steam even before the C-19 crisis. It was an aspirational future, an economically framed historical narrative of transition from one form of production (industry, mass, material) to another (information, knowledge, individuated, immaterial). In this there would be winners and losers, people inevitably left behind as others – the educated young especially – made the transition to the new economy. The 'cultural and creative industries', if I may use that term, overwhelmingly employ educated people, at higher rates than other industries. Since the arrival of digitalisation this has accelerated, the sector has been staging its own internal de-industrialisation, losing huge swathes of 'blue collar' jobs in printing, publishing, textiles, ceramics, and the wholesale, retail, and distribution of physical 'creative goods'. The famous 1998 definition (Creative Industries Mapping Documents 1998) of creative industries, as those based on 'individual creativity, skill and talent', with a 'potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property', worked to combine the heroic struggle of the avant-garde artist with the amoral 'creative destruction' of the Schumpeterian entrepreneur. The creativity mythos effected a trade-off between individual creative fulfilment and collective social justice.

This is the story told by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018), who chart the emergence of 'creative capitalism' in the growing separation between the younger white-collar workers looking for 'quality of work/life' and the blue-collar workers seeking better pay and condition in the older trade union manner. The ways in which the former, over the 1970s, became re-attached to a new form of creative capitalism, whilst the organised working class was systematically marginalised, is a complex one, but the rise of the 'creative economy' is clearly entangled with it. This story reappears in Richard Florida, who blithely consigns the industrial working class to economic, social, and cultural irrelevance (Florida 2005). Thomas Piketty's new book charts the consequences in detail (Piketty 2020). The parties of the Left become the parties of the educated ('Brahmins'), those of the Right of the (educated) wealthy ('Merchants'). Left outside, disenchanting, are the (disorganised) working class. The acceptance by Brahmins and Merchants of an educational meritocracy, and the abandonment of redistributive policies as futile or undesirable, has had deleterious political consequences, as we know. The 'creative industries' are set deep within this ideological formation.

This has not served 'creatives' well. The transformative potential of the creative economy gave way to new forms of exploitation and labour discipline; the financialisation of the 'new' economy meant public services that used to be free or state subsidised – health, education, social insurance – were now transmuted into private debt (Lazzarato 2015). Public housing shrank, gentrification ripped through urban real estate, above all in 'creative' cities, and younger people were locked out of the housing market. Young (and not so young) creatives (along with their educated peers) have increasingly resembled the losers, the uneducated precariat, stuck endlessly in low paid work rather than temporarily paying their dues in Bohemia. It is less and less likely that they will join the 'progressive' middle aged, middle class ('Gen X') (Davies 2020) who benefitted so much from the 'third way' social democracy of the

1990s – let alone the now infamous ‘Boomers’. Piketty’s work points to some of the baleful consequences of this age of galloping inequality, within and between countries and regions. But already we can see how precarity drives cultural workers into the bigger cities, a necessity in order to make a living across multiple employments, pushing up rents and pushing out the older ‘blue collar’ workers to the urban outskirts. Inequalities explode within and between cities, between cities and countryside, between region and region (take a look at the Brexit map, Doré 2018).

How this will play out in this crisis nobody knows, though already the armature of inequality is showing through (Scheiber, Schwartz and Hsu 2020) the skin of ‘we are all in this together’. What seems clear is that it will accelerate further the exit of cultural workers from the ‘creative imaginary’, its promises now hollowed out further. Though it still appeals to aspirations to self-fulfilment within an imagined global modern, the dissonant juxtaposition of this imaginary with deepening inequality and ecological catastrophe is becoming difficult to ignore. If this crisis really means Not Business as Usual, with some form of a return of ‘state’ and ‘social’ focused on social justice, solidarity and re-embedded markets then, possibly, we might emerge with a different configuration of culture and society. But for this to happen it will take more than just saying ‘see, you need culture now’; what that need for ‘culture’ actually is no longer seems clear, and the growing discontent amongst those inside and outside the creative imaginary currently finds no collective articulation.

The legacy of this last thirty years will be hard to shake off. A full recognition of, and accounting for, the entanglement of the creative imaginary with exacerbated global inequalities will be difficult.

In the last two decades, governments and cultural agencies in both the Global North and South have presented creative economy as a vision for equitable and sustainable growth and development. It has not been that; there is little evidence, outside of China and South Korea, of any creative economy shift to the Global South, and none to suggest that this new ‘economic’ driver is less – rather than more – inequitable and exclusionary. The creative economy discourse has become increasingly self-serving as cultural agencies refuse to register any of the downsides for fear of getting thrown out of the meeting room, not allowed back to the top table. The desperate bid to promote culture through its direct association with economic development – jobs, exports, innovation, branding – has had a corrupting effect on those international agencies. Its altruistic illusions of culture being a universal ‘good’, able to deliver greater equality, social mobility, gender equity, and sustainability, have shielded the promoters of the global ‘creative class’ from acknowledging their complicity with ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ (Peck, Brenner and Theodore 2018, 3–15) – its investment in an educational meritocracy of ‘talent’, its caving in to an economy-centred vision of human progress, its lip-service to the disenfranchisement of those left outside (Therborn 2014, 7–16) – the rural migrants, the old and the new working classes, the vast precariat. Always presenting itself as the ‘clean’, sustainable development option – what resource is more ubiquitous, inexhaustible, and cheap than human creativity? – creative economy’s association with unsustainable urbanisation, gentrification,

resource extraction ('no copper, no digital'), the diffusion of the languages of entrepreneurial self-improvement and of endless, insatiable consumption – this is all firmly locked away in the attic.

Thirty years of chasing neoliberalism's tail has left the established voices of the cultural sector mute. Their self-positioning as willing servants of culture as economic development, modesty ensured via the fig-leaf of 'sustainability', has left them unable to articulate anything like a critical purchase on the current global situation. Without this reckoning, avoiding Business as Usual will be impossible. If the 'return of the state' or the 'social' is to mean simply more funding for arts and culture (itself still a distant hope), then all this will simply continue unabated, feeding resentment of the 'metropolitan elites' and the growing disaffections of the 'age of anger' (Mishra 2018) which now apply as much to the 'creative precariat' as they do to the uneducated excluded.

Learning to speak again

It might come as a surprise, to somebody who has not had a steady salary for a decade nor managed to earn more than \$40k a year in that time, to be told they are 'complicit'. In many of the most socially devastated areas of our cities, towns, and rural areas, the shoe-string funded arts and cultural projects, barely surviving cinemas, struggling book shops, occasionally functioning music venues, underfunded local museums and galleries – these represent some of the few signs of hope and life. In the last decade the shift to non-commodified production and exchange, mutual aid, co-operatives, socially embedded cultural projects have gone on apace; it is just that these register as the 'not-for-profit' part of the creative economy 'ecosystem'. These everyday life-worlds make up the 'social factory' (Gill and Pratt 2008, 1–30); or the 'dark matter' (Sholette 2010) of local art practice sustaining the glittering art world; or act as an assemblage of non-commodified labour, integrated nonetheless into capital's global supply chains, like the *matsutake* mushroom pickers at the 'end of the world' (Lowenhaupt Tsing 2015). That all this might, in fact, represent something very different from the organising narrative of the creative economy, built on a different organising principle, a different way of seeing the future, is barely registered by cultural sector leaders. Whilst this sector represents the most vulnerable workers who require urgent support, in seeking 'creative justice' (Banks 2017) we might also look for the beginnings of a different way of organising arts and culture outside the imaginary of 'creative economy'.

Calls now for a return to social values, with culture as its 'heart', ignore how deeply the cultural sector has absorbed the language of neoliberalism. The 'creative economy' was always about horizontal networks, the state 'getting out of the way', albeit after it had invested heavily in research and capacity-building. It was about entrepreneurship plus markets, set within a distributed social innovation system. The consequences of such 'network sociality' (Wittel 2001, 51–76) have been well documented (McRobbie 2015). The reality of the creative industries – winner takes all, supply chain domination, platform oligopolies, massive financialisation, aggressive free trade and intellectual

property legislation – was something very different, as were the actually existing ‘big industry’ policies of countries such as China (O’Connor and Gu 2020) and South Korea (Lee 2018), the US, and Japan. The less industrialised arts and cultural sector developed its own economic impacts, as ‘core R&D’, generators of tourism and essential to city branding. They also had a ‘social impact’ which, suitably metricised, justified state subsidy framed as ‘market failure’. Not a failure of the market *per se* but rather culture’s failure in the market. The positioning of art and culture as ‘welfare’ worked to cow its leaders, as they, along with all those who took hand-outs, were reminded that their dependency on benefits would only be tolerated by taxpayers if they showed themselves to be deserving. In accepting this mendicant position, and the need to fill in the ever-expanding forms detailing how money was spent and with what results, they also accepted the right of a certain kind of economic theory to define not just ‘the economy’ but also the whole purpose of public administration, and indeed, society as a whole.

The period since 2008 has accelerated critiques of neoliberalism, about which we now know much more. We also know that it stubbornly persists. In Australia, even though the Rudd government bought in a stimulus package after 2008, heralded (Rudd 2009) as a ‘return to Keynesianism’, it was vehemently attacked by the opposition Coalition, who attempted, when in power, to bring in the ‘austerity’ that was sweeping the UK and EU. This stimulus did little to change the basic acceptance of (soft) neoliberal orthodoxy within the Australian Labor Party. The massive spending in this crisis, completely dwarfing that of the ALP (and of 2008 globally) is not a return to Keynesianism but something else, about which little is known, and which will require considerable parlaying. What seems clear, is that, outside the secure firewalls of the current emergency, the basic settings of economic rationality, as established at the heart of treasury and economic development departments across the globe, remain locked firmly in place. It is the market not the state which delivers efficient growth, and all values are, ultimately, expressible as a numeric economic value.

So too, the language of public administration has been re-written in these market and metric fixated terms by the New Public Management (Hood 1991) of the 1980s, which in turn had roots in the cybernetics and logistics (Mirowski 2012) of the ‘military-industrial complex’ (remember that?). The cultural sector finds it difficult to see beyond this, thoroughly internalising its position as welfare recipient whose value-for-money must be accounted for to taxpayers in a set of metrics. In this logic, as Terry Flew (Cunningham and Flew 2019) writes, it is its economic contribution that ‘demonstrates the social license to operate of the cultural sector’. The reality of the massive on-going transfer of state revenue to banks, hedge-funds, mining, real estate, airlines and so on, is completely ignored in this kind of account. More damagingly, the memory of an older form of public administration (Yeatman 2015), based on need and addressed through a professional public service corps responsible to indicators of success set by its substantive value-laden assessment of that need – this has evaporated. The history of how this economic rationality utterly transformed public administration – its ethos and that of the polity it served – is retrieved only with difficulty from the recesses of a collective amnesia.

If the state and society are to come back, along with a re-invigorated role for culture within these, then a lot un-forgetting needs to take place, and not just at the abstract theoretical level either; our everyday language is sodden with the common sense of economic rationality. We may point out how 'efficiencies' in public administration have hollowed out the state's capacity to act efficiently in this emergency, but still economists stubbornly claim the high ground of 'hard' (Guest 2020) rationality. Prioritising saving lives is 'sentimental', economists must think with the head not the heart: when this is over the efficiencies must begin again. Choice of lives and livelihoods is indeed very hard, but that hard choice rests squarely on the ground of a shared political ethics not sub-contracted to the death-rattle calculations of our economist-actuaries.

The 'social' which we hope to bring back has also lost much of its capacity under the onslaught of this economic common sense. When we have been told that acting rationally means taking individual responsibility for our own life choices, maximising our opportunities whilst the market aggregates this into statistically expressed 'social outcomes'; and that public administration must use informational levers ('signals', 'nudges') built around the rationally optimising individual; then it is difficult to ask people to self-isolate, and take a significant cut in income in order to save, not themselves – 'it's not a plague for God's sake, calm down' – but somebody else, over there, with whom they have little connection. Altruism is a social capacity. There is no need to idealise or mystify (Maçães 2020), but the capacity of many Asian countries to act with collective solidarity in this emergency is something to be taken seriously. Especially when the global hegemon has gone AWOL: for, propaganda aside, this is the first global crisis since 1945 that is being faced outside any US (Glasser 2020) attempts at leadership.

Culture's ever-growing reliance on economic impacts (Meyrick, Phiddian and Barnett 2018), and the social metrics that accompany this, has not only undermined its sense of its own value but has blinded it to the fact that the values culture claims to stand for are at best surplus to requirements and at worse, threats to be contained. 'Culture employs more than agriculture, as much as construction; music adds millions to the economy, the tourism industry is unthinkable without art': the failure of these arguments to cut through, then and now, should indicate that the burial of art and culture under a mountain of metrics is not just part of the collateral damage from New Public Management. It is purposefully punitive. Culture must be (seen to be) put to work in the creative economy, its residual values eradicated or de-fanged (or taped to the wall of an art gallery). Neoliberalism is not (just) some outbreak of hyper-instrumental rationality, spread by 'bean counters': it is part of a long counter-revolution set in motion at the end of the 1960s against the culture of that epoch. Culture must be made to pay for the temerity it had to challenge – however symbolically – the fundamental values of a modern capitalist society. For those parts of culture than cannot be moved wholesale to commercial distribution, where the only 'intrinsic value' that matters is that which results in a purchase, there is a long slow death by reporting on 'outcomes', that expands in inverse proportion to the amount of funding.

The success with which economic rationality has colonised ‘common sense’ can be in the way evolutionary biology and cognitive neuroscience replaced sociology and psychoanalysis in the popular imagination. The ‘selfish gene’ (Dawkins 1976) responds to informational signals, from which the ‘blind watchmaker’ (Dawkins 1986) constructs the edifice of creation. Networks of individual neurones, responding to electrical signals, produce a subject with a set of behaviours, responding to external (or in the case of drugs, artificial internal) stimuli. ‘One day’, Matt Ridley promises (Ridley 1994), thinking of Romeo and Juliet, ‘some scientist will know exactly how the brain of a young man becomes obsessed by the image of a particular young woman, molecule by molecule.’ Enter art as serotonin. And the promise (Andrejevic 2013) of Big Data, after all, is that it allows us to go ‘below’ culture, directly accessing the real, aggregating its vast data outputs through computational power rather than a wet-wear based symbolic system. Culture (Andrejevic 2019) is not needed in a world of algorithmic governance.

As with universities, reporting to metrics is not about ‘bean-counting’ but control. They dissolve any form of participatory democracy – collegiality, peer-review – and replace crucial occasions for substantive judgement by robo-scheduled data input. Art and cultural workers, taking the money, are bound by contracted deliverables, not the mutual trust of partnership. In the face of such an onslaught the arts and culture sector diligently offers up its metrics as down-payment on its social license to operate, though it continues to clutch an ‘intrinsic value’ like an orphan with a crumpled photo of her parents. That this ‘intrinsic’ value is precisely its social, its human value, rather than some residual self-indulgence, barely rates a mention.

Others have valiantly tried to add ‘cultural value’ as a ‘fourth pillar’ (“Culture, fourth pillar of sustainable development” 2020) of development (economic, social, environmental) or adapting the ‘triple bottom line’⁰⁴ (the phrase is telling), adding culture to economic, social, and environmental outcomes. What these ignore is that art and culture’s job has always been to give meaning to the world, a world that includes within it what we call the ‘economic’ and the ‘social’. It makes no sense to identify ‘economic’, ‘social’ and ‘cultural’ outcomes unless you have already previously separated the world into these distinct categories. The ‘four pillars’, as viewed from government, are grotesquely asymmetrical, the pathetic stump of culture overshadowed by the tower of economy. In fact, buried inside the black box of ‘intrinsic value’ culture’s ongoing challenge is that to organise the world in terms of the absolute priority of individual and collective economic advantage is a disaster. It is culture’s job to protest that the sheer preponderance of ‘economy’ can only lead us to a catastrophic social and environmental nihilism. It is art’s job – along with the other natural, social, and human sciences – to help articulate how we might inhabit the world in a manner that might promote human thriving not its extermination.

⁰⁴ According to https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triple_bottom_line: The triple bottom line (or otherwise noted as TBL or 3BL) is an accounting framework with three parts: social, environmental (or ecological) and

financial. Some organisations have adopted the TBL framework to evaluate their performance in a broader perspective to create greater business value.

From 'Not Business as Usual' to 'Another World is Possible'

Not Business as Usual, where culture regains its role in a post-neoliberal state and society, cannot just be about more funding. It is also about how this funding is allocated and distributed, along with a clearer articulation of the grounds on which that funding is given and for what purpose. This is crucial, for without it more funding will come with more metrics, expanded 'dashboards', more triple bottom line Key Performance Indicators (KPI).

We must think how we organise the economy of culture – how public funding is given (the conditions of acceptance, reporting and judgement), but also how commercial and state agencies produce cultural goods and services. Crucially important is to start the long haul back from a default system in which advertising and marketing not only represent the main source of employment for cultural workers – what a crying waste of creative time and energy – and the only socially acceptable form of funding for some of the most crucial parts of our political, social and cultural life. We are currently living with the disastrous consequences of giving over the public sphere wholesale to private sector companies – not just the late evolved forms of FAANG (Johns 2016) but also older reptilians, such as News Corps. Just thinking how to organise all this, outside of 'let the market decide', will be a huge challenge. Not many in government have this capacity, and the accumulated knowledge of public broadcasting and cultural administration have been allowed to dissipate.

This must go hand in hand with a new settlement with art and cultural workers, not only refusing the inevitability of the gig economy but also extracting them from their association with 'creative entrepreneurship'. We must look instead at promoting greater de-commodification (Davies 2020), through forms of direct public funding but also co-operatives (Boyle and Oakley 2018) and community-based enterprises. Why try desperately to call the thousands of underpaid musicians in break-even venues 'an industry', when we could see it as a fantastically enlivening collective enterprise, for musicians, venue managers, and audiences alike? Rather than paying for music industry masters' programmes we could facilitate a thriving network of co-operatives and community-owned music venues. So too an increase in cultural funding must come with a new conceptualisation of public funding as accountable not to metrics but to the full range of participatory democracy, from *Porto Allegre*-style budgeting to peer review based on substantive judgement not generic KPIs – including cultural worker representation on high level decision-making boards (rather than just bankers and lawyers).

Think of the energies such a radical rethinking might release! The chance to reframe the way we think about funding, producing, and enjoying culture together, outside the ideology of market efficiencies. To re-embed the economy of culture in the social life of those it serves. And while we are at it, we might want to use the words 'art' and 'culture' again, giving the term 'creative' a well-earned and extended holiday.

This would also help us reset relations with those excluded from the educational meritocracy of the creative industries. There can be no conception of a new equitable social state that does not include strong re-distributive policies; this also means a reassessment of the accelerating credentialism,

bringing with it crippling debt, over-qualification and the corruption of the university system that willingly supplies them. Re-investment in ‘technical’ or ‘further’ education not only financially but in social recognition – valuing differently skilled education for those performing crucial social tasks, not underfunded job training for career market losers. For the cultural sector, this might herald a reappraisal of all those making skills which have so rapidly diminished or disappeared, buried under a narrative of progress in which immaterial creation supersedes material making.

We also need to reset our relationship to the ‘audience’, to establish a different language, a new way of talking, that can re-centralise culture’s role in our public life, and articulate how these relate to our collective conception of ‘the good life’. To reframe the public beyond ‘bums-on-seat’ metrics, or digitally enabled audience feedback dashboards. To fundamentally rethink what ‘public’ actually means – more diverse, more active, more adept but also more united than ever before. Something like this happened in 1945; it happened again, more chaotically, in the 1960s and ’70s, but rolled back over the course of the 1990s, reduced again to the mass of consumers after the brief frisson on the ‘digital revolution’. Such a reframing did not happen after 2008, social solidarity extending only to the bankers, with culture (and social services) taking a massive hit. I think some kind of reframing of the social will have to happen after this crisis, but which way will it go? To some new post-neoliberal authoritarian ‘Big State’ with an expanded social reach and firmly policed borders, or a social state, operating within an expanded democratic participation, whose common values are expressed, amongst others and in appropriate fashion, by art and culture?

In this crisis it is not just the organising narrative of the global hegemon that has absented itself, so too have the routines and infrastructures of everyday life. This is a global experience, involving a dimly imagined community the like of which I do not think we have seen before. Many have tried to call this community into being in the face of global climate catastrophe, to limited avail. Now we are all locked up together, and we all know it.

What words do we use for such a collective experience – neither trauma nor celebration, neither war nor world cup? It is less the spectacular stopped moment of Diana’s funeral, perhaps more the collective, slightly unsettled leisure time of the 1968 general strike (Ross 2008) in Paris. What words will be used – an interruption, a glitch, a void, an interregnum, a pivot, a birth?

What we have is a momentary **[Pause]**. For those of us whose time is not overshadowed by hunger, domestic violence, debilitating isolation, and precarious anxiety, the question is: What do we do with that time? In the **[Pause]** brought on by this crisis will we, who are concerned with art and culture, find the time to think and reflect, and then the will to plan and act, in a way that will allow art and culture to come out and take their rightful place in the debates about the future of human society on the planet, our common terrestrial life? For this is what comes next, the virus being just a first global red light – though there are whole rooms, buried or locked away, full of such desperately flashing red lights.

The cultural sector may have jumped last into the new world order that grew apace from 1980; it is currently looking like the last one out too.

Political debate is aflame, as are dissident economists, feminists, ecologists, philosophers, and artists and cultural workers too: but, like the global hegemon, the cultural leaders are missing in action, ready for Business as Usual, with a bit more cash to splash around, some new ‘post-virus’ KPIs to add on the end of their funding applications, some more creative economy programmes to mop up the unemployed.

We do not only have to have a **[Pause]**, we can also have a **[Reset]**. This could be to the default factory settings of Business as Usual; it might brutally delete years of hard work in an unequal ‘now we have to pay for it’ austerity; or it might connect the return of the social state to the need for the systemic reforms exposed so brutally by C-19. Art and culture are there to help show us how another world is possible.

Why should we expend our collective creative labour on keeping afloat the rusted hulk of a catastrophically dysfunctional system, when we could be diving for pearls?

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