Thoughts on the (Ab)Use of Creativity in Undoing Creation

Louise Katz

Introduction

There already exists an abundance of definitions of creativity, whether sociological or scientistic, romantic or skeptical, ideological or idealistic.[1] Some of these will be explored in his article as they relate to its overarching thesis, which calls for a radical re-thinking of contemporary understandings of creativity in industry, of what it means to be imaginative, and of the complexities of hope, whose forms may be passively fatalistic, utopian, or allied to 'toxic positivity'. Other forms, however, are unsentimental and critical, representing hope as inseparable from direct, practical engagement with the world. Having made a foray into these complexities, this article argues that creative thought, when separated from the rhetoric and values of 'creative industries', and hope, when separated from technotopianism, can have beneficial world-changing consequences. This article will therefore be set up as two discrete parts: the first arguing against creativity theory that is allied with commodification and consumerism, and as a result, ecological

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[1] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); David H. Cropley, 'The Dark Side of Creativity: A Differentiated Model,' in *The Dark Side of Creativity*, eds. David H. Copley, Arthur J. Copley, James C. Kaufman and Mark A. Runco (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996); Vlad P. Gläveanu and James C. Kaufman, 'Creativity: A Historical Perspective,' in *Creativity: An Introduction*, eds. James C. Kaufman and Robert J. Sternberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Lee Martin and Nick Wilson, 'Defining Creativity with Discovery,' *Creativity Research Journal*, vol. 29, no. 4 (2017); Christopher Martiniano, 'The Scientization of Creativity,' *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, vol. 49, no. 2 (2016); Oli Mould, *Against Creativity* (London: Verso, 2018); Keith Negus, *Creativity, Communication, and Cultural Value* (London: Sage Publications, 2004); and Rob Pope, *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice* (London: Routledge, 2005).

devastation. The second part will consider possibilities for hope, however fragile, based on imaginative prognostication in the face of seemingly impossible odds, and on iconoclastic thinking and attitudes of mind, some of which might be thought of as representing a kind of 'secular spirituality'.

The Havoc of (Mal)Creativity

Some Background: Creativity, Divinity and Individualism

The large body of creativity research indicates one thing fairly clearly: its meanings are attached to time and place. The stonemasonry of Gothic cathedrals and the fantastical gargoyles of Notre Dame, for instance, were seen as examples of skilled craftsmanship at the time; 'creativity' was not ascribed to them, as it was considered the domain of the deity only.[2] Contemporary understandings of 'creativity' require a conception of human beings as individuals for whom decision-making and the choices that result, whether social or political, technical or aesthetic, are individual responsibilities, a premise which, according to Paul Feyerabend underpins modern political, educational and scientific thought.[3] He contrasts it with the stories of Homeric heroes, showing that what many have read in recent history as, say, Odysseus's 'choices' were not actually independent decisions he made. Instead, Feyerabend explains, the hero simply finds himself taking one or another direction. An emphasis on personal responsibility and individual choice - and therefore the possibility for human creativity as understood today - are neither global nor abiding concepts. For Odysseus, who had no concept of the ideology of individualism, there was "no spiritual center, no 'soul', that might initiate or 'create' special causal chains."[4]

Nevertheless, associating what some *now* call creativity with, if not the vexed concept of 'soul,' then with a temporary phase of unworldliness, is found in diverse traditions globally. Interestingly, Victor Turner's anthropological description, in *The Forest of Symbols*, of certain liminal phases of tribal initiation, seem relatable to creative process outlined by Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, from immersion in an idea over time through to

[2] Gläveanu and Kaufman, 'Creativity'; and Pope, *Creativity*.
[3] Paul Feyerabend, 'Creativity – A Dangerous Myth,' *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 13, no. 4 (1987), p. 708.
[4] Feyerabend, 'Creativity'.

realisation.[5] The intentions and the experiences of artist and initiand are very different, but the liminal experiences each may undergo may have something in common. The tribal initiand is temporarily disconnected from society – though not from its mythos – and seeks to emerge from the limen "betwixt and between" with a reinvigorated understanding of the cultural gnosis.[6] Similarly, the creative practitioner may also enter liminal zones – but the aim in this case is to then go beyond conservation to extension of cultural knowledge, to acquire some new perception so as to produce a new artifact or idea. There are resonances here with the European Romantic belief that some people - but in this tradition, just a select few - have access to the inspiration of fugal experience or psychospiritual conditions, and are able to present of the fruits of their experience in artifacts such as poetry or painting. According to Keith Negus, the exclusivity of this version is perhaps where the current Western tendency to relate individualism and creativity arises.[7]

Vlad P. Gläveanu and James C. Kaufman, too, see creativity as dependent on contemporary notions of individualism - based on Romantic exceptionalism, perhaps, and definitely central to the contemporary Western mythos.[8] Arguably, much of this individualistic creativity - co-opted by industry for profit and severed from attachment to the common good on the one hand, and on the other, from antediluvian notions of numinosity – risks becoming hollow and platitudinous at best, malignant at worst. Practical applications of creativity, or 'creative innovation' in industry might be considered to be 'realistic' or pragmatic uses of this facility, indisputably a good as they foster profit and industrial growth. However, this article will contend that often this form of creativity extends into activities that are adamantly neither realistic nor good, but upper-case Romantic, in the sense that the overblown fantasies of tyrants are Romantic, from Hitler's Aryan dream to Trump's nationalistic romance of a return to an alleged former glory. [9]

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[5] Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); and Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity*, pp. 111-113.
[6] Victor W. Turner, 'Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage,' in *The Forest of Symbols*, ed. Victor W. Turner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).
[7] Negus, *Creativity*.
[8] Gläveanu and Kaufman, 'Creativity'.
[9] Felix Wiedemann, 'The Aryans: Ideology and Historiographical Narrative Types in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', in *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist*

Tumorous, 'Numinous' Creativity

Counterintuitively perhaps, creativity as otherworldliness returns with neoliberal economics. This is a system also known as market fundamentalism, a term coined in 1998 by business magnate George Soros.[10] There are other terms - economic rationalism, laissez-faire capitalism, right-wing libertarianism - but this one conveys "the quasi-religious certainly expressed by contemporary advocates of market self-regulation" whose pundits promote an ideology that is grandiose and self-serving to the extent that it seems that the survival of the world itself has become a secondary matter to its central tenet: the pursuit of economic growth and wealth creation.[11] Ghassan Hage likens the effect of this economic system to that of boiling lava; Naomi Klein dubbed its most extreme form 'disaster capitalism' for its exploitation of anxiety and its engineering of calamities in order to reap ever greater profits.[12] McKenzie Wark and Jennifer Mills have named it 'thanaticism', after the Greek daemon: "Thanaticism: like a fanaticism, a gleeful, overly enthusiastic will to death".[13] This article argues that it is misguided notions of 'creativity' that drive market fundamentalism, and that the kind of complaisant hopefulness that enables it is bringing us to the edge of the abyss.

In Pierre Bourdieu's view this iteration of capitalism represents "a sort of … new ecumenical gospel."[14] Like the originary Hebrew monotheism, economic fundamentalist monoculture dominates through the power of logos and image–making. According to Bourdieu, 'radical' capitalism 'glorifies' the market, "answering to no law except that of maximum profit" so that it

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Italy and Nazi Germany, eds. Helen Roche and Kyriakos N. Demetriou (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

[10] Fred Block and Margaret R. Somers, *The Power of Market Fundamentalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

[11] Block and Somers, *The Power of Market Fundamentalism*.

[12] Ghassan Hage, 'Trumpontologies 1', *Hage Ba'a* (2016), at http://hageba2a.blogspot.com/2016/11/trumpontologies-1.html, accessed 31/12/ 2021. See also Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Penguin, 2008).

[13] McKenzie Wark, 'Birth of Thanaticism', *Public Seminar* (2014), at http://publicseminar.org/2014/04/birth-of-thanaticism/. Accessed 31/12/2021.

[14] Pierre Bourdieu, 'A Reasoned Utopia and Economic Fatalism', *New Left Review*, vol. 1, no. 227 (1998), p. 126.

is becoming "a sort of universal belief." That prediction came nearly a quarter of a century ago, and today it seems it has arrived, or as Eugene McCarraher writes in *The Enchantments of Mammon*,

> Evangelicals refer to Jesus Christ as their "CEO" or personal investment advisor, while management writers cull from Lao-tzu, Buddha, Confucius and Carl Jung. Counting out "seven habits" or "four competencies" or "sixty-seven principles of success", business advice books can be as comically arcane as end-times prophesy, the oracles of Nostradamus, or another Dan Brown novel. Some writers see a sacramental significance in contemporary consumer culture. "…Suburban acquisitiveness stems from a "sacramental longing" … a desire to enter "a magical realms in which all is harmony, happiness, and contentment".[15]

Ten years after the publication of *No Logo* in 1999, Naomi Klein noted some of damage done in the 'creative' sphere of marketing. Klein declared that, "This was the era when corporate epiphanies were striking CEOs like lightning bolts from the heavens: Nike isn't a running shoe company, it is about the *idea of transcendence through sports*; Starbucks isn't a coffee shop chain, it's about the *idea of community*."[16] Or - as McCarraher has it - mega companies do not produce products, but, "neoliberal totems of enchantment."[17] Therefore, is not capitalism, as Terry Eagleton argues in *Culture and the Death of God*, just another "surrogate form of transcendence"?[18] McCarraher's rejoinder might be yes it is, as it "scrambles for the crown of the King of Kings: reason, science, literature, art, nationalism, but especially 'culture'," to which might be added the idea that it is actually no longer in competition with these 'kings', but has in fact absorbed them.[19] As Klein ironically points out, absorption is hard to avoid:

> The offers for *No Logo* spin-off projects (feature film, TV series, clothing line . . . were rejected [… including…] the ones from the megabrands and cutting-edge advertising agencies that wanted to give me seminars on why they were so hated. (There was a career to be made, I was learning, in being a kind of anti-corporate dominatrix,

[15] Eugene McCarraher, *The Enchantments of Mammon: How Capitalism Became the Religion of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019).
[16] Naomi Klein, 'No Logo at 10', *The Baffler* (2018), at https://thebaffler.com/salvos/no-logo-at-10. Accessed 31/12/2021.
[17] McCarraher, *The Enchantments of Mammon*, p. 3.
[18] Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (London: Yale University Press, 2015), p. ix.
[19] McCarraher, *The Enchantments of Mammon*, p. 10.

> making overpaid executives feel good by telling them what bad, bad brands they were).[20]

At the heart of the market fundamentalist mythos is the faith-based belief that the growth of capital in and of itself is worthy, is righteous - and creative. Arguably, the growth is tumorous, fecundated by creativity rhetoric which valorises the market according to "the capitalistic logic of accumulation" and characterises virtually all potentially profitable enterprises as 'creative' - as a quick perusal of advertising on Google readily demonstrates.[21] This article will further explore the damage done by industry in the name of creativity by firstly considering some of the misappropriations of the concept.

(Ab)Use of creativity, and Faux Creativity

Commonly the words 'creativity' and 'innovation' are used in tandem, or articulated as if it were one word, one thing. But creativity is not innovation. Innovation develops and applies ideas and goods for use. Creativity, by definition, means to make something new, and it is not necessarily benign: in of itself it is value-free, amoral as the central character of the Judaeo-Christian mythos, He who "makes weal *and* woe."[22] Either way, creativity is unpredictable, being a move from "the known to the unknown."[23] Creative practice is therefore uncertain, risky. This problematises it in environments where timelines and outcomes-based directives are paramount. In fact, one might argue that actual creativity can handicap profit-making, as cinematographer Jake Ures rather eloquently explores with the example of formulaic and trite storylines trumping originality in Hollywood.[24]

Making pictures with pencils or words or computer software is not necessarily creative. One can paint a cliched image or write a piece of formulaic fiction or a trope-riddled television series much more readily than something fresh and startling and invigorating - but such produce does create wealth - for some. For example, in their chapter on 'Entrepreneurial

[20] Klein, 'No Logo at 10'.
[21] Giogos Kallis, Vasilis Kostakis, Steffen Lange, Barbara Muraca, Susan Paulson and Matthias Schmelzer, 'Research on Degrowth', *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, vol. 48 (2018).
[22] Joseph Jensen, 'Weal and Woe in Isaiah: Consistency and Continuity', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 2 (April, 1981).
[23] Pope, *Creativity*, p. 11.
[24] Jake Ures, 'Movies Are Worse Now Because Their Corporate Funders Are Risk-Averse', *Jacobin*, (2021), At https://jacobinmag.com/author/jake-ures. Accessed 31/12/2021.

Creativity and Growth', both accepted uncritically as ineffably good, Pangiotis E. Petrakis and Kyriaki I. Kafka put creativity, "one of the most important entrepreneurial skills", "at the heart of the spirit of enterprise."[25] In this context creativity is seen as both an essential industrial tool and a basic resource for exploitation – as are many of the human beings who work in or for creative industries. This utilitarian attitude fails to recognise the humanity of employees, who at one end of the scale become 'human resources' (rather more like office furniture or fleshly aggregations of competencies than workers, staff, or personnel); and at the other, the forced labourers and debt-bonded workers who form the backbone of, for example, the electronics industry, which is rife with grandiloquent creativity rhetoric.[26] Some might point to the parallel between this and the virtual enslavement of the Gothic cathedral-builders mentioned in the introduction, which may be a fair comparison, but not in terms of scale. Today, the amount of damage done and ongoing is immeasurably greater.

The over-determined focus on utility and marketability results in 'creative outputs' that may simply be derivative material tweaked and rebranded - the opposite of what they purport to be. It also eclipses artifacts or ideas that are not valued by industry, as large companies tend to be exceedingly risk-averse. In *The Entrepreneurial State*, economist Mariana Mazzucato debunks the myth that major technological developments – from medical breakthroughs to IT to nanotech – are the province of creative entrepreneurs, pointing out that actually most of today's leading technologies were publicly funded.[27] Mazzucato shows that it is only after government has taken the initial risk and profit seems likely, that many projects become privatised. Nevertheless, a company may still use 'creative' as an emblematic buzzword while relying on faux 'creativity', so as to profitably continue to produce more of the same or variations on an extant theme. Further, as David Skold contends, when employees fail to meet organisational perceptions of

[25] Pangiotis E. Petrakis and Kyriaki I. Kafka, 'Entrepreneurial Creativity and Growth', *Entrepreneurship: Practice-Oriented Perspectives*, ed. Mário Franco (Rijeka: Intech, 2016), p. 5.
[26] Kerr Inkson, 'Are Humans Resources?', *Career Development International*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2008); Genevieve LeBaron and Neil Howard (eds.), *Forced Labour in the Global Economy* (London: OpenDemocracy, 2015).
[27] Long Now Foundation, 'The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Private vs. Public Sector Myths | Mariana Mazzucato', YouTube video (2020), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hoAwNZoS8o. Accessed 31/12/2021.

creativity, whether working for a tech giant or a small firm, they may actually be preparing the ground for truly creative production that is likely to be sidelined by safe, risk-free faux creativity.[28]

Perhaps, then, real hope resides with that that which is overlooked or discarded, from objects and images to ideas or emotions, for these may be the actual sites of creative possibility and action. These 'hopes' will be developed in Part Two.

Creativity on speed

Industrialised creativity is not a new phenomenon. Toby Miller situates the beginning of what would become creative industries discourse in the 1960s, and by the 1980s, creative or cultural sector jobs were well in the ascendant in the Western world, where once manufacturing or agriculture had dominated the market.[29] One of the most influential proponents of creative industries is Richard Florida, who argues for creativity as "the driving force of economic progress and decisive source of competitive advantage."[30] Indeed, in that year he declared in an unnatural conflation, that "creativity *is* the new economy" (my italics). Florida defines the creator as "one who rebels against nature's dictates', conjuring up the image of "the 'creative' Hollywood-style cowboy whipping the steers of industry across the dusty plain (now cleared of natives and bison)".[31] The rebellious loner image is part of a pervasive and pernicious myth of American individualism which has been contested by many. Historian Daniel Boorstin took exception to it in 1965 when he reminded readers that actually any triumphs of frontiersmen were dependent on groups of collaborative colonists, not lonely but daring American mavericks.[32] Further, rebelling rather than cooperating with

[28] David Eric Sköld, 'The other side of enjoyment: Short-circuiting marketing and creativity in the experience economy', *Organization*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2010).
[29] Toby Miller, 'From Creative to Cultural Industries', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2009).
[30] Richard Florida, *The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle Class-and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).
[31] Louise Katz, 'Square pegs: creativity on campus needs an urgent re-think', *The Conversation* (2015), at https://theconversation.com/square-pegs-creativity-on-campus-needs-an-urgent-re-think-36125. Accessed 31/12/2021.
[32] Alfonso Montouri, 'Interdependence is the Key Issue: Mary Catherine Bateson and the Myth of Individualism', *Cybernetics and Human Knowing*, vol. 28 (2021).

nature, or the failure to recognise that human beings are one part of an unfathomably complex apparatus of interconnected natural ecosystems, has had devastating ecological consequences.

Richard Florida champions creative work that is "the apotheosis of economic growth … Creative work is good because it encourages growth [also good] and all other work is not good because it is boring and ultimately unfulfilling."[33] In *The New Urban Crisis*, Florida admits that his utopian urban gentrification and creative class theory, which has since been found to fuel gross urban inequality, was not a success, yet his creativity rhetoric has still become "the new normal of development across the world."[34] Mould cites Florida's claim on a video call to the Democratic Republic of Congo, that his 'creative class' model could also be a success in their country, even though it is "ravaged by centuries of imperialism, [its] natural resources mined (using child labour) for the raw materials to [create] consumer products for the West."[35] This version of capitalist 'creativity' is actually destructivity – not 'creative destruction' - just destruction enabled by imaginative failure, or the breakdown of the ability to see the world beyond the ideological limits of capitalist logic.[36]

Hopeless Hopefulness

Much has been claimed for the ability of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to play a leading role in averting ecological disaster. Venture capitalist and commentator on AI, Rob Toews writes in Forbes magazine of the "many billions of dollars of enterprise value" being invested in consultancies to build "category defining" technologies in the field of "climate intelligence," largely because adverse weather events have unwanted impacts on business when supply chains are interrupted or mass evacuations occur, or when bushfires or floods make tracts of land uninhabitable.[37] He explicates the range of climate crisis solutions proposed by start-ups for problems generated by "building things, moving things, powering things, eating things,

[33] Mould, *Against Creativity*, pp. 21-22.
[34] Florida, *The New Urban Crisis*; and Mould, *Against Creativity*, p. 24.
[35] Mould, *Against Creativity*.
[36] Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010).
[37] Rob Towes, 'These Are the Startups Applying AI To Tackle Climate Change', *Forbes* (2021), at https://www.forbes.com/sites/robtoews/2021/06/20/these-are-the-startups-applying-ai-to-tackle-climate-change/?sh=773b533b7b26. Accessed 31/12/2021.

computing things," and reviews several of the main areas where AI technology can assist in reducing carbon emissions. These include retrofitting building design; he cites several examples, starting with Deep Mind, which in 2016 dramatically reduced Google's data centres' energy consumption. Precision agriculture is another field of great interest to AI companies, and machine learning can also optimise the massive and complex electrical grid systems, and support fire-fighting systems, though these are all in development. Toews recognises that "tackling climate change is … an urgent global imperative," but also "a massive business opportunity,' and cites investor Chamath Palihapitiya's prediction that the world's first trillionaire will be made in climate change."[38] There is undoubtedly a great deal of opportunity in disaster - as author/activists such Naomi Klein and Antony Loewenstein have explained in fine detail.[39] Those who already possess great wealth may become yet wealthier while also enjoying the sense of security available to them through parametric insurance, which uses AI to price risk with greater accuracy "for the era of climate change." AI-powered risk modelling can deliver returns that are much higher than those of traditional insurance companies.

It is perhaps not unreasonable that these motivations and priorities might provoke a sceptical response to the ability of business people and venture capitalists to find timely solutions – and timeliness is vital, according to findings of scientists of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2018.[40] A year later, the UN Emissions Gap Report 2019 states that carbon emissions must fall by 7.6% yearly, from 2020 until 2030 to prevent temperatures rising more than 1.5 degrees Celsius, which would enable the world to limit further damage being done. However, at the moment a rise of over twice that figure is indicated, according to Benedetta Brevini; that is, more drought, fires, hurricanes, extreme heat and poverty for millions. The author also points out that, as cited on Amazon's website, AI is completely dependent on massive energy consumption and therefore emissions, along with material toxicity and as yet unsolved issues to do with electronic waste. The huge amounts of data required by AI means its energy demands are

[38] Toews, 'These Are the Startups Applying AI To Tackle Climate Change'.
[39] Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*; and Antony Lowenstein, *Disaster Capitalism: Making a Killing Out of a Catastrophe* (London: Verso, 2015).
[40] Benedetta Brevini, *Is AI Good for the Planet?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022).

unsustainable due to the needs of algorithm training and cloud computing, Brevini explains.[41] In the meantime, AI companies market themselves to fossil fuel companies, a situation which obviously problematizes any moves towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Brevini concludes with a recommendation to abjure from "embracing AI as a new utopia […and…] start quantifying and reducing the environmental costs and damages of the current acceleration of algorithm-powered AI."[42]

Techno-Romanticism

In Australia today, leading climate technology experts have warned government "not to expect future technology to solve its climate change problems," and as Phillip Coorey notes in the *Financial Review*, Prime Minister Scott Morrison's "technological road map towards net zero emissions by 2050" is in part based on technologies that are not yet developed.[43] Yet Morrison maintains that these non-existent technologies will emerge from 'creative' industries such as those discussed above, and that they will solve environmental problems.[44] Such hopeful evocations as Morrison's, as from AI pundits, represent a paradoxically unworldly sensibility that Richard Coyne describes as 'technoromanticism', wherein such "quintessentially modern utopias promise indefinite progress and material abundance enabled by the development of science and technology, and the ultimate 'defeat' of pain, disease, and death itself."[45] Arguably, technoromanticism is a kind of exalted but "hopeless hopefulness" that becomes, in the phrasing of Hannah Arendt's, "a perilous obstacle to acting

[41] Brevini, *Is AI Good for the Planet?*
[42] Brevini, *Is AI Good for the Planet?*
[43] John Davidson, 'Climate tech experts reject Morrison's "colossal piece of obfuscation"', *Financial Review* (2021), at https://www.afr.com/technology/climate-tech-experts-call-out-morrison-s-bullsh-t-net-zero-plan-20211029-p5948e. Accessed 31/12/2021. See also Phillip Coorey, 'PM pins net zero hopes on technology, updates 2030 projections', *Financial Review* (2021), at https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/pm-pins-net-zero-hopes-on-technology-updates-2030-projections-20211026-p5933i. Accessed 31/12/2021.
[44] Davidson, 'Climate tech experts reject Morrison's "colossal piece of obfuscation"'.
[45] Majif Yar, 'Virtual Utopias and Dystopias: The Cultural Imaginary of the Internet', in *Utopia: Social Theory and the Future*, eds. Michael Hviid Jacobsen and Keith Tester (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 182-185.

courageously."[46] Arendt goes on to argue that this is because, "In [passive] hope, the soul overleaps reality, as in fear, it shrinks back from it."[47]

Toxic Positivity

Mats Alvesson discusses how many organisations today are "rife with corporate bullshit talk, ceremonial structures, and window-dressing activities that lead to a profound … contradiction between organisational and managerial surface and 'substance'."[48] Action is replaced with compliance or acceptance, assisted by buoyant, euphemistic 'Corpspeak'. Such positivity is 'toxic' as it deflects attention from the imperative to contend with legitimate fear or anxiety, anger or frustration, within untenable working environments. However, its influence extends well beyond problems of individual workplaces - particularly when allied with technoromantic fantasies of salvation through industrial 'creativity'. False optimism and empty cheerfulness is 'shrinking back' from reality.

Toxic positivity greatly assists maintaining such attitudes and power structures driven by myths of individualistic creativity wherein heroic Floridian creative cowboys continue to drive productivity ad infinitum. It supports mega-companies originating in wealthy nations in ignoring basic facts such as global warming and the scale of cloud energy consumption and pollution.[49] Large masses of the world's population are encouraged to carry on producing and consuming while climate catastrophe is pending.[50] Earth

[46] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland: Meridian Bools, 1951).
[47] Samantha Rose Hill, 'When Hope is a Hindrance', *Aeon* (2021), at https://aeon.co/essays/for-arendt-hope-in-dark-times-is-no-match-for-action. Accessed 31/12/21.
[48] Mats Alvesson, 'Upbeat leadership: A recipe for – or against – "successful" leadership studies', *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 6 (2020).
[49] Brevini, *Is AI Good for the Planet?*; and Toby Miller and Richard Maxwell, 'How Green is Your Smartphone?', *Comunicación y Medios*. vol. 41 (2020).
[50] Mark Bould, *Anthropocene Unconscious: Climate Catastrophe Culture* (London: Verso, 2021); S. Bradshaw, 'What Does the IPCC's Latest Report Mean?' (2021), at https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/what-does-ipcc-latest-report-mean/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAraSPBhDuARIsAM3Js4pHPWPOJHJNb06tWXFBOKH_8gSM5STEXAF_fgrGvQNPrDKsBewCH_AaAl8TEALw_wcB. Accessed 31/12/2021. See also Neil Gunningham, 'Averting Climate Catastrophe: Environmental Activism, Extinction Rebellion and coalitions of Influence', *King's Law Journal*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2019); James Hansen, 'Climate Catastrophe', *New Scientist*, vol. 195, no. 2614 (July, 2007); Lars Jaeger, *Ways Out of the Climate Catastrophe* (Cham: Springer, 2021); and Frederick van der Ploeg

Science researcher Andrew Y. Glikson describes our current predicament in the abstract for his book, *The Event Horizon: Homo Prometheus and the Climate Catastrophe*:

> With the advent of global warming and the nuclear arms race, humans are rapidly approaching a moment of truth…As these lines are being written, fires are burning on several continents, the Earth's ice sheets are melting and the oceans are rising, threatening to flood the planet's coastal zones and river valleys, […yet…] Homo sapiens continues to transfer every extractable molecule of carbon from the Earth to the atmosphere, the lungs of the biosphere, ensuring the demise of the planetary life support system.[51]

Assuming that he, and all of the scientists advising the IPCC are not in error, then waiting patiently for a return to 'business as usual' would seem to represent an obsessional denialism that is nothing short of pathological. Indeed, Ruth McKie's study of climate change counter-movements - led by fossil fuel industries and conservative think tanks - diagnoses the (in)action of the actors as socially deviant and criminal.[52] Neil Gunningham writes of governments' demonstrated failure to effectively act towards the deep decarbonisation necessary; that is, "to put a price on carbon and remove fossil fuel subsidies, to remodel agriculture, to engage in rapid reforestation and to rebuild our transport infrastructure."[53] Warnings have been mounting for decades, yet "hoping against hope" seems to be the favoured strategy.

Rational Despair and Irrational Hope

Negative Creativities and Utopia

At about this point, a previous draft of this article began to present some of the literature on the praxis of change. A discussion of the marriage of action and thought fuelled by the sort of hope that refuses despair ensued, and sardonic quote marks bracketing the key terms, 'creativity' and 'hope' were

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and Aart de Zeeuw, 'Non-cooperative and Cooperative Responses to Climate Catastrophes in the Global Economy: A North–South Perspective', *Environmental and Resource Economics*, vol. 65 (2016).

[51] Andrew Y. Glikson, *The Event Horizon: Homo Prometheus and the Climate Catastrophe* (Leiden: Springer, 2021).

[52] Ruth E. McKie, 'Climate Change Counter Movement Neutralization Techniques: A Typology to Examine the Climate Change Counter Movement', *Sociological Inquiry*, vol. 89, no. 2 (2019).

[53] Gunningham, 'Averting Climate Catastrophe'.

dropped. The focus shifted to the possibilities for a kind of hope that is both critical and utopian. However, on re-reading, this basic question emerged, almost as an assault: "How is despair not the only reasonable response to the current state of the world?" Then, this criticism: "This piece of writing falls into the same trap as many of those whose thoughts it has been criticising - false hopers, creative people for whom the ethics of their creative production are subordinate to capital, denialists of the inevitable, time wasters." Indeed, it may well be true that hope can readily support wishful thinking and complaisant sanctioning of abhorrent conditions that are, often enough, resolved in acquiescence to the desires of self-serving politicians. "In the face of the significant and increasingly global challenges," write Katie Stockdale and Michael Milona, "it's clear that we can't rationally hope for a better world…"[54] The authors do add with faint hope - though not optimism - the word "… tomorrow." If one accepts that one cannot hope 'rationally', then, any discussion of beyond the immediate 'tomorrow' must be preceded with the caveat: "*In case* a future is possible…"[55]

The Virtues of Negativity

Earlier on it was proposed that upbeat creativity rhetoric "eclipses artifacts or ideas not valued by industry." To 'artifacts and ideas' might be added, 'states of mind'. As well as requiring lively curiosity, creativity can also demand a kind of valorous willingness to endure discomfort and emotional pain. Defeat, sorrow, solitude, ennui, and the anguish of doubt have come to be seen as part of the now largely defunct nineteenth century Romance of the suffering artist, possibly because such emotional conditions are hardly aspirations of the modern entrepreneur of today's buoyant and bullish creativity zeitgeist. Yet as this article has argued, it is precisely this upbeat 'can do' version of creative enterprise fuelled by 'positive thinking' that must take a great deal of responsibility for the ecological nightmare currently accelerating. Negative creativities instead, are an apt response to current cultural and political circumstances.

[54] Katie Stockdale and Michael Milona, 'Even when optimism has been lost, hope has a role to play', *Psyche* (2020), at https://psyche.co/ideas/even-when-optimism-has-been-lost-hope-has-a-role-to-play. Accessed 31/12/2021.

[55] Stockdale and Milona, 'Even when optimism has been lost, hope has a role to play'.

Authentic creativity – making or thinking something previously unthought of and unmade – requires at least a temporary embrace of that uncomfortable sensation, doubt, as Jennifer Hecht's historical compendium of doubters attests.[56] Doubt is, in Eric Eisenberg's words, "a source of possibility and potential action."[57] Doubt may be experienced as paralysing, but it is here, as Turner might phrase it, in the "realm of primitive hypothesis," that creators are forced to work with the possibilities of accident, of chance, and to seek what Matisse has called "the desire of the line."[58] As Alvesson explains, attempts to deny such complexity and discomfort, chance and randomness, and to limit creativity to the knowledge-rationality-predictability of outcomes, distracts from its possibilities.[59]

Roger Karapin and Leonard Feldman devote an issue of *Polity* to essays discussing ways in which perceived negativity invites creative developments.[60] For instance, protest movements - necessarily marked as harmful by the object of their opposition – may mark the genesis of necessary political change. Failure, too, is frequently a stimulus to creativity. According to John Dewey, because of its way of disrupting expectations and desires, failure may be more of a stimulus than success.[61] Recent studies show also that boredom, perhaps derogated more than any other 'negative', has been shown to stimulate creativity.[62]

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[56] Jennifer Michael Hecht, *Doubt: A History* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003).
[57] Eric Eisenberg, 'Building a Mystery: Toward a New Theory of Communication and Identity', *Journal of Communication*, vol. 51, no. 3 (2001), p. 540.
[58] Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, p. 106; and Jack Flam, *Matisse on Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 48.
[59] Alvesson, 'Upbeat Leadership'.
[60] Roger Karapin and Leonard Feldman, 'Creative Negativity', *Polity*, vol. 52, no. 4 (2020).
[61] Aaron Stoller, 'Educating from Failure: Dewey's Aesthetics and the Case for Failure in Educational Theory', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 47, no. 1 (2013).
[62] Julia S. Haager, Christof Kuhbandner and Reinhard Pekrun, 'To Be Bored or Not To Be Bored: How Task-Related Boredom Influences Creative Performance', *Journal of Creative Behaviour*, vol. 52, no. 4 (2018); and Christoph Lindner, 'Boredom and Creativity in the Era of Accelerated Living', in *Boredom, Shazhai, and Digitisation in the Time of Creative China*, eds. Jeroen de Kloet, Chow Yiu Fai and Lena Scheen (Amsterdam University Press, 2019).

Melancholy, as Maria Melgar suggests, with reference to Borges' *Plato*, shows that creativity can emerge "out of the heart of mourning."[63] Such sorrowing can move one to create in order to retain, in some form, what death takes away. Examples of novels and memoirs which have grown out of grieving abound (such as Roland Barthes' *Mourning Diary*, Max Porter's *Grief is the Thing with Feathers*, Karl Ove Knausgaard's *A Death in the Family*, Julian Barnes' *Levels of Life*, and Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*). More than this though, melancholy is a condition that Joseph Winters reminds his readers, is an ethical disposition, at least according to Walter Benjamin and Theodore Adorno.[64] Ethical, largely because it enables a critical stance with which to confront the status quo, seeing flaws and hazards which a more accepting and optimistic gaze might simply trip over, then carry on.

Melancholy does not necessarily lead to bitterness or cynicism and is not antithetical to hope for a different and better world. Rather, "it engenders vital dispositions, attitudes, and desires—a critical gaze toward the social order … But this is a hope that, in Theodore Adorno's words, finds itself 'draped in black'."[65] Anger too, is needed, as Karapin and Feldman mention; it is central to galvanising support in political contexts, as Greta Thunberg demonstrated in her speech to the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2019.[66] Thunberg spoke of the oft-cited claim that adults make of their responsibility to give young people hope, to which she replies, "I don't want your hope. I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic … And then I want you to act. I want you to act as if the house was on fire. Because it is."[67]

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[63] Maria Melgar, 'Mourning and Creativity', in *On Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia'*, eds. Leticia Glocer Fiorini, Thierry Bokanowski and Sergio Lewkowicz (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 110.

[64] Joseph R. Winters, *Hope Draped in Black: Race, Melancholy, and the Agony of Progress* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

[65] Winters, *Hope Draped in Black*, p. 22.

[66] Karapin and Feldman, 'Creative Negativity'.

[67] '"I want you to panic": 16-year-old issues climate warning at Davos', *Guardian News*, (2019), YouTube video, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjsLm5PCdVQ. Accessed 31/12/2021

Anger and Active Hope

Two years later, in 2021, Thunberg speaks of how it has been duly noted that the house is indeed on fire and that the decision has been made to call the fire department, but in a decade or two. Nevertheless, Thunberg persists in her work, because "hope is the feeling that keeps you going even though all odds may be against you … hope comes from action" – and one might add, "action comes from hope."[68] Thunberg's stance echoes Hannah Arendt's theory of natality. Natality is the spontaneous and unpredictable" human power "to break with the current situation and begin something new."[69] To begin something new is a creative act. Often enough, anger is the vehicle of that movement. It mobilises the kind of hope described by Václav Havel,

> Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as … willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but, rather, an ability to work for something because it is good…. The more unpropitious the situation in which we demonstrate hope, the deeper that hope is.[70]

This is hope that is not optimistic. It seems to approach the utopian, yet recognising that utopia is not an endpoint, but "the perpetual and ongoing moment of the beginning. It is always the first step towards that which is - and remains - not-yet."[71] These authors seem to be drawing on The Principle of Hope, where Ernst Bloch speaks of hope with "a brooding quality and an anticipation of Not-Yet-Become."[72] Tester et al also write that, "the path to the not-yet might be hard…. but still its starting point has to be located in the is-ness of the present […and…] the world of is-ness has to be taken to contain latent tendencies." These words are, in turn, reminiscent of Raymond Williams' theory of creativity, which insists that creativity is "already, and actively, our practical consciousness […which…] can be … a struggle at the roots of the mind […towards…] the articulation and formation of latent, momentary, and newly possible consciousness."[73]

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[68] '"I want you to panic"', *Guardian News*.
[69] Hill, 'When Hope is a Hindrance'.
[70] Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvížďala* (New York: Vintage, 1990).
[71] Keith Tester and Michael Hviid Jacobsen, *Utopia: Social Theory and the Future* (London: Routledge), p. 1
[72] Ernst Bloch, 'The Principle of Hope', *Marxists*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/bloch/hope/introduction.htm. Accessed 31/12/2021.
[73] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

In this view, creativity is fuelled by the 'negative' emotions of anger and failure - there have been many failures – the tedium of sustaining energy against the odds, melancholy and its extremes, grief – as opposed to 'positive thinking', industrialised creativity and technotopian Romanticism. Creativity is reprieved from its (ab)use as a marketised, monetised tool, and can function instead as Ken Robinson's 'applied imagination'.[74] In other words, and as Williams proposed, creativity enables change whose starting place is the individual consciousness – though probably not that of the individualistic free-market libertarian - and unsentimental hope is "the moral conditioner of this project."[75] If refusing to accept an odious status quo governed by the tyranny of busy cheerfulness, hope – that fundamental proclivity of human beings, according to Ernst Bloch – may become a "utopian endeavour."[76]

Bloch's 'daydream' "manifest[s] in the inclination 'to mend the world'."[77] This literally translates from the Hebrew, *tikkun olam* as 'world repair'. To contextualise Bloch's utopian thought, it will be useful to segue - very briefly - into the lore that so profoundly influenced him: the Zohar, or the Book of Splendour within the mystical Jewish tradition of Kabbalah.

Myth, Creative Imagination, and Active Hope

In kabbalistic cosmology, as in contemporary scientific theory, the universe began with a single point that expanded; that is: a big bang. The sixteenth century kabbalist, Isaac Luria, proposed that at this initial point God, represented by the image of a clay vessel, began a withdrawal to make space for creation.[78] The deity, the clay vessel, first contracted then shattered, thus bringing into existence the material world. It is one's duty to perform *mitzvot*, or acts of goodness in order to heal these broken fragments. Since the 1950s however, *mitzvot* have come to refer less to mystical experience and primarily to social action. It is also important to note that the images of this living myth describe creation as ongoing, or "a world that is *constantly*

[74] Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica, *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 67.
[75] Judith Brown, 'Ernst Bloch and the Utopian Imagination', *Eras Journal*, vol. 5 (2003).
[76] Ze'ev Levy, 'Utopia and Reality in the Philosophy of Ernst Bloch', *Utopian Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1990), p. 3.
[77] Levy, 'Utopia and Reality in the Philosophy of Ernst Bloch', p. 5.
[78] Joel R. Primack and Nancy Ellen Abrams, '"In a Beginning…" Quantum Cosmology and Kabbalah', *Tikkun*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1995).

coming" (italics mine).[79] Bloch's conception of utopia is attuned to this 'becoming', and not in an "abstract or unworldly sense [but] much more centrally turned towards the world: of overtaking the natural course of events."[80]

Bloch's hope for ongoing creation; that is, for ongoing changes for better in the world, is informed by dreaming, by myth, and imagination.

> Hope knows itself as the 'utopian function'. Its contents are first represented in ideas, and essentially in those of the imagination. Bloch speaks of such imaginative ideas as extending, "in an anticipating way, existing material into the future possibilities of being different and better". Here imagination is qualitatively, ontologically, something other than fantasizing or the remembering. It has a quality which is forward-directed, a call to action. The truth-bearing imaginative act is 'hope-charged' and realistic.[81]

For David Graeber, too, imagination is "hope-charged and realistic," when he speaks of change as having its source in the creative imagination.[82] He sees, on the one hand, the current dominant economic system as "designed to devastate the imagination," via a vast bureaucratic apparatus comprised of armies, prisons, police, private security, military intelligence, and surveillance systems constructed "to destroy any sense of alternative futures […so that…] the only thing left to imagine is more and more money." [83] On the other hand, though, he still insists that *immanent* imagination, which enables us to see beyond things as they are to things as they might be, can – and, he emphasises, *should*, "be used produce the world and remake it as we wish."[84] Such a shift, Graeber argues, is not only possible, but natural, an aspect of a "political ontology of the imagination […or…] an ontology of creativity."[85] This position reflects that of celebrated educator and activist, Paulo Freire, in his insistence that intervention in the world goes beyond

[79] Daniel C. Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), p. 1.
[80] Bloch, 'The Principle of Hope'.
[81] Brown, 'Ernst Bloch and the Utopian Imagination', p. 2.
[82] David Graeber, *Revolutions in Reverse: Essays on Politics, Violence, Art, and Imagination* (London: Minor Compositions, 2011).
[83] Graeber, *Revolutions in Reverse*, p. 8, 35.
[84] Aaron Vansintjan, 'David Graeber: The Power of the Imagination', *Green European Journal*, vol. 21 (2021).
[85] Graeber, *Revolutions in Reverse*, p. 48.

action or reaction to circumstances, beyond duty; rather is an "ontological vocation."[86]

Spiritual Force and Activism Meet Capitalism

Against the odds, Gunningham points to the capacity of other "webs of influence" involving non-state actors including business and the financial sector, some of whom at the very least recognise the practicality of sustaining the natural environment as a business incentive.[87] Frank Stilwell, too, mentions that although global multinationals will certainly continue to combat resistance to their claim to the privilege of exploiting both human beings and nature, "relatively enlightened managers also know that, from a long-term perspective, a stable social order and a sustainable environment are important business conditions."[88] In other swords, this may the point at which capitalist logic might in fact be harnessed and repurposed. There is an argument that it is precisely this logic and the capital it generates that has the ability to redress a critical amount of the ecological damage already done. In recognising that further wealth might accrue by investing in new, green industry and in financing research into yet more of these endeavours, these powerful members of the global business community do fact have the chance to be a major force behind environmental reclamation.

Gunningham suggest, however, that that "rapid and deep" decarbonisation will largely come from below with grass-roots activism.[89] Extinction Rebellion, as a prominent example, has recognised the failings of representative democracy to respond to the climate emergency, and although it is impossible to predict how influential their acts of civil disobedience will prove to be, they have "captured the zeitgeist of political polarisation," and continue to force attention from policymakers as well as citizens.[90]

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[86] Paul Sutton, 'A paradoxical academic identity: fate, utopia and critical hope', *Teaching in Higher Education*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2015), p. 41.
[87] Gunningham, 'Averting Climate Catastrophe'.
[88] Frank Stilwell, 'From green jobs to Green New Deal: What are the questions?', *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2021), p. 164.
[89] Gunningham, 'Averting Climate Catastrophe'.
[90] Oscar Berglund and Daniel Schmidt, 'Conclusion: XR, the Climate Change Movement and Capitalism', in *Extinction Rebellion and Climate Change Activism*, eds. Oscar Berglund and Daniel Schmidt (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 97.

This is action stimulated by critical hope energised by an imaginative shift in perspective (Williams' "newly possible consciousness," perhaps) that leads to creative movement. Not yet, but also, not for nothing has there been an increase in advocacy for economic restructuring towards mitigation of the effects of climate change over the last two decades, which "opens the possibility of a more transformative approach to employment, environment, equity and empowerment."[91] Stilwell also reminds the reader that an alternative to the 'job versus environment' polarisation (popularised by conservative pundits, the fossil fuels industry, and the media that can be relied upon to support them), is the 'jobs *and* environment' lobby. It may be true that impediments to actions towards a Green New Deal are many and powerful, championed as it is by Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, Elizabeth Warren, and Bernie Sanders in the United States; activist and journalist Naomi Klein, who remains a powerful advocate; and Noam Chomsky, Robert Pollin and C.J. Polychroniou, with the publication of *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal*.[92] Yet, profit-focussed business enterprises do tend to seize opportunities made available by industrial restructuring of systems, energy supply, transport and urban development. Such moves would be aided, perhaps, by proposals such as Thomas Pogge's awards system, where governments fund innovations based on the ecological merit of their inventions, while keeping intellectual property in the public domain.[93] It is also important to remember that as Rebecca Solnit writes, apart from outright revolution, "changes in ideas and values also result from work done by writers, scholars, public intellectuals, social activists, and participants in social media [that seem] insignificant or peripheral until very different outcomes emerge from transformed assumptions [imaginative shifts in consciousness] about who and what matters."[94]

[91] Stilwell, 'From green jobs to the Green New Deal', p. 156.
[92] Noam Chomsky, Robert Pollin and C.J. Polychroniou, *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (London: Verso, 2020).
[93] Thomas Pogge, 'Keynote Address: Poverty, Climate Change, and Overpopulation', *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2010).
[94] Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

Hope Against TINA: Alternatives to the Dominant Current Political and Cultural Mores

It might be tempting to think that a globalised, market-driven world, wherein a controlled, surveilled populace is divided into producers and consumers (whose value as human beings is measured by the extent of these two particular capacities) is what humanity has inexorably and inevitably been moving towards for 10,000 years. However, Graeber and Wengrow enjoin their readers to remember that we do not know what the world will be like in twenty years, let alone in fifty, and ask, "Is not the capacity to experiment with different forms of social organisation itself a quintessential part of what makes us human?"[95]

Graeber and Wengrow's book, *The Dawn of Everything*, has been criticised on several levels. Indeed, while arguing that states as they currently exist need not be the dominant form of social organisation, they fail to explain why it is that these forms have come to dominate. Nevertheless, the authors' task with this "compelling fable" is to question standard histories and heroic myths concerning conventional social, economic, and organisational structures; to ask what it means to be 'civilised'; and to look back in order to look forward with some possibility of hope.[96] They abjure the customary linear historical narrative – from foraging to agriculture to industrial modes of production, or ages delineated in stone, iron, bronze to what might now be called the rare-minerals age, (if the mineral metonymy is retained) which is supposed to represent the apex of human achievement. They lament the delegation of other ways of living to the margins, and based on anthropological and archaeological evidence, suggest a re-thinking of the descriptor, 'anomalous' as applied to many past societies for whom the market was not central. They demonstrate an understanding of the workings of more flexible societies in parts of Africa, America, and Asia - where they existed in relatively recent times. However, they find "frustratingly little of how they operated in periods when these were by far the world's most common forms of government": not 'anomalies', they note – not freakish 'bumps' in the road interrupting an inevitable destination.[97] The authors

[95] David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (London: Penguin, 2021), p. 15.
[96] Arjun Appadurai, 'The dawn of everything?', *Anthropology Today*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2022).
[97] Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*.

argue that seeing different organisational structures (based on values other than those of the market and competition) as freakish endures because the imaginative faculties of historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists have been constrained by "the teleological habit of thought, which makes us scour the ancient world for embryonic versions of our modern nation states."[98] Yet, divergent historical perspectives aligned with inherently speculative immanent imagination supports the argument that presiding paradigms are just that – paradigms.

Rebecca Solnit has a clear-eyed vision of the many examples of the devastation, physical and psychological, caused by "terrifying powers" of control and manipulation owned by 'monstrous' corporations from Amazon to Google, and of the social and cultural degradation that frequently accompany privatisation of industries and gentrification of communities (as per the Floridian model previously mentioned).[99] Solnit also speaks of the assault on the imagination that enables it:

> before you privatised a bank or a railroad you had to privatise imaginations and convince people that we do not have anything in common with each other that matters; that we owe each other nothing... that we're consumers, not citizens … we're told over and over that the public sphere is superfluous, messy, unpleasant, dangerous, not where our pleasures and purposes are located, and Silicon Valley has worked hard to profit off this point of it…[100]

Yet, having spoken of the despoilation of imagination, both immanent and empathetic – she also insists that imagining futures still persists, and that the activity of working towards the creation of other ways of being demonstrates the persistence of hope. Such hope is often carried at a grass-roots level by recognition of the successes of, for instance, 'Occupy Wall St; Black Lives matter; Idle No More [in Canada; Breaking the Silence in Israel Palestine] the Dreamers addressing […US immigration rights]', Schools strike for Climate, Indigenous land rights actions, MeToo and so forth, and further back with the civil rights movement of the 50s, anti-war demonstrations of the 70s, the era which also mobilised the advances of the feminist movement which had been in train since the suffragettes, and is, as are all the others, still in motion, against colossal, ingrained, odds. Then there are countless

[98] Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*, p. 623.
[99] Rebecca Solnit, *Call Them by Their True Names* (London: Granta Publications, 2018), p. 168.
[100] Solnit, *Call Them by Their True Names*.

valorous individual activists and whistleblowers, such as Frances Haugen, who leaked the Facebook Files; Li Wenliang, who warned about the Covid-19 virus in 2019; Chinese-Australian writers Yang Hengjun and Cheng Lei; Nobel laureate Maria Ressa, who established the Philippines major news portal Rappler; Howard Wilkinson, who exposed a massive money laundering operation between Russia and the US; and Edward Snowden, who released top-secret NSA programs. Creative change, whether through cultural or political action, is an ongoing project, as Solnit has repeatedly stressed, aligning with Ernst Bloch's Kabbalah-inflected reflections upon the ongoingness of creation itself: The world is unfinished, as are human beings. Both are in the process of becoming, but change "can only happen through praxis: a dialectical process of critical refection and action."[101]

Hope endures, Bloch tells us, as "neither passive … nor locked into nothingness."[102] He emphasises the vigour of hope, that it "goes out of itself, makes people broad rather than confining them. The work of this emotion requires people who throw themselves actively into what is becoming … it will not tolerate a dog's life." Bloch then contrasts the 'dog's' long-suffering acceptance of how things are, of 'What Is', with hope that imagines and actively engages in making what can be. Hope "looks in the world itself for what can help the world."[103]

The paradox of the practicality of an apparently utopian yearning brings us to Hannah Arendt's thinking on the subject of 'radical hope', a foil to the condition that Kant termed 'radical' evil, but which Arendt rethought very controversially, as 'banal'.[104] This 'banality' refers to that everyday, unthinking, disconnect from reality that leads to imaginative failure. Arendt developed this line of thought in a previous era of totalitarian ascendancy, war, and genocide. Today, absolutist thinking has again arisen, making way for ongoing thanatical adventures of growth-fixated surveillance capitalists allied with industrialists and the creative dynamism entrepreneurs. These moves have been supported by a belief in a particular interpretation of creativity and creative people as tools of industry - anchored now, as in

[101] Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*; Solnit, *Call Them by Their True Names*; Bloch, 'The Principle of Hope'.
[102] Bloch, 'The Principle of Hope'.
[103] Bloch, 'The Principle of Hope'.
[104] Jeffrey Newman, 'Hannah Arendt: Radical evil, radical hope', *European Judaism*, vol. 47, no. 1 (2014).

Arendt's day, into a "way and philosophy of life … insistently and exclusively centred on the individual's success of failure in ruthless competition."[105] Today, this self-absorption continues to enable an indefensible growth model to continue to operate as if the resources of this finite planet were infinite.

Arendt repudiated – as did Ernst Bloch - the sort of inert hopefulness that turns people away from the world, and which sanctions exploitation of people and nature. They argue that this 'turning away' comes about when a focus on the present is supplanted by a longing for some desired outcome (as per the currently ascendant instrumentalist, industrial 'creativity' and technotopian thinking). Nevertheless, Arendt's enduring hope emerges when she claims that at every turn human beings encounter "infinite probability."[106] "From the very creation of the universe to the emergence of organic life we are faced with the advent of things so absolutely "unexpected, unpredictable, and ultimately causally inexplicable" that they are effectively miraculous." Arendt's conception of natality is "the expression of 'demonstrably real transcendence', or of an 'unadulterated inventiveness'." It represents her radical, active hope, and it remains mobile and energetic; it is not merely a condition of mind but something people *enact.*

Conclusion

Creativity and Imagination

This article has attempted an investigation of aspects of creativity that are, in the view of this writer at least, essential to divest from, and others which must be embraced so as to think a way out of a seemingly impossible predicament. Some readers will find the tone hyperbolic or alarmist at times. However, based on the recent advice from the IPCC, one might argue that it is impossible to be 'alarmist'. The current addiction to consumerism and growth persists, regardless of the sacrifice of the humaneness of humanity - and of the planet itself.

In their introduction to *Utopia: Social Theory and the Future*, Jacobsen and Tester write that, "Utopia is an ambition which puts question marks against the everyday inevitability of this world and, moreover,

[105] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 313.
[106] Simon Wortham, *Hope: The Politics of Optimism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), p. 90.

motivates thought and action - praxis - aimed at transforming what is through the lever of what could be."[107] They also point out that one must have confidence in the idea that the process of transformation might actually be undertaken; and one must also have hope. Perhaps they would agree that the version of hope needed is certainly not yearning, and is unlikely to be optimistic, yet it demands thought with active engagement with the world (praxis), or Arendt's natality. Jacobsen and Tester claim that one must also possess the sense that the world as it is (or its 'is-ness') contains *latent tendencies* (italics in original), a claim which brings to mind Williams' theory of creativity, mentioned earlier.[108] It will be useful at this point to reiterate this theory. Williams refers to creativity as 'practical consciousness' that can be "a struggle at the roots of the mind […towards…] the articulation and formation of latent, momentary, and newly possible consciousness." This idea in turn seems to align latency contained within the world's "is-ness" with that of individual human consciousness. Like recognising like, perhaps. Similarly, for Ernst Bloch, human consciousness has, as basic features, "expectation, hope, intention towards possibility that has still not become… [and] concretely corrected and grasped, a basic determination within objective reality as a whole."[109]

Thinkers such Solnit and Graeber explore the possibilities that continue to exist for human imagination, of which the latter recognises two kinds. One is allied with empathy (for it is difficult to conceive committing an act of violence or subjugation of another if one is capable of feeling oneself into the being of the recipient). The other, 'immanent imagination', which Vasintjan paraphrases as the opposite of ideological naturalisation, or the "deadening effect of hierarchy and domination," such as Social Darwinism.[110] Graeber insists that human beings still have the facility to envision concepts and forms that could be but have never been before, rather than being bound, by instinct, to the repetition of old patterns. For Graeber and Williams and Bloch, Arendt and Havel, and very recently, such youthful activists as Greta Thunberg, real imaginative possibility of change may still come about - through radical hope allied with action.

[107] Tester and Jacobsen, *Utopia*, p. 2.
[108] Tester and Jacobsen, *Utopia*.
[109] Bloch, 'The Principle of Hope'.
[110] Vansintjan, 'David Graeber'.

Hope and Imagination

Ze'ev Levy notes that Ernst Bloch's questions regarding life begin not with "Where from?," but rather "Where to?" and "What for?" Bloch's "What for?"[111] is central to this article which has implied that creative motivation falls into the category of 'not-for-profit', and that hope is an expression of what is *really possible*.[112] Such hope requires conscious dreaming which is adamantly not "stale, even enervating escapism, even booty for swindlers, [this other] part is provocative, is not content to just accept the bad which exists, does not accept renunciation."[113] Critical, radical hope and creativity embrace complexity. They are traits, or perhaps conditions of mind, that insist upon engagement in uncomfortable conversations. They recognise that normality as it now exists is a system of inequity and injustice reliant on toxic positivity to function and 'creativity' to profit - yet this need not be permanent. Rather than acceptance and passive, compliant hope, it is critical and radical hope - not optimism, even though the two are frequently conflated - that wields power. This is the kind of hope that begins with ideas imagined and which then may, as Bloch tells us, extend,

> …in an anticipating way, existing material into the future possibilities of being different and better…The truth-bearing imaginative *act* is "hope-charged" and realistic, "fully attuned... to objectively real possibility...and consequently to the properties of reality which are themselves utopian, i.e. contain future." It brings dreams and life into a realistic relationship, so it is able to respond to circumstances and sustain the work of changing the world even in the most adverse conditions.[114]

This is hope with utopian reach. This term is used advisedly. Utopia attained is utopia failed. Rather, the project is imagining the future, and working towards it incrementally in an ongoing process of, in this case, world-creation. It cannot be finished, ever, for finitude is death, but imagination is ongoing becoming.

[111] Levy, 'Utopia and Reality in the Philosopgy of Ernst Bloch', p. 4.
[112] Levy, 'Utopia and Reality in the Philosopgy of Ernst Bloch', p. 5.
[113] Bloch, 'The Principle of Hope'.
[114] Brown, 'Ernst Bloch and the Utopian Imagination', p. 2.