

# The War of Art: Virus, Viral, Virtual, and Revival

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 crisis continues to challenge all dimensions of our lives for the unforeseeable future. The cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are among the worst hit. Creative hubs, museums, galleries, co-working spaces, and craft shops were closed. The self-employed, freelancers, and giggers, already in precarious situations, are suffering from these tremendous losses. Most projects were presented, performed, and attended through technologically-mediated platforms. The pandemic challenges every aspect of managing the CCIs — from transitioning to virtual platforms to creating viral content and recognizing the sector’s vulnerability. How can we reflect on its revival? How can we harness the vulnerability and flexibility of the CCIs to plan for the future? The industry must strengthen itself as the pandemic also offers opportunities to recalibrate. Embracing an active role, the CCIs can navigate these circumstances and emerge more robust and better equipped to adapt and thrive in the face of challenges. This paper highlights a series of reflections on the state of the CCIs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the pandemic exacerbating the vulnerabilities of the cultural and creative industries, this sector has long been encountering predisposed, pre-existing risks and susceptibilities. Drawing from the concepts of the precarity of labor, technology, and vulnerability as a form of resilience and revival, I explored the Philippine cultural and creative industries as a case study. I looked into surveys amongst the cultural and creative hub managers on the effect of the pandemic, giving a rich narrative on how crisis serves as a place of precarity and opportunities.

**Keywords:** *Philippines, COVID-19, cultural and creative industries, policy, precarity*

## INTRODUCTION

*Nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules, etc. These are products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of the human will over nature, they are organs of the human brain, created by the human hand; the power of knowledge objectified. The development of [technology] indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a direct force of production, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and have been transformed in accordance with it.*

— Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Notebook VII – The Chapter on Capital* (1973, pp. 625-626)

This paper aims to highlight a series of reflections and questions on how culture and creativity are managed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the pandemic exacerbating the vulnerabilities of the cultural and creative industries, this sector has long been encountering predisposed, pre-existing risks and susceptibilities. Drawing from the precarity of labor, technology, and vulnerability as a form of resilience and revival, I explored the Philippine cultural and creative industries (CCIs) as a case study. I looked into surveys amongst the cultural workers and creatives on the effect of the pandemic, giving a rich narrative on how crisis serves as a place of precarities and opportunities. Some numbers, collectives, and other organizations mentioned in this paper might have changed throughout writing and publication. This only demonstrates the trickling ramifications of the pandemic and an even stronger attestation to the precarity of the CCIs.

### **Virus**

We are at a juncture of a consequential crisis with consequential impacts. A crisis that has challenged not only our existing systemic configurations, questioned perspectives, and every fabric of life possible, but also a crisis that dictates and charters ways on how we conduct things immediately in the present and the future. Generations prior have experienced this situation, but only now have we faced a global health emergency of this magnitude in recent memory.

The severity and breadth of the COVID-19 pandemic are being experienced by everyone worldwide, on any scale possible. They will continue to challenge all dimensions of our lives in the unforeseeable future. It will continue to shake the foundations and exhaust infrastructures of every

government and private group, sending waves of impact on socioeconomic, political, cultural, and even mental outlooks worldwide.

Part of this situation is the CCIs, among the badly hit sectors enduring the pandemic, trying to make ends meet or barely surviving. The creative value chain has drastically suffered — from creation, production, distribution, access, and consumption. Those who are self-employed, freelance workers, and gig economy participants, primarily engaged in non-conventional work arrangements, bear these significant losses.

The doors of creative centers, music halls, theater platforms, dance workshops, museums, art galleries, shared workspaces, artisanal stores, and manufacturing labs were all shut down. During the months of lockdown, most happenings, exhibitions, carnivals, shows, concerts, and various initiatives were shifted to, executed, and visited via digital platforms. These canceled or rescheduled events and engagements mean unpaid work, refunds, and revenue losses. The crisis has also accelerated, if not compelled, the virtualization, digitization, platformization, and automation of most organizations within the cultural and creative sectors. Events, conferences, and performances that were agile and nimble have shifted virtually and redefined their delivery mode, performance, effect, and production. This “restaging” has created unparalleled setbacks, restructuring how culture and creativity are managed. Even before the pandemic, the sector agreed that technology and innovation would be the two-edged tools that could make or break how organizations produce and audiences consume creative content. Much like other industries, the challenge was to innovate or to die. The question was not *about what* would happen but *when* it would happen. It was only a matter of time.

These scenarios have revealed the precariousness, industry volatility, and working conditions of the CCIs, but it is nothing new. Lamentably, these industries have been built on these age-old, deep-rooted challenges — how they are perceived, structured, supported, compensated, manipulated, and annexed by information and communications technology growth — being fought by hardworking artists and creatives daily, crisis or not. Notwithstanding, the pandemic magnified and exacerbated these pre-existing apprehensions.

Now, the coronavirus is here to question every aspect of how the CCIs are managed — how it is forced to go virtually, how they must create content that must go viral, and how we acknowledge that the CCIs are vulnerable. How do we then reflect on its revival? How can vulnerability or the proverbial “flexibility” of the CCIs be employed to help us plan for

the future? As the pandemic also presented opportunities to recalibrate the industry, the status of the cultural and creative industries “must be upheld, strengthened, and reinforced through legislative and material means. As decisions taken now are likely to shape our world for years to come, it is imperative to be strategic” (UNESCO, 2020) and perhaps use this same flexibility of creativity to inform its resiliency.

How is creative and cultural work negotiated and mediated during this “new normal”? What is the level of impact and recovery on the creative industries? Have digital cultural and creative activities made us realize the power and importance of the arts in expressing, manifesting, and dealing with the spirit of the times? Has the pandemic indeed exposed the precarity of the creative class? Or has this issue of precarity been a long-standing battle even before the pandemic? Or are we dealing with a more prominent ingrained “virus” all along? Can we turn these vulnerabilities to revive the industry? We will examine and answer this in the following parts of this paper.

### **A Brief Scan of the Philippine Cultural and Creative Industries**

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer of the renowned Frankfurt School examined the concept of the *culture industry* in the 1940s, setting the foundation for the evolution of creative industries. They addressed this through a chapter titled *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* in their influential book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, published in 1944. This then continued and developed across decades through the foundational definitions and framework of *Cultural policy - a preliminary study* by UNESCO in 1969, the political economy of culture (Garnham, 1990; Murdock & Golding, 2000; Schiller, 1989), policymaking in cultural studies (Bennett, 1992), and cultural policy for urban regeneration (Bianchini & Parkinson, 1993; Greater London Council, 1985). The inclusion and acknowledgment of the CCIs within national governments have been championed by the policymaking efforts of Australia in 1994 when they published their cultural policy document entitled *Creative Nation: Commonwealth Cultural Policy*. This was Australia’s response to adjusting to the globalizing world, embracing information technology, and trying to equip the creative sector with the fast-rising growth of the internet and digital media. This could also be considered one of the early high-level policies that attempted to assess and explore formalizing creativity through industrialization deliberately. This is also a bold move by the government to explore the economic potential and quantifications of culture and artistic activities.

The evolution from the culture industry to creative industries and its amalgamation into policymaking and its “expediency” has been well-documented by academia (de Peuter, 2011; Florida, 2002, 2012; Garnham, 2005; Hartley 2004; Ross, 2013; Yúdice, 2004). In the last 20 years, many countries worldwide, including the Philippines, have realized the essence of linking and harnessing people’s creativity and artistic potential, making the creative industry a new mobilizer of economic growth. The Philippine experience, which I divided into *first* and *second waves* (for a separate discussion), has seen initial propositions through the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), the government agency in charge of policymaking and promoting Philippine culture and the arts. Under its 2002 *Annual Report*, the *Culture and Development Program* section recommended “strengthening social infrastructure and developing cultural industries for sustainable development at local and national levels” (NCCA, 2002, p. 34). This decade also saw the aggregation of the creative sector and the then-state of the industries through Cesar Tolentino’s secondary-sourced research entitled *A Primer on Creative Industries and on Digital Content Goods and Services in the Philippines* in 2008.

Some of the points made by the primer gleaned upon the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of the Philippine creative industries. Tolentino mentioned that the handicraft and furnishing sectors are globally competitive, and cultural events and art segments are unmined opportunities to explore further. Furthermore, he added that due to its English-speaking creatives, the Philippines was poised to be the best place to have solid creative services (e.g., marketing, digital advertising, and other cultural content utilizing digital platforms).

Since then, albeit slowly, this effort sparked the interest of the public and private sectors and has now created national bills and other corresponding government support to “formalize” the industry. The primary policy initiative is contained in Republic Act No. 11904 (RA 11904), or the *Philippine Creative Industries Development Act* (PCIDA), and has finally lapsed into law. It triggered the creation of *The Philippine Creative Industry Development Council* to “promote and support the development of Philippine creative industries by protecting and strengthening the rights and capacities of creative firms, artists, artisans, creators, workers, indigenous cultural communities, content providers, and stakeholders in the creative industries” (House of Representatives & Senate, 2022).

Presently, the Philippine creative scene is a multi-billion-peso industry. In a study titled *Creative Economy Outlook: Trends in International Trade in Creative Industries*, the United Nations Conference on Trade and

Development (UNCTAD) revealed some noteworthy statistics for the Philippines. According to the report, the country secured the 10th spot among its contemporaries as a leading participant in the trade of creative goods. Additionally, it emerged as the 9th largest exporter of design commodities, yielding revenues amounting to PHP 35.3 billion (US\$ 716 million). The United States, Japan, and China were the top 3 countries where exports were sent.

Before the research publication came to light, it was not apparent that the creative industry had such a significant role in the domestic employment arena, engaging 14.4% of the Philippines' total labor force and providing a substantial PHP 661 billion (US\$ 13.4 billion) to the nation's economic lifeblood in 2014. Consequently, it is reasonable to hypothesize that these figures have progressively ascended in subsequent years, with an apparent stagnation during the pandemic. This significant financial infusion represented 7.34% of the country's total GDP during that year. In addition, a diverse array of Filipino creatives engaged in a spectrum of fields — from advertising, film and video creation, music, performing arts, publishing, and broadcasting to visual and graphic arts — made up 11% of the nation's labor force. Considering its economic effect, this substantial impact situates the Philippine creative industry in a strong position on the global stage. Hence, the data has corroborated this potential.

While it promises to leverage the country's economic growth, the industry also creates a new image for the country. It has become a cornerstone of nation-building and helped boost Filipinos' innovation capacities, giving way to the government's vision of making the Philippines "a major creative hub in the Asia-Pacific, with strong and thriving creative industries supported by a pool of world-renowned Filipino talent, imbued with the passion for innovating goods and services that showcase the best of the Philippines, using new and emerging technologies" (Department of Trade and Industry, 2019).

From the context of Philippine CCI policies, I agree with Andrew Ross' view on how governments administer the creative industries, with most of their data, policies, and projects "often regarded as a slick routine, designed to spin value out of thin air, or else aimed, more surreptitiously, at bringing the last, most recalcitrant, holdouts into the main currents of marketization, where they can swim alongside the other less exotic species (managers, insurance agents, lawyers) that are lumped together" (2013, p. 6). The government has yet to find solutions to acknowledge their working conditions, such as dignified regularization and social protection, the aesthetics of creatives, and other underpinning challenges, to which the

new creative industries law could close these gaps. Ross elaborated that “[r]egulation of creative work need not stifle innovation... All creative work results from shared knowledge and labor; originality springs forth not from the forehead of geniuses but from ideas pooled by a community of peers and fellow travelers” (2013, p. 8).

Having worked under the Philippine government’s administering of the cultural and creative industries, it is a reasonable assumption that the efforts and initiatives of the government are sporadic, sparse, and lack assessment, strategic framework, and master plan. In addition, intelligent data are not harnessed. Current laws regarding the conservation and protection of cultural resources exist, but implementation could be more robust. Data, profiling, and mapping on the creative industries’ width, depth, and breadth of impact have yet to be collected. Policymakers establish bifurcation between cultural appreciation, cultural consumption, and cultural production rather than blurring the lines and treating them as relationships that could enhance technological innovation. Garnham explains that the “use of the term “creative industries” can only be understood in the context of information society policy. It draws its political and ideological power from the prestige and economic importance attached to concepts of innovation, information, information workers, and the impact of information and communication technologies drawn from information society theory” (2005, p. 15).

## **Viral, Virtual**

The government set measures in various levels of stringency — refraining from mass gatherings, physical distancing, quarantines, lockdowns, and redesigned working and travel arrangements — to curb the increase of new cases and curtail the outbreak’s spread. Since the initial imposition of the Community Quarantine<sup>1</sup> (CQ) on March 16, 2020, the Philippines, like most of the world, has been battling a major health crisis with a sudden economic slowdown caused by adopting contagion mitigation measures.

The Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT)<sup>2</sup> has been mapping and surveying countries all over the world and the

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<sup>1</sup>The Community Quarantine (CQ) is a tier of quarantine measures laid out by the Philippine government, akin to a lockdown.

<sup>2</sup> The Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT) systematically collects information on several common policy responses that governments have taken to respond to the pandemic on 17 indicators, such as school closures and travel restrictions. (Hale et al. 2020)

responses of the governments using several indicators, divided into four (4) pillars: 1) Containment and closure; 2) Economic response; 3) Health systems; and 4) Miscellaneous responses (Hale et al., 2020). The Philippines has been given an overall score of 96.3%<sup>3</sup> in terms of stringency; only a handful of countries make it in this tier. In addition, the country's lockdown measures were considered "among the fiercest and longest lasting in the world" (The Economist, 2020). How did this stringency affect the CCIIs?

The economic trajectory of the Philippines, which has been recognized globally as one of the fastest-growing economies, has recently taken a turn for the worse. The predicament is severe enough to potentially reverse years of impressive and steadfast economic advancements. As per the 2020 assessment by the Asian Development Bank, the aftermath of the viral pandemic was expected to deal a devastating blow to the Philippines' growth. Predictions for the 2021 annual GDP growth rate depicted a drastic plunge, transitioning from a promising 6% to a concerning -3.8% (Asian Development Bank, 2020). In tandem with this, the UNCTAD shed light on a significant shrinkage in global investment flows. They highlighted a sharp fall between 30% and 40% that occurred within the timeline of 2020 to 2021 (UNCTAD, 2020).

This substantial economic contraction presented a grave scenario for the Philippines, a country deeply reliant on its micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). These MSMEs form a mammoth 99% of the nation's economic infrastructure, functioning as the heartbeat of its financial well-being. They serve as a crucial source of income for a significant part of the populace while concurrently delivering a wide array of goods and services indispensable to the smooth operation of many other sectors. Evidently, these MSMEs encompass the cultural and creative industries. These industries are pivotal in offering grassroots employment opportunities and stimulating creativity and transforming cultural goods and artistic expressions into valuable economic assets. Today, these enterprises stand on the precipice, facing existential threats due to the current economic conditions.

During the years of lockdown and other COVID restrictions, the internal demand for creative goods and services stagnated. Pivoting to digital platforms is difficult for most theatre and performance groups and artists. As of writing, an estimated loss of PHP 268.66 million (US\$ 5.4 million) in contracts based on cancelled or offline freelancer projects has been estimated, according to the private sector-led *ilostmygig.ph*, "established to

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<sup>3</sup> A score of 100% is deemed strictest.



collate data to quantify the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on independent businesses, the arts, culture, and the creative industries in the Philippines” (Aguillon et al., 2020). Their latest tally also estimated approximately 5549 projects lost; and 4458 people directly impacted within the entertainment, arts, media, design, retail, health and wellness, and education sectors (Aguillon et al., 2020). The report also shared some of the stories they compiled to quantify the losses and qualify and give voices to real people suffering socially, emotionally, financially, and mentally. Some of the accounts (Aguillon et al., 2020) were:

I am the breadwinner, and my family relies on my art projects. The gigs I get vary monthly so it is quite disappointing to have murals postponed and portraits cancelled. (Artist A)

Given all of these uncertainties, I find myself in a slow downward spiral to bouts of anxiety and ceaseless worry that it has affected my concentration and has shelved any desire to create or be productive. As the days go on, it gets harder to imagine how I will float financially and professionally... (Artist B)

Aside from corporate gigs, I have lost theatre shows that made more than 20 people in 1 production alone lose income. (Artist C)

I had to return some supposedly non-refundable down payment to some clients because they pleaded that they needed the money. To keep the relationship healthy, I obliged and gave them refunds, which meant some events, I earned PHP 0 from, despite contracts and confirmation. (Artist D)

Most artists work from one project to another, without tenure or job security. In addition, in Philippine society, culturally, earning Filipinos tend to share finances with their families in paying for the rent, electricity, water, or any household expenses. Due to unforeseen circumstances and uncertainty of the future, cash-on-hand or credit has quickly depleted. This epidemic caused damaging to low cash flow for most artists and cultural workers, exacerbating their pre-existing susceptibilities. With this in mind, most are grasping at straws, urgently finding provisional financial support to append the looming reality of deficiency or stagnation.

The COVID-19 crisis has created an escalating feedback loop of reduction and contraction. The breakdowns in the production, delivery, and consumption flow of goods and services compound upon each other. There needed to be more supply and demand for merchantable items and services

other than essentials. There were fewer purchases because there was less work, which led to less production and conduct of services, less income to continue operations, and ultimately, less or no payment to employees. A considerable drop from PHP 20,000 (US\$ 405) – to PHP 60,000 (US\$ 1200) to PHP 5,000 (US\$ 101) in average monthly income for online creative workers was forecasted (Aguillon et. al., 2020).

Furthermore, pivoting to digital platforms has proven difficult due to the uneven access to digital infrastructure, profession-grade software, editing equipment, high-speed internet, and other connectivity issues among individual artists. The support staff and crew for regular productions could not resort to alternatives within their field and may have pivoted to completely new business activities. Assuming additional support for digitization is broadened, there are opportunities to engage new audiences, particularly in addressing educational needs.

Moreover, performing arts groups, galleries, museums, cultural institutions, and other artist collectives had compellingly established or increased usage of online channels to provide some forms of entertainment, relief, distraction, expression, and education to help societies and individuals with those trying times, when most were demanded to stay at home and limit mobility. These artists' crucial role in keeping our mental health and well-being must not be gleaned upon and treated lightly. Additionally, while traditional teaching formats may still be utilized, digitizing performances and other art-related products and services has genuinely increased audience engagement and cultural programming. This scenario gave way to new audiences that otherwise these artists may have yet to reach physically or geographically or do not have access to cultural and artistic facilities in their areas of residence. This led to an overwhelming amount of content one with a stable internet connection may access, with virtual sites streaming and producing 24/7, in various languages in different parts of the world. It has boosted and put the creative class on a different trajectory.

Now, when artists have been critical of our well-being, who takes care of their survival? "The current challenge is to design public supports that alleviate the negative impacts in the short term and help identify new opportunities in the medium term for different public, private, and non-profit actors engaged in cultural and creative production" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020).

Undoubtedly, the growing connection between technology, digitization, and cultural production and consumption will result in emerging forms, modalities, opportunities, and new focus on the body

of media communication and culture management in general. These interconnections shall be the site of:

...cultural and informational activity that populate the busy landscape of attention... [W]ork has been increasingly distributed from sites of production to the realm of consumption and social networking. The outside is no longer the extraneous – marginal or peripheral to the real decision-making centres. Increasingly it is where the action is located, and where our attention to building resistance and solidarity might be best directed (Ross, 2013, p. 11).

The NCCA earmarked PHP 4 million (US\$ 78,872) in April 2020, giving priority to displaced “freelance artists and cultural workers without regular income or with no benefits” (Custodio, 2020). It also “pledged to support disadvantaged freelance artists and cultural workers affected by the nationwide quarantine by providing 10-days tax-free minimum wage and sanitation of their residences” (Samodio, 2020). This amount, indisputably, did not reflect the level of priority given to the artists and cultural workers and only aimed to be a stopgap measure. Nevertheless, with the pandemic proven to be lengthier and more far-reaching, it does take more than one-time financial assistance to revive the quickly declining sector. Despite efforts by both the private sector and the government to alleviate the financial shock to the business sector in the weeks immediately following the initial quarantine’s imposition, the creative sector’s viability remained under constant threat.

### **The War of Art**

The pandemic is not to be solely blamed for the challenges of the artists and creatives since they have been some of the most vulnerable sectors even before this crisis. However, the current pandemic certainly worsened, yet highlighted, the situation of the industry. A lot of this vulnerability has something to do with how the sector is perceived, which ultimately leads to the structure of their working conditions and their precarity. Precarity, according to Tsianos and Papadopoulos, is

where immaterial production meets the crisis of social systems which were based on the national social compromise of normal employment... Precarity means exploiting the continuum of everyday life, not simply the workforce... Precarity is this form of exploitation which, by operating only on the present, exploits simultaneously also the future (2006, p. 2).

The notion of precarity that Tsianos and Papadopoulos have been espousing talks about the interrelation of temporality and spatial qualities that deepened the vulnerability of the industry's structure. Adhering to this line of reasoning, it could be inferred that the pandemic has not unveiled anything novel from artists, creatives, or cultural workers. Instead, it has heightened the vulnerability of the creative community, deepened existing challenges, introduced new forms of susceptibility, and instigated a fresh set of contemporary disputes. A notable conflict is an abrupt and necessary shift to digital and artificial spaces.

Even though the CCIs operate in a unique spatial and temporal context characterized by self-sufficiency, time-based flexibility, mobility, and diversified income streams, these traits can be seen as a double-edged sword. The creative class, now an influential concept examined by Richard Florida (2002), "were left further and further behind by the onslaught of technology-based growth" (Florida, 2012, p. 353), and technology has partly "shaped the huge rise in wage inequality, which in turn underpins a broader set of social, cultural, geographic, income, and other inequalities" (p. 359). Even a few decades ago, Lazzarato already addressed this concern, relating immateriality and connecting it with information, technology, and creativity. He put forth that "as regards the activity that produces the 'cultural content' of the commodity, immaterial labor involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as 'work' – in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms and, more strategically, public opinion" (1996, p. 133).

Now that we have established that technology contributes to vulnerabilities in the creative sector, leading to the obsolescence of many creative jobs, how can one negotiate this shift and contend with the challenges it presents? How do we make them resilient? Has the pandemic led the CCIs to this situation? Or has the pandemic further exacerbated these difficulties that even led the creative class through further labor and digital divide?

Some creative class members suffer from major setbacks like unemployment, underemployment, exploitative working hours, contractual and short-term projects, outsourcing, seasonality, multiple-job holding, or surviving from pay check to pay check, with inaccessibility to social security and other government-mandated benefits. Creatives assumed by policymakers that their responsibilities be borne individually or by a handful of individuals (Gill & Pratt, 2013). Whereas creative work is work.

The prevalent perspective concerning creativity, culture, and labor that most people adhere to involves accepting exploitation as a trade-off for personal autonomy and agency. This exploitation is often disguised by the relaxation of company regulations, offering perceived flexibility (Huws, 2014; Ross, 2013). Due to this thinking, most, if not all, have associated the creative class as more bohemian and informal, leading to their marginalized position in society or every aspect of commerce, enterprise, and management. Hesmondhalgh and Pratt described this as a pervasive conceptual tension on how policymakers view the CCIs — “the romantic notion of the isolated artist-genius who works for the love of art, typically suffering poverty in a garret room” (2005, p. 7). In addition, American cultural journalist Scott Timberg wrote that they are “seen neither as the salt of the earth by the left nor as a “job creator” by the right—but as a kind of self-indulgent parasite by both sides” (2015, p. 141). Due to this side-lining, the CCIs have only been peripherally within cultural policies.

With greater reason, it must be highlighted that the struggles of the creative class and working artists have been a hard-fought battle; these disputes, and the aim to break the chains, can also be traced to the long-standing traditions of autonomist Marxism, post-Fordism, and post-operaismo (Hardt & Negri, 2000; Lazzarato, 1996; Negri, 1979; Virno, 2004). These traditions can somehow be considered as bottom-up approaches, shifting the focus from the working class as passive objects but rather as active agents, “the well-spring of the skills, innovation, and cooperation on which capital must draw” (Dyer-Witherford, 2017). Other forms of marginalized classifications also emerged, like the precarious proletariats or the precariat (Davies, 2013; Gill & Pratt, 2013; Munck, 2013; Standing, 2011), and how this group relates to the creative industries (De Peuter, 2011).

In an industry highly reliant and productive on social interactions, referrals, networking, and creation of knowledge, the pandemic has not only exposed and presented the precarity and vulnerabilities of the CCIs, but indisputably highlighted its muddled concepts regarding mode of production and the immeasurable scope of immaterial labor (Hardt & Negri, 2000; Lazzarato, 1996) through the artists, creatives, and cultural workers. How does one grasp culture as work in cultural work? How is creativity manifested? The notion of immateriality in knowledge-based sectors (Gorz, 2004), like the CCIs, is a central theme to how it is perceived and valued, as intangibility is hard to measure in an economic world obsessed with quantitative data alone — metrics and figures and key performance indicators.

We have often overlooked and failed to recognize legally — in a true neoliberal capitalist fashion — the artists and cultural workers as formal workers, value creators, and service providers, much like any “professionals” in other fields. Their production of “immaterial goods such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge or communication” (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 292) is every bit as important an industry as manufacturing, retail, or electronics, to name a few.

## Revival

Despite the vulnerabilities, a crisis offers a reset, an opportunity to reassess, recalibrate, reimagine, revisit, and reinvent the systemic processes, loopholes, and structures that led to the fragilities of the cultural and creative industries and the reasons that caused socioeconomic setbacks. The support must continue beyond band-aid solutions but rather invest in redesigning support and development strategies to revive the industry and the workforce behind it. I echo Antonio Negri’s gallant query and critique almost fifty years ago — more relevant now than ever. It is a call for a shift in how the working class is being viewed and portrayed that still rings true to the creative class and the precariat: “What is the working class today, in this specific crisis, no longer merely as objects of exploitation, but the subject of power?” (Negri, 1973, p. 105).

Now more than ever, it has been proven that in crises and catastrophes, the creative class and its products and services have an indispensable place and value in societies. They have adopted, adapted, and quickly transformed into digital platforms. Historically, they have made sense of previous plagues, epidemics, disasters, crises, and catastrophes. They interpret the world in ways we never knew possible, capture its meaning, to record and elucidate the current milieu. These productions and performances offer recreative and fascinating works and a means to reflect and question our inner self and consciousness. As the philosopher Marshall McLuhan boldly puts it, the artist “is always seeking new patterns, new pattern recognition... He alone has the sensory awareness necessary to tell us what our world is made of” (McLuhan, 1968).

Artist exploitation must cease and be compensated for work they tender. They must be honored with truly transformational ways and infrastructural changes to protect their rights, working conditions, and other privileges they must enjoy. To realize these hopes, it genuinely requires a “progressive industrial policy driven not by GDP stats about the revenue extracted from creative jobs, but by qualitative input about what makes a job creative” (Ross, 2013, p. 9).

As we strategize and craft ways to reboot our economies headstrong, the cultural and creative industries have proven to be central figures in crisis response and recovery efforts. They are some of the driving forces — the next in line in essential services. It is critical to remember that our societies will also depend on them to power the recovery process once the immediate health crisis passes. Catering and crafting specific support mechanisms for the CCIs shall start by looking at available statistical data and mapping the sector as a foundation for analysis. It must then be institutionalized (Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2005).

One clear thing the pandemic brought was an awareness of infrastructures that can be strengthened and worked on. Statistics over the last thirteen (13) quarters projected the unemployment rate in the Philippines at an average of 5.4% (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020). Despite its marginal rise and fall for years, it is hardly about lack of opportunity. Even with the creation of new jobs for a quickly growing economy like the Philippines, the issue lies with underemployment and skills mismatch. These issues contribute to the slow-paced absorption of available labor, with the highly skilled and educated Filipinos seeking opportunities elsewhere. This reality was only heightened when COVID-19 turned the world upside down with a radical shift to digital and technological platforms. Suddenly, the workforce is necessitating a shift the country is unprepared for. The swift progression towards digital dominance, bolstered by the rapid advancement of technologies like artificial intelligence and automation, should not have been an unexpected shift. Even prior to the pandemic, this evolution posed a significant hurdle for the Filipino workforce. Addressing this disparity should be of paramount importance.

The time has come for governmental bodies to augment their capabilities to function efficiently in an increasingly digital landscape. Organizations like the Department of Education (DepEd), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), among others, bear the responsibility of formulating and executing digitally focused training programs and curriculums. Such initiatives should nurture skills that align with the post-pandemic world's demands—skills that ensure the workforce can adjust to rapid changes in design and innovation and bridge the gap between the requirements of the government, academia, and the industry.

Over several decades, we have observed the remarkable expansion of technology and the digital universe. Furthermore, the forthcoming years will likely witness an even more accelerated pace of these advancements, making it increasingly challenging to stay abreast of these changes.

We are truly living in the now generation, a digital revolution of high interconnectedness and efficiency. Technological innovation has continued to influence socioeconomic development and is embedded in our everyday lives. It is then a moot point to posit that “technology influences culture and culture influences technology or technological innovation leads to social innovation as society adapts to new technology and then seeks new solutions” (Moore, 2014, p. 740). Unfortunately, “digital control of our lives will remain a permanent feature” (Žižek, 2020) during this pandemic and in the future. As technology gets more entrenched, the CCIs must embrace this quality while not losing their critical voice. Cultural programming and other cultural practices must now face and recognize this radical shift. They must use this as “opportunities to elaborate relevant public policies and to promote the diversity of cultural expressions and the inclusion of creatives from countries where access to digital platforms or data is limited by infrastructure and cost” (UNESCO, 2020, p. 51).

As much as the CCIs like financial support through economic stimuli, a more sustainable solution — as a means for revival — is utilizing their services to fill the gaps that need addressing. For example, one of the challenges of the government is the lack of a centralized internal documenting system that could track or verify if a document on hand is authentic. Some small digital enterprises have already created a solution for this problem. Engaging with these enterprises shows the government’s solidarity in supporting small and local enterprises and creatives while lessening the risk of fraudulent activities for and within the government. Similarly, doing business and partnering with the government is a dignified way to support this sector, allowing them to secure jobs for their employees and sustain growth.

The power of the working class must enhance the mechanisms by which the governments operate and manage the creative style, and the nimbleness of communities to organize. Top-down, chains-of-command, and control-oriented approaches must acknowledge the power of individuals’ and collectives’ innovation, resourcefulness, and creativity. These actors have cultivated an informal and practical set of quotidian skills and networks, found ways to improvise, and sought transformational opportunities in crises they face. It is high time to acknowledge bottom-up approaches in national development strategies — a bottom-up approach driven by the creative community.

From this discourse, we understand that the cultural and creative sectors are frequently seen as susceptible to diverse obstacles, encompassing scarce resources, infrastructural limitations, and economic volatility.



Nonetheless, it's critical to acknowledge that these hurdles can also act as assets, often catalyzing ingenious and innovative responses. This is notably prominent in the sphere of social reform, where imaginative methods bear significant potential to engender positive influences and incite substantial change.

In many ways, the creative sector is a space where resilience and resourcefulness thrive, despite its challenges. Despite challenges, the cultural and creative industries demonstrate a remarkable capacity to generate new ideas, foster collaboration and community-building, and drive meaningful societal change. They possess a distinctive capability to initiate societal transformation in unforeseen and remarkable manners. By venturing into fresh viewpoints, questioning prevailing discourses, and proposing novel resolutions to intricate societal challenges, the creative sphere can assume an essential role in sculpting our future and fostering a more just, inclusive, and sustainable world.

While the cultural and creative industries may face many challenges and vulnerabilities, they are also sources of great strength and resilience. This resilience and ability to adapt to changing circumstances make the cultural and creative industries valuable and exciting spaces for fostering progress. Indeed, the cultural and creative industries are uniquely positioned to foster innovation and inspire transformative societal change. Their influence extends beyond the confines of amusement and artistry, penetrating societal, economic, and ecological spheres. These sectors bear the capacity to tackle essential matters like reducing poverty, enhancing education, sustaining the environment, fostering social integration, and a myriad of other concerns. Furthermore, their unique capability to touch human emotions and alter perceptions provides an opportunity for cultural and creative industries to lead the dialogue, challenge existing norms and stereotypes, and inspire a sense of collective responsibility. These sectors hold the capacity to promote discerning thought and galvanize civic participation, which are core elements in championing social equity and fairness.

Nurturing these industries remains a key priority. By furnishing them with requisite aid, be it monetary, academic, or structural, we can guarantee their sustained role as crucibles for inventive concepts. We must regard their challenges not as impediments, but as stimulants that invigorate creativity and fortitude. While RA 11904 has the potential to form a solid basis for structural and legal protections of the Philippine CCIs, its practical execution and enforcement remain somewhat uncertain. The law's effective implementation and diligent enforcement are yet to be witnessed, thereby

questioning its capacity to actualize its potential and influence the CCIs' trajectory. The anticipation is imbued with a subtle sense of caution as we observe how its real-world impact unfolds.

In sum, the cultural and creative industries remain significant catalysts for societal evolution even when confronted with considerable challenges. Harnessing their creative energy, tenacity, and capacity for innovation, these sectors possess an inherent ability to steer societal advancement and facilitate a more just and sustainable global community. Recognizing their distinctive role and potential, it is imperative that we commit to cultivating an environment in which these industries can flourish, perpetuating the transformative changes we aspire to witness in our society.

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