

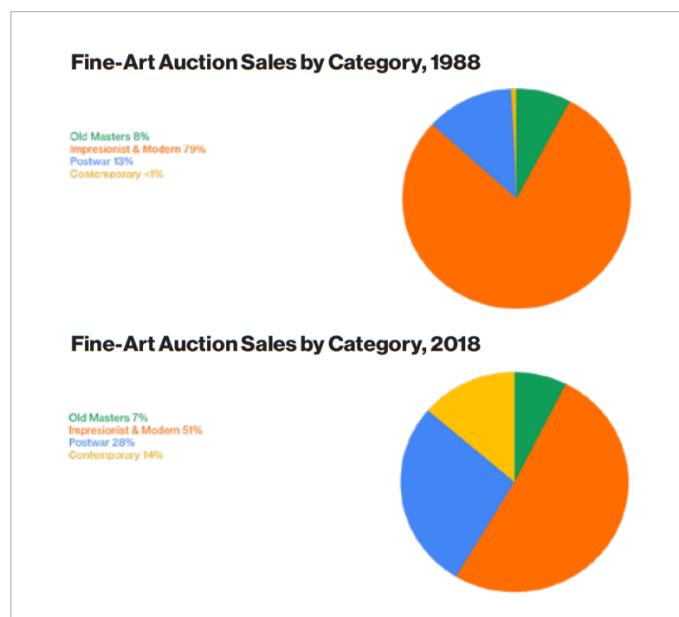
COMMUNIST CREATIVITY FREED FROM THE CONSTRAINTS OF CAPITAL.

This article has two purposes. Firstly, to debunk the view reinforced by Stalinism that a communist society will be drab and dreary without the colour of art. Secondly, the view that art cannot be priced in a communist society, that is paid for, as it is in a capitalist society.

Stalinism (USSR) has damaged and contaminated the view of communism including the field of art, and by association, it has contaminated the perception of Marx and Engel's views on the subject as well. Marx and Engel's on the one side, and Stalin on the other, were polar opposite. Whereas Marx and Engels were cultured and well read, Stalin was coarse and uninformed. And whereas Marx and Engels insisted that art should express candour, Stalin ensured that art was styled to reinforce the party line. The genius of Shostakovich's work trimmed by 'Socialist Realism' is a legendary example.

I will not go into the encyclopaedic assimilation of the history of art by Marx. Instead I will point the reader to this detailed enquiry into Marx and Engel's appreciation of the arts and its role in society. "[The founders of Marxism](#) emphasised that art was an important weapon in the ideological struggle between classes. It could reinforce just as it could undermine the power of the exploiters, could serve to defend class oppression or, on the contrary, contribute to the education and development of the consciousness of the toiling masses, bringing them closer to victory over their oppressors." And, "While showing that a link existed between art and the class struggle, Marx and Engels always fought against attempts to schematise this problem." "They considered realism, as a trend in literature and a method of artistic creation, to be the supreme achievement of world art. Marx's and Engels' demands on the artist include truthfulness of depiction, a concrete historical approach to the events described and personages with live and individual traits reflecting typical aspects of the character and psychology of the class milieu to which they belong."

Nor should we accept any criticism from the apologists for the capitalist class. After all a class who spends more money on dead artists than live ones, who secretes these works away for private viewing, who speculates on it, and who treasures scarcity above all else, is not fit to pronounce on art now or in the future. The graphs below show the spend on dead versus contemporary artists. ([Source](#) of Graph below.)



The Brain and how it economises on energy.

The mapping of the brain begins in the second half of the 19th century and was largely completed before the First World War. The structure of the neuron was described by Camillo Golgi using a staining procedure in the late 1890s, and his techniques were later used by Santiago Ramon y Cajal to describe the function of the neuron. Thus neuro-science, especially the ability to use instruments such as magnetoencephalography (MEG) to map electrochemical reactions in the brain, was in its infancy during Marx's lifetime.

To understand the manner in which art allows us to challenge world views, we need to understand how the brain works. The brain is essentially a defensive organ connected to the outside world through the senses. In a resting state the brain consumes a fifth of the energy produced by the body, of which three quarters is used for signalling rather than maintenance. The old saying that to keep your feet warm, wear a hat is apt in this regard because the loss of critical head-heat below a certain level alters the distribution of energy throughout the body.

Given the brain's heightened energy consumption of the body's limited energy potential, evolution has produced energy saving measures. Firstly, the brain's external communication via the senses subordinates the internal communications via the CNS (central nervous system) thus reducing the waste caused by interference. That is why pain subsides over time though a wound may not be fully healed. Another good example is the intestines. The digestive tract is linked to the brain via the Vegas Nerve with the bulk of the information in the direction of the brain filtered by the small-brain attached to the intestines itself. In the case of irritable bowel the volume of cell signalling from the intestines intensifies sometimes to the degree that it overwhelms the brain, giving sufferers the feeling of being spaced out. The opposite is the case as well, the brain necessarily dulls itself to repeated conditions of discomfort or abuse. For example food intolerances are difficult to detect for this reason, which is why a selective fast over weeks is needed to resensitize the brain to a particular food by its absence, followed by its reintroduction.

Turning to the outside world. The brain is not digital, its analogue. It makes a bio-chemical imprint of the outside world which costs energy. When it re-records the outside world it does not start from scratch by making a brand new copy, rather it measures the changes to the original and then updates it, which is much more energy efficient, as this is akin to topping up. Thus biologically we are prone to prejudice and bias, that is to seeing the world not with fresh eyes but with eyes already informed by previous perceptions. That is why for instance, on analysis it was found that most algorithms were infused with the *unconscious biases* (I prefer the word unacknowledged or unchallenged) of their programmers.

Thus the brain biologically lends itself to us being conditioned to see the world in a particular way if that world is reinforced repeatedly. That is why it is wrong to use the term brain washing. That implies, the brain is purged and then reprogrammed, exactly the opposite of what happens in real life.

And that is why art is so powerful and so feared by oppressor classes and religions. Art challenges our prior perceptions. A film with a couple kissing on screen in public was considered obscene decades ago due to its unfamiliarity. A film with a gay couple kissing in public is still considered challenging by many viewers today. In religious communities whose world view is dominated and narrowed by the de-sexing of women, a semi-nude woman would be considered overwhelming, simply because such a view is so unfamiliar.

Which brings us to the word candour. In the article above the authors discuss at length how Marx and Engels spoke of art having to be realistic. I much prefer the word candour, which includes not only realism but honesty and courage as well. An analogy will suffice. Taking a picture with a camera is realistic, it captures the world as seen through the lens. But refusing to turn the camera to focus on the corners of society the authorities hide, is dishonest. The pictures will lack candour because the issue of censorship arises.

Thus art needs not only to be colourful and vivacious, without which it ceases to be art, it also needs to be audacious, fearless, daring. These latter words describe political relations not the art itself. Art that shocks for the sake of shocking, owes more to the extremes of competition than it does to the extremes of art. And it is unlikely to endure, whereas beautiful art that reflects and enhances reality, does endure.

Art above all clashes most heavily with religious prejudices. All the major religions, whether it is Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity or Islam, were born out of agrarian, mostly feudal, societies. It is for this reason that the capitalist class in its revolutionary phase around the end of the 18th Century had such an uneasy relationship with religion, later corrected out of fear for their growing working classes. More to the point, it is the historical gap amounting in some cases to thousands of years between the societies then and now, in which the old world is out of phase, which makes the cruel suppression of art, literature and dress (which itself is an artform) necessary by religious authorities as evidenced in Iran today.

Art as a commodity.

In the world of private property, art has always needed a patron. When walking through any art gallery it is the changing world of patrons which becomes more obvious than the changing techniques. Indeed, patrons can each be assigned their own floor. First floor, the plethora of religious art courtesy of its patron, the Catholic Church. Second floor, later portraits of the wealthy aristocrats, generals and kings/queens. Third floor, the age of the industrialists, portraits of the wealthy. Fourth floor, the emergence of popular art and the submerging of portraits of the rich and famous in favour of the more representative subject. Fifth floor, still under construction, video graphics. Video graphics?? Well one day history will look back at the early 21st century and the dominant art form it will alight upon, will be computer graphics, particularly those found on game stations, visited by billions of players, rather than the millions going to museums.

Of course patronage and inequality are bound up. The more unequal a society becomes, the more art is monopolised by a narrower clientele, the more individual patronage and philanthropy comes to the fore. The result is that fewer artists become more successful and sought after, while the majority of artists or players lose out and have to find second jobs. We will see this in the comments around the Spotify series on Netflix. This is everywhere seen, as art in its many forms is turned into an industry ripened for exploitation. Take football and its patron television and corporate sponsorship. Hundreds of billions of Dollars or Pounds are poured into the industry and mainly funnelled into the pockets of the top players at the expense of the sport as a whole. Of course football players are highly skilled and it can be said that this skill is their pallet used to perform their art which goes beyond skill and is highly entertaining. But the very competition that stimulates this art also degrades it, as the game becomes more brutish and physical, more unsportsmanlike.

In the meantime the gap between the players and the fans grows in distance and in capability. The mass of fans inside and outside the stadium become increasingly passive, more and more removed from the joy of playing themselves, instead settling for the joy of chanting while forking out their subscriptions.

Massing around sport is one of the few assemblies promoted by capital but only because these assemblies are akin to extras on a movie-set hosting a football production where the players are the inaccessible stars. And of course behind the scenes, as the short film *The FIFA Family – A love Story* shows, much of the money contributed to this sporting body to fund and develop grass roots football was re-rooted instead into the pockets of FIFA officials, their padded salaries and expense accounts. Wherever there is big money, there is corruption, subverting instead of improving and enhancing.

Art and Freedom of Speech

Art is the *extraordinary* form of communication. It does not sit apart from the general communication between people, between people and nature and within societies. For that reason the freedom of art is always part of the freedom of speech. When speech is clamped down on, so too is art because art is *concentrated or condensed* freedom of speech.

And we are now entering the period where the freedom of speech is under attack. The first volleys are not censorship, that would be too crude, but vilification and distortion. It is often said that art, satire and humour tends to be left-wing. Just so. The left is more liable to criticise the existing state of affairs while the right is more liable to reinforce it. Laughing at oneself is a form of self-criticism, something which the right forbids. To them existing and pre-existing aspects are sacred, untouchable, because when one laughs at oneself, at how ridiculous behaviour can be, that opens the door to changed behaviour, to a new and higher form of being.

In the UK the attack on freedom of speech, of being WOKE, was seen around the issues of statues. Britain we are told is a small island which cannot house refugees, but still has room for tens of thousands of statues commemorating ‘important’ Brits. There was a time when Britain ruled the waves, and this island could not have ruled the waves without becoming *Cruel Britannia*. This is an issue that goes well beyond slavery. The streets and squares of this island are littered with statues of men (mainly) who have blood on their hands and whose victims are still remembered by their descendants, and if not, they should be.

Trying to reverse these injustices by removing these statues is cast as trying to rewrite history. But history is always written by the victors, the ruling class that oppresses us, making it not history but their version of history which they have compiled and enforced. We encounter this all the time. The dominant narrative may never be attacked. If the state tries to take steps to mitigate bad food it becomes the *nanny state* trying to inhibit consumers. But the dominant influence - advertising, marketing and packaging - goes unmentioned by those who accuse the state of being a nagging nanny, which is their devious way of saying “hands off our marketing”. Similarly with the “cancel culture” accusation. It is not the left which seeks to cancel culture, but the right which seeks to preserve and defend the existing culture, cancelling any criticism. Cultural wars are synonymous with political struggles to change the existing order, and no profound political struggle can ever succeed without becoming a cultural war.

Modern art and its dissemination under capitalism in the age of the internet.

I would like to conclude this section by focusing on how the internet changed art and culture. It was one of the reasons why traditional art became so bland, desperate and transient despite the influx of money and patrons such as Saatchi. More to the point, beginning in the late 1980s, the new art found in museums and galleries reflected the vacuousness of neo-liberalism and those enriched by it.

Recently Netflix has produced two series which undermines the narrative about the authenticity of the inventors of the Apps that changed popular culture. The first series was based on the genesis of the music streaming App Spotify, and the second was Google Earth. The name of the Spotify series is called *Spotify Untold* and the latter is called *The Billion Dollar Code*. Both should be viewed by the reader if they have not done so already.

But I would like to begin with the biggest software company of them all – Microsoft. The reason being that it was the personal computer which kicked off the technical charge propelling the cultural changes, which then led up to smartphones (which are really pocket computers). Thus before the internet and connectivity, it was computer programmes (software) which heralded the revolution.

The founder of Microsoft was Bill Gates who was a programmer. (All the notables seem to have spent some time at Harvard which is east coast not west coast.) He was able to take advantage of two strokes of good luck. First, there was IBM who had scaled up the production of desk top computers. However, they saw themselves as a big box company specialising in large industrial computers. Consequently they were prejudiced against these small box computers, failing to see their potential, which meant minimising the spend on their development. This included developing software packages for these desk tops.

Bill Gates appreciated this failure by IBM and sought to exploit it. He also knew of a small programming company called *Seattle Computer Products* who had developed a programme which could run the IBM PC. His business plan was as simple as it was deceptive. He miss-bought the rights to this operating system called QDOS, which later came to be known as MS-DOS, by not disclosing to the originators of the programme that he was contracted to IBM. He then supplied IBM with this readymade operating system to run their desk top computers. IBM officially launched on the 12th August 1981 with QDOS preloaded, barely two months after Gates had acquired the rights to the programme.

This separation of software and hardware, which satisfied IBM, but which was exploited by Microsoft, turned it into one of the largest corporations in the world, in the end surpassing IBM itself. But the cost was immense, the world was saddled with a cumbersome operating system which delayed the emergence of more refined software by a decade. Had IBM set some of its programmers to work, they would have produced much better and more elegant software sooner, consigning Microsoft as it became, to an alternative reality.

From there we jump to 1993 and the launch of Terra Vision in Berlin by two visionaries which composes the story behind *The Billion Dollar Code*. The opening to the series captures the idealism which the information age brought into being. The young drawn to this field felt that the new technology could prise the walls of private property apart and usher in a new freer society. Programmers who worked dangerously long hours were driven mainly by idealism and not by financial reward. Predictably many of the programmers who were recruited to Terra Vision had honed their skills as hackers, believing this new technology should be free. They became the new electronic sculptors of the world.

But as the series continues it becomes clear that idealism does not pay the bills, capital does. The two partners strike it lucky, they convince Deutsche Telekom to fund a project similar to the later *Google Earth*. To win funding they underestimate its complexity while overstating their progress. Typical entrepreneurial ruses. The whole project hinges on the one partner who is the chief programmer being able to write an algorithm single handedly capable of marrying a request to view a locality anywhere on the planet with a

smooth journey to view it up close. He succeeds just in time but at great personal cost to his health, and the project becomes the sensation of the *Kyoto Communications Fair* of 1994.

This algorithm does get patented. And it is a ground breaking algorithm whose applications are not immediately understood at the time. But patenting an idea does not pardon naivety. Our Terra Vision programmer now famous, continued to be infatuated with developers in the USA and their achievements, and shortly after Kyoto he travels to the USA to meet up with one of his heroes. While in the desert he discusses the ins and outs of his algorithm. Ten years later *Google Earth* appears adopting his algorithm and adapting it to the PC for the first time. As a result the friendship between the two pioneers of Terra Vision is destroyed because the second partner sees the earlier breach of confidentiality as betraying what they had worked towards. Destroyed friendships is a common theme in the genesis of this and other important Apps, as is the stupidity of the holders of capital and their lack of imagination blunted by years of obsessing over the bottom line.

Ten years later Facebook emerges. Once again its genesis is based on deception. The 2010 film, *The Social Network* partially exposes this. In a nutshell Zuckerberg, again a programmer, is commissioned by two Harvard seniors Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss, together with a classmate Divya Narendra, to develop a social platform for Harvard students called *Harvard Connection*. In effect Zuckerberg purloins this idea, and instead of developing it for those commissioning it, he begins to develop it for himself. To get away with this deception he keeps fobbing off his fellow students by claiming his lack of progress is due the burden of academic work, while in reality he is focusing not on his course work, but on developing what came to be known as Facebook. While the film is ambiguous on this point, later evidence in the form of [email messages and instant messages](#) reveals not only that he stole this idea, but also the contempt he had for the other three students. This contempt was not limited to these students but later to his partner, Saverin, who had provided the original seed investment, and who is subsequently shafted in order for Zuckerberg to reduce his shareholding from 34% to a mere 0.03%. Of course as in all things business, there are no happy endings only court endings. All the series and film end in litigation with juries favouring the now large corporations due to their defence attorneys portraying the originators of these Apps as modern day outlaws trying to hold up the fabulous stagecoach the corporation had built themselves at great effort.

Those who are dumfounded by the avarice of corporations like Facebook, who see them becoming perverted by Wall Street only later, miss the point, they were perverted from inception by entrepreneurs disfigured by ambition and gain.

Spotify Untold again describes the genesis of *Spotify* the music streaming site in Stockholm shortly after the emergence of Facebook in the USA. It better captures the anarchistic outlook of the early hackers especially around *Pirate Bay* which became famous then notorious for its free downloads of music. Spotify was set up to provide free music downloads but without infringing copyright as *Pirate Bay* was doing. They proposed to pay record labels for the free downloads with the advertising revenue their site would generate.

To make their site viable, their key programmer once again revolutionised the way downloads could be accessed by writing an inspired algorithm which prevented the traditional lag between selecting a title and listening to it. Despite this unique technical accomplishment the music industry refused to bite. The story then continues with how the Spotify partners, especially their business partner, manages to break through to the record labels by convincing key figures that the days of the CD were numbered.

Of course, once the music industry bites it does so on its own terms, and streaming is tailored to protect their profits. As a result Spotify's original mission, to not only provide a platform for new talent, but to pay them accordingly, is perverted. The profits are hogged by existing stars and their labels leaving crumbs over for the rest. The majority of music artists have to find second jobs. This is the key take-away. It shows how capital destroys any idealism and how it robs the talents of those it exploits including the talent of the programmer who made Spotify possible and whose one wish was that it should not fall into the hands of the record industry. Predictably the relationship between the programmer and his business partner is shattered because of this disappointment.

These films and series comprise a mosaic of the problematic genesis of much of which has changed our world and testifies to the de-humanising process it had to go through. It gives new meaning to the expression: "*It's just business*".

A communist approach to art.

What these films shows is how capital destroys the possibilities inherent in a technology. Despite this, it is true to say that by the mid-1990s, once the internet was established, the opportunities it opened up were welcomed with open arms by the venture capital industry. The prevailing mantra became; *that investing in 1 successful start-up more than made up for investing in 9 failures*. Money poured in. Valuations soared. Start-ups burnt money like there was no tomorrow. But tomorrow did come as it always does when capitalism over-invests, this time in the form of the *Dotcom Crash* of 2000/1. [Five trillion dollars](#) was wiped out. Puberty for the information age turned out to be harsh.

Today the information age is long in the tooth. Behemoths tower over most of the sector monopolising it. They buy up competition, litigate against competitors and generally lobby Congress to frustrate foreign competition. And here I am not talking about Huawei but much earlier on when within two years of the founding of Spotify, [Apple](#) was already seeking to block its entry into the USA to protect iTunes.

Today, the information age is bogged down in the quicksand of monopolies. Innovation has been reduced to a crawl. Intellectual Property disputes abound. Apple even claimed the rounded corners of its smartphone were covered by Intellectual Property. It seems the lawyers and their case law have taken over from the programmers and their algorithms.

To add insult to injury, much of what was and is to become Intellectual Property, was and is publicly funded in the first place. This applies particularly to the field of medicine where public funding gives rise to medicines and vaccines which are then kidnapped by Big Pharma.

But there is one exception which shows how technology can work, and that is the internet together with the world-wide-web. The whole of the internet in its present form would not exist were it not for the public funding that gave rise to it, and, because the inventors refused to patent it as their own intellectual property. Had they done so we would all have to pay a toll to use the internet because it would not be a public service, but one falling under the protection of Intellectual Property and the riches that commands. In that event, our world would look very different today, because if everything had to be paid for, it would have delayed if not stalled much of what we take for granted today.

And so it will be in a communist society. How to explain something which is yet to exist? In the UK we have the National Lottery. To advertise it the slogan "*It could be You*" is endlessly promoted. How such a slogan is allowed by *The Advertising Standards Authority* speaks to the whole corruption of the system. In

fact the accurate slogan should be "*It won't be You*" because for every winner there are fourteen million losers. Thus what capitalism does, is to only show the winners, but to do so, by hiding the losers. And it is these winners – these entrepreneurs - who are held up to be the source of the dynamism of the system, not the losers, all the scientists and engineers, who by their endeavours made the technology possible.

The same applies to art and culture. The dazzling entrepreneurs, as presented by their public relations officers, blinds us to the nefarious ways they emerged, and how their emergence was compromised in the first place by capital. How the shenanigans discussed above did not accelerate innovations, but retarded it. On closer examination capitalism does not so much revolutionise production and art as much as stumble over it.

It took the assembly line 50 years to emerge in the hands of Ford. Even the smartphone, the single most emblematic item of the information age, did not appear as if by revelation or by Apple genius. The first touch screen was developed in 1965. The first patented screen followed 10 years later. After touch screens became available to help air traffic controllers, HP brought out the first commercial screen for its HP-150 in 1983. The first phone with a touch screen called the *IBM Simon* was released in 1993, a decade and a half before the first iPhone launched in 2008. The first successful consumer product using touchscreen technology was the Nintendo DS launched in 2004 which became an immediate hit. But the smartphone could have been beaten the DS to the post, and by doing so it would have been Taiwan not the USA which would have won the acclaim, *HTC* at the expense of *Apple*, had *Android* been available and not ensnared by Google's protracted attempts to buy it, which it eventually did. In that case *HTC*, which had developed a modern smartphone as early as 1998, would be remembered for inaugurating the age of the smartphone not *Apple*.

In a communist society technical developments will circulate immediately unencumbered and uncomplicated by private property. These development will be transparent and will be assessed by all, not some entrepreneur behind closed doors. This collective investigation will be more speedy and accurate than the inspired guesses of individuals in a capitalist society. Above all, once the need or want for such a product is established, resources will be committed in a conscious and programmed way, not in the clumsy devious ways characteristic of a capitalist society, where new products are not assessed on their merits but on their ability to produce profits. This applies to creative products as much as mundane products.

In a capitalist economy new products take the form of luxury goods first. Their scarcity to begin with, until production is ramped up, allows them to be overpriced, as was the case with the first series of flat screen televisions. In turn the super profits so generated helps fund the scaling up process and the realisation of economies of scale. How does this apply to a communist society? It does not? Here the demand for new products will be known in advance. *Consumer led planning* in real time will instruct the planners how many of the new product are required, and by substitution which products will no longer be needed. Thus planners will be well placed to switch and convert production at the earliest opportunity to meet the changed demand. This change will thus be direct and conscious rather than indirect and reactive as found in a capitalist society.

Which leaves only one question unanswered, how are artists of all descriptions to be rewarded? It is often forgotten today that many of the [proponents of fine art](#) up to the 18th century saw it to be priceless produced by amateurs. Kant was amongst them. Art for its own sake. Today art has been commodified

and most of its production is for exchange. In the era of neo-liberalism this has become acute, it is not the art between the frame but the price tag below which is important. Art has been reduced to a collectable.

The other side of the coin is that while private finance chases after commodified art, at the same time in education it seeks to stifle art. Art is to be separated from the masses. If art is to be financialised it's supply needs to be controlled less it collapses prices (which is why dead artists are so valued, seems it is possible to now price death). And what better way to do this then by robbing schools of their art classes. The masses are to be trained to write, to add, to light Bunsen burners and to programme and are not allowed to waste their time on art. And yet all the evidence proves that art encourages, no inspires learning, and that outcomes are better when art is included. Here are two observations from a study in 2017 *Participation in structured arts activities can increase cognitive abilities by 17%. Students from low-income families who take part in arts activities at school are three times more likely to get a degree.* In sum, as a result of this dumbing down of students, the educational sausage machine under the sway of neo-liberalism has been reduced in size from a robust banger to a slimmed down chipolata.

Today, particularly in the world of art, the neo-classical view of price dominates, namely that the value of a piece of art or a song is in the eye or ear of the beholder. The price is thus set by how many clicks, how many views, how many downloads, how big the gigs, how long the queues of fans etc. Here we have inverted immaterial piece rate payments set by the consumer. The greater the consumption of these "pieces" of art the higher its price is projected. This is unlikely to endure. But we must leave it to the future to decide how artists, singers and so on will be supported. All we can say is that a cultured working class which replaces an exploited and alienated working class is likely to devote more resources on art than present day society.

It is the task of fools to predict the future in detail. Will art become priceless in the future produced by those who love it for its own sake? We cannot say. Will they be full-time professional or part-time amateurs? We cannot say. All we can say is that the opportunities for producing art will flourish. None of the platforms and Apps will be hijacked for private gain, but be open and available to all. Nor will education be deprived of its artistic content. The working class will sing once more, paint once more, sculpt once more instead of merely being exhausted by the production line. The reduction in the working day will become society's palette, society's keyboard, society's stage. And so the gap between those who can and those who can't will wither, between those who provide and those who consume.

What we can say with certainty, however, is that art in a future communist society will not be put in a straitjacket tailored by the party or the state, as happened in the USSR. And furthermore, as the crisis of capitalism deepens today, as the movement of resistance and struggle grows, it will be signposted as always by revolutionary art and song. Of this there can be no doubt.

Brian Green 15th December 2022.