

# AGAINST CREATIVITY

## LOOSELY STRUCTURED THOUGHTS ON A LOOSELY DEFINED TOPIC

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*This article\* addresses the notion of creativity by following its use in a discourse common to a heterogeneous group of social agents. It is argued that creativity, with an associated notional framework, shapes a depoliticized way of imagining communities, places, and society. It is claimed that such an approach prevents us from properly grasping the form of social processes under scrutiny and must be rejected.*

Keywords: *creativity, neoliberalism, critique, Ljubljana, Tim Ingold*

*Prispevek obravnava pojem ustvarjalnosti, tako da sledi njegovi rabi v diskurzu, ki je skupen heterogeni skupini družbenih akterjev. Skupaj s povezanim pojmovnim ozadjem ustvarjalnost oblikuje depolitiziran način predstavljanja skupnosti, krajev in družbe. Teza prispevka je, da takšen pristop onemogoča, da bi ustrezno zajeli oblike družbenih procesov, ki jih preučujemo, in ga je zato treba zavrniti.*

Ključne besede: *ustvarjalnost, neoliberalizem, kritika, Ljubljana, Tim Ingold*

### INTRODUCTION

In contemporary social science and the humanities, at least in some quarters, any kind of critical approach seems to be seen as an outdated, “good for nothing,” and pessimistic procedure, often dismissed as an act of mindless destruction. Instead, an approving and “caring” stance is promoted—one is encouraged to compose, contribute, assemble, recycle, and, indeed, create. Arguing that such a position nowadays “constitutes a dominant and largely unremarked *doxa*” of social sciences and humanities, the philosopher Benjamin Noys (2010: ix) termed this trend one of “low affirmationism.” Supposedly fine-tuned, as opposed to “high theoretical positions,” to the task of “affirming historical density, complexity and materiality” (Noys 2010: ix), it is, especially in its experiential or ethnographic mode, at risk of reflecting and perhaps inadvertently valorizing contemporary capitalism (Noys 2014: 195), specifically its drive for novelty and exaltation of creativity. This is done by asserting “inventive potential[s] of the subject, the necessity for the production of novelty, and a concomitant suspicion of the negative and negativity” (Noys 2010: ix).

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\* I have appropriated the title from Jack Goody (1977), who argued “against ritual,” and Miha Kozorog (2012), who argued “against urbocentrism.” A shorter version of this article was presented at the conference *Creative Green Ljubljana: Contribution of Creative Industries and Cultural Initiatives to the European Green Capital 2016*, held in Ljubljana on April 14th, 2016. I would like to express my gratitude to the participants for their useful comments. I would especially like to thank Nika Nikolič for her selfless help, two anonymous reviewers for extremely stimulating comments, and the guest editor, Saša Poljak Istenič, for her superhuman patience.

Against the background of low affirmationism, it is not difficult to recall the work of the “urban theorist” Richard Florida and many others that followed his lead. Even though Florida’s thesis on the “creative class” (Florida 2012) was convincingly criticized for furthering neoliberal politics and policy, and obscuring (changed) class relations (in the Marxist sense), as well as for its empirical, methodological, and epistemological shortcomings (Peck 2005; Davidson and Wyly 2012; Krašovec 2013a), his ideas seem to live on largely unscathed not only in urban policy and managerial studies, which one might reasonably expect, but also in the work of numerous researchers in geography and in urban and cultural studies.<sup>1</sup> Anthropologists, however, are (or were?) more reserved. In fact, Eitan Wilf (2014: 406–407) characterized the recent upsurge of interest in creativity among managerial and organizational theorists, despite their frequent reliance on a Romantic image of creativity, as having “had the potential to demystify creativity as a mysterious process from which only a few can benefit” by proposing numerous generic ways of “unlocking the creative potential.” However, as Wilf critically emphasized,

this ascendance of [interest in] creativity cannot be set apart from the rise of a “neoliberal agency” that requires subjects to imagine and fashion their own future by engaging with risk and making decisions under conditions of increased uncertainty. (Wilf 2014: 407)

Beyond the fact that—apart perhaps from anthropologists working in applied projects—most anthropologists do not engage with the issues discussed by Florida and his adherents, two apparently contradictory points need to be made.

First, long-term fieldwork in anthropology can elucidate social aspects and ways of going about by actual people in context(s) in which the “creative class” and its ideology reign. In addition, anthropology can contribute to defamiliarization of the familiar and, indeed, a critique of self-evident discourses and practices. For example, neoliberal notions of creativity often presume the existence of an autonomous inner nature of each and every individual that can, and must, function as a router towards his or her success and “creative expression.” Whoever, for whatever reason, does not follow this router is portrayed as individually responsible for his or her failure to be creative. Moreover, failure to be creative and to transcend present constraints is deemed to be the result of one’s natural predispositions (Wilf 2014). Something quite similar could also be argued about cities that do not, or fail to, attract members of the “creative class.”

Second, anthropology has provided its own views on creativity (e.g., Lavie et al. 1993; Liep 2001; Hallam and Ingold 2007). As discussed below, while having qualities of their own, some of these perspectives can also be problematic in certain contexts; although

<sup>1</sup> In projects aimed ultimately at furthering the “creative agenda,” some have symptomatically rejected the use of the term “creative class” and have opted for supposedly more natural terms or euphemisms, such as “creative people” (e.g., Kozina 2016).

they perhaps provide an apparently unorthodox, alternative, or new perspective on the matter, they in fact integrate ideological views and obscure actual social relations. These views “celebrate creativity” as a form of inexhaustible resistance of the weak (see Friedman 2001; Löfgren 2001) or, more problematically, we find ourselves again in the heart of low affirmationism because creativity is deemed to be ubiquitous, dispersed—always happening and transient—even among nonhuman constituents of any environment (e.g., Hallam and Ingold 2007; Edensor et al. 2010).

In order to critically present certain currently hegemonic tendencies in social-scientific and humanistic thinking about creativity, as well as society at large, I first rehearse some well-known but surprisingly often neglected or forgotten arguments about what I had previously termed neoliberal notions of creativity. It seems that many researchers have adopted these notions—along with the “creative newspeak”—into the very substance of their writing; this task is especially pertinent when touching on the “creative industries.” Here one simple point needs to be made: the notion of the creative industries is not a scientific or a theoretical one, but a political-ideological one (Vogrinc 2012: 126).

Second, I point out some of the crucial social relations and processes that tend to disappear from view once “creativity” is adopted either as a framework of analysis, a “thing” towards which individuals and cities must strive, or as a (supposedly) neutral way of working. Although I briefly refer to examples of “creative urban regeneration”—to use a phrase borrowed from a prominent Slovenian book on the topic of creativity (Žaucer et al. 2012)—and much of what is presented here stems from observations made during my fieldwork with organizers of arts and crafts fairs in Ljubljana, and craftspeople that sell their products at these fairs (Bajič 2014, 2015), this article is not ethnographic in character.

Third, I turn to one contemporary anthropological view of creativity associated with the work of Tim Ingold, as mentioned above. I argue that such a view, although it appears to have successfully avoided political issues and present-day concerns with “unleashing” cities’ or peoples’ creative potential, is in fact in tune with “post-ideological ideology” and—despite some fundamental differences in philosophical backgrounds and the overall interests and purposes of their respective work—it is in certain aspects in accord with the work of the “urban theorist” Richard Florida.

However, I begin with a short reflection on my previous ethnographic fieldwork, and against this background I outline the methods employed both during the fieldwork itself and for this article.

#### A SHORT QUASI-METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

I should emphasize that this overview of recent writings on the topic of creativity is by no means comprehensive and indeed is not intended to be. I try to highlight certain issues and connotations of “creativity” without going into the details of individual works or

presenting all of the relevant authors. Furthermore, this overview is by no means neutral or objective (nor could it be). There are two main reasons for this; first, I base my reading on a thesis that no neutral argument is possible when discussing “creativity” because all positions presuppose, and are in the last instance embedded in, class antagonism (in a Marxist sense), even if the prevalent trend is to deny any such relation and purport to be neutral, post-class, and post-ideological—which is, of course, an ideological stance (Davidson and Wyly 2012). Second, my reproach derives from injustices encountered and/or told about during my fieldwork; these were suffered by social groups that were slowly but surely pushed out of the city (and the common world, which was in the process itself disintegrating), as well as by the craftspeople themselves (precarity, exploitation, lack of recognition, etc.).

I carried out the main part of my fieldwork between October 2012 and July 2013—when the discourse about all individuals’ and cities’ own responsibility to “creatively reinvent” themselves to overcome economic difficulties and the risks of the post-2008 financial crisis years was particularly strong (Poljak Istenič 2016: 161)—by visiting fairs and having informal conversations with the organizers, craftspeople, and visitors, while following web-based and printed publications. In addition, I conducted structured interviews with all of the organizers and for a short time participated as an assistant with a small group of “crafters,” as craftspeople often label themselves. In light of the issues discussed here, perhaps the most important part of my research was my participation in a team of anthropologists/ethnologists and craftspeople in writing an edited volume (Korun Hočevar 2014); reflecting on our discussions and overall collaboration, what seems most important for my current interests is not so much its purpose (i.e., to give an expert but necessarily positive assessment of the fairs, crafters, and their products as contributing to the “revitalization” of Ljubljana, stressing local specialties, and, of course, reinvigorating “creative passions”), but their (apparently) self-evident qualities.

In previous works I focused on the role of fairs in the production of the media and social image of Ljubljana and its “lively atmosphere.” This image was, and is, used for addressing relevant social groups in and outside Ljubljana, as well as craftspeople themselves. Much like city officials, who openly but selectively encourage “creativity” in order to attract “the right kind” of people, fair organizers and craftspeople evidently took a page from Florida’s book, but were “taking it personally.” They employed the discourse of creativity when forming their own identities, the “stories” of their products, describing their work, engaging in mutual “networking” online and off, and doing more broadly, including the “revitalization” and “promotion” of Ljubljana.

Taken in itself, without considering the gentrification of the city center and the precarization of working conditions in which “creativity” and these social groups are embedded, “creativity” seems innocent enough. “Creativity” forms an important basis of people’s identifications and sense-producing activities. For example, studying the crafters from a purely ethnographic point of view, the relevant discourses are no different, no more and no less “real,” than any other, and should be treated as such. However, these discourses were

and are also used by rather powerful social agents, ranging from an international level to the local, from institutional and political to NGOs and scientific actors, affecting actual social processes. To paraphrase Douglas Spencer (2011: 16), from a critical perspective “creativity” is a joyful way to inculcate requisite connective, flexible, and informal modes of conduct into people, and to render it permeable to its surrounding environment as a mechanism for the integration of everyday life and business or the market. In other words, “creativity” embellishes not only the city, but the fact that individuals are increasingly recast as “entrepreneurs-of-the-self” (Lazzarato 2012).

Because many researchers have adopted the very same basic discourse (even if they do add a great deal of empirical data, a more nuanced and systematic terminology, etc.), they simply affirm it rather than study it (and the social actors using it) in the context of broader socioeconomic processes.<sup>2</sup> Put differently, a discourse that is from its very inception an invention of politicians and a way to implement their agenda has become dominant, and was taken up by some scholars as an epistemological discourse, to use the term quite loosely. In this way they legitimize—or “scientifically substantiate”—a certain type of politics (and policies), already embedded in the very substance of their work, that despite protestations to the contrary contribute to and normalize social exclusion, ceaseless competition, precarization, gentrification, and so on, but never question established social relations and discourses. In a further twist of irony, due to its ubiquity and compliance with, put simply, contemporary common sense, it appears neutral.

I could thus say that, by following “creativity” and its permutations from everyday to political to scholarly registers, I adhere to Michel Foucault’s (2008) theory of discourse. I have focused on events, series, regularities, and conditions of possibility (2008: 18) of a discourse common to various institutions, groups, and individuals. I am interested in the historical moment, in which “creativity” gained purchase in Slovenia, local institutions that

<sup>2</sup> Writing specifically about contemporary anthropology, James Carrier (2012) persuasively criticized its exclusive engagement with culture and individuals, at the expense of engagement with society, and its rejection of systemic theories of social order. Furthermore, he points out “that, together, these changes have left anthropologists with no critical perspective on the world, just as the ascendance of neoclassical economics left economists with no such critical perspective” (Carrier 2012: 115). He notes that by rejecting systemic analysis anthropologists and economists are left without a means of understanding social and economic processes, respectively. Instead, many “responded by celebrating what they had ceased to try to comprehend. For economists, that celebration took the form of arguments for market efficiency and rationality, and of efforts to see market behavior everywhere. For anthropologists, that celebration took the form of arguments for cultural diversity and human agency, and efforts to see signs of them everywhere” (Carrier 2012: 126). “Creativity,” together with widespread enthusiasm about it, precisely fits this shift from the Keynesian political economy to neo-classical economics (which in many respects coincides with neoliberalism) and from “grand concepts anthropology” (structural functionalism, structuralism, etc.) to postmodern anthropology. Something similar, I would argue, stands for what could perhaps be called “amodern anthropology,” borrowing a term from Bruno Latour (1993; cf. Ingold 2007: 167–170). However, in a further turn of the screw, agency or creativity have been ontologized and inscribed by amodern anthropologists into matter itself (see Bajič 2016: 19–20).

advocate(d) “creativity,” as well as (purportedly) professional and/or scholarly literature on the topic. Furthermore, I was interested in how, who, and what is excluded or denied by way of (apparent) inclusion with this discourse and its affinity for affirmation.

## CREATIVITY’S POLITICAL-IDEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

“Cultural and creative industries,” as the prevalent Slovenian phrasing goes, were introduced into political vocabulary in 2008, when—during the term of an (at least in name) liberal and social democratic government—the Ministry of Culture issued its Resolution on the 2008–2011 National Program for Culture. It recognized that the “cultural industry is the main factor in changing once autonomous art into a commodity, thereby extinguishing its potentially critical charge and authenticity” (ReNPK0811 2008: 3385). Furthermore, it was stated that the cultural industry’s “value system is shaped by the market, that, on the one hand, functions as means of dissemination and affirmation of artistic production, and, on the other hand, guarantees the necessity of artistic production, shown in the exchange value/usefulness of art products” (ReNPK0811 2008: 3385). It was concluded that, despite being controversial due to furthering commercialization of art, one cannot imagine functioning of the cultural field without cultural industries, which were, moreover, described as bringing about tremendous technological possibilities for accessing culture and education, for innovation, and for economic growth (ReNPK0811 2008).

In 2011, at the height of (rather unreflectively) adopting austerity measures and reforms for promoting economic competition and flexibility (i.e., normalization of precarious working conditions, deregulation of labor markets, lack of social security, dubious options for purchasing real estate, etc.), as were demanded by the European Union, two interesting texts appeared, both calling for “more creativity.” The first is the booklet *Cultural and Creative Industries—Slovene Style* (Breznik Močnik et al. 2011), again published by the Ministry of Culture, which presents the cultural and creative industries in a distinctly positive way, virtually without any reservations, as an opportunity for “networking” among a multitude of different actors that will lead to “synergetic effects,” all the while urging those working in relevant sectors, ranging from art and media to museums and (certain) institutions of higher education, to adopt to the jargon presented (see Vogrinc 2013). It was argued that the use of this jargon will increase one’s chances for employment in processes of privatization and commercialization of culture (cf. Bibič 2013: 179–180).

The second text is the column “Political Technology for the Second Republic” by the sociologist Borut Rončević, who soon thereafter served as a director general for higher education and science, in the next neoliberal-conservative administration.<sup>3</sup> Although

<sup>3</sup> Much like the preceding coalition, the administration that Rončević served in enforced and intensified austerity measures and introduction of neoliberal economic policy. Funding for arts programs was reduced, the independent Ministry of Culture was suspended and annexed to Ministry of Education,

not dealing specifically with the creative industries, but the overall social and political direction of Slovenia, the author called for “a society that promotes knowledge, creativity, entrepreneurship and free initiative” and emphasized that the economic crisis presents an ideal opportunity to start shaping such a society. This, Rončević continued, “presupposes fundamental changes that would cut in the very core of the social structure.” In the new society of knowledge, creativity, entrepreneurship, and free initiative there will be no need for those unwilling or unable to comply with “new ways” of doing and should simply be let go of, Rončević concluded. The column raised more than a few eyebrows due to its open attack on public services, especially on what was characterized as the “old way” of running things in the media and academia, on what could be summed up as a widespread “mentality,” and the proposed way of achieving “the second republic.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite noticeable differences in the approaches and methods advocated in their respective “affirmations of creativity,” and despite their origin with political parties that in most instances define themselves in contrast to each other, the two texts share, and take for granted, certain basic ideological premises (evident also in policies demanded and enforced by the European Union): those working in culture, media, academia, and so on have no choice but to surrender themselves to the market. There they should refrain from criticizing and simply adopt appropriate modes of conduct, repeat time and again certain gestures, make use of pertinent jargon—and success will follow.<sup>5</sup> Thus exposed, the advice given to (future) “creative industrialists” by policymakers bears an uncanny resemblance to Blaise Pascal’s (1966: 152) advice for curing unbelief (Pascal’s Wager). Crucially, in the discourse of creativity, in tandem with the associated complex of modes of conduct (“customs”) and institutions, because it is structurally incomplete, anyone can “find himself,” imagine desired qualities and “prizes.” Nonetheless, “creativity,” as external to each individual (i.e., embodied in various institutions and objects), leads him its own way. Due to its straightforward and vile prose, Rončević’s column shamelessly presents the ideological premises in their purest form (Dolar 2013; Zupančič Žerdin 2013), explicating that one *must* follow requisite discourses and ways of doing, making it a somewhat shameful affair for left-liberal proponents of what are in certain respect similar goals, to those advocated by Rončević; for example, transforming knowledge and culture into a means of making profit, serving the economy, and providing new, “creative” jobs (cf. Krašovec 2013b).

The texts cited are in themselves rather unimportant, but, as mentioned above, they indicate ideological suppositions shared across (most of) the political spectrum about the role and importance of—among other “topics”—creativity and its coupling with the logic

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Science, and Sport, and perhaps most tellingly the Art Directorate was renamed the Creativity Directorate. At the time, the renaming was quite appropriately described as acceptance of management paradigm at the linguistic level (Jelesijević 2012). The subsequent government re-established an independent Ministry of Culture, but retained the Creativity Directorate.

<sup>4</sup> The column was published on the author’s blog, but it has since been removed.

<sup>5</sup> The same stands in relation to expertise provided to municipalities by, say, Richard Florida (2012).

of market competition (see also Bibič 2013). Although the texts cited do indeed come from government representatives and state policymakers, the views presented therein are by no means limited to them, but are common among actors of different legal and institutional statuses, and active in diverse areas nowadays often lumped together as the cultural and creative industries—including researchers of the topic in Ljubljana.

Due to this self-evidence of neoliberal ideology of creativity, two points that are often repeated (among more critically minded scholars) need to be made. First, the recent rise in the popularity of the notion of creativity is intimately connected with a specific social and historical period. Moreover, it is not homegrown in Slovenia. Its beginnings can be located in the UK around 1990, when, as the sociologist Jože Vogrinc puts it,

the term *creative industries* emerged as one of the outcomes of political, social and cultural struggles [...] when conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher introduced a neoliberal economic policy, which was taken over as a self-evident framework of policies and ideologies in economics and culture by her successor, John Major, and afterwards by Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair. (Vogrinc 2012: 128–129)

In the context of accelerated deindustrialization, culture had little choice but to transform into a “bundle of private services and to promote itself as a post-industrial, postmodern, private and flexible—or, in a word, post-Fordist—sector of the economy,” to use Vogrinc’s words again (2012: 129). It is not hard to note the parallels with (and differences from) the Slovenian case, where, as in Britain in the 1980s, most if not all of the events mentioned took place under the mantra “there is no alternative.” Those that disagreed were, and still are, seen in Slovenia as remnants of some distant Balkan past, both in daily politics and in daily life (see Bajič 2015: 155–158).

Second, it should be emphasized that the events described had their antecedents throughout the 1990s. As Bratko Bibič observed *apropos* culture’s role in (gentrification of) Ljubljana, in the gaze of state and municipal authorities people that, willingly or not, did not conform to a “proper way of life” came to be seen as dangerous and “had to” be dealt with accordingly. Their dangerousness consisted in resisting and disturbing the “festivalization and glamorization of public life” that was in the interest of the local authorities and contributed to “an appearance of depoliticized social harmony” (Bibič 2003: 75). Although neoliberal notions of creativity and associated practices do differ in certain respects from the processes described by Bibič, they function and are used by the local authorities in much the same way and for same purposes (see also Lebarič 2013). Among other things, they contribute to an image of Ljubljana as a “creative city,” to use Landry’s term, where room for those that disagree with the set guidelines is diminishing. In other words, “creativity” is one of the preferred means of achieving international visibility and attracting people “of the right sort”; namely, cultural tourists, professionals, and investors (Poljak Istenič 2016: 159–161, 2015).

## CREATIVE URBAN DEGENERATION

To many adherents of (neoliberal) creativity, it no doubt seems strange to even invoke politics in this context because for them it lies beyond politics—it is instead a question of post-political management of the city and “human capital” (Davidson and Wyly 2012), and individuals’ ability and responsibility for tapping into their “creative potential” (Wilf 2011); or, as it is termed in a more vernacular context, a question of the promotability of creativity. For example, gentrification processes come to be seen not as contingent, but inevitable, thus cleansed of their wider politico-economic dimensions and social antagonisms:

Gentrification is widely observed as an inevitable process occurring as a result of many broader socio-economic processes, as changes in the demographics and household structures, the impacts of urban growth and consequent changes in the relationship between space and accessibility, etc. Since gentrification is often assumed to be part of natural flow of urban change, it is often supposed to be unstoppable. (Žaucer et al. 2012: 29)

To prevent or at least diminish possible resentment among those that are pushed out, steps for expanding and enhancing inclusion are usually suggested; that is to say, further “post-political management” is proposed as a solution. Typically, “culture” and “creativity” are central in this; museums, galleries, exhibitions, festivals, arts and crafts fairs, creative quarters and clusters, educational programs, leisure amenities, and so on are deemed an appropriate vehicle for achieving social inclusion, promoting “openness” and tolerance, recognizing difference and complexity, and so on.<sup>6</sup> In my opinion, there are at least three objections to such a stance.

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<sup>6</sup> At least in larger cities, these “progressive” tendencies are often reflected in the architecture of the buildings themselves, as well as in urbanism more broadly. However, as Spencer (2011) noted, in architecture these tendencies are in strategic allegiance with corporate organizations and managerial paradigms that stress de-hierarchized and de-centralized networked forms of organizing, values of autonomy, spontaneity, informality, and so on. As Spencer (2011: 12) emphasizes, following Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, this liberatory repertoire of critique of capitalism, originating in May 1968, was appropriated by capitalism; now, “affirmation of creativity—especially in terms of the production of ‘the new’ and compliance with the ‘progressive realities’ of neoliberalism—is in fact one of the main means by which this current of architecture opposes critique [as such]” (Spencer 2015). These—usually privately owned—buildings, for instance, open out towards their surroundings, thus creating a quasi-public space, where a heterogeneous and changing mix of activities and facilities stands (public art, communal performances, shops, cafés, “lively atmosphere,” etc.), but with its form encourages “nomadism” of its visitors. Although a handful of buildings in Ljubljana do fit this model, it should be pointed out *apropos* arts and crafts fairs that, although they are transitory and much cheaper to insert in the city, they play a similar game of pretend, where lines between public and private temporarily blur. It should be emphasized, however, that it is not individual architects or crafters that are to blame (who, in fact, often are just trying to make ends meet, and many are striving for a “better tomorrow”), but the dynamics of contemporary capitalism.

The first one has to do with the omission of categories of class; talk about “attracting the creative class is about avoiding all serious thought about the fundamental meanings and inequalities of [...] *class*” (Davidson and Wyly 2012: 395–396, emphasis in original; Krašovec 2013a). In other words, the notion of “creative class” obscures the socio-structural differences and economic inequalities within this group, and actual relations of productions, where, in post-Fordist capitalism, producers are separated from social conditions of production (Močnik 2010: 180–181), by lumping together not only different legal and institutional statuses and activities, as mentioned above, but also class positions; one should not make the “mistake [of] changing appearance of class structure with the disappearance of class antagonism” (Davidson and Wyly 2012: 396).

Closely related is the second problem; namely, the issue of social inclusion of citizens. The notion of citizen presupposes a uniform social structure, in which antagonistic social relations have been transcended, and the notion of social inclusion reduces, if it does not completely cover up, the problems of structural inequality and poverty, as well as calls for redistribution, to simple deviations from what is otherwise posited as an unproblematic norm. The notion of citizen appears socially neutral and value-free, but it often nowadays presupposes, and functions within, the post-political managerial horizon. It is not so much that the political is recast as a competition between accepted agents within representational space in accordance with predefined rules, but that even “politics-as-competition” is “replaced by a collaboration of enlightened technocrats . . . and liberal multiculturalists; via the process of negotiation of interests, a compromise is reached in the guise of a more or less universal consensus” (Žižek 2004: 72). Disagreement with the consensus—in Jacques Rancière’s (2004) precise sense of the phrase as a struggle against the implicit/presupposed “distribution of the sensible,” which defines what is visible and audible, what can be thought, said, and done, and thus constitutes a partition of the world and of the people, a struggle that constitutes politics proper—is, as Bibič (2003) has also shown, labeled in advance as both unrealistic and unproductive.<sup>7</sup>

Happenings of this nature are, of course, not reserved only for the international and national levels, but also take place at the local, everyday level, with regard to, say, ways of organizing and imagining (common life in) the city. For example, reactions from the municipality, “experts in creativity,” and certain scholars to squatting at the Rog factory, which stands next to the Ljubljana River—or, one could say, Ljubljana’s waterfront—and is the site of a planned “creative hub” with an adjunct hotel, business complex, apartment building, and underground garage made it clear in numerous public statements, coupled

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<sup>7</sup> Although Rancière highlights the audible and the visible, because these are the principal channels thorough which the police order works, one wonders, when dealing with its effects on everyday life, whether the gustatory, the olfactory, and the tactile are not just as important. As noted by Sandi Abram (forthcoming), with respect to the struggle against the “creative revitalization” of the Rog factory, gentrification’s influences on everyday (multi)sensorial experiences of different social groups remain largely unexplored, but in fact seem to play an important role.

with eviction attempts and legal action, that for them any real alternative was inconceivable and inadmissible.<sup>8</sup> One of the socially inclusive “solutions” proposed by the municipality was that (if its plan to “revitalize” Rog succeeded) the former users (many of whom are, to put it mildly, in a socially unenviable situation) could apply for the tender on an equal footing—the footing of cultural and creative industries—like anyone else. In this apparently neutral and inclusive way, which (to repeat the thought above) presupposes that people will refrain from criticizing and simply adopt the appropriate modes of conduct, the diversity of practices and viewpoints would be reduced and many would be excluded due to interests inscribed in the very frames of what is permitted. Those that would continue to resist would, in addition to not having a chance to peruse their activities, be at best tolerated as mere (sub)cultural “oddities,” and at worst excluded: made invisible and inaudible. The permanent possibility of such culturalization of politics is answered by Rog’s users with the politicization of culture, as they themselves also emphasize—and therein lies part of their “danger.”<sup>9</sup>

This leads to the last problem; it has to do with the “cultural” aspects of social groups that are to be the object of social inclusion (and exclusion). Specifically, the third objection is associated with one of the essential qualities of so-called creative cities, namely that they are supposedly liberal, tolerant, multicultural, and open to diversity. However, what kind of tolerance and what kind of Otherness are effectively at stake here? It is a tolerance for diversity and pluralism of “ways of life” (e.g., being gay, vegetarian, Hindu, etc.), effectively constructing the Other in an utterly harmless, benign form, a “folklorist” image and deprived of its substance, accepting the same basic “customs” and values as everyone else. In other words, it is the Other without its Otherness, without its “dangerous” and “unacceptable” characteristics (see Žižek 1997).<sup>10</sup> In Ljubljana, such tolerance is, for example, “applied” in media and tourist portrayals and the museumization of the Metelkova City autonomous social center as a “cultural enrichment” and one of Ljubljana’s “attractions” (see Bibič 2013: 187–189). In terms of the creative city paradigm, such a place is, or should be, nothing more than a component of a “lively, urban atmosphere,” a venue to consume a “craft beer”—because it has already been cleansed of any and all “distasteful phenomena” (including different ways of cooperation and participation, ideas, and people) and commoditized.<sup>11</sup> Such an understanding completely misses the point and much of what is

<sup>8</sup> Representatives of (potential) private investors were for the most part tellingly silent. The reason for this, perhaps, lies in the fact that the municipality and the “creatives” were effectively doing their bidding. In their actions, the creatives and the municipality conveyed that the private investors (or rather, capital) functioned as the “untranscendable horizon of our time” (Noys 2010: 171).

<sup>9</sup> On the (liberal) culturalization of politics see, for example, Žižek (2008).

<sup>10</sup> Alongside the acceptable Other without its Otherness, however, Florida (e.g., 2012: 313–314) constructs in a rather surprisingly essentialist way Other cities—cities stuck in the past, unable or unwilling to change.

<sup>11</sup> I have chosen the example of Metelkova City for one simple reason, even though there are other similar, perhaps even more acute, examples of autonomous social centers under threat from the cohort of the municipality, investors, and (socially and economically powerful) cultural industrialists where their

going on there: “the central value of grassroots venues is rebellion—rebellion against the mainstream, standardization, and stupidification” (Muršič 2012: 26).<sup>12</sup>

## TINKERING

One fairly recent anthropological conception of creativity reflects, or rather incorporates, many of characteristics of the present historical situation and attributes them to what is deemed to be the true structure of reality itself, imagined as a meshwork (see below). I am thinking of the conception proposed by Tim Ingold and Elisabeth Hallam (Hallam and Ingold 2007; see also Ingold 2007, 2011, 2013). Due to a rather exclusive and elitist notion of creativity found in the usual treatments of creative industries and related topics (e.g., implicit dichotomies of the “creative class” vs. “uncreative class,” the “creative city” vs. “uncreative city/village,” and “talented” vs. “untalented” individuals), and due to notions that differentiate between forms of creativity—for example, innovation or “true creativity” vs. improvisation or “small-scale everyday creativity” (Liep 2001), and bricoleur vs. engineer (Lévi-Strauss 2004)—many have turned to Ingold and Hallam’s conception. Relating to the first problem, by offering a set of (fairly) new notions (wayfarer, meshwork, lines, etc.), the latter conception avoids these distinctions and, accordingly, recognizes the creativity of each and every one. In connection to the second issue, and specifically *contra* John Liep’s position, these anthropologists maintain that “the difference between improvisation and innovation [...] is not that the one works within established convention while the other

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violence recently assumed physical and legal forms. The reason behind choosing Metelkova City is that a photograph of it is featured on the back cover of the book *Creative Urban Regeneration: Potentials in the Ljubljana Urban Region* (Žaucer et al. 2012), arguably one of the central books on the topic dealing with Ljubljana in recent years. On the back cover, Metelkova City is portrayed as “colorful” and “untamed,” but on the front cover of the book there is only the title in imposing, “regimented,” and “strict” letters, printed against a monotonous, gray background—is this not a perfect “expression” of the political unconscious of “creativity”? (However, one should probably not be surprised by this feature because the cover was designed by *Novi kolektivizem*; thanks to Sandi Abram for reminding me of this group’s involvement.)

<sup>12</sup> Despite the above criticisms of liberal multiculturalism, one must not forget that such an ideological, institutional, and practical framework makes it possible to perceive cultural contexts and identities as non-binding and constructed, as well as (on account of personal convictions, and not in spite of them) to respect others’ convictions and to recognize actual inequality against the background of formal equality. Today, in light of the rise of the extreme right, these qualities are absolutely crucial. Precisely for this reason, the “post-political politics” mobilization of liberal-multiculturalist tropes, and its limitations, need to be critically examined (how, for example, do post-political endeavors to culturalize politics and to preclude politics proper in fact (co)produce certain forms of bigotry?; Žižek 2004, 2008). People’s dissatisfaction over social injustices, economic inequality and exploitation, and so on generated by global capitalism can be articulated in dangerous ways. As pointed out by one of the reviewers of this article, the task of articulating the dissatisfaction of the oppressed and the exploited in an emancipatory way paradoxically falls on the same group of “creative” people “currently chained to the role of a colorfully entertaining Other,” who must become “destructively critical.”

breaks with it, but that the former characterizes creativity by way of its processes, the latter by way of its products” (Ingold and Hallam 2007: 2). Thus, in this view, creativity is a movement forward and the only proper way to study it is to accept its terms and conditions and to move along with(in) it, in correspondence with fellow participants, feeling ahead in anticipation, and so on. (According to this view, as soon as we look at creativity from the outside, its magic disappears and we are left with mere objects.)

Such a conception seems to have its merits. First, it emphasizes the ceaseless and continuous generativity of peoples’ actions, all of which demand certain “enskillment.” Second, it asserts that creativity always happens in the company of others, as an “organic” continuation of previous work, and demands adjustments in real time to occurring changes. Third, Ingold and Hallam stress that creativity is a forward-moving process in terms of time and one that is essentially unforeseeable and indeterminable. As this description suggests, no two acts are exactly alike. Fourth, and to slightly rephrase the point made above, creativity as improvisation is the way we all work and live and—borrowing from Pierre Bourdieu—is “as remote from creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from simple mechanical reproductions of the initial conditions” (Bourdieu 1977: 95; Ingold and Hallam 2007: 15).

At first glance, we have ventured far from Florida and the troubles with the “creative class.” However, when some of Florida’s assertions on the nature of creativity—that, for example, “creativity is truly a limitless resource; it is something we all share” (Florida 2012: ix) or that “creativity is essential to the way we live and work today, and in many senses it always has been” (Florida 2012: 12)—are compared to those just outlined, it is not hard to see an agreement, already at the level of “manifest content,” between the two authors. However, in what follows, I argue that the authors, more importantly, share the “dreamwork” of creativity. In this, perhaps, lies the reason why Ingold’s “creativity as improvisation” today appears intuitively understandable and a viable alternative in, among other areas, design anthropology (Otto and Smith 2013: 9), where (to use a Kantian term) public use of reason is suspended, as signaled by its motto “for the people, with the people, by the people” (Blazo 2017; Otto and Smith 2013: 17–18).

With “creativity as improvisation,” one is essentially faced with a conception that, as far as ethnographic enquiry goes, focuses solely on the unison of indeterminable bodily action, perception, and intentionality in a world of the meshwork,<sup>13</sup> which, as Ingold repeats time and again, is the only proper world to place creativity in. The meshwork portrays a world of “entangled lines of life, movement and growth” (Ingold 2011: 63), where no constituent “line” has priority over another, but simply “entangles” to create ever new, always

<sup>13</sup> This narrow focus is reflected in the examples used by Ingold and Hallam (and others in their volumes, as well as numerous contributors to the *Anthropological Studies of Creativity and Perception* series) to illustrate their points; the “hands on” work of an architect, calligrapher, printer, carpenter, cook, or pedestrian. In my opinion, the rather optimistic tone of many of these discussions stems from idealized/romanticized images of these activities. As such, they reflect and appeal to a “hipsterish” structure of feeling.

transient formations; there is and can be no alienation (only “organic” continuity between the maker and the product), no gaps (only complex connections; even Florida recognizes, albeit in a mystified form, the very real social rifts) and no antagonisms (only consensual and harmonic relations of apprenticeship between the novice and the master, or between the proletarian and the capitalist; e.g., Ingold 2000: 290–292), a level playing field where one nonetheless has no option but to find the “grain of the world’s becoming and to follow its course while bending it to [his] evolving purpose” (Ingold 2011: 211; 2013: 93).

Because there is of course no denying that people no matter their class, gender, ethnicity, and so on make things, the notion of creativity outlined appears neutral and democratic, recognizing the creativity of those whose talent is denied by usual Florida-style arguments (Edensor et al. 2010). However, therein lies the principal problem of the notion of creativity discussed here: although the substitution of conventional terms with an “Ingoldian” new-speak may appear to be a conceptual innovation, it nonetheless follows basic post-political logic—one can only function, or rather create, within the confines of the world, whose way of running is determined once and for all, but acts that would change that way of running and reshape what, and how, something is possible are seen as unrealistic and destructive.<sup>14</sup> Because social ways of doing, and relations within which actions take place, are akin to natural processes (more precisely, in the meshwork there is no distinction between nature and culture/society), they are ontologized.<sup>15</sup>

As Eitan Wilf noted, the notion of “creativity as improvisation” and its accompanying framework function obscure “social stratificatory repercussions of socialization into different forms of improvisational agency and competence” (Wilf 2014: 403). Put differently and more to the point, with creativity and improvisation one is unable to grasp specific social forms of different kinds of work (Wilf 2014: 399–400), and with the meshwork one is unable to grasp *forms* of different social systems and indirect social relations (Bajič 2016: 27).

If Ingold’s creativity presents itself today as a viable alternative and is, despite its somewhat obscuring terminology, easily graspable, it does so because it is not (an) alternative, but because it is “in tune” with the “complexities” of the “real world.” In fact, whereas with conventional calls to “become creative” one can always refuse or resist, here the very possibility of this has been taken away—only appropriate modes of conduct, in which everyone is always already embedded, are possible; here, there is no need to state that “there is no alternative.”

<sup>14</sup> Is Ingold’s (2011) portrayal of “official science” with its “logic of inversion,” not one of an irrational agent of destruction of the “normal” way of functioning (see Bajič 2016)? Moreover, does this portrayal not parallel the City of Ljubljana’s perception of current users of Rog in that they are “bad” for offering an “abnormal” view of the world?

<sup>15</sup> For example, in an evidently absurd example, Ingold and Hallam (2014: 4) write: “[W]hat the farmer brings about in the meadow, when he grows grass, is ‘grassing’—the photosynthetic process which binds carbon dioxide in the air with moisture absorbed in the soil and taken up through the roots, in the presence of sunlight, to fuel the formation of plant tissues. And that is precisely what is brought to a halt when the crop is harvested to make hay. By analogy, the financier grows his investment, but makes a lot of money by cashing it in!”

## CONCLUSION

(Purportedly) depoliticized notions of creativity, either explicitly neoliberal or not, serve to diminish, omit, or even to deny social and economic inequalities and political differences: it reduces them to mere inequalities of income or culturalizes them to simple lifestyle choices. Within the level playing field of the market and of the meshwork, such reductions are inevitable. Furthermore, by “promoting creativity” (and its “positive” generative character as opposed to the nagging old critique) not only in “real life,” but in scholarly work one is on the way to “tranquilizing” and “harmonizing” social relations in advance. It is not surprising that such means of framing is common in managerial and entrepreneurial discourses due to its promise of financial gain. What perhaps is surprising is that much scholarly writing, in various disciplines, reflects analogous politics. Ljubljana, like London (Davidson and Wyly 2012), comes to be represented as post-class city, simply a city of a multitude of citizens more or less freely choosing according to their own preferences. In other words, today—often via “Florida’s brand of post-industrial neoliberal utopianism” (Davidson and Wyly 2012: 396), but increasingly also via notions of creativity *a la* Ingold—views fundamentally at odds with historical realities become integrated into the very substance of mainstream scholarly discourses. Such an approach prevents us from properly grasping the form of social processes under scrutiny and must thus be rejected.

Perhaps, then, as J. C. Crawford harangued a long time ago, one *really* must choose . . .

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PROTI USTVARJALNOSTI.  
OHLAPNO STRUKTURIRANE MISLI O OHLAPNO DEFINIRANI TEMI

*Prispevek se osredinja na pojem ustvarjalnosti in njegovo vlogo v nedavnih politikah, na njegovo ideološko ozadje in njegov vpliv na način dojemanja življenja v Ljubljani. Primere črpa iz dokumentov različnih institucij, pa tudi avtorjevega pretekelega etnografskega raziskovanja sodobnih rokodelskih sejmov v Ljubljani. Pojem ustvarjalnosti se pogosto nekritično rabi tudi v dozdevno znanstvenih besedilih, zaradi česar, nemara nevede, podpirajo ideološko ozadje pojma ustvarjalnosti; to ideološko ozadje se kaže kot neideološko in nepolitično, docela nevtralnno upravljanje družbenih odnosov, pri čemer vprašanja političnih razlik zvede na vprašanje kulturne raznovrstnosti.*

*V desetih letih po gospodarski krizi so mnogi v Ljubljani, podobno kot v drugih mestih po Evropi, za svoje lastne sprejeli različne prakse in diskurze, ki so na tak ali drugačen način povezani z »ustvarjalnostjo.« S tem ne mislim le na vzpon kulturnih in kreativnih industrij, temveč tudi na specifičen način predstavljanja različnih skupnosti, krajev in družbe. Ta način predstavljanja prispevek kritično oriše na primeru percepcije zasedbe nekdanje tovarne Rog in podobe avtonomnega kulturnega centra Metelkova mesto. »Spodbujanje ustvarjalnosti« ne le v »resničnem življenju,« temveč tudi v dozdevno znanstvenem delu, je razširjen način vnaprejšnje depolitizacije, pomiritve in harmonizacije družbenih odnosov. Tudi domnevno alternativna pojmovanja ustvarjalnosti, ki so v tem času postala vplivna v antropologiji, slonijo na enakem osnovnem postopku kakor konvencionalnejša pojmovanja, četudi so izražena v precej drugačnem jeziku. Teza prispevka je, da pristop, ki temelji na pojmu ustvarjalnosti, onemogoča, da bi ustrezno zajeli oblike družbenih procesov, ki jih preučujemo, in ga je zato treba zavrniti.*

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