



**TO  
NOT  
BE  
CAPITAL'S  
SAVIOR**

This essay, written by Ben Turk in May of 2010 originally appeared in ZIGZAG collaborative arts magazine based in SRQ, Florida. See [zigzagcrew.blogspot.com](http://zigzagcrew.blogspot.com)

Other projects from the author:

INSURGENT THEATRE – a radical touring DIY theatre company.  
[insurgenttheatre.org](http://insurgenttheatre.org)

COLUMBUS ANARCHIST BLACK CROSS – prisoner support and prison abolition in Columbus Ohio.  
[columbusabc.org](http://columbusabc.org)

MORE ZINES (available on [zinelibrary.org](http://zinelibrary.org)):  
Police State Funnies!  
Capital, Insurrection and Art.  
Towards a Practical Revolution.

Contact Ben here: [insurgent.ben@gmail.com](mailto:insurgent.ben@gmail.com)

waiting for bureaucrats to give them permission and a paycheck before putting their creativity to use.

The managers of state and capital continue to dominate and mediate our lives for one reason: tradition. Capitalism is the dominant system today only because it established itself as the dominant system years ago and has the cops, armies and social norms needed to maintain itself, crush all forms of resistance and reproduce the capitalist form of life. Once we recognize that these processes require our creativity, that capital is clamoring to access our power, we have a choice.

They want us to produce their pretty objects, pioneer urban revitalization, reap temporary recognition and disgusting fame while living estranged lives dependent on the toil of others. Our other option is to put our creative energy into our lives. We can renounce division of labor and specialized roles. We can stop being artists and “creatives” living off the services of others. We can cease to reproduce the capitalist form of life and instead construct another.

Making this choice is not difficult. What we ought to do is obvious. The difficulty comes in acting on it. If artists want to break from capital’s oppressive traditions, they must leave school, stop begging for grants, avoid specialization, abandon romantic myths, positive reinforcement and special treatment we’ve been brought up on. Indeed, artists must emphatically reject the very identity “artist”. This word must cease to exist. This is the most brilliant creative challenge humans face today, the only one really worth our energy. To realize our full potential. To drop out of all traditional structures. To live whole lives. To put our creativity into either shaping an entirely new society, or tearing the present one apart. To not be capital’s savoir.

environment (flexible, nurturing, expensive). No capitalist enterprise can provide a large number of workers such an environment while still earning a sizeable profit. Instead, the creative business will handpick a few who have already gone through extensive training at their own expense (college) and place them in the nurturing environment (informal workspaces, flex schedules). There the artist or “creative” will be paid fairly well, but will have every ounce of energy and potential milked out of them.

What results are two new labor classes. First, a small group of creatives (whether in arts, science, technology, whatever) who are paid well, given a nurturing environment, but worked so hard that they don't have time or ability to simply take care of themselves. This creative class then spends much of their high paychecks purchasing labor time from others who do their cooking and cleaning. These others form the second class, a large service sector, paid poorly, working in shitty conditions, often doing humiliating work and full of untapped creative potential. Additionally, both these classes do additional unpaid labor for their "entertainment". When we create content for websites, become audience for advertisers, perform viral marketing tasks, beta test new software, or otherwise help to externalize costs, we are working, unpaid, for capital's profit in the new economy.

We can do better. The potential capitalists only recently recognized in the creative economy has always existed, and it's they who've been blocking its full realization. This fact has become so blatant it's offensive. There are gurus making a living publishing books and YouTube videos to explain how recent neuroscience research proves human beings are best motivated by “autonomy, mastery and sense of purpose”. Anyone but a bureaucrat or a CEO already knows that intuitively, and yet artists spend years in school earning degrees and

# THE COLLAPSE IS HERE AGAIN.

Throughout history capitalism has weathered so many near-death experiences that most of us are too bored to hope. We used to watch with terrified fascination as the system collapsed, stalled, depressed, and exploded, only to somehow mutate and survive. Some of us still watch, and sigh with a totally unsatisfying mix of relief and

resignation. It seems the storm was weathered, but the opportunity has also passed. What if we let this fucking thing go? What if we took up a replacement? What might happen? We'll never know. Instead, we return to capital's routines and await the next collapse.

Capital has always had a *savoir*. There was always some war, a shift to the administrative welfare state, and some technological innovation to bring the system back up, stronger than ever. This time, capital has identified the artist as its *savoir*, and artists are far too willing to accept the role. Governments everywhere focus on developing the creative economy and businesses adapt their structures to embrace and better exploit creativity, while pseudoscience gurus churn out studies to help state and capital spread its tentacles toward and around us. Too many artists are lining up, welcoming capital's embrace, begging for it.

Instead, we, as artists could recognize that it's not us who need state and capital, but they who need us. The industrial economy continues to decline rapidly and there is no other suitable replacement. The status quo is untenable. A recovery may have begun, but it doesn't promise much. Flipping houses, swapping toxic credit, and bailing out doomed institutions cannot make a viable economy for long. Capital needs its *savoir*. The institutions of power need a new frontier to colonize, a new source of innovation, production and extractable value. Human intellect is that new frontier, the creative economy is the ambush set to break into that frontier, and artists are the bait in that ambush.

To be explicit: years ago, demographers demonstrated how culturally diverse and vibrant cities correlate with economic growth. The theory is simply that artists attract high quality creative workers (software developers, marketers, engineers, etc) who create the real wealth. Sociologists and business gurus have developed

the models needed to unlock those creative workers' full potential (flextime, autonomy, profit sharing). Bureaucrats have developed careful plans to nourish artists and create the attractive urban environment. There is a whole elaborate system building up across the country focused on artists and other creatives. It's clear artists have power, and the power elites are aggressively working to access it.

Many artists seem to view this as an opportunity, a chance to get their work out there and see it valued. It's not so simple. Anyone capable of critical thinking or any artist truly desiring creative freedom and personal autonomy ought to be naturally suspicious of businessmen and fucking allergic to bureaucrats. The creative economy is a scheme. The artist's role is at best temporary, and the creative workers they attract will be ensnared and exploited.

There are two shifts modern capitalism needs in order to complete a transition from the industrial economy to the creative economy. The first is geographic. Industry wants workers living in the suburbs and toiling in factories. Creativity wants workers living in the city, interacting with each other, stimulated enough to have inspirations and flexible enough to act on them. This transition drives "urban revitalization", and artists play the key role of pioneering the frontier. The artist's willingness to live poor and desire to live in diverse neighborhoods makes them a tool. They move in, push unwanted populations out, attract desirables, and then get priced out and move on to pioneer the next neighborhood.

The second required shift is qualitative. Modern capitalism has come to recognize the higher cost of cognitive and immaterial labor, creative work. Every human has the potential and capacity to do this work, but to realize that potential, people need to work in a certain