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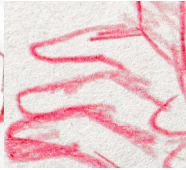
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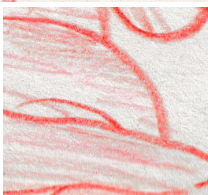
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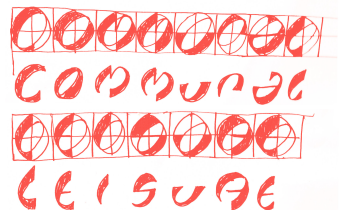


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Communal Leisure

communalleisure.com

THE PITS – OPPOSING THE PLATFORM

Communal Leisure started a decade ago as a “space for discussion and sharing of music, art, and politics, based in Glasgow.” We did a bunch of Zines towards the start of this time (available on our website), where we debated questions around anti-work politics, DIY cultural production, and what it means to try and do fun, accessible and politically-engaged music and art under the conditions of contemporary capitalism. In the last year we’ve been expanding our ‘DIY Events Wall’, and through that, thinking more about the possibilities of rebuilding forms of the internet that capture something of its early utopian potential: free or cheaply accessible content & tools, no corporate platforms or hosting, celebrating free expression & creativity, decentralised, collaborative, using simple code that is geared towards easy replication and skill sharing (along with low server use), fun to use. In this, we’re following and learning from a whole range of people who have done lots of practical and theoretical work to try and help make such a move. One of these people, ada fuge aka netgf aka bitrot, outlines some great initial steps for doing this:

*Build your own website. browse from a computer, leave your phone in the other room. surf the web; click links, explore. keep bookmarks. make the internet a place you visit, not an endless distraction in your pocket. block ads. use open source software. pirate everything and pay when you want. you'll find yourself giving more of your money to artists, and less of your time to advertisers. participate in your community irl. tell stories about it on your blog.*¹

Through engaging with this process and politics, we started to think more about the concepts we were encountering: platforms, infrastructure, DIY. We decided to commission some people to write pieces about these ideas, and to share them freely via our mailing list and a series of printed posters. This is the first of this series, and we thought we’d use it to outline the series theme: ‘PITS: opposing the platform’. We’ll explain the idea for the series, and offer a few practical ideas for resisting, interrupting and working outside platform capitalism.

What is DIY?

DIY is an expansive term that gets applied to describe a set of ethics, aesthetics and activities around music and artistic production; with a focus on self-sufficiency, free expression, frugality, and building community. Though the decentralised forms that DIY take evade any singular definition or narrative, most histories of the concept’s lifespan in musical terms trace things to the 1970s free festival movement – where anarchist Ubi Dwyer distributed promotional flyers telling people to “Bring what you expect to find” – and the hardcore punk ethics of bands like Minutemen and Minor Threat, who kept shows as cheap as possible, expenses low, and encouraged people to form bands of their own. Over the years, various writers have critiqued the way such a lineage (and the occasional hero worship / public self-flagellation it entails) misses a much wider (and less US/UK and male-centric) history of decentralised and anti-capitalist artistic production. Indeed, in our first edition of the Communal Leisure Zine we (very much in soapbox mode) complained that: *‘DIY’ has too often become nostalgic, co-optable and about simply escaping the status quo, rather than changing it. For all the love we have for the term, it’s due a reassessment, and possible replacement. We need to build critiques of the structures that deny people access to artistic production and enjoyment: work, sexism, racism and other form of oppression and exclusion based on gender, sexuality, ‘ability’, bodies and class, that ‘DIY’ has too often replicated itself.*

Others, keen to avoid the individualising ‘Y’ of DIY, have moved to talking about ‘Do It Together’ or ‘Do It Ourselves’, emphasising the collective forms that cultural production takes, and thinking more carefully about the structural ways that people are excluded from artistic production. We stand by such critiques, but think that ‘DIY’ still operates as a useful avatar for a range of anti-capitalist, self-sustained, free and cheap ways of approaching artistic production. We’re still keen to think about the various and multiple ways DIY has helped people make art outside and against capitalist capture, and particularly what we can learn from applying DIY principles to the current platform-focused form that capitalism takes.

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So, what is a Platform?

For a word that has become quietly pervasive in contemporary life, the ‘platform’ can be hard to pin down. In this series we follow writers such as Nick Srnicek, who argue that the platform is a “new type of firm [...] characterised by providing the infrastructure to intermediate between different user groups,” that attempts to maximise profits through a focus on the recording, monopolisation, extraction and analysis of data.² As Srnicek outlines, the 2008 financial crises reconfigured global capital in huge ways, creating new pools of investment capital and a focus on new technologies, ‘gig economy’ models and increased automation. Newer digital-focused firms emerged that put data extraction at the core of their business: harvesting information on social interactions, location data, purchase histories, content creation, and idle browsing behaviour to target advertising, shape algorithms, and control markets. Many act solely as intermediaries, not producing products or services themselves, but controlling the terms through which producers and consumers interact. This new form of ‘platform capitalism’ normalises surveillance and enclosure of digital life, tending towards monopolisation: the logic of the platform is always to maximise the number of users, as this creates a ‘network effect’ where leaving said platform comes with a high cost (‘I’ll lose my freelance work if I quit Instagram’, ‘Spotify is the only place my band can reach a lot of listeners’).

Why Anti-Platform?

Platforms - from Instagram to SoundCloud, from OpenAI to Alphabet - have monopolized culture. We live in a moment of just-in-time capital where to make, disseminate, promote, or engage with culture mean sacrificing autonomy and ownership as our identities are refracted into data points collated through likes and engagement. The cultural sphere has become, as Paul Rekret describes it, subject to “platform capitalism’s limitless digestive system.”³ For those of us who believe in the value and politics of culture, we are faced with a problem that is both infrastructural - how do we create alternative systems of circulation - and social - how do we foster relationships outside of platforms? Our goal is to start building new social and technical infrastructures that can foster relation and radical imaginations outside of platformization. Central to platform capitalism’s endgame is to stifle alternatives, to offer us a flattened landscape where it seems impossible to extract our datafied being from being served recommended likes and brain rotted content. To remix Mark Fisher remixing Frederic Jameson: it’s easier to imagine the end of the world, then it is to imagine the end of the algorithm.

What can we do?

But the algorithm is not forever, platform capitalism can be interrupted, resisted and overthrown. Rather than overdetermine the forms this might take, we want to use the essays - grouped under the theme of ‘The Pits’ - to explore different ways people are already working against and outside the platform. We’re already experimenting with various forms of this ourselves - building our own self-hosted music servers, starting small archives of our art and music, (re)learning HTML and making our own websites, inhabiting defunct and out of date tech - but we want to hear what others are doing and imagining too. How might we build our anti-platform / post-platform / DIY politics in opposition to the platform: non-profit, non-extractive, anti-data gathering, open source, decentralised? What political registers might exceed this, to affirm other ideals, principles and ways of operating? How can we dig pits against the platforms, whilst acknowledging the very real material & social reasons many of us need to inhabit platform capitalism? We’d love to hear from anyone who is asking similar questions and trying out other alternatives.

If you’re interested in writing a piece for the series please get in touch with your ideas via communal leisure@proton.me - we imagine written pieces to be 800-1000 words long, but are open to other formats. We can pay £150 per commission. Essays will be printed, like this one, on specially designed posters, and distributed far and wide.

See you in the pits! Love, Communal Leisure x

¹ <https://bitrot.online/>
² Srnicek, Nick (2016). Platform Capitalism. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press: 29
³ Rekret, Paul (2025). ‘Against the Stream’ The Wire 503/504, December 2025

