Conjunctions of resilience and the Covid-19 crisis of the creative cultural industries

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Abstract
This article compares the conjunctions of emergency resilience and ecological resilience that underpin the creative cultural industry (CCI) crisis. It first introduces three characteristics that socially construct the CCI crisis and its hegemonic practice of emergency resilience (time, disaster discourse, and the adaptation of aesthetic digitalization) and exposes multiple discourses – from the technologies of cultural statistics to corporate financial modelling – that construct an ideology of ‘resilience-as-deficit’. In contrast to this approach, the article develops three characteristics of ecological resilience: a focus on transition and the long term; resilience as a decentred strategy and networked resource; and aesthetic digitization as a radical praxis of adaptability. Examining arts impact and cultural policy reports, drawing on ecological, feminist and cultural resilience studies, and analysing a digital cultural event in Asia (the Singapore LGBT cultural festival, Pink Dot), the article argues that ecological resilience offers new capacities towards a cultural ecology that can nurture fair work, artistic innovation, economic growth and cultural vitality.

Keywords
CCI crisis, creative cultural industry (CCI), cultural crisis, ecological resilience, emergency resilience, LGBT Pink Dot Singapore

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Introduction

In early 2020 just before the Covid-19 (C-19) pandemic, the creative cultural industries (CCI) contributed US$2250 billion to the global economy and accounted for 26.5 million jobs worldwide (UNESCO, 2020a). A year later, more than 10 million jobs and US$750 billion in CCI goods and services were lost globally (UNESCO, 2021). Part of entertainment and recreation, including venue and visitor-based sub-sectors such as performing arts, museums, cinemas and heritage, the CCI sector relies on footfall to thrive. Health protocols such as travel bans, lockdowns and social distancing have caused in-person attendance to plummet, leading to the mass cancellation of exhibitions, tours and events, the closure of cultural institutions and programmes, and loss of jobs for artists, freelancers and contractors. It was the first sector to close and will be the last to fully reopen (AFA, 2020a). The Covid-19 public health crisis has exposed the crisis of the CCI sector.

A crisis is not simply a disaster to be managed. It is socially constructed by ideological, political and juridical forms that create the site through which it is articulated (Hall, 1978: 219). This site is the vector of the conjunction that brings together multiple fields, discourses, knowledge and institutions as the problem space through which the crisis is produced (Grossberg, 2019). Understood in this way as social construction and conjunction, crises are moments of simplification of social relations and clarification of reality. They reveal the hidden which we usually do not see’ (Antentas, 2020: 316).

This article examines the social construction of the CCI crisis and, by contrasting its ‘reopening’ practices of emergency and ecological resilience, uncovers the conjunctions of resilience that shape the current CCI ecology. It draws on critical theories in resilience, queer and digital placemaking studies, reviews global cultural policy and arts impact reports, and analyses case studies from selected digital cultural events in Asia. The first section introduces the social construction of the CCI crisis through the hegemonic ideology of emergency resilience characterized by crisis time, disaster discourse and short-term adaptation. It shows how the CCI crisis has exposed the sector’s endemic vulnerabilities, such as precarious cultural labour, and, through its corporatized financial modelling towards ‘recovery’, the economic reductionism of digital globalization. The second section contrasts these top-down practices of emergency resilience with ecological resilience. Where emergency resilience highlights short-term adaptation through mitigation, ecological resilience emphasizes long-term adaptability through creative iteration and transformation. It examines alternative sector discourses of ‘reopening’ that focus on transition and empirical studies of informal CCI. In particular, it discusses the case study of Pink Dot, an annual LGBT festival in Singapore, and its ecological impact. Where emergency resilience constructs resilience as a lack (resilience-as-deficit), ecological resilience draws on ecological, feminist and cultural studies of resilience as a decentred strategy and resource for capacity-building (resilience-as-dividend). In elucidating these conjunctions of resilience, this article argues that a robust post-pandemic CCI ecology must embrace a long-term commitment towards sector transition, one that supports fair work, embeds place and engages community.
The CCI crisis and emergency resilience

This section examines how the CCI crisis is socially constructed by the ideology of emergency resilience through the temporal mode of crisis, the discourse of disaster and the adaptation practice of mitigation. It evaluates arts impact and cultural policy reports from UNESCO, the UK, the US, Australia and Singapore to situate different scales and geographical regions, and exposes how, despite their differences, these organizations and countries have developed similar universal emergency measures to respond to common sector problems.

Time

The CCI crisis is socially constructed by time. A crisis is usually referred to as a short-term disaster, connoted through a condensed temporality and experienced as immediate, urgent and abrupt. The CCI crisis began around early March 2020, escalated over the following few weeks and continued over the next few months until summer that year when some countries gradually reopened. CCI crisis time was precipitous and intense.

During this period, advocacy associations initiated urgent impact surveys to ascertain the extent of immediate economic loss and hardships for organizations and individuals. This was not easy as official cultural statistics have always been unevenly collected and non-comparable, internationally and even within nation-states (Throsby, 2010). Additionally, the market failure rationale of the arts, following the microeconomic cost disease theory (Baumol and Bowen, 1966), has meant that the external benefits and financial deficits of public arts, for example, cannot be easily quantified. The arts, as cultural policy theorists have long extolled, produce intrinsic cultural values that transcend box office profits and neoclassical economics (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2014). Nonetheless, arts advocacy organizations across the world – such as the Americans for the Arts (AFA, 2020a, 2020b), The Artist Trust (2020), European Creative Business Network (2020a), a-n The Artists Information Company (2020) and the Australia Council (2020a, 2020b) (see also Crosby and McKenzie, 2021) – quickly documented the direct impact on the sector. CCI crisis time is evident in the speed by which these rapid assessment surveys had suddenly appeared and circulated across the short weeks between March and April.

Data enumerated and materialized the experiences of hundreds of thousands of cultural workers directly affected, and the problems faced by the sector. While economic impact studies are limited and instrumentalist, these reports nevertheless provided some baseline evidence to track the ravaged sector, so much so that as early as 23 March, less one month into the first lockdown, Culture Action Europe (2020) was already calling the European Commission to earmark €25 billion in emergency package. Although this temporal mode parallels the public health crisis, its cultural statistics made visible the severity of job loss, the lack of job relief support, and the diminished capacity of organizations to maintain operations. These aggregations legitimate the disaster discourse.

Disaster discourse

The disaster discourse, as the second characteristic of the social construction of the CCI crisis, was becoming evident by the end of summer 2020 when it was clear the pandemic 

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had severely crippled the sector with sudden and prolonged closures. This discourse is first established by referring to the CCI crisis as a disaster. Terms such as ‘culture shock’ (OECD, 2020), ‘culture in crisis’ (UNESCO, 2020b), ‘cultural catastrophe’ (Creative Industries Federation, 2020) and ‘lost art’ (Brookings Institute, see Florida and Seman, 2020), headlined in reports of leading cultural organizations, convey this fallout. They connote the CCI crisis as a disaster that will damage the sector temporarily and a seismic blow that will collapse it permanently. This discourse is next anchored through the signifier of ‘lack’, such as in these reports’ frequent use of terms ‘vulnerable’ (European Parliament Think Tank, 2020; UNESCO, 2020a) and ‘weaknesses’ (UNESCO, 2020b). It is further entrenched by foregrounding the narrative of ‘unpreparedness’. For example, the opening of the OECD’s (2020) Culture Shock report highlights the sector’s lack of readiness and its trauma by pointing to ‘jobs at risk’ and the ‘structural fragility’ of cultural production (2). The same structure also informs UNESCO’s (2020b) Culture in Crisis report of how jobs have been ‘profoundly affected,’ the ‘precarious nature of their work’ (2020b: 1) and the need to ‘[strengthen] the resilience of the sector’ (2020b: 4). Even the term ‘disaster preparedness’ is used as a matter of fact in the title of the Americans for the Arts’ (AFA, 2020a) report. Through signifiers of disaster and lack, and the narrative of unpreparedness, this discourse socially constructs the CCI crisis as one that is created by the sector’s lack of readiness because it could not withstand the economic shocks caused by the Covid-19 crisis, and how insecure cultural work has made creative professionals unable to protect their jobs. Underpinning this discourse is emergency resilience.

The concept of emergency resilience derives from disaster management studies to refer to systems and their ability to ‘maintain or rapidly return to desired functions in the face of a disturbance, to adapt to change, and to quickly transform systems [for] future adaptive capacity’ (Meerow et al., 2016: 45). It promotes normative understandings of resilience centred on the trait-orientation of lack and adopts a hegemonic discourse of emergency preparedness. The disaster discourse anchors this dominant ideology of resilience-as-deficit (Yue, 2020), which has genealogies in engineering resilience (Folke, 2006; Holling, 1996) and social resilience studies (Adger, 2000; Adger et al., 2005; Keck and Sakdapolrak, 2013; Welsh, 2014). The former highlights the ability of systems to withstand sudden shock, quickly adapt and return to normal, while the latter highlights the skills needed by groups and individuals to successfully integrate into society. Shaped by deficit, this ideology gives rise to the short-term adaption practice of mitigation.

**Adaptation**

The adaptation of mitigation foregrounds the third characteristic that undergirds the social construction of the CCI crisis. As the term ‘mitigation’ suggests, adaptation measures focus on reacting to change and ameliorating short-term stress so systems can rapidly rebound and regain normality. This is evident in two ways: the first is structural, through the provision of job relief support; the second is aesthetic, through the production of new digital genres. One reveals the precarity of cultural labour while the other unproblematically celebrates the platform capitalism of digital globalization.
**Adaptation: precarity.** The most significant emergency measure is job relief support for creative professionals. Recommended in *Culture Shock* (OECD, 2020) and *Culture in Crisis* (UNESCO, 2020b), and mirrored in local measures globally, these unfurled in crisis time in March (e.g. Arts Council England, 2020; Australia Council, 2020b; European Commission, 2020; US CARES Act in Loane, 2020) – so much so that by the end of March, about 54 countries had provided emergency support to the arts (Bailey, 2020). In addition to income loss compensation, other mitigation measures focus on business support, education and training. The Singapore National Arts Council, for example, launched the SG$55 million Arts and Culture Resilience Package (MCCY, 2020a) that included a Capability Development Scheme to provide training programmes on digital technology to remediate art forms; digital learning for the arts; creating videos for social media; writing, planning and budgeting for the arts; audience engagement arts education; professional skill improvement in play-writing, filmmaking, dancing, set management, and artist self-care (NAC, 2020a). While these measures slightly offset wage loss and provide basic digital skills for artists to quickly pivot online, they ignore non-traditional forms of cultural work, and the role and needs of cultural workers.

Cultural workers are considered the original ‘gig’ economy workers. An Australian study estimated that most creative professionals (81%) work as freelancers or are self-employed in their art form (Throsby and Petetskaya, 2017). CCI job losses were mainly caused by arts and recreation businesses ceasing trading; as venues closed and events were cancelled, organizations had no alternative income and could not pay rent and overheads, including utilities, staff, contractors or themselves, and including those from the ancillary services industry. Most could not qualify for support due to their freelance and non-standard forms of work, leaving them to fall through the cracks in terms of public support (OECD, 2020). Indirect impacts were also immensely felt in the downstream industries, including tourism, hospitality and SMEs (small, medium enterprises), and on the broader economy and community. In a country like Singapore, with no social welfare unemployment benefits, many freelancers fell through the safety net. Cultural impact data reveals there are about 26,300 full-time creative professionals (MCCY, 2020b: 14) and 12,361 freelancers (47%) (NAC, 2019) and in an emergency impact survey (NAC, 2020) conducted with the latter, 91% had reported project cancellations, 83% project postponements, 54% had lost more than half of their income, and expected their income to decrease by 70% over the year, and more than 50% were under the age of 35.

The precarity of cultural work has long characterized labour in the CCI sector. With non-standard employment in 1970s that introduced contingent work, the increased pressures of flexibility in the new economy of the 1980s, and the rise of the cool economy in the 1990s that glamorized creative work and encouraged young professionals to internalize the risks associated with entrepreneurial labour (Neff et al., 2005), post-Fordist structural transformations of production have led to precarity as a norm of capitalism for increasing numbers of workers and a defining feature of cultural work. While there are debates regarding creative labour, which is viewed as part of the romantic general human condition, and cultural work, which is specifically related to meaning making, identity construction and pleasurable consumption (e.g. McGuigan, 2010), the
definition of cultural work as the ‘symbolic, aesthetic or creative labour in the arts, media and other creative or cultural industries’ (Banks et al., 2013: 4) is most useful for this article. Cultural work is experienced as immaterial labour, where labour is that which produces the informational and cultural content, and value is extracted from these cognitive, affective, informational and creative activities in commodity capitalism (Lazzarato, 2003). Such work has become increasingly individualized in the current risk society (Beck, 1992 [1986]) and is sustained in an environment where jobs are frequently short-term, poorly paid, insecure, uncertain and non-unionized (McRobbie, 1998). Usually informal, with long working hours that blur the boundary between work and play, cultural work requires distinct forms of socialization and networking to keep up with new trends, projects and contracts (Ross, 2009). These jobs often attract workers who blend work with identity and creativity, and are more willing to undertake voluntary self-exploitation to pursue what they perceive as their passion (Gill and Pratt, 2008). These features underpin precarity as both ‘ontological experience and labour condition’ (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008: 54) associated with vulnerability and susceptibility to injury (Butler, 2004). Bourdieu (1979) uses the French term précarité to refer to these conditions where there were no work timetables or fixed places of work, and where the search for work was constant, and ‘the whole of life [was] lived under the sign of the provisional’ (1979: 66; see also Standing, 2011). In the CCI sector, precarious cultural work is evident in this shift from open-ended full-time employment to part-time, self-employed and serial portfolio work, with no or little access to health, unemployment, pension and other benefits (McDowell and Christopherson, 2009).

The CCI crisis in general, and the precarity of cultural work in particular, have exposed these unequal and unsustainable labour practices. Small organizations and freelancers are most at risk (Betzler et al., 2020). In the UK, 90% of grassroots venues face permanent closure, and 25% of freelancers have stopped working (UNESCO, 2021: 13). A global museum report from 107 countries notes the situation facing freelancers as ‘alarming’ and ‘fragile’, with 56% suspending salary, 39% downsizing firms and 54% considering the future of their firms at risk (ICOM, 2020: 2). Rather than adapt to emergency short-term stop-gap measures such as quick-fix digital training, urgent reform is needed to labour policy, reform that recognizes the ‘flexicurity’ of cultural work (Murray and Gollmitzer, 2012).

Adaptation: aesthetic digitalization. Mitigation is also evident in the promotion of aesthetic digitalization through digital cultural transformation and platform adoption. This comprises digitization as a technical process for creating new genres in order to facilitate digitalization as an economic process for establishing new business models. Towards the end of the first lockdown in the West, the CCI sector began to develop best organizational practices on how to safely reopen cultural venues, and align with audience sentiments towards online arts reception and their readiness to resume attendance at live cultural events. Governments, non-profit foundations and sector peak organizations commissioned consultancy companies such as A Different View and Panelbase (2020), Patternmakers and Wolf Brown (2020), AEA Consulting (2020), Slover Linett (2020), and TRG Arts (2021) to track audience participation and artistic trends. Common to
these reports is the sector’s accelerated digital transformation and increased cultural consumption.

China’s successful and immediate digital pivot furnishes the scope to introduce these new strategies of digital transformation. A few days after the Wuhan lockdown (on 23 January 2020), the National Administration of Cultural Heritage encouraged state-owned and private museums to share their exhibitions online (Mughal and Thomas, 2020). Netizen’s online exhibitions on WeChat also concurrently appeared, initiated by the community including interest-based societies, clubs and communities, and showcased people’s responses to the pandemic via participatory arts in poetry, calligraphy and craft (Feng, 2020). By February, eight museums had opened to online visitors via live streaming (Yang, 2020). The National Museum of China exhibited ‘Ancient China’ and ‘Dream of Red Mansions’ online, and initiated interactive lecture and audio tours of ancient cultural treasures. Virtual tours of museums in the West were also livestreamed on short video platforms such as Kuaishou. A 90-minute livestream of the British Museum, for example, attracted more than 2 million viewers one Saturday (Bi, 2020). In March, live performances had also begun to go virtual. China’s four most popular performance groups, including the comedy cross-talk Beijing Deyun Club, launched programmes on the video platforms Xigua, Toutiao and Douyin (Cai, 2020). While its film industry was the hardest hit, it was also a digital innovator. January coincided with the Chinese New Year Spring Festival holiday season, which is usually the biggest movie-going month of the year and has traditionally seen the release of blockbuster films. To offset this box office loss (which saw the shares of some of its largest exhibition chains such as Wanda Film, Imax China and China Film Company plummet by an average of 25% [Davis, 2020]), the sector launched premium-video-on-demand (PVOD), a new television-on-demand (TVOD) business model that allows customers to access new releases of movies that are also concurrently showing in the cinemas by paying a higher subscription fee. By early February, the market rebounded and popular film-viewing soared on video streaming platforms such as Alibaba’s Youku, iQiYI’s IQ and Ten Holding’s Tencent Video. PVOD quickly reinvented the cinema’s ecosystem, stimulated new consumption patterns and, in the following few months, became a dominant global trend.

Aesthetic digitalization is evident in these practices of digitizing analogue collections of official and grassroots archives, and sharing them online; curating interactive digital arts tours via livestreaming; virtual live performances; and the introduction of PVOD. Although enabled within the state-sponsored platformization of the internet in China, with its specific technological affordances, market demands and Party political logic (Yang, 2021), they nevertheless demonstrate how mitigation measures can be quickly and successfully implemented across all CCI funding models, from formal to informal, grassroots-initiated to government-sponsored and commercially facilitated. As new media technology is swiftly harnessed to generate new genres and delivery formats, cultural organizations and workers have also expediently returned to work with little or no delay.

These early practices were lauded in a follow-up British Council (2020) report that reviewed similar practices in the Asia-Pacific: for example, in Korea, the livestreaming of dance and theatre performances was conducted via Naver and Kakao digital platforms;
in Australia, the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra broadcast new performances online via their ‘Virtual Concert Hall’, and the Biennale of Sydney (the country’s biggest festival of contemporary arts) delivered live content; and, in Jakarta’s Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara, fintech payment portals like GoPay and OVO were implemented for contactless digital ticketing. In describing these developments as ‘creative’ and pioneered from ‘resilience through innovation’ (British Council, 2020: np), this report unproblematically celebrates creativity as a technical practice of platform adoption.

Key to aesthetic digitalization is adaptation as a short-term practice of digital skills acquisition to shore up preparedness. This process, a moebius loop-like movement from origin to disaster (change) and back to the equilibrium of the origin, has become a dominant sector discourse. In the West, connotative terms such as ‘rebound’, ‘restart’ and ‘recovery’ are commonly used by the OECD (2020), UNESCO (2020b) and the European Creative Business Network (2020b) and WTO (Nurse, 2020). In Asia, in Deloitte Singapore’s (2020) impact-readiness report, words such as ‘recover’ and ‘thrive’ are used to develop a ‘readiness frontier’ framework to ‘position for a potential rebound,’ ‘ensures success in the post-COVID-19 world’ and plan towards ‘readiness for the future’ (2020: 3, 7). This framework identifies a ready industry with a gap of ‘0’, and highlights a gap of −22 for adaptability and −12 for resilience for the CCI sector. Supporting the CCI sector’s deficiencies using economic indicators such as revenue, operational and supply chain vulnerabilities, this framework underscores the resilience-as-deficit discourse that promotes ‘readiness’ through the hegemonic ‘preparedness for change’ language of technology adoption. Implicit here is also the promotion of platform adoption for sector innovation.

In these reports, the ideology of emergency resilience constructs aesthetic digitalization as a techno-centric practice where advanced digital skills are used to furnish cultural production with innovation that will expand value chains through new forms of public–private partnerships such as with big-tech collaboration. Not surprisingly, when China’s CCI sector was announced as the world’s biggest importer and exporter of creative cultural goods in 2020 (Cui, 2020), its impact was measured through intellectual property earnings derived predominantly from new media platforms. Resonating with the theoretical roots of creativity such as creative destruction (Schumpeter, 1942) and new arts contracts (Caves, 2000), emergency resilience cloaks creativity with a veneer of digital aesthetics that champions the economic reductionism of digital globalization.

Digital globalization – by deepening and broadening the connections between people, countries and businesses that have arisen from the expansion and integration of digitization and globalization – presents opportunities and challenges. As a process of ‘rapid increase in both the size and the value of cross-border data flows’, including soft and hardware, services and support systems, it has opened up multiple-directional flows that challenge the Western domination of media and creative cultural industries (Thussu, 2018: 55). Despite accelerated access to and diffusion of knowledge, as well as de-centred audience networks and democratized information, crucial here is the role of digital infrastructure as foundational to the economy and quality of life for nation states and their citizens on the one hand, and as central to the agility and user experience of global businesses on the other (Luo, 2021). Arts impact reports, by celebrating
platform adoption and economic indicators, have inadvertently prioritized the latter and championed a new financial model based on platform capitalism (Smieck, 2017).

To address the precarity of cultural work and harness the radical praxis of new digital cultural forms, it is necessary to support long-term sector development. This commitment is already emerging in a recent World Trade Organization (WTO) publication that highlights how digital globalization has led to the rise of the digital creative economy and is creating economic value in developing nations (Nurse, 2020). Despite drawing on economic indicators such as trade, copyright data and the fast-rising valuation of Facebook, Apple, Netflix, Google, Spotify and Tencent stocks to support its assertions, it nevertheless calls for a robust governance framework to improve the participation of creative digital entrepreneurship, including the development of a whole-system support structure – from education, skills training and enterprise development to intellectual property rights – that links start-ups, incubators and clusters to end-to-end market entry and business solutions. Although this report does not use the term ‘long-term’ to describe the timescale of this structure, implicit here is a long-term commitment to the development of a CCI sector that nurtures ecological resilience.

**Ecological resilience: adaptability**

This section contrasts the cultural sector’s practice, policy and ideology of emergency resilience with ecological resilience. It does so by examining alternative cultural policy reports that focus on ‘transition’ and through a sustained case study analysis of the community-based CCI festival, Pink Dot. Drawing on ecological, digital placemaking, and cultural and feminist resilience studies, it highlights the following characteristics of ecological resilience: the timescale of the long-term; a decentred strategy and networked resources; and aesthetic digitization as a practice of adaptability that exposes (in)equality, embeds place and produces community.

Instead of the quick mitigation of emergency resilience, ecological creative resilience adopts a long-term view where adaptation is better understood in evolutionary terms (Caputo et al., 2015) and expressed through creative capacities such as learning (preparedness), robustness (persistence), innovation (transformability) and flexibility (adaptability) (Davoudi et al., 2013). It updates common ‘emergency’ understandings of resilience (vulnerability and lack) to focus on ‘emergent’ qualities of benefits that arise from the flexible and creative ability of individuals, groups, communities and systems to persist and transform through change. Characterized by resilience-as-dividend rather than resilience-as-deficit (Yue, 2020), this approach draws from the change mechanism in the ecological resilient system to highlight the threshold as the point where, if the system changes too much and begins to behave in a different way with different feedback that changes the component part and structure, it is said to have undergone a regime shift (Walker and Salt, 2006). Where emergency adaptation is short-term focused, and refers to highly specialized and specific skills, emergent adaptability is enduring, and refers to general flexibility and inherent capacities created through the continuing relationship between individuals and the environment. Resilience-as-dividend demonstrates resilient capacities as creative (rather than reactive) in ways they open up new practices and spaces of change.
Ecological resilience is emerging as an alternative discourse in the sector’s reopening plans. In IDEA Consult’s framework for the European Parliament (European Parliament Think Tank, 2021), the term ‘transition’ is used rather than ‘recovery’ to refer to the rebuilding and repair of the sector (2021: 77). It also uses the term ‘crisis resistance’ instead of ‘crisis recovery’ to highlight transition as a sustainable process of foundational and continual change to structures and practices (2021: 78). This focus on transition supports ecological resilience’s change mechanism as the threshold point where the emergence of new structures and practices is also intertwined with the dynamics of co-evolution and self-organization. Where recovery is ‘back to normal’, transition extends beyond a recovery approach to consider ‘repair and prepare’ (2021: 81). Drawing inspiration from the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) and UNESCO’s (2018) roadmap for remapping cultural policies, transition is a long-term process where CCIs are drivers and enablers of sustainable development through creative and artistic innovation, economic growth and employment, social inclusion, equity and environmental justice. In such an ecology, technological adaptability through digital business innovation intersects with other domains as public health, and business models must also respond to digital exclusion, and individual and community wellbeing.

Ecological resilience has always been an enduring trait of the CCI sector. Examining how the UK arts survived and thrived under economic austerity, Pratt (2017) highlights resilience as a socially engaged and change-focused relational strategy located in the composition of the sector, the context of its change economy, and the new kinds of connections forged. He shows how the CCI proliferated not through large organizations or corporations but informal rhizomatic circuits of small firms, businesses and self-employed freelancers. Examining artists’ and organizations’ continual adaptation and transformation of work practices, he stresses they are ‘born resilient’ (Pratt, 2017: 136) rather than having internalized the governance of resilience. Drawing from Pratt’s thesis that approaches resilience as a strategy of local embeddedness through decentralized networks of people and organizations, ecological resilience has the capacity to generate new resources (dividend) that can reorganize and contest culture. It recalls feminist theorizations on vulnerability (Butler et al., 2016) and resilience (McRobbie, 2020) that challenge the pastoral patriarchy model of resilience as lacking agency and powerless, and draws on the embodiment of performativity to expose how precarious subjects and contexts are being acted on and acting in relation to their dependency and interdependency on infrastructures, networks and support. The resilience of Singapore’s Pink Dot and its digital iteration in 2020–21 evince this.

**Case study: Pink Dot**

Pink Dot is Singapore’s annual LGBT pride festival-day. The community-based festival is named after the pink colour of the Singapore identity card and its small dot size in the world map. In a country where homosexuality is criminalized and organized public gathering is only permitted (with a licence) at the city-based Hong Lim Park, the festival provides a common public space once a year for LGBTs to come out and express their freedom to love (see Figure 1). It consists of community stalls in the garden, with speeches and pop singers on the stage. The main activity is the evening light-up, when
everyone in the park is corralled to gather inside a large circle formation to shine their pink torch lights (provided by the organizer) to the sky for an aerial group photo (see Figure 2). During the light-up, the lit pink dot formation materializes the place, event, people and message.

Like Pratt’s CCI practitioners, Singapore’s LGBTs are also ‘born resilient’ having to fight institutional and everyday discrimination, and yet have survived with a visible and enviable queer Asian culture (Yue and Zubillaga-Pow, 2012). Pink Dot has even created a new cultural form that has been exported to other cities such as Toronto, London, New York, Montreal, Penang, Taipei, Utah and Okinawa. Its reverse globalization and disjunctive queer modernity challenges the post-Stonewall rights-based model of emancipation that undergirds Western pride festivals. Over the years its growing popularity has attracted state recrimination that would introduce control mechanisms to diminish its influence, such as the banning of foreign residents from attending, and foreign companies like Apple, Microsoft and Facebook from sponsoring the event. Conservative public discourse has also emboldened religious groups to counter-protest at the event, such as in the mass turnout of Christians and Muslims under the Wear White Movement in the mid 2010s.

Figure 1. Pink Dot 2010 with LGBTs wearing pink awaiting the light-up. Source: https://pinkdot.sg/2011/06/over-10000-supporters-of-the-freedom-to-love-turn-hong-lim-park-pink-for-pink-dot-2011/, 15 May 2010.
Ecological resilience is evident in Pink Dot’s longevity: its persistence to endure, survive and thrive despite the illegality of homosexuality. It started with 2500 people attending in 2009, rose to 26,000 in 2014, and even reached 20,000 in 2017 when foreign participation and sponsorship were banned. It highlights the long-term commitment in its fight for LGBT recognition. In the face of escalating state suppression, the festival has not once been cancelled, and has even continued to evolve. Pink Dot’s adaptability relies on a decentred strategy and a network of resources: community leaders and volunteers, paid and pro-bono artist-performers (some of whom are successful mainstream practitioners like award-winning filmmaker Boo Junfeng, the resident photographer of the iconic ‘pink dot’ press photo), private donations from individuals and local companies, and an audience-base of resident-citizen LGBTs and their allies. In a country where participatory and community arts are predominantly state-sponsored, Pink Dot evinces a novel approach to producing and organizing culture. Significantly, it is also embodied and embedded in its practice, with the mass wearing of pink attire, mass gathering and mass light-up, and the coming together at Hong Lim Park to celebrate the park’s gay history of cruising and to subvert its current branding as an eco-hotel tourist precinct (see also Yue and Leung, 2017). Pink Dot exemplifies placemaking through these subjugated histories and communities, and exposes the politics of place, people and identity with its carnivalesque ritual. Through its transnational and sub-national commercial and community partnerships, and via its socially engaged mode of participatory arts, Pink Dot demonstrates resilience-as-dividend. Decoupled from governance and neoliberal public management that marks hegemonic emergency resilience, it shows how ecological resilient capacities can generate a resource pool of social and cultural capital to build and maintain an enduring queer cultural institution that has

Figure 2. Pink Dot 2019 during the light-up with a call to repeal section 377A of the penal code. Source: Mediacorp, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/pink-dot-calls-acceptance-and-equality-lgbtq-community-1329326, 29 June.
evolved with its decentralized networks of sponsors, organizers and patrons. Its performativity makes explicit the vulnerabilities that accompany continued minority subjugation and suppression.

Its radical praxis of aesthetic digitization is evident in 2020–21 when Pink Dot, like all cultural events, took place online. While songs and speeches are pre-recorded and livestreamed, the most distinct is the digital light-up. During the two-hour plus event, audiences who wish to participate in the digital light-up are invited to log in, enter their postcode, and write a support message. Instead of a still photo that captures the spatial enclosure of LGBTs squeezed into Hong Lim Park, the digital map is a map of Singapore linked to its postcodes. Rather than a pink dot composed of people shining their pink-lit torches in the park, the digital pink dot is a Singapore map of pink-lit geotagged postcodes. Postcodes in Singapore are classified according to the street address of apartment blocks, and in a country where 95% of the population live in high-rise blocks (DSS, 2021), each postcode is singular and unique to one block. In the digital map, any blocks with a registered participant will be lit up. The post light-up map even allows interactive close-ups into any districts or blocks to read individual support messages tagged to participants’ postcodes. With the digital iteration’s ‘Love Lives Here’ theme, the digital Pink Dot map shows participants coming from all over the island (see Figure 3).

Where Hong Lim Park encloses, exceptionalizes and minoritizes LGBTs in a ghetto, digital Pink Dot enlarges, naturalizes and materializes the aphorism that ‘LGBTs are everywhere’. Where the former is physical, abject and minuscule (the park is only 9400 square metres in size), the latter is virtual, expansive and nation-wide. It is not the actual–virtual divide that reveals the conditions of subjugation; rather, it is the virtuality of the event that makes visible its infrastructural relations that construct the

![Figure 3. Digital Pink Dot 2021 where more than 15,000 pink dots lit up across Singapore. Source: https://pinkdot.sg/2021/06/pink-dot-13-over-15000-pink-dots-light-up-across-singapore/, 12 June.](image-url)
hegemonic conditions of subjugation. This is evident in the event’s digital placemaking practice. Digital placemaking does not simply embrace technological adoption as an aesthetic veneer to buttress the actual event; it uses digital technology to impact the urban experiences of place, identity and belonging (Toland et al., 2020). While the digital light-up’s interactivity makes the event embodied and participatory, it is in its cultural somatics, a process of suturing technology, body, place and community together with the virtual information on the screen (digital Pink Dot) and the past actual information from the park (past Pink Dot), that produces the virtuality of the event and its experience of identity, place and belonging. This is evident when its post-lit map celebrates the real spaces (postcodes) in the country where LGBTs live, and exposes at the same time how relational infrastructures (including laws, parks and high-rise blocks) are governed to exclude LGBTs from recognition, access and rights. In enacting and performing resilience, the post-lit map also reveals how these infrastructures (apartments, neighbourhoods and parks) are everyday intimate tactical spaces of habitation, dwelling, cruising and love. Its aesthetic digitization demonstrates ecological resilience as an iterative process of creative transformation that reveals entrenched heteronormative subjugation, social exclusion as well as an embodied practice of local embeddedness and networked belonging.

**Conclusion**

This article has critically examined how the Covid-19 public health crisis is also a CCI crisis by introducing three characteristics that socially construct the CCI crisis and its hegemonic ideology of emergency resilience. First, CCI crisis time has generated arts impact reports to enumerate a large segment of globally unemployed cultural workers. Second, connotations of disaster and lack, and a narrative of unpreparedness, have framed the CCI crisis discourse to reveal the sector’s unsustainable model of work. Third, the CCI crisis is mitigated by short-term adaptation: through business relief support that exposes the precarity of cultural labour, and aesthetic digitalization that favours the platform capitalism of digital globalization. Multiple discourses and institutions – from the technologies of disaster management and cultural statistics to corporate financial modelling, and from global cultural organizations to transnational commercial consultancies – construct this conjunction of resilience-as-deficit, and give warning that a post-pandemic cultural policy must incorporate the securities of labour and social policy, and foster an enduring commitment to cultural economic recovery.

This article further proposed rethinking emergency resilience by critically developing three characteristics of ecological resilience. First, a focus on the timescale of the long-term as a process of transition; second, as a decentred strategy and networked resource decoupled from neoliberal governance; and, third, through aesthetic digitization as a radical praxis of adaptability. Drawing on ecological, feminist and cultural studies approaches to resilience and demonstrating this with Pink Dot, it argued these characteristics support resilience as emergent (not emergency), iterative (not rebound) and transformative (not back to normal), and furnish new resilience-as-dividend practices for building the capacity of a wholistic cultural ecology that can nurture fair work, artistic innovation, economic growth and cultural vitality. In Asia, where cultural digitalization
is accelerated, and in Singapore, where marginal groups like LGBTs confront continued persecution, ecological resilience further presents opportunities for formal and informal CCIs to thrive sustainably and inclusively.

**Declaration of conflicting interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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**Note**

1. On the temporality of crisis and its difference from catastrophe, and the difference between epidemic and endemic temporal modes, see Foucault (2003 [1976]).

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