On the FREEDOM to BE OPAQUE MONSTERS

Communist Pedagogy, Aesthetics, and the Sublime

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Abstract **As social movements amplify across the globe, activists and researchers are increasingly interested in the pedagogies of revolutionary transformation. To provide a rich resource for political educators and organizers, this article formulates what we call an (un)communicative communist pedagogy that is oriented against communicative capitalism. We show that there is a taut connection between capitalism and democracy that consists of a shared logic, pedagogy, and aesthetic that revolves around communication, inclusion, and transparency. Without grasping this aesthetic connection, anticapitalist struggles are reduced to liberal reforms that end up reinforcing and deepening capitalist production relations. To break out of this trap, we block together several political, philosophical, and aesthetic theories that might otherwise be thought of as mutually exclusive. In particular, we return to Immanuel Kant and his theory of the beautiful and the sublime to make a case that connections between capitalism and democracy rest on an unexamined aesthetic of the beautiful. To sever this link, and thus to push democratic struggles for equality toward a communist horizon, we suggest a new alignment between radical politics and aesthetics of the sublime via the Communist Party. Importantly, we find in the work of Jean-François Lyotard the point of intersection between communist pedagogy and sublime aesthetics. In closing, we read this aesthetic communist pedagogy through a communist study group in the Jim Crow South. What we find is a different aesthetic relationship between self and world that is not prefigured in various forms of liberal reformism. Rather, an excessive surplus is discovered that presses beyond the boundaries of what can be known and what can be imaginatively figured, provoking a sense of ineffable sublimity or political opacity. We call this excess the aesthetic dimension of (un)communicative communism.**

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Struggles against capitalism today are often, but of course not exclusively, posed as struggles for democracy, especially in its various liberal guises. This is even true in critical and radical academic research (e.g., Hardt and Negri 2005; Chou 2014; Steigler and Turner 2010). On one level this has appeal, for there seems to be an enduring contradiction between capitalism and democracy. For whereas democracy is the rule of the many, which demands the maximum political participation of the citizenry, capitalism is the rule of the few, which demands the minimum political participation of the proletarians. Whereas democracy demands equality (one person, one vote), capitalism demands inequality (one dollar, one vote). Education has been integral in managing this contradiction. For example, in the United States one of the founding rationales for the public school system was that it would suspend this contradiction through the introduction of meritocracy and equal opportunity, and the creation of a citizenry that is viewed in terms of nation and not class. David Labaree thus writes that the formation of "the public school system was part of a grand compromise between democratic politics and capitalist markets that has proven essential for the durability of the United States as a liberal democracy" (2010: 4). Education is the hinge that allows capitalism and democracy to cohabitate. Much of radical and critical educational thought has seen education as a lever that can push us away from capitalism and toward democracy, moving us to one side of the antagonism (e.g., De Lissovoy 2015; Giroux 2015). Through changes in curriculum and content, pedagogy, and teacher-student relationships, so the thinking goes, we can create a new (or, in liberal cases, old) set of social relations.

Within this literature addressing the relationship between education and capitalism, relatively little attention has been paid to aesthetics.[1] At the same time, in explorations of the aesthetic realm and its possible anticapitalist tendencies, there has been little attention paid to questions of pedagogy. There is a crucially neglected moment here for a more robust articulation of the relationship between anticapitalist pedagogy and aesthetics that could not only enrich both sides of this dialectic but also provide key insights for political educators and organizers. However, to intervene on this terrain alone, we believe, would be a mistake, for there is an error that runs the gamut of this educational and aesthetic conversation that has yet to be corrected, and that is the supposition that there is an inherent antagonism between democracy and capitalism, and that in order to be opposed to one, we must be for the other. There is, so we argue in this article, a taut connection between capitalism and democracy that consists of a shared logic, pedagogy, and aesthetic that revolves around communication, inclusion, and transparency. Without grasping this aesthetic connection, anticapitalist struggles are reduced to liberal reforms that end up reinforcing and deepening capitalist production relations. To break out of this trap, we propose and articulate a communist aesthetic pedagogy.

To make this happen, we block together several political, philosophical, and aesthetic theories that might otherwise be thought of as mutually exclusive. In particular, we return to Immanuel Kant and his theory of the beautiful and the sublime to make a case that connections between capitalism and liberal democracy rest on an unexamined aesthetic of the beautiful. To break this connection, and thus to push democratic struggles for equality toward a communist horizon, we

suggest a new alignment between radical politics and aesthetics of the sublime via the Communist Party. Importantly, we find in the work of Jean-François Lyotard the point of intersection between communist pedagogy and sublime aesthetics. In closing, we read this aesthetic communist pedagogy through a communist study group in the Jim Crow South. What we find there is a different *aesthetic* relationship between self and world that is not prefigured in various forms of liberal reformism. Indeed, an excessive surplus is discovered that presses beyond the boundaries of what can be known and what can be imaginatively figured, thus provoking a sense of ineffable sublimity or political opacity. We call this excess the aesthetic dimension of (un)communicative communism.

The Endless Loop of Communicative Capitalism

Communicative capitalism names the confluence of capitalism and democracy via networked technologies and the recent radical transformation in information and communication networks. The democratic ideals of access, participation, inclusion, diversity, transparency, and critique become actualized through capitalist technological infrastructure. New forms of communication technology increase the possibility of democratic participation and discussion by bringing more people into conversation with each other. Anyone with access to a computer or smartphone can start a blog, vlog, Tumblr, Facebook, or Twitter account, gain followers, and state opinions on any debate. We can comment endlessly on others' posts, news stories, pictures, videos, and more. We can post about or file complaints with private entities or government offices across the globe in an instant. If someone posts something racist or sexist, we can screenshot it and tweet it at their bosses. Not enough access to information or avenues to voice your participation? There is an app for that!

Jodi Dean, who first theorized communicative capitalism, notes that rather than "leading to more equitable distributions of wealth and influence, instead of enabling the emergence of a richer variety in modes of living and practices of freedom," networked communication "coincides with extreme corporatization, financialization, and privatization across the globe" (2009: 23). Increased participation in communicative capitalism enriches the coffers of the global elite at the expense of the global poor. Not only is there the massive conglomeration of technologies and gadgets, like data servers, databases, computers, smartphones, cables, and satellites (and the energy that goes into powering them and keeping them cool), but there is also the expropriation of information, data, and social relations generated through the use of such technologies. Just as importantly, it has done the crucial ideological work of erasing the antagonism that is fundamental to political organization. The circulation of ideas, memes, blog posts, and so on contributes "to the billions of nuggets of information and affect trying to catch and hold attention, to push or sway opinion, taste, and trends in one direction rather than another" (24).

In this sense, to demand democracy is to demand more capitalism, and vice versa. Indeed, democracy as liberal democracy is barely distinguishable from the economic logic of production and exchange that underlies it. What is more, even anticapitalist and antidemocratic critiques and resistance are flattened and dulled in this configuration. It is a trap. Dean's critique of the Left emerges as an insistence that we begin our resistance

from within this trap. We cannot sidestep the reflexive circuits of communicative capitalism; we have to burst out of them. This is a political project in part about subjectivity and, so we wish to suggest, about aesthetics. Communicative capitalism produces us as individual subjects who find our being only in our unique subjectivity. Educationally speaking, we become individualized learners, each worried about our own skill sets and how we can market ourselves as unique human capital to corporations. The Left has bought into it all.[2] "When the Left echoes injunctions to individuality," she writes, "when we emphasize unique perspectives and personal experiences, we function as vehicles for communicative capitalist ideology" (Dean 2016: 35). Dean, of course, does not call for some flattening of differences or the dismissal of lived experience in response. Instead, her response has led her to an exploration of the Communist Party as an affective infrastructure that is heterogeneous, permeable, flexible, and variegated. While her theory of the party is rich and has many compelling characteristics, what we wish to expand on here is a minor component of Dean's theory that we see as deeply important, which we refer to as the party's opacity.

The problem posed by communicative capitalism and its process of individualization is that it covers over division—divisions that resist articulation within debates and thus resist the transparency and communicability so privileged by democratic liberalism. Rather than fundamental antagonisms, politics becomes about individual differences of opinion and feelings struggling to assume visibility within a political community. The demand for inclusion and participation excludes division from the purview of the political, and from subjectivity:

> The split in the people *goes all the way down*. It can't be limited to the idea that some are excluded from the people (and hence that including them would solve the problem of the gap). Nor can it be rendered as the problem of representation (and hence addressed via ontology). Rather, the people do not know what they want. They are not fully present to themselves. Conflicting and contradictory desires and drives render the people a split subject perpetually pushing to express, encounter, and address its own non-knowledge. (90–91)

While communicative capitalism individuates us as subjects (and indeed sustains itself through the production of autonomous subjects), the party de-individualizes us and organizes us as a collective subject that produces another split: a gap between the word as it exists and something else; "instead of asserting unity, communists assert the gap" (255). More precisely, the party *seizes* this gap, intensifies it, and holds it open. This produces an affective disjointedness in which we can feel ourselves otherwise, where we can experience our potentiality divorced from the demands for communication, recognition, and integration within a liberal system (Ford 2017).

Dean's party is an opaque organization, yet it lacks any aesthetic formulation. This is a problem because communicative capitalism is itself a deeply aesthetic project, one that, as we argue below, is founded on Immanuel Kant's *aesthetic community*. As such, opting for the party will necessitate an aesthetic alteration, what we refer to as a shift from the beauty of communicative capitalism to the sublimity of (un)communicative communism. There is something *supersensible* about the party that denies full, transparent communication as dictated by liberal democracy and communicative capitalism.

More to the point of pedagogy, however, by articulating a sublime aesthetic dimension to the party, we can develop a crucial resource for educators and organizers in our struggle for a different world along radically different aesthetic lines.

The Question of the Beautiful and the Sublime

The sublime has become an increasingly important contemporary aesthetic category. While the concept of the sublime can be traced all the way back to ancient Greek philosophy and the work of Longinus, in the modern era Kant's discussion of the sublime has become as fundamental as it is controversial. But before we can appreciate Kant's analysis of the sublime and how it is related to the political (and pedagogical), we first have to take a short detour through his understanding of the beautiful.

According to Kant (2000), there are three kinds of aesthetic judgments. While differing among themselves, they are all nevertheless aesthetic because they rest on subjective grounds. Judgments of the agreeable, the beautiful (taste), and the sublime thus find their justifications in feelings rather than in objective properties of things or rational concepts. Pleasure in the agreeable is based on desire/need and is therefore particular to individual cases (Kant 2000, 5:206). Because it is personal, agreeableness cannot be universalized, and in this sense, agreeableness is in the eye of the beholder. Here Kant makes another distinction between the beautiful and the good (5:208). Pleasure in the good, like the agreeable, is based on desire. We desire the good because it will somehow improve our lives or make us excellent. Agreeableness and the good are concerned with pleasure and with some kind of *interest* in the object. Yet there is a key difference. Unlike the merely agreeable, the pleasure from the good comes from the application of a concept of what something is intended to be.

Now we can turn to Kant's reflections on the beautiful (5:210). Like the agreeable and the good, the beautiful is subjective. For Kant, the beautiful is the sensation of a harmonious resonance between the imagination and the understanding and is therefore not found in the objective properties of things. Yet unlike the agreeable and the good, the pleasure from the beautiful is not a satisfaction based on desire or on respect for a law or standard. Two implications follow. First, judgments of taste are free. They are free in the sense that they do not need to obey the body (and its desires or needs) or the law (and its conceptual standards of practice or acceptability). Second, judgments of taste are disinterested in that we do not need to have our desires fulfilled or achieve congruency with a set standard in order to feel a beautiful pleasure.

Because judgments of the beautiful are free and disinterested, we are committed to the claim that everyone should also judge the object as beautiful (5:213–14). Aesthetic judgments are universal (no exceptions) and necessary (it must be the case). Kant has put his finger on a very real phenomenon here. There are indeed times in our lives when we are prepared to defend our judgments of taste from attack and to assert that we regard others as wrong when they do not agree with us. Unlike the agreeable, where we simply throw up our hands and say, "well you like what you like and I like what I like," and go separate ways, in judgments of the beautiful, an argument ensues wherein each party attempts to convince the other of the rightness of a certain judgment of taste. Indeed, we are sure that many of us have had the experience of being *shocked* when

someone does not agree with our taste. This indicates that we have *presumed* that there is something universal in our judgment, something not reducible to the agreeable. There is a sense of purposiveness in the object, yet, unlike the good, we cannot put our finger on what that something is or what specific purpose an object teleologically fulfills. The judgment must remain subjective (thus lacking a concept of reason to guide it) even in its claims to universality. Judgments of this kind are paradoxically, *subjectively universal.*

For the purposes of this essay, there is one other small point about Kant's analysis of the beautiful. When we state "*X* is beautiful" we are assuming *everyone* can and should agree with the statement. We believe others ought to agree with our judgment of taste because our pleasure is free (and thus not bound to personal desires or needs and is not beholden to any law or standard that can be measured). But in practice this is rarely the case, and we find ourselves in constant dispute over who does and does not have taste. Kant describes this situation as follows: someone makes an aesthetic judgment and makes it public, "then he expects the very same satisfaction of others: he judges not merely for himself, but for everyone, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. . . . He rebukes them if they judge otherwise, and denies that they have taste, though he nevertheless requires that they ought to have it" (5:213). Because judgments of taste are never guaranteed in relation to a concept (for that would be a judgment of the good), there is no way to absolutely verify that anyone's judgment is truly disinterested (and thus free). The result is as follows for Kant:

> Whereas the taste of reflection, which, as experience teaches, is often enough rejected in its claim to the universal validity of its judgment (about the beautiful), can nevertheless find it possible (as it also actually does) to represent judgments that could demand such assent universally, and does in fact expect it of everyone for each of its judgments, while those who make those judgments do not find themselves in conflict over the possibility of such a claim, but only find it impossible to agree on the correct application of this faculty in particular cases. (5:214)

This is a community that is open and pluralistic because no one can prove or disprove that such and such is a real judgment of taste. A *beautiful community* is, on our reading, a liberal, inclusive, democratic community open to everyone—an everyone that is always communicating judgments and thus always in dispute.

We will come back to the political implications of Kant's theory of an aesthetic community in perpetual dispute, but now we are finally set to turn to our central topic: the sublime. Kant divides the sublime into two basic varieties. The mathematical sublime is defined as something "*absolutely large*" that is "*large beyond all comparison*" (5:249). Usually when speaking of the size of things, we make either an implicit or an explicit comparison. For instance, when we say things like "that person is tall!" we usually mean tall compared with other people. Yet, when referring to the absolutely large, we do not make any comparison, meaning that the thing is large in and for itself ("the universe is vast"). The dynamically sublime refers to a magnitude of power (rather than size). Here we can think of vast storms raging or of the power of the atomic bomb. In both cases, the subject feels terror at being overwhelmed by something so vast that it cannot be properly measured or calculated. And, different from a judgment of

the beautiful, the sublime has (at least on the first pass) no sense of purposiveness. Indeed, there is a profound feeling of contra-purposiveness that forces us to ask the question "why did that hurricane have to happen?" Or, when staring up at the universe, "it all seems so meaningless and empty." In both cases, there is a sense of *pain* attached to the sublime. We are finite, and there are forms and forces out there that we cannot hope to represent through our fallible, precarious senses.

Yet this is not the end of the story for Kant. While the sublime first gives the impression of contra-purposiveness in which we feel our sense of finality through our failure to grasp something as a whole (and thus make sense of it), there immediately emerges a second feeling. The failure of the senses to represent the immensity of the sublime leads us to contemplate the nature of reason itself, and its ability to think the world beyond the senses and the imagination. Thus the sublime gives way to the supersensible realm of reason and critical self-reflection on the mind's free autonomy from brute, material existence. Whereas the aesthetic community argues endlessly about what is and is not beautiful, the sublime community—faced with what is unfathomable, supersensible, and opaque—pauses to reflect on its own conditions of possibility. It therefore returns us to the potentiality of reason to touch on an excess that cannot be figured through imaginative resources or linguistic discourse.

The Politics of the Beautiful and the Sublime

In this section, we make a political leap from Kantian reflections on the beautiful and the sublime to more contemporary political issues and ideas. This move is not as far-fetched as it might at first appear. Indeed, scholars from Friedrich Schiller (1982) to Hannah Arendt (1982) to Joseph Chytry (1989) have linked Kant's description of aesthetic judgments with some form of participatory democracy. For instance, Arendt argues that the judgment of the beautiful can be a paradigm for a nonpossessive, nonconsuming political society and a shared world characterized by unrestrained communication. While there are many merits to this line of inquiry, in the rest of this article we would like to offer a possible criticism of the links between the beautiful and the particular form of democratic politics unique to communicative capitalism.

As outlined above, the aesthetic community argues about what is and is not beautiful. Because all positions are subjective yet claim universality (without clear guarantee), all must be included, and the debate appears endless. There is a constant circulation of criticism, verbiage, opinions, and commentary. In this sense, the beautiful forms the aesthetic background of communicative capitalism's liberalized democracy. Stated differently, *the democracy of communicative capitalism is modeled on Kant's aesthetic community.* It might at first appear that communicative capitalism is predicated on judgments of the agreeable and/or the good. For instance, it might appear that all choices within communicative capitalism are simply personal preferences, thus prioritizing the individual self as the autonomic unit of political and economic organization. Stated differently, the agreeable applies to individual cases of consumption, which cannot be universalized, and drives economic production through the proliferation of desires. On another level, it might appear that communicative capitalism equates its judgments with that of the good. This good is derived strictly from financial logistics: the market

decides what is best and what is right; profit is the ultimate bottom line. Thus we are told that "the economy is improving" even though working conditions worsen and the income gap increases. Although both of these observations are right in a certain sense, the real heart of communicative capitalism is the subjective universalism of the beautiful. Thus the fundamental claim is that "capitalism is the best possible economic system." This is the most basic form of subjective universalism in that it does not rest on any objective criteria or economic law (indeed, material conditions would suggest precisely the opposite), yet it is taken to be a universal truth to which all rational individuals *should* agree. Presupposed here is a fundamental consensus that is not predicated on any concept besides the feeling of seemingly spontaneous accord between human self-interest and economic advantage. Because of this spontaneous feeling, capitalism—as a system—cannot be reduced to any class-specific set of interests. Indeed, it takes on a radically disinterested (and thus economically objective) appearance. Capitalism is a *taste* for a certain kind of disinterested community where everyone and everything can be put into circulation (and thus argued about and debated). In all cases, communicative capitalism circulates judgments of the agreeable and the good, thus excluding a sublime excess that cannot be communicated.

While such a community constitutes itself through channels of communication, it is also predicated on an excess that it does not communicate, which remains supersensible: economic inequity and the class struggle that it engenders. The political question becomes, how to conceptualize this excess beyond the beautiful? Such a question is also *pedagogical*: can one teach an excess that denies communication, that defies figuration/formalization? Instead of communicative inclusion as the bedrock of educational responses to capitalism, can we think of an education that, as Édouard Glissant (1997) might state, asserts the *right to opacity*? Such a pedagogy would demand a different kind of taste: a taste for what is painful, formless, but also radically open to what expands beyond the horizon of communicative capitalism.

Teaching the Sublime Excess of Communicative Capitalism

Before drawing out a sublime pedagogy from Lyotard, we want to first locate such a pedagogy from within his critique of liberal democracy. We do this not only to provide crucial context for such a pedagogy but also because Lyotard helps us gain a deeper appreciation of the interdependent aesthetic commitments that bind capitalism and democracy to the beautiful. In this sense, Lyotard helps enrich Dean's critique of communicative capitalism—in particular, a critique of its aesthetic logic—and also helps articulate a pedagogical practice of what we ultimately call (un)communicative communism.

Across his body of work, Lyotard makes frequent mention of "the system." While many have interpreted him as an apolitical pragmatist with no interest in any particular system, Lyotard indeed writes of *the* system. Specifically, in a collection of fables published in the early 1990s, Lyotard defines the system in at least two ways: "liberal, imperialist capitalism" and "liberal democratic" (1997: 199, 89). If Dean provides us with a way to understand the contemporary intermingling of capitalism and liberalized democracy that emerges from the development of communication networks, Lyotard gives us a critique of democracy that demonstrates

how this intermingling evolves out of the very ethos of democracy. In essence, the theory is that democracy is the political mode that allows for the greatest complexification, contradiction, difference, crisis, instability, and decenteredness. In a democracy, everything is open for debate, including the rules of debate. Contradictions and crises do not stifle democracy but propel it forward. "This process was called progress," he tells us (90).

His critique of democracy is not that it is adaptable or that it accommodates (lots of) opposition but that it demands endless publicity and expression. Liberal democracy, in other words, cannot tolerate the excess of the sublime, and so it forces us again and again to participate in deliberation, dialogue, and communication. As Margret Grebowicz (2011: 151) states: "The democratic state denies the subject her secret existence . . . by pressuring her to exert her rights at all times, to be exhaustively, absolutely public. One must be crazy not to exercise the rights one has! 'Why didn't you do this, do that? You had the right!'"

Current liberal democracy, on this reading, can tolerate dissent, but it cannot tolerate dissent that is not made public, that is not expressed, that is held in abeyance. Here we can appreciate the deep kinship between this political logic and capitalism, for both compel us to actualize everything, to enter absolutely everything we can into the circuits of communication and exchange. Perhaps we could summarize this in the form of a simple mandate: "Be what you produce!" Production can be read in terms of economic imperatives to translate one's labor power into surplus value, in terms of a political imperative to speak your mind, and in terms of an aesthetic imperative to communicate one's judgment of taste. In fact, Lyotard (1997: 209) writes that the system "is but the extension to language of the same routine of exchange: interlocution, interactiveness, transparency, and debate, words are exchanged for words as use value is exchanged for use value."

Glissant makes a similar point. He argues that within current forms of Western democracy, difference is heralded as an inherent political good, yet such differences—when they enter into communicative circuits—reinforce the normative value of *transparency* and *accessibility*. Thus the call for interlocution, interactivity, and so forth are ways to *enclose* difference within a form: the form of a beautiful community where everyone can speak, be heard, and find a place within a discourse. Such enclosing is also, for Glissant, a form of appropriation that, indeed, denies that there is really any true difference, any true otherness that can elude Lyotard's system. In opposition to this position, Glissant and Lyotard propose the affirmation of an irreducible opacity and thus a solidarity that emerges from within a space that is not supported by communicative recognition.

What ultimately resists democracy and communicative capitalism is what the party organizes: our collective opacity. Here, Lyotard's aesthetic ruminations and pedagogical provocations provide important resources for communist theorizing. Lyotard turns to the aesthetic because it is here where the silent secret takes up residence against the demands of the system. To respect this, however, we have to approach aesthetics carefully, for works of art are "born elsewhere, far from all communicational transparency." Having been born as such, they bear a "resistance and opacity [that] must be respected . . . even when one is trying to make commentary on them" (207). This holds not for any particular medium, and in fact, for

Lyotard, philosophy itself represents a sublime resistance to liberal democracy and capitalism.

In a series of lectures that Lyotard (2013) delivered to first-year students at Sorbonne University in the fall of 1964, he asks: *why* philosophize? By asking *why* philosophize, and not *what is* philosophy, Lyotard foregrounds the disruption inherent in philosophy, which is an act and not a discipline or thing. Whereas to ask *what* philosophy is would be to pin it down, proceeding on the assumption that philosophy *is* a particular thing, to ask *why* philosophize "bears within itself the annihilation of what it is questioning" (18). In this sense, philosophy, like the sublime itself, is not bound by a question of form. If it were, it would become something beautiful. Rather, philosophy is immeasurable (always appearing where and when it is not wanted) and dynamic (always exceeding any attempt to bridle its powers of critical reflection and creative speculation). For everything philosophy demonstrates or reveals, it hides something, renders something else obscure or oblique. We philosophize because we desire, because our lives are ruled by "the *yes and no*": "even when we are at the heart of things, of ourselves, of others, of time or of speech, their reverse side is constantly present to us" (26). Desire names the hinge that constantly swings back and forth between unity and separation. It exists in a supersensible gap. In short, philosophy *is not about communication*. On this reading, philosophy—though spoken—interrupts communicative circuits precisely by annihilating itself in its very articulation.

Lyotard (1993) specifically addresses the teaching of philosophy in a letter to Hugo Vermeren, which was published as part of a collection initially titled *The Postmodern Explained to Children*. While this title may convey contempt for the "postmodern debate," it is actually quite sincere and serious. Childhood is an important theme that recurs throughout Lyotard's opus. Childhood names the state in which the human is also inhuman, is not yet integrated into the established community of speakers and knowers. The child is not completely reducible to the system and therefore not beholden to the rule of communicative dominance. Whereas the adult knows, has mastered language and the world, the child has no such pretenses. The child knows things for which it does not have words, knows that there is more to know, is never quite satisfied with the answers received, and will not hesitate to interrupt anything with relentless questioning. There is no concern in childhood for efficiency, rationality, or performativity. The child does not really *want* to know: it wants to want to know, or it desires desire. It should be clear, then, that childhood is not at all a stage in a linear development of the human, just as the postmodern is not something that comes *after* the modern, a fact often lost on critics.

Childhood is like philosophy, or at least how philosophy *should* be. Not grounded in rationality or striving toward systematizing the world, philosophy is an act of asking, of listening, of interrupting and letting oneself be interrupted. In this sense, philosophy is fundamentally an aesthetic instead of epistemological experience—one summarized in the experience of the child. "Childhood," he writes to Vermeren, "is the monster of philosophers. It is also their accomplice. Childhood tells them that the mind is not given. But that it is possible" (100). Childhood is monstrous in its embrace of excess and its rejection of the quest for concrete knowledge. That it is a monster and an accomplice to the philosopher means that

it is not a state within a successive path of development, being neither the progenitor nor the offspring of the philosopher: "It is what, in the midst of man, throws him off course. . . . It is the possibility or risk of being adrift. We always begin in the middle" (101). That one must begin in the middle means that there are no prerequisites or foundational understandings necessary for the course of philosophy. There is no teleology leading from child to adult. There is always a monstrous, opaque, and thus immeasurable gap that opens within such systems, and this is where we find philosophy.

Consider the act of reading, through which we learn that "reading is never finished, that you can only commence, and that you have not read what you have read. Reading is an exercise in listening" (101). Philosophical reading presupposes that there is *always* something else there, something that will resist articulation, communication, and transparent recognition. In this way, philosophy as an act of listening does not entail achieving understanding at all; rather, it entails *forgetting*, but a particular type of forgetting, which Lyotard, drawing on psychoanalysis, calls anamnesis. In the clinic, anamnesis is a practice wherein the analysand engages in free-play association, and from this, the analyst picks up on recurring signifiers and themes. This is usually done when helping the analysand work through a repressed event. Through anamnesis the patient is taken hold of by the unknown, thereby allowing themselves to be guided by the unpresentable.

Lyotard's pedagogy, at its base, entails teaching one to be open to alterity, to be seized and held by the monstrous childhood of thought. The characteristics that Lyotard ascribes to such an educational process include "patience, anamnesis, and recommencement" (105) and "anamnesis, discomposure, and elaboration" (107). We see, then, a contradictory movement of discovery, articulation, and loss, with all phases of the educational process happening simultaneously.

(Un)Communicative Communist Aesthetic Pedagogy

If there is an aesthetic unconscious for Lyotard's pedagogy, it is a sublime unconscious. In the face of the monstrousness of the sublime, he posits a form of philosophical education that speaks the ineffable within the effable, the uncommunicative within the communicative *without* thereby reducing this excess to yet another consumable signifier. Whereas the beautiful acts of communicative democracy always call for recognition through inclusive dialogue and debate, the sublime acts of philosophical education call for misrecognition, interruption, and forgetting. One focuses on the circulation of opinions while the other turns inward to look at the very aporias of thinking itself, to the silences and gaps. Because this aesthetic turn might be overwhelming if not painful (as Kant might argue), Lyotard emphasizes the need for a pedagogical form of *patience* with what is hidden, what withdraws, what remains unsaid in the said. Thus patience emerges as a powerful political and pedagogical virtue for continually returning to the unformed surplus at the heart of all reading and thinking. Without such patience, students might very well foreclose on the gap and thus reinsert themselves back into the circulation of communicative capitalism.

Lyotard's writing takes place within communicative capitalism while pushing us toward the possibility of (un)communicative communism. It breaks asunder the relation between democracy's call to equality and capitalist

circulation, thus offering up a sublime breach of contract between politics and profit. Whereas one privileges the agreeable, the good, and the beautiful within an aesthetic community, the other privileges what withdraws, what refuses to be said, what remains in opacity. Philosophy as a sublime pedagogical act returns us to the potentiality of thinking (its very preconditions) and thus forms a community that lacks transparency or self-identity yet nevertheless stands in solidarity. If we patiently listen, this philosophical education can return us to what is most precious and precarious: the freedom to be opaque, childlike monsters.

(Un)communicative communist pedagogy is what the party mobilizes to interrupt the order of things and imbibe a sublime gap in the present order. The gap covers over the world in an opaque cloak that is not meant to be lifted by the all-knowing teacher or the progressive facilitator; rather, it is the possibility of imagining and enacting alternative social arrangements. It is, however, important to pay attention to how the opaque is engaged, just as it is crucial to decipher what kind of monsters we need to be. To provide an illustration of the kind of aesthetic pedagogy we are after here, we want to call on the narrative of Hosea Hudson. Hudson was a Black sharecropper from Georgia who joined the Communist Party USA in 1931. Having never attended school, Hudson got his education in the party. As he puts it, "The Party learnt me a whole lot" (Painter 1994: 78). Hudson illuminates an aesthetic communist pedagogy that operates through the party's newspaper that focused on the Black nation, the *Liberator.* By 1932 Hudson was living in Birmingham, Alabama, participating in party meetings weekly, meetings in which they would study and discuss the newspaper. Here is Hudson reflecting on the *Liberator* study groups his unit—which was composed of six people—would undertake:

> We would read this paper and this would give us great courage. We had classes, reading these articles and the editorials in the *Liberator*. We'd compare, we'd talk about the right of self-determination. We discussed the question of if we established a government, what role we comrades would play, then about the relationship of the white, of the poor white, of the farmers, etc., in this area. If you had a government in the South—they'd give you the right of self-determination in the Black Belt—you got whites there. What would you do with the whites? We say the whites will be recognized on the basis of their percentage, represented on all bodies and all committees. But the Negroes at all times would be in the majority. All parties would be elected. We were talking about electing people to committees. Our position was that on committees, if you had a committee, the majority of that committee would be Negro. But you'd also have representatives in all committees by all factions, not exclusive Negro, see. (102)

Here we find Hudson and the five other comrades in his unit, gathered in someone's house, deep in the Jim Crow south, a racist, apartheid dictatorship enforced by military and paramilitary alike. As Harry Haywood (1978), another Black communist, writes about his time visiting with Hudson in Birmingham, "racism was all-pervasive and blatant. One could feel it in the atmosphere. Birmingham was a mean town, a place where the police periodically shot down Black people" (396).

Under the constant threat of arrest by the police or murder by the police or the Ku Klux Klan, they would gather to discuss this newspaper. The *Liberator* was

not an explication tool or device. Hudson never says that they valued it because it explained everything. Indeed, the exploitation, degradation, and violence in the South could never be communicated or made fully transparent. The value of the paper he highlights is the *courage* it communicated, the sublime feeling it generated that, through philosophical speculation, a new freedom could be forged that exceeded the excesses of capitalism. The overwhelming disconnect between life as it was and life as it could be was not a deficiency to be overcome and explained away but a *sublime force* that allowed for philosophy to take place, a philosophy that could birth a communist praxis. No mere academic exercise, the point was (and is) to mobilize the opacity of the gap between what is and what could be *pedagogically* as part of a communist project for revolutionary transformation. The stunning chasm between the material conditions of life and the political program imagined was not closed down, was not publicly articulated, and thus did not enter into the circuits of exchange (to become yet another liberal reformist policy). It was precisely this opaque chasm that animated the monstrous momentum of a radical philosophy beyond measure.

This is not a call for generalized or universal opacity or a refusal of articulation and explication. Capital, after all, as an inherently expansive project demands surplus and excess, and when limits to that surplus and excess are reached, all manner of destructive crises pave the way for new growth. Similarly, opacity is not inherently antagonistic to capital. Our opacity could be completely irrelevant to the expansive reproduction of capitalism, or we might even conceive of it being commodified in some way. It is for precisely these reasons that we are constructing an (un)communicative *communist* pedagogy, an aesthetic education of, in, and for the Communist Party. Sublime courage was not generated by the mere engagement of collectively reading something; it was generated by philosophizing the collective content created by the party from within the party-form. This also means that this pedagogy is proposed not as a comprehensive platform but as a kind of educational model for opening and mobilizing the possible (as what confronts those who struggle against exploitation yet nevertheless exceeds communication).

Unlike Kant's judgment of the agreeable, Hudson and his comrades' concern was not with mere personal preferences. Indeed, their project was universal in scope. And unlike a judgment of the good, it was not based on a clear concept/blueprint of an imagined communism to come. For them, the concept of the good did not merely exist in waiting but was a good-yet-to-come and thus remained to be articulated. And unlike a judgment of the beautiful, the sublimity of their suffering was not foreclosed for spontaneous accord. Rather, the unbridled horror of capitalist racism in the South gave way to a reflection on the equally immeasurable power of reason to posit a communist alternative. Thus the patience to think through the pain of sublime horror alchemically transformed into a revolutionary courage: a courage forged from within an opaque fissure of desire for an equality that was (and is) irreducible to liberal democracy. Hudson's challenge is thus an educational challenge that still speaks to us today: how to foster an (un)communicative and thus militantly communist aesthetic education of possibilities?

Notes

1. For a discussion of the negative impact of excluding aesthetic questions from critical pedagogy, see Lewis 2014.
2. For a demonstration of the relationship between the individual subject-form and capitalism, see Ford 2013.

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