Chapter 6
A Communist Theory of Writing: Virno, Lyotard, and a Rewriting of the General Intellect

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Introduction

What is a communist theory of writing? What does it mean to write like a communist? A first response to these questions might hinge on the orientation of the writing's content. Communist writing is writing about and for communism. Communist writing subjects capitalism to critical analysis, examining its differing histories and various contradictions to formulate revolutionary theories of communist praxis. This chapter takes a different route of response. Rather than focus on content, I propose that communist writing is a particular kind *rewriting*, a patient rewriting that occurs along a general line between intellect and stupidity, speech and silence, and knowledge and thought. My response emerges from several rewritings of the general intellect. I begin with a speech by Lyotard (1988/1991), which distinguishes between rewriting as remembering and rewriting as working through and introduces the role of digital technologies in rewriting. I then turn to Paolo Virno's (2003/2015, 2004) rewriting of the general intellect, which expands the concept beyond determinate capabilities and knowledges. Yet I show that this rewriting at the same time compresses the general intellect into a fundamental and linguistic truth that lacks an antagonism to capital. In the remainder of the chapter, I rewrite the general intellect again, returning it to its indeterminacy by positing a general and postdigital (squiggly) line between intellect and its other.

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Rewriting for Knowledge or Thought

In a talk delivered at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee and Madison, Lyotard (1988/1991) addresses the topic of 'rewriting modernity'. Although the formulation was given to Lyotard by the conference organizers, he says it is a better way of phrasing the 'postmodern' genre because of two shifts it enacts: it changes the 'post' into a 're', and then applies the 're' to 'writing' rather than 'modern'. The 're' is more appealing than the 'post' because it clearly eschews any attempts at periodization. The modern is not something that is *before* the postmodern; there is no temporal break between the two. Further, the distinction between a 'before' and 'after' eclipses the 'now', ultimately relegating it to the after (as in, 'we are in the era after modernity') and disallowing the pursuit of excess and surplus, or that which cannot be represented. This is because 'the postmodern is always implied in the modern because of the fact that modernity, modern temporality, comprises in itself an impulsion to exceed itself into a state other than itself' (25). There is always excess and a surplus—an untamable thing—at work in modernity. The postmodern is an interruption in the modern, a way of *re*approaching the modern by rewriting it.

One way to approach rewriting is to take something that is more or less finished (like a final draft) and then go back to the beginning to write it again. This approach mirrors the postmodern division, locating definite origins and ends, and revising the period in between in an effort to clarify and shore up any excesses, which in writing appear as errors like stray marks, misspelled words, incorrect phrasings, and so on. In this approach, rewriting modernity is revisiting the period to settle accounts and expose errors, to show the way things really were, to get at the funda-mental truth. Such a rewriting is merely a remembering of modernity: a *writing again*. When one remembers, one identifies a chronology of events: at this moment I felt/saw/heard/thought/knew this, and then that happened, and so on. Rewriting as remembering tries to gain more precision each time, getting closer and closer to—and finally mastering—an origin or cause ('no, you do not remember correctly, it was at *this* moment that *this* happened, not at *that* moment!' '*That* thing had nothing to do with it!'). Rewriting here is refinement through isolating the object of memory from everything else.

Rather than rewriting as remembering, Lyotard posits rewriting as working through, a process without predeterminations, prejudices, judgments, will, or end. Whereas rewriting as remembering forces conclusions and causality, rewriting as working through opens the subject up beyond reason and logic: 'the only guiding thread at one's disposal consists in sentiment or, better, in listening to a sentiment. A fragment of a sentence, a scrap of information, a word, come along. They are immediately linked with another "unit".' (Lyotard 1988/1991: 31) Working through has no guarantees to finality and no assurances to predetermined ends. It requires patience and listening. Descriptions and connections do not flag revelation, knowl-edge, or certainty, but ambiguity, opacity, and possibility. Remembering aims for an increasingly determinate decipherment of truth, while working through circles the truth as it disavows access to any fundamental or final truth. The former, in other

words, aims for understanding and knowledge while the latter aims for thought. The postmodern is therefore not something that comes after the modern, but a rewriting of the modern, a rewriting that is and has always been part of or internal to modernity.

Interestingly, Lyotard concludes his rather brief talk with a quick set of remarks on digital technologies and their impact on culture and cultural commodities. Digital technologies rewrite the world, but he sees them in this talk as promoting only the first approach to rewriting. He here links this rewriting to the definition it assumes in journalism, 'an already ancient craft, which consists in erasing all traces left in a text by unexpected and "fantasy" associations.' (34) Computers, he says here, promote this kind of rewriting 'since they submit to exact calculation every inscription on whatever support: visual and sound images, speech, musical lines, and finally writing itself.' (34) [1] Indeed, as I write this on a computer, squiggly lines of different colors appear under 'incorrect' or 'problematic' words, phrases, and other markings. I want to make the lines go away, which means I right click on them to find out what problem my word processor has with them. I make a split decision about it and accept or reject it. I might add a word to the processor's dictionary to prevent future squiggly lines. This is a serious problem for Lyotard: 'what is really disturbing is... the importance assumed by the concept of the *bit*, the unit of information. When we're dealing with bits, there's no longer any question of free forms given here and now to sensibility and the imagination.' (34) I am writing into a program, which is programming my writing. I can modify the program (by adding words and rules), but these modifications themselves are only possible because the program accounts for them. Moreover, any modifications are *responses* to the program. The word processor flags something and I respond. Even if I preempt the program, I am still responding to it; I am just doing so before its prompt. This is a properly postdigital configuration: the digital technologies have altered my being in such a way that I cannot properly untangle them.

Working through requires patience because it is a state of openness to the unforeseen where one listens for what one does not know, for what is other. Computers programmed in this way simply are not suited for working through. Rewriting, Lyotard concludes, means resisting the rewriting of my word processor. Yet this is only one way to conceptualize computer technologies. As I show at the end of the chapter, we can *rewrite* these technologies to accommodate, or even facilitate, rewriting as working through.

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[1] This is just one place of many where Lyotard writes on technology, and it is not representative of his general take on it. Elsewhere, for example, he writes of the thoroughly postmodern opportunities for rewriting as working through opened up by technologies. For one example, see Lyotard (1996/2009: 40).

Rewriting the General Intellect

The word processor, the computer on which its running, and the network from which it continually updates itself bring us directly to the general intellect, a concept that organizes a section of the sixth and seventh notebooks of Marx's *Grundrisse* (1939/1993). Collectively and posthumously known as the 'fragment on machines,' in these 10 or so pages Marx theorizes some of the contradictory aspects of changes in the organic composition of capital (specifically the relationship between living labor and machinery). The basic thrust of these pages is that, as capitalism develops, it congeals the means of labor into one large automated machine system that, 'set in motion by automation, a moving power that moves itself; this automation consisting of numerous mechanical and intellectual organs, so that the workers themselves are cast merely as conscious linkages.' (692) Rather than workers deploying skill and knowledge to transform raw materials with tools, under this new configuration agency is shifted to the system as a whole, such that the workers are only relay points in the production process, which is progressively dominated by machinery. Workers do not run the machines anymore, they conform to the machines, responding to their squiggly lines.[2]

The development of capitalism is the progressive subsumption of 'the general productive forces of the social brain' (Marx 1939/1993: 694) to the extent that they appear as capacities of machines (and capital) rather than workers. Yet machines themselves are the products of labor, which continually works to develop machinery. My computer, word processor, and network are all the products of past and continual labor. Machines are, Marx says here, 'the power of knowledge, objectified.' (706) The more the productivity of machinery grows, the greater 'degree general social knowledge has become a *direct force of production*', and, consequently, the more 'the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it.' (706) As the organic composition of capital shifts toward fixed capital, production depends less on actual labor time and more on the general social brain.

Herein lies the central contradiction: capital is the production of value, which depends on labor power, but as capital develops its productive capacity, it requires less labor power. Thus, we have 'the material conditions to blow this foundation sky high.' (Marx 1939/1993: 706) Rising productivity could reduce necessary labor time and increase time for 'artistic, scientific, etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them.' (706) The general intellect's command over production enhances the material conditions for communism, but conditions are not guarantees for outcomes. This is why, just a few pages later, Marx reminds us that as machinery develops it 'forces the worker to work longer

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[2]Some Marxists might accuse me of lazily slipping here between production and non-production, but I am, after all, working this machine as a condition of my employment (and while the university I work for does not properly produce profit, the publisher I am producing for definitely does).

than the savage does, or than he himself did with the simplest, crudest tools.' (708–9) Now that I can type rather than write, send and proof articles online, and so on, my productivity requirements increase. Nonetheless, these few pages remain rich resources for communist theory, particularly with recent transformations in the capitalist mode of production, most notably the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism.

The overlapping crises of global capitalism, as they manifested in the most industrialized countries in the 1960s and 1970s, stemmed both from the internal logical operations of capital accumulation and the inspiring national liberation, socialist, and progressive struggles of working and oppressed peoples across the globe. Out of the different ways capital reconfigured itself in response to these crises are two related developments that depended on the general intellect. One of these was the spatial reorganization of production in absolute and relative terms. Absolutely, moving production out of the industrial core broke up the power of industrial unions (and the social movements connected to them), driving down wages and increasing structural unemployment. Relatively, production broke up into smaller and more flexible units. This spatial response was possible (and necessary) because of the development of the general intellect, which was now objectified in 'increasingly sophisticated supply chain software' (Srnicek 2017: 17). The other reconfiguration widened the net of capitalist exploitation beyond the factory and into the whole of society. Not only were formerly public or collective goods and services privatized and subsumed under the logic of capital, but capital increasingly looked to exploit the realm of social reproduction. In both of these developments, capital responded to the struggle of labor: in the first case by attack and the second by absorption.

The way in which capital incorporated the demands of radical struggles is, according to Paolo Virno, a 'masterpiece', as capitalism mobilized the 'exit from the factories, indifference to steady employment, familiarity with learning and communication networks' for its own ends (Virno 2004: 99). Post-Fordism, therefore, takes on precarity, difference, and the desire for cooperation. The working life is not a continuous life but one constantly interrupted and redirected; instead of one or a few stable and long-term jobs, one has multiple (often overlapping) temporary and flexible jobs, requiring endless interviews (communicative acts), the orientation to new and shifting rules and norms, and so on. As it incorporates these elements, post-Fordism represents the communism of capital.

Before continuing on with Virno's important developments on the general intellect, it is important that we note the link between the general intellect, networked technologies, and living labor. Giorgio Griziotti (2019) demonstrates broadly how digital technologies facilitated the communism of post-Fordist capital, or how capital accumulation was able to accommodate and incorporate the demands of the multitudes in the social struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. The key here lies in the differences between developments in industrial machinery and digital hardware and software. For one, there is little time between invention and implementation in the latter, whereas the former required years and even decades before they reworked factories, the economy, the social, and subjectivity. Relatedly, the cost of integrating digital technologies is generally less than industrial technologies. Thirdly, digital technologies are generally open such that new developments do not render previous ones

irrelevant. Important here is 'interrupt', the ability of the operating system to be interrupted but still function, which allows it to 'manage multiple interactive levels with the outside world', which makes software 'social' in that it is 'constantly relating to the outside world' (39). Fourth, and as we noted with Srnicek above, real-time computing makes automation, delocalization, and fragmentation possible and easier.

There is, as such, a simultaneous and differential process of delocalization and concentration, and balancing this is key to post-Fordism's ability to thrive on the extraction and enclosure of the general intellect. On the one hand, capital encourages common production and peer-to-peer networks because these unleash the creativity of the general intellect. On the other hand, however, capital encloses these through vertical integration by inserting itself as relay points, as we see, for example, in platforms like Uber and AirBnB. Capital also simply takes products of the general intellect that were produced through free and open software by innumerable nodes in an ever-expansive network. He notes that Linux and Unix BSD, which are under 'non-restrictive licenses, are still the key elements of our technological-cognitive era' (Griziotti 2019: 30). Capital, however, encloses these by developing incompatible and proprietary derivatives from them: 'Yesterday it was IBM and H&P, today the champion of closed and proprietary systems is called Apple, with its iPhone/iPad Operating System (iOS) and Mac OSX, both derived from Unix BSD.' (30)

The general intellect produces the material basis of outsourcing and new fertile ground for capital extraction, enclosure, and accumulation. Virno claims that post-Fordism is the empirical verification of Marx's theoretical formulation about the general intellect in the 'fragment'. At the same time, he rewrites the general intellect in different ways that entail both remembering and working through the history of capitalism. Virno places particular emphasis on the *general* of the general intellect, as distinct from any *particular* intellect. The concept, he writes, 'should not necessarily mean the aggregate of the knowledge acquired by the species, but the *faculty* of thinking; potential as such, not its countless particular realizations.' (66) Virno links the general intellect with living labor, rather than with fixed capital, as Marx (apparently) did in the *Grundrisse*. The general intellect is *public* and based on the cooperation of workers, even though capitalists privately appropriate it. While this distinction between fixed capital and living labor has significant implications for any theory of surplus value (as it upsets the definition of value as socially necessary labor time), more pertinent to my purposes here is the extension of the general intellect to potentiality via the linguistic faculty.

The general intellect most clearly attaches itself to living labor under post-Fordist production through the paradigmatic role of language and communication. Under Fordism, silence was the rule. Communication was a distraction, or worse, something that signaled the potential for forging solidarity and radical consciousness. The worker was receptive to the demands of the boss. Under post-Fordism, the opposite is the case. If the slogan in the Fordist factory was "'Silence, men at work!"'... Today, in certain workshops, one could well put up signs mirroring those of the past, but declaring: "Men at work here. Talk!"' (91) The communication industry is hegemonic in the sense that it provides the means of production for the totality of capitalism;

except it produces linguistic forms and practices instead of machines. Still, the relationship runs even deeper, for post-Fordism is not merely the exploitation of actual historical languages, but the linguistic faculty in general.

To get at this, we should turn to another one of Virno's (2003/2015) works, *When the Word Becomes Flesh*, a book that is more concerned with linguistic than political theorists. The possession and utilization of language reveals the pure potentiality and absence of specialization that characterize human being—making humanity political—and that post-Fordism both relies on and puts to work. 'Life and language', Virno remarks, 'share the same indeterminacy because, being deprived of any extrinsic purpose, they both obey arbitrary rules.' (2003/2015: 29) Language is *praxis* because it makes its own rules and its product coincides with its execution. Of course, language can result in products that are external, but even when this is the case, the products are still goals internal to language. In this manner, we can appreciate how it provides the archetype for post-Fordist production.

When the communication industry—the work of producing knowledges, data, language games, affects, and so on—attains hegemonic status in post-Fordism (transforming industrial and agricultural production in its own image), the worker becomes a virtuoso in two related ways. Both the worker and virtuoso produce something without an end product. When the singer or pianist perform, the performance itself is the production. Because of this, the performance or the immaterial labor requires an audience or the presence of others; they are necessarily public. Physical commodities—end products—are obviously produced in post-Fordism, but the value of these commodities is determined largely by the immaterial labor that goes into their production (and distribution and sale). Education is a proper example here. There is undoubtedly an end product to the educational process—a transcript, degree, certificate—but this is less important than the ideas, experiences, affects, and so on that occur through and are inseparable from the educational experience itself. Moreover, even the value of the end product is itself determined by other kinds of immaterial labor, primarily involving public relations and perceptions.

Speaking the General Intellect

As a speaker, the worker's virtuosity differs from that of the performance artist in that the latter relies on a well-defined script, while the former does not: 'the language taken up by the speaker's virtuoso performance constitutes a simple potentiality, without preordained measures nor autonomous parts.' (Virno 2003/2015: 32) The speaker, to be sure, relies on all manner of conventions, rules, and so forth, when they utilize historical languages to convey content. Thus, to understand the pure potentiality of the speaker and the role of the general intellect in post-Fordist production, we have to turn from the historical or particular to the general:

> In every enunciation there are two fundamental, symbiotic but distinctive aspects: a) *what we say*, the semantic content expressed by the enunciation thanks to certain phonetic, lexical

and syntactic characters; b) *the fact of speaking*, the decision to break the silence, the act of enunciating as such, the speaker's exposure to the eyes of others. (43)

It is this second aspect of the enunciation that contains the pure potential of speech, of which the first is an actualization. Moreover, there are times when what matters is not the content of our speech but the very act of speaking, when we communicate our ability to communicate. While the enunciation's content is generally prioritized in an almost or totally exclusive manner, there are moments when the background of language comes to the fore. When I am riding in my building's elevator with a neighbor and we have a brief chat about the status of the weather, the content is almost totally irrelevant. Instead, we are simply displaying and exchanging our ability to communicate, presenting and recognizing each other as speaking beings. There is one instance, however, when the content and fact of speech, when language in particular and the linguistic faculty in general, coincide perfectly: '*I speak.*'

'I speak' is a performative utterance of an exceptional class. Performative utterances are those that accomplish something: 'I promise you that…' 'I forgive you for…' or 'I now pronounce you husband and husband.' With performative utterances, the content figures more prominently than the fact of speaking; the speech act produces something external, and the content need not correspond to reality (I can *say* a promise without actually *making* it). With 'I speak' the situation is totally different. The content of the enunciation *is* the act of the enunciation; the particular actualization and the general potential occur simultaneously. The utterance does nothing more or less than its content, and thus perfectly corresponds with reality and needs only the body and air to occur. 'I speak' references and signals only itself. For these reasons, it is the *absolute performative* and, in this role, provides the form for all speech acts that signal the act of speech rather than content. Finally, as it foregrounds the generic capacity for speech, it serves as a crystallization of the general intellect.

It is true that we rarely say: 'I speak.' Nonetheless, we enact the absolute performative in a host of other expressions and times:

> Staging the fact of speech is appropriate—and actually desirable—every time our lived experience is forced to retrace the essential steps of our becoming human. That is, every time that a danger, a doubt, a possible confusion can be dispelled only be reenacting, within the specific forms of human life, the travails of *anthropogenesis*. (60)

When the child begins to speak, they initiate the absolute performative through different expressions of repetition, fabulation, and announcement. Whereas development psychology focuses on the content of these repetitions—which they call 'egocentric', Virno argues that their enactments as the absolute performative are what really matter. The content might refer to the *particular* kind of being they are becoming, but the fact of speaking refers to their inauguration into the *general* intellect *as* a particular individuation.

This inauguration and individuation are never complete. Human being is not guaranteed once and for all. Vygotsky postulated that the child's echolalia was preparation for the 'internal voice' of the adult mind. But there are definitely times when

we externally vocalize the absolute performative. When I walk into an empty class-room before teaching, I might say to myself, 'here we go' or simply, 'let's see...' Writing this book chapter, I perform several different utterances, like 'hmmmm', 'does this make sense?' or 'what about...' As absolute performatives, each one of these asserts that I am here, I am I, and I am a speaker. The most intriguing statements of this sort are those with ellipses at the end. The actual thought need not be articulated out loud. What matters is the initial anthropogenesis, the initial statement of, 'Alright, what about...' When writing, this comes out of my mouth at those moments of transition or interregnum, when I am between two things, but I am not sure what the between is or what lies on the other side. This is common for the absolute performative, which tends to occur in limit situations. Even the neighborly elevator exchange occurs at the limits between two strangers. Uncertain what norms we share, we turn to phatic communication, communicating communicability. Each act of anthropogenesis emerges from a primordial transindividual common.[3]

The absolute performative only remains marginal during periods of stability. When a certain way of living and relating is in crisis, when the rules and frameworks through which we understand society and ourselves no longer function smoothly or lose legitimacy, the absolute performative takes central stage. Periods of stability push potentiality into the background and actualizations into the foreground, thereby covering over or repressing the indeterminacy and lack of specialization that characterizes human being. Post-Fordism, however, is a new period that is stable in the temporal sense, but unstable in its character. As an unstable stability, under post-Fordism the absolute performative is 'the hallmark of today's communication society' (90). Post-Fordism is upfront about this, and the forms of life within it 'don't hide the disorientation and the instability of the human animal but, on the very contrary, they push them to their extreme and systematically valorize them. Our amorphous potentiality... pervades every aspect of the most banal *routine.* ' (204) Never before have the demands and contours of the capitalist economy shifted with such frequency and rapidity. At my liberal arts college in the USA, we sell students and parents on the liberal arts as something that teaches a variety of skills with general and wide applicability. Students know they will likely work multiple jobs before they are even 30 years old, and that they will be a rare case if they end their working life in the same industry or field as they began.

In essence, then, what the post-Fordist mode of capitalist production puts to work is the generic indeterminacy and potentiality of life itself, as 'the labor process mobilizes the most universal aspects of the species: perception, language, memory, affects' (227). It is worth recalling that the very category of 'labor power' captures, or attempts to capture, these universal aspects in their potentiality. In the first volume of *Capital*, when Marx introduces the category of labor power, he writes that it is a capacity that encompasses 'the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities

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[3] For more on Virno's conception of transindividuality and the relation between the singular and the common, see Read (2015).

existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description' (1867/1967: 164). Virno rewrites this definition in an expansive way so that labor power does not only refer to *the aggregate* of capabilities, but the *potential* for capabilities. Under post-Fordism, labor power 'encompasses within itself, and rightfully so, the "life of the mind"' (2004: 81). Training for work is not the development of specific competencies that would then scale up into an aggregate—in which particular manifestations of intellect scale up into the general intellect—but the development of pure potentiality—in which particular manifestations of intellect derive from the infinite wellspring of the general intellect.

To put it differently, training involves exposure to flexibility, uncertainty, and change. Thus, from the perspective of capital, when the worker's job is replaced through automation, the worker immediately re-enters the training grounds as they look for work and try to make ends meet on a daily basis. From the perspective of proletarian struggle, this time can also be spent training in revolutionary organizing, critique, and so on. But the point is in either case that the workplace and the school are no longer privileged sites for preparation for the working life, but rather the preparation is endless and takes place across the entirety of the social field (and here, again, we can see why this has important implications for value). Society as an evolving totality produces the general intellect, which in turn serves as an unmarked script for the virtuoso proletariat. Capitalism proper is therefore increasingly exterior to the production process, which it no longer has to systematically organize like it did under Fordism. This exteriority, for Virno, is a primary reason that the post-Fordist revolutionary subject—the multitude—does not have to overthrow capitalism, but defect from it.

A General Line for the General Intellect

The ambivalence of post-Fordism makes the absolute imperative a central aspect of language and production. The fixed careers that characterized Fordism made visible the articulated content of speech, while the precariousness of post-Fordism makes the fact of speech visible. The absolute performative is the pinnacle of the appearance of ontology, 'when nature knows its own full *revelation*' (2003/2015: 17). Because the absolute imperative is the key linguistic element of post-Fordism, the revelation is not occasional but constant: 'the root has risen to the surface… That which has always been true, is only now unveiled' (2004: 98). Post-Fordism allows us to fully grasp the potentiality of life and the general intellect. Virno's rewriting of the general intellect is expansive as it opens up the concept beyond determinate capabilities, knowledge, aptitudes, skills, dispositions, and so on. Yet even as Virno works through the general intellect by expanding it into pure potentiality, at the same time he remembers the general intellect by compressing it into a fundamental truth of the human. By positioning indeterminacy as the state of the human species, he makes indeterminacy determinate.

Virno's rewriting of the general intellect, in sum, is both a remembering and a working through. The latter aspect concerns his push beyond the aggregate of fixed capacities into the realm of pure potentiality, while the former aspect concerns the empirical verification of the general intellect, the discovery and articulation of the inner core of capitalism and humanity. This is a pressing political and philosophical issue. If the linguistic faculty is indeed innate for the human species, then that would mean that those without that faculty are not part of the human species, or that those who do not or cannot demonstrate that faculty are deficient in some way.[4] Even as Virno's theory of individuation insists on a fundamental commonness or a transindividuality that precedes and exceeds the individual, he still prescribes the linguistic faculty as its nature. In the remainder of this chapter, I want to rewrite the general intellect again, not in an effort to further *describe* it, but to return again to its indeterminacy by asking about the other of the general intellect.

In other words, what I am after is not a more precise or even more open or expansive definition of the general intellect, but an approach to the general intellect that accommodates that which is other to the intellect: the stupid, the mute, the invisible, the silent. How can we rewrite the general intellect so that it does not subsume or erase that which escapes it? Is there, to formulate it succinctly, a general line to the general intellect? To explore these questions is not to universally or ahistorically valorize indeterminacy in the same way that Spivak (1988) demonstrates how Foucault and Deleuze, in their celebration of postrepresentationalism or antirepresentationalism, erase the history of imperialism and the capitalist division of labor and universalize an Other (which is always the European-Othered). Stupidity, muteness, and opacity are not in themselves communist. Articulation and knowledge are of course central to the communist project, and yet that project, and others similar to it in academia (the context within which the piece is written and published), is almost entirely focused on inexhaustibly detailing and documenting every crime of oppression and exploitation. They are solely concerned, in other words, with the first kind of rewriting Lyotard presents: clarity and certainty. The task is to keep these dual goals concurrent.

In one of his short fables published toward the end of his life, Lyotard (1993/1997) seizes on fragments of Nina Berberova's *The Revolt*. Berberova's narrator in the book reflects on two different aspects or spaces of life. There is the public life, the life that one lives in the open, the visible life. On the other hand, there is the secret life, the invisible life, which Berberova's narrator calls a 'no-man's-land'. The two are not distinguished based on morality or responsibility. It is not that one is accountable in one and unaccountable in the other. There are different forms of accountability and interaction, however. In the secret life, one does not properly 'answer' another. This does not mean, as Lyotard insists, 'that you are irresponsible. It follows only that it happens by means of answers and questions. It is not argued.' (117) Secrets, by

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[4]This is not a hypothetical concern, but a totally empirical one, and one that disabled activists and critical disability theorists continue to fight and struggle to address.

definition, are inarticulable. They literally cannot be said. If a secret is enunciated, it is no longer a secret.

As a consequence, the secret escapes—lies outside of—both historical languages *and* the linguistic faculty, both *parole* and *langue*, and the *ability* to speak. The secret life is not about what one knows but what one does not or cannot know. Even so, it does not serve as a reserve for new knowledge. 'You grant your hours of solitude to that existence because you have a need *not* to know more. That's how it is that you can encounter what you are unaware of. However, you wait for it.' (116–117) (emphasis added). As the (non)place where one goes to rewrite, it requires an enduring patience and openness to unexpected, unforeseen, and unforeseeable encounters. The general life is where one argues, reasons, articulates, and expresses; in a word, where one *knows*. The secret life is where one *thinks* without knowing or having to know, where one is receptive to the absolutely other. The secret life is an inhuman zone that constitutes as it interrupts humanity. Lyotard asks: 'How can we have any chance of finding how to say what we know not how to say if we do not listen at all to the silence of the other within?' (121–122)

The two lives run continuously; there is no temporal disjunction between them. They are not mutually exclusive, antagonistic, or even necessarily dialectically related. When one's in the secret life, the public life is still there, outside, suspended, off at recess. The antagonism, the difficulty, the terror comes when the general line is chipped away at, erased partially or totally by the general life. The antagonism keeps itself low key, and surfaces gradually, cautiously, and discreetly. We do not even recognize the attack until it is well underway. When rewriting is reduced to remembering, that is one instance when the general line is obliterated: write to express the truth! write to complete the story! write to articulate (and reduce) the excess! The duty is to maintain the general line between rewriting as remembering and rewriting as working through.

We have to keep our watch over the general line so as to accommodate the secret life, to protect it and its permanent stupidity while not eschewing knowledge and certainty. While Marx posited that the general intellect was embodied in fixed capital—which is necessarily private—Virno argues that the general intellect is embodied in living labor—which is necessarily public. Post-Fordism realizes the generic nature of the general intellect, which appears most clearly in the communications industry. That industry, which supplies the means of production for other industries, is itself based on the absolute imperative. With all of this incessant babbling, post-Fordism attacks the secret life, and Virno welcomes the attack as he defines the general intellect as the (now revealed) truth of the human. At this point, we can formulate one concise distinction between capitalist and communist knowledge that falls along the general line. Capitalism cannot tolerate the secret life, and so it forces it into expression and commodifies it. As such, capitalism performs a rewriting of modernity that seeks to capture all excess to turn it into profitable sources of revenue and production. Communist writing, by contrast, is freed from the domination of exchange value and thus has no need to compel the secret life into expression.

Rewriting the Postdigital Speech of the General Intellect

One day I entered my class, walked up to the computer, and opened up a text-to-speech application. I proceeded to teach the class using this application. The question we grappled with that day revolved around the voice, and 'my' voice in particular: where is it? What is it? Is 'I speak' relayed through a text-to-speech application the invocation of the absolute performative? 'I speak', as the perfect coincidence of the semantic content of speech and the fact of speaking, depends on the human utilizing their 'innate' linguistic faculty to perform the speech act. When 'I speak' through the text-to-speech application, I am not utilizing the generic linguistic faculty. At the same time, however, the semantic content enacts an (apparent) *deviation* from the fact of speaking. On the one side, we have the articulated and graspable content, and on the other side, we have an opacity and uncertainty about speech, voice, the human, and the very ability (and desirability) to grasp. This rift is a manifestation of the general line between the public life and the secret life, one that helps us rewrite Lyotard's final remarks in his speech on rewriting. What is my text-to-speech act if not a kind of rewriting of myself? The computer's algorithms are precisely what return the 'I speak'—and with it, the general intellect—to a state of indetermination. For, as Virno would remind us, the algorithms do not belong to the computer, but to living labor and the general intellect. In this instance, however, the general intellect moves us to the *other* of intellect.

To conclude, I would like to posit a theory of communist writing by first turning to a model proposed by Lewis (2017, 2019) and his reading of Althusser's (2006) later works on aleatory materialism and the encounter, a Marxism that embraces contingency, unpredictability, and excess; in short, the secret life. Althusser draws on Epicurus' conception of the world's origins. Before the world, there was a mere void in which atoms fell parallel to each other, until there was a clinamen, an unpredictable swerve of the atom that, as Lewis says, 'ruptures the orderly parallel distribution of atoms. A series of encounters akin to a chain reaction occur because of this swerve effect, leading to the birth of the world.' (Lewis 2017: 312) The swerve was unpredictable and ultimately unintelligible; there was no reason, intention, or motivation behind it. In his afterword to David Backer's *Althusser for Educators*, Lewis (2019) identifies the aleatory swerve at work in Althusser's use of *italics*, which Lewis posits as 'the formal equivalent of the swerve, shifting a word ever so slightly so as to highlight it, bring out its meaning, curve the reader's eye toward a nuanced inflection.' (79)

Yet for the equivalence to work, it needs to be pushed a bit further. Althusser was ultimately the one who produced the italics, who chose what words to italicize. Of course, through italicizing the author *opens* the word up to new meanings. Nonetheless, there is still the absence of unpredictability and unintelligibility. Thus, to propose a model of communist writing that accommodates the secret life, we need to introduce these elements somehow, and I want to do so by returning to the word processor's algorithms. Malott (2019) reminds us in his helpful work on digital communist education, that digital technologies don't have any permanent and

unalterable political disposition; they are neither inherently liberating nor inherently oppressive. Because capitalism, the dominant mode of production, structures digital innovation, the question is how to *sublate* algorithms and all digital technologies into a communist mode of production. Germane to the word processor is the algorithm: the operating languages and codes programmed into software and hardware. Because the algorithm operates according to predetermined rules, it

> ...does not facilitate a purely creative process but orients the operator in a particular direction relatively fixed by its coded language. Part of the challenge for sublating an algorithm is therefore to edit or rewrite the machines' internal logic or code. The algorithm can therefore be preserved but in an altered form with the aspects conductive to capitalism overcome. (6)

My current word processor generates squiggly lines that follow a logic that is graspable and alterable. This alterability makes the word processor not only capitalist, but democratic. To properly rewrite communist knowledge, we need to edit the word processor's algorithm such that it generates squiggly lines erratically and unpredictably. My body is then drawn to unexpected and unanticipated words, spaces, phrases, characters, paragraphs, and so on. I would be rewriting as I am writing, constantly and unendingly working through these squiggly lines, then, which would return us to the inhuman territory of thinking that cannot be measured, quantified, evaluated, and put into the circuits of capitalist exchangeability. Communist revolution, of course, is not achieved through writing, or at least not through writing alone: it attacks the fundamental causes of oppression and exploitation through organized, disciplined, and protracted struggle. As such, no theory of communist writing is sufficient. Yet through communist writing, we can labor to defend the general line of the general intellect, thereby increasing the liberatory potential of the general intellect.

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