

Collective knowledge, memory of the common

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It should be obvious that intelligence is a social product, not just a union of ideas, but above all, of people. It's not difficult to show that language - all forms of language and cultural signs - can only unfold on a social, or collective, horizon. Nobody knows everything, everybody knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity. There is no transcendent reserve of knowledge and knowledge is simply the sum of what we know.

However, the whole of History, we should say, the whole of history as an account of those who dominate over those who are dominated, is also proof of the wilful management of ignorance through processes of exclusion and appropriation of entire areas of knowledge that had previously been shared.

Unfortunately, even social systems can perpetuate themselves on the base of a terrible waste of human experience, skilfulness and richness. In these circumstances it's impossible to think about the development of collective intelligence.¹

Today, the kinds of social knowledge that used to develop as ways of sharing work and knowledge in a co-operative way (that is, in a communal, voluntary and open manner, for the purpose of satisfying shared cultural, economic and social needs and aspirations), have been strengthened by the possibilities of linking individuals and collectives that are generated in a new - virtual - space, which allows work and immaterial goods to flow more easily and with greater reach; work and immaterial materials that are able to provoke

the unexpected, what is not yet known... The problem is that, according to the logic of Capital, the time has also come to apply the law of value to them, and for them to start producing dividends.

Thus, informational capitalism seems to be heading towards a certain form of communism and at the same time stimulating the growth of the legal instruments that will make it impossible, transforming services and information into essential goods subject to private property and market laws (copyright, licenses, patents, canons, etc.) and, as a last resort, the criminal and repressive measures that will ensure compliance.

In this way, while these social co-operation networks are being encouraged, informational capitalism is also trying to figure out how to make ownership of intangible goods possible. In other words, how to make people pay for playing music that can circulate freely on the internet, or how to produce value from social co-operation networks based on enormously complex connections that cannot be measured in simple working time-units.

It's clear that capitalism sees in the *General Intellect* (or general abstract knowledge) what, in reality, it is: the accumulation of fixed capital, generated through processes of co-operation and the creative generation of sociality, which can be made to work within a new matrix consisting of objectified products and programs that are subordinated to profit, the accumulation of personal wealth and the generation of surplus value. In appropriating

it, capitalism completes the old ideal circle of exploitation that becomes a political, bureaucratic, administrative and monetary problem, while the law of value is dissolved because the whole life-time has become production time (Negri, Guattari).

Capital's control and appropriation of collective intelligence implies a new battle over the rights to ownership of knowledge, or to put it another way, over where to cut the «accumulated social knowledge» that we don't pay rights for, from the flows of knowledge production defined by the sections of cognitive work controlled by Capital. In the words of Negri, «the exploitation of the common has become the *locus* of surplus value». And there it reveals its parasitical nature. It lives from social creativity and co-operation, at the same time surrounding itself with intellectual property laws, the appropriation of patents, and all manner of copyright associations such as the SGAE.

The idea is, basically, to privatise something that is abundant in order to make it scarce, to make citizens pay for what they already use. This is no way to protect creation, let alone culture. Rather, it leads to the capitalist appropriation of knowledge, the management of consumption, the use of the cooperative nature of cultural production, and the creation of a legion of artistic singularities doomed to complete labour precarity.

All if this completes the most perverse circle of capitalist ideology, which states that capitalism is the “natural” way of life. Faced with this, we have to reaffirm that collective creation is not the clearest way to hand Capital its profits, but a sign of the most fundamental resistance to it. The redistribution of knowledge based on the premise of free circulation and accessibility contains the old paradigm - the understanding of production and redistribution as a social need and not just another business.

It's up to us to promote and support the possibilities for appropriating the accumulated intelligence of humanity, its abstract richness, and collective creativity. Our ability to co-operate is the perfect weapon against capitalism. Beyond its tangible results, co-operation involves valuing principles that are unconnected to the capitalist system and opposed to it, and that also pre-exist it, such as self-responsibility, participative volunteering, solidarity, social responsibility and commitment to others.

Co-operation in the production, development, distribution and enjoyment of collective knowledge and its abstract richness is, therefore, the basis for sustainable development of communities that make use of it; its members construct and re-construct it continuously, also as the source of an always-deferred project for liberation. Our duty is to let its power and free play spread freely to new collective subjects and new revolutionary representations.

Faced with us, those in power repeatedly declare the market to be a totalitarian stage through which social life flows. But something isn't right, and social criticism is overflowing the retaining lines of pre-programmed spectacle, of a Reality always constructed in playback. Opposing movements are multiplying and making attempts at resistance and fight increasingly unpredictable. The possibilities of producing uncontrolled events are spreading through contagion. Over and over, old flashes of communism re-appear, sparks from a world to come, which is to be constructed from radically different positions and materials. On a pre-election day it appears in front of the ruling party's headquarters, and on another day, self-organising into an Internet loan network, or in occupied social centre. Flashes of communism that are still rare, sporadic, but speak of the revolution to come.

Ellington and so many other musicians said so long ago, "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing." As the information age moves into full gear, it would be wise to remember the cautionary tales of shades and shadows; to recall and remix the tale of a bored billionaire living in a dream world in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, who said:

It was shallow thinking to maintain that numbers and charts were the cold compression of unruly human energies, every sort of yearning and midnight sweat reduced to lucid units in the financial markets. In fact data itself was soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process. This was the eloquence of alphabets and numeric systems, now fully realized in electronic form, in the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet's living billions. Here was the heave of the biosphere. Our bodies and oceans were here, knowable and whole.³

Sample away!

Paul D. Miller is a conceptual artist, writer, and musician working in New York City. His written work has appeared in *The Village Voice*, *Artforum*, *Ra-ygun*, and a host of other publications. He is co-publisher of the multicultural magazine *A Gathering of the Tribes*, and has just started the online new media magazine www.21cmagazine.com. Miller is perhaps best known under the moniker of his «constructed persona», *DJ Spooky that Subliminal Kid*, whose recent aural efforts have included the cds *Optometry* and *Modern Mantra*, and *Not in Our Name*, a remix collaboration with Saul Williams and Coldcut. His most recent art project is *Errata Erratum*, created for *L.A.'s Museum of Contemporary Art*. This is a Net-based remix of Marcel Duchamp's artworks *errata musical* and *sculpture musical*.

NOTES

1. Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, with notes and commentary by Richard Leppert, translated by Susan H. Gillespie and others. University of California Press, 2002
2. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson Smith. Blackwell Publishing, 1974
3. Don DeLillo, *Cosmopolis: A Novel*. Scribner, 2003



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