

CHAPTER 14

Critique or Collectivity? Communicative Capitalism and the Subject of Politics

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1. Introduction

The questions posed for the symposium ‘Digital Objects, Digital Subjects: Activism, Research & Critique in the Age of Big Data Capitalism’ take up possibilities of digital activism and of critique in a digital age. What does digital mean as a qualifier of activism and condition of critique? On the one hand, this is obvious: we are talking about our current conditions of networked media, personalised mass communication and the production of the devices that support it; we are talking about Big Data, about the general setting of communicative capitalism. On the other hand, there is something that is rather less clear in qualifying activism and critique with ‘digital’, namely the underlying theory of the subject. What notion of the political subject is posited or assumed in inquiries into digital activism and critique, and how is this subject impacted by a digital age? Is this impact, if there is one, best understood in terms of ‘digitality’, or might ‘digital’ in fact mark or periodise a certain understanding of capitalism and the ways it determines our setting? (I should add here that

How to cite this book chapter:

Dean, J. 2019. Critique or Collectivity? Communicative Capitalism and the Subject of Politics. In: Chandler, D. and Fuchs, C. (eds.) *Digital Objects, Digital Subjects: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Capitalism, Labour and Politics in the Age of Big Data*. Pp. 171–182. London: University of Westminster Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16997/book29.n>. License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0

in critical media studies it is of course Christian Fuchs who has insisted on the necessity of analysing digital media in terms of capitalism and its categories of labour, production, and value rather than, say, bourgeois categories of information.) In my view, 'digital' directs us to our setting in communicative capitalism. It tells us less about the subject of politics than it does about the processes aligned to block this subject's appearance, processes that nevertheless contribute to the concentrations and aggregations that are opportunities for the subject's appearing.

I take it as uncontroversial that a theory of the political subject is important for any approach to activism and critique (digital or otherwise). Do we think, for example, that the subject of politics is necessarily an activist subject? Or do we assume that it is acted upon, subjected, conditioned or determined? Likewise, do we imagine the political subject as engaging in or impacted by critique? Are online practices of sharing and opining, Twitter storms and Facebook updates, the practices of a political subject? What about hacking or blogging? Perhaps most important, do we proceed as if this subject were individual, or collective; is it present in the actions and events carried out in its name and, if so, how?

In this essay, I first briefly sketch a theory of the political subject (anchored in Lacan), that brings together the Slovenian view of subject as gap in the structure (Žižek and Dolar; see my discussion in Dean, 2016) with the early Badiou's (2009) emphasis on subjectivation and the subjective process as responses to the intervention of the subject. Second, I illustrate the theory by turning to crowds. Crowds are not the political subject, but their 'egalitarian discharge' (a term I take from Canetti 1984) can exert effects that are retroactively attributed to the divided people (people as the rest of us [Dean, 2012], a revolutionary alliance of the oppressed) as their subject. The emphasis on crowds enables, third, a way to find 'grave-diggers' in communicative capitalism's mobilisation of and reliance on complex networks and their power law distributions of links. The politics of digital networks then takes shape as a dual problem of the one versus the many and maintaining the gap of the subject – a politics of collectivity rather than critique. Finally, I put my thesis up against Hardt and Negri's approach to networked biopolitics to demonstrate the relevance of the party form for us today as that perspective, that instrument and organisational means, necessary for revolutionary politics.

Rather than jumping right in to the theoretical discussion, I want to set out descriptively the general problem I aim to solve in terms of survivors and systems. Two dominant themes in contemporary theory and activism constellate around either survivors or systems. So some activists and theorists, not to mention many students and others active on social media, are deeply invested in identity politics and intersectionality. They take identity to be a crucial site of politics, one that must be defended and asserted against multiple violations and harms. Lacking either solidary social and political associations or an economically reliable future, they raise the multiple intersecting challenges obstructing

access to success and happiness. They imagine these challenges as, like them, specific rather than general. Betrayed by institutions, they have little faith in organised collectivity. So they repeat, spontaneously, the dominant injunction to rely on themselves and go it alone, despite the fact that they are already outraged by the obstructions that block them from being able to 'go it alone.' In this vein, some advocates hold up livability, survivability, as a crucial achievement. 'Survivor' thus becomes, in this strand of theory and activism, a key figure for the contemporary subject of politics.

Yet even as social media and left political culture more broadly valorise survivors, a concurrent strand of contemporary theory distances itself from people, from anything like a subject, indeed from the human. For these theorists, understanding the present requires a posthumanist focus on systems – geologic, galactic, algorithmic, chaotic and so forth. We see this general move in emphases on extinction, exhaustion, objects and things.

These two theoretical currents correspond to neoliberalism's dismantling of social institutions and to communicative capitalism's intensification of capitalism via networked media/informatisation. University, schools, family and unions are less stable and more in flux. Social welfare protections have been dismantled in the name of people taking responsibility for themselves. The breakdown of social groups and institutions renders individuals ever more vulnerable to exploitation, violence and coercion; they are ever more likely to experience others as competitors or threats, and view them with suspicion. Taking care of oneself now appears as a politically significant act, rather than as a symptom of the dismantled social welfare net and obscenely competitive labour market wherein we have no choice but to care for ourselves if we are going to keep up. The spontaneous response is individual: outrage, a demand that something be done, a call for change. Communicative capitalism supplies the infrastructure for this spontaneous politics of the individual: mobile phones and social media. These media reward immediate reactions such as the tweet, the status update, signing of a petition, emailing a representative – individual activities all ancillary to the singular act said really to matter: voting. What passes for politics enslaves individuals ideologically to bourgeois individualism and its individualised political practices. Jobs are less reliable, and people feel like everything is more competitive, more precarious. More and more choices in a more and more complex and uncertain informational field are downloaded onto the individual, even as these individuated choices have little to no impact on the real determinations of our lives in a setting where satellites, fibre-optic cables, server farms, Big Data, and complex algorithms power high-speed trading, enable just-in-time production, intensify labour markets and concentrate wealth in ever fewer hands.

The Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt characterised liberalism as replacing politics with ethics and economics. I would say that when combined with communicative capitalism, neoliberalism is characterised by ideological investment in survivors and systems (intensifications, respectively, of ethics and economics).

Neoliberalism compels (and social media encourages and encloses) individualised self-cultivation, self-management, self-reliance, and self-absorption, at the same time as communicative capitalism installs and accelerates impersonal determining processes, circuits and systems. Singularised, rendered-unique, hyper-individuated persons find themselves confronting a setting that is utterly determining and outside their control. Survivors struggle to persist in conditions of unliveability rather than to seize and transform these conditions. Systems are presented as the processes and objects determining us, something to view and diagram, perhaps even to predict or mourn, but never to affect. And for good reason – no individual can make a difference. Individuals can have political feelings – and social media encourage the expression and circulation of these feelings, the generation of affective intensities via the outrage of the day. Individuals can document and report – here’s a photo of this event, here’s how I felt about that bit of news. Individuals can even speak – social media (like anarchist politics) tells us that no one can speak for us and lets us each speak for ourselves, even as the cacophony of voices means that it is ever harder to feel heard, and so we are then all enjoined to listen. But how can we listen to everyone, even to many, without trying to get each other to be ever briefer, and even at 140 characters it is impossible to hear very many at all, and at this point haven’t we become an audience again, the cost of being a free provider of content that of also becoming a permanent member of an audience for a performance that never ends? An audience not of mass media but of personalised media, a media of and by many, that we curate for ourselves?

At any rate, our present ideological configuration of survivors and systems makes it hard to see the political subject. We can see fragile individuals and powerful algorithms and geologic forces, but we omit entirely the subject capable of political action – the divided people, historically figured as working class, peasantry, reserve army of the unemployed, the colonised, those who have fought back against slavery, against patriarchy, against oppression. Communicative capitalism operates as a system of desubjectivation – and those who place their political focus on algorithms, objects, geology, and extinction provide ideological expression of this desubjectivation.

But there is another way, a way that begins from the divided people as the subject of politics.

2. Subject: The People as Subject

As we learn from Marx, we don’t make our own history. Politics is not a matter of our own choosing, something we make as we please under self-selected circumstances. What these circumstances are and how they are circumscribed is neither fixed nor infinitely malleable. History’s repetitions are not repetitions of the same; what was once a tragedy is later a farce. Expressed in more Žižekian terms, repetition can work as negation, negativity or death drive, producing not just impasses but also ruptures.

For Žižek (along with Mladen Dolar), these ruptures are the subject: the subject is the gap in the structure. My claim is that the political subject is a gap in the social structure because the people are the subject of politics (by people, I mean the divided people; the proletarianised and oppressed, not the people as populist totality).

In their self-relating, people always come up against themselves. They encounter the practical, material limits of their association, the psychic and affective pressures of their commonality. The excess of their reflective relation to themselves as ‘the people’ is the torsion of politics. Politics takes place in the non-identity, gap, or torsion between people and their self-organisation. Political subjectivation forces this non-identity, making it felt as an effect of a subject. The ‘subject of politics’ is not just any gap or absence. The political subject appears through the active occupation of the constitutive lack in the people.

There is politics because the political subject is collective and it is split. This split is practical and material, the condition of our physical being. The people can never *be* politically (or, differently put, the ‘people’ is not an ontological category). They are only present as parts, as subsets, as claims. This is the case with crowds occupying public squares, elected assemblies, armies in battle and opinion polls. All are necessarily parts. Their partiality – the gap between parts and (imaginary) whole – is the exciting cause of political subjectivation. Even as parts, the people are only present temporarily. They may try to inscribe their presence, their having been, in documents, practices and organisations which will take their place and operate in their stead, a taking and operating which is also and unavoidably partial. Some degree of alienation is unavoidable because creating new institutions cannot eliminate the minimal difference between the collectivity and the people. The condition of politics, then, is simply this practical material split between the people and the collective that actually comes together.

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, as if our alienated condition would be remedied through a rebirth into ontological fullness if only we could do away with representation). And it is surely not resolved via platforms that seek to replace political forms like unions and parties with forms of preference aggregation. Such technological fixes reproduce communicative capitalism’s ideology of survivors versus systems, that is, individuals with their individual needs confronting a large infrastructure outside their control. I am thinking here of Alex Williams’s positioning of ‘parties and unions structured around outdated principles of structural unity’ as something to be overcome in favour of platforms ‘capable of hosting an unknowable range of contingent political actions’ (Williams 2015, 227). Not only does the expression ‘structural unity’ misrepresent the political need for unity of action in the face of an enemy, but the party (especially in Lenin’s version) names ‘the flexible organization of a fidelity to events in the midst of unforeseeable circumstances’ (Bosteels 2011,

243). Williams omits the element of fidelity, of consistency, indeed, the political dimension of ‘platform’ where a party’s platform announces its commitments, values, plans, and intentions. ‘Array of contingent political actions’ doesn’t name a politics at all; really, it is no more than an embrace of Facebook and Twitter.

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. As the collective subject of politics the people is nothing but this gap, the force or push of many through and against claims, representations and institutions offered in their name.

The economy (over-)determines the *setting* of subjectivation. It configures the terrain on which we organise the consequences of a subjectivation. To come back to my argument, politics cannot have just any point of departure because it does not take place in an open, unconditioned manifold. Rather, it pushes forth in a setting ruptured and structured by a fundamental antagonism. So the economy, the mode of production that characterises a society – digital or otherwise – doesn’t *determine* the political subject. It is the setting for the subjectivation of the rupture or gap that attests to the force of the subject. Further, the economy is the setting of the *struggle over* this attestation – what, if anything, a rupture means, the terms and images available for this meaning, and the constellation of forces lined up for or against a given attestation that an event was an effect of the subject of politics.

Crowds – collectivities, provisional heterogeneous unities – help illustrate how the people as the political subject appear in and as a gap.

3. Crowds – Force of Collectivity

Over the last decade, crowds and protests have shown us the people sensing their collective power, the capacity of many to inscribe a gap in the expected. This ‘inscription of a gap in the expected’ was manifest during the Occupy movement – finally people were protesting, rising up. We’ve seen crowds pushing against the separations of democracy in Tunisia, Egypt, Spain and Greece; in a wide array of anti-austerity protests; in protests for reproductive freedom in Poland and Ireland; in the massive outpouring of women in the US on 21 January 2017, and so on.

The very powers that let crowds force a gap in the expected, however, also introduce a set of political challenges. Crowds are destructive, creative, unpredictable, contagious and temporary. They don’t endure. People go home. Crowds are politically indeterminate – people amass for all sorts of conflicting reasons, feelings and compulsions (which is why interviewing single participants misses the point; you can’t interview a crowd – and here I have in mind Paolo Gerbardo’s [2017] in many ways very interesting and essential book, *The Mask and the Flag*. Gerbardo breaks up the crowd into individual recollections.

By doing so he is able to reduce an international chain of disruptive crowd events into citizen participation, 'citizenism,' thereby effacing the challenge of the various occupations and demonstrations of 2010-2011 to the status quo. The strength that comes with the indeterminacy of the crowd's message is a weakness when the crowd disperses. The crowd doesn't have a politics; it is the opportunity for a politics – which is another way of saying that the crowd inscribes a gap; it breaks up the expected, the everyday, but it doesn't tell us how or in what direction.

How the crowd gets a politics depends on the response to the crowd event and whether this response is faithful to the egalitarian substance of the crowd. In *Crowds and Power*, Elias Canetti (1984) describes the moment of the crowd's emergence as the 'discharge.' This is the point when 'all who belong to the crowd get rid of their differences and feel equal.' Up until that point, there may be a lot of people, but they are not yet that concentration of bodies and affects that is a crowd. As the crowd's density increases, libidinal effects are unleashed: 'In that density, where there is scarcely any space between, and body presses against body, each man is as near the other as he is to himself, and an immense feeling of relief ensues. It is for the sake of this blessed moment, when no-one is greater or better than another, that people become a crowd.' Canetti gives us the crowd as a strange attractor of *jouissance*, a figure of collective enjoyment. The libidinal energy of the crowd binds it together for a joyous moment, a moment Canetti renders as a 'feeling of equality' and that we might also figure as the shared intensity of belonging. The feeling won't last; inequality will return with the dissipation of the crowd. But in the orgasmic discharge, 'a state of absolute equality' supplants individuating distinctions.

What we get from Canetti, then, is the substance or essence of the crowd form as an absolute equality. This equality is only temporary, but it is essential to the crowd discharge, the feeling for which the crowd amasses. Canetti argues that the crowd's equality infuses all demands for justice. Equality as belonging – not separation, weighing and measure – is what gives 'energy' (Canetti's term) to the longing for justice. The crowd concentrates equality and a longing for justice (and so carries out a function Marx associates with the factory).

The crowd event may register as the movement of the people. Some other will view the crowd as having been the people because she apprehends the *jouissance* of the egalitarian discharge. She responds to the courage and justice intertwined in the crowd, perhaps with some anxiety in the wake of its *jouissance*. Her response indicates that the rupture of the crowd event was a subjectivation (my analysis here is guided by Badiou [2009] in *Theory of the Subject*). The other sees the people in the crowd, their collective force, as the universal struggle of the oppressed. She responds to the rupture as a moment in the subjective process of the emancipatory egalitarian movement of the people. The crowd was not just these particular people here right now. They were *the people* fighting for justice. Fidelity to the egalitarian discharge is an effect of the crowd event; the people as subject is thus understood as its cause.

Neither capital nor its state want the people to appear. So they try to mend the rupture, close the gap as quickly as possible. They deny something happened, relying on the repetitive novelty of relentless media to deflect and disperse attention. They claim it wasn't the people; it was thugs, a mob, outsiders. They make it business as usual, the citizens participating like citizens are supposed to do. Spontaneous responses on the Left challenge claims for the divided people as the collective subject of the crowd event by emphasising specific groups, issues, and identities, by highlighting who wasn't there, by prioritising their own unique spin on the event just for the sake of being different. Social media encourages such responses, the more and more varied the better. Communicative capitalism feeds on multiplicity, confusion, indeterminacy, anything that can disperse the force of the crowd.

4. Central Feature of Digital Networks – Power Law Distributions

And yet, communicative capitalism nevertheless produces crowds. We can quickly point to several different kinds: crowds of 'friends,' followers, and users in social media; crowds of workers in factories (see Jack Qui's book, *Goodbye iSlave* [2017]), as well as Christian Fuchs's detailed case studies of digital labour); crowds of commodities and disposable things; crowds of Big Data (in fact Big Data might be one of the most powerful crowd symbols in our current digital era); and crowds of those dispossessed from their work, homes, lives, and futures by the intensified inequality of the networked economy. These crowds need to be understood in terms of the 'long tail' of a power law distribution – the many to the one.

Communicative capitalism stimulates the production of networks that generate power law distributions. It relies on the creation and enclosure of general fields or commons characterised by free choice, growth and preferential attachment. Out of the common a 'one' emerges, the one at the top, the one with the most hits or links, the blockbuster or superstar. Here exploitation consists in stimulating the production of a field in the interest of finding, and then monetising, the one. Many contribute, many work. One is rewarded. The bigger the field, the more powerful, valuable, or elite the one.

Inequality is a necessary and unavoidable feature of complex networks, that is, networks characterised by free choice, growth, and preferential attachment. As Albert-Laszlo Barabasi demonstrates, complex networks follow a power law distribution of links. The item in first place or at the top of a given network has twice as many links as the item in second place, which has more than the one in third and so on, such that there is very little difference among those at the bottom but massive differences between top and bottom. Many novels are written. Few are published. Fewer are sold. A very few become best sellers. Twitter is another example: it has over a billion registered users; one pop singer, Katy

Perry, has over 94 million followers. Most people have 200. Popular media expresses the power law structure of complex networks with terms like the '80/20 rule,' the winner-takes-all or winner-takes-most character of the new economy, and the 'long tail.'

Notice that it doesn't matter what kind of network or field we are talking about – novels, Twitter, Amazon, Google, movies – the content is unimportant. Capitalist productivity depends on the expropriation and exploitation of communication. Any communicative action is equivalent to any other; their meaning or use value matters less than their exchange value, the fact that they can be shared. A repercussion is that capitalism has subsumed communication such that communication does not provide a critical outside. Volume, number and the crowd overpower critique. And in complex networks this volume, this number, is organised hierarchically in power law distributions: the one versus the many.

The challenge of politics in communicative capitalism is to make effective the power of the many – how the crowd can be in and for itself, that is, how crowds can produce effects that can be attributed to the divided people as their subject. Social media functions to dissipate efforts to hold open the gap produced by the crowd rupture, so that what for a moment was the people is later forgotten, diminished, reinterpreted. Yet its very processes produce new crowd forms through which collectivity tries to exert its force – hashtags, memes, selfies and other common images. My point is not that hashtags are revolutionary. Rather they point to political openings that arise as critique loses efficacy.

5. Hardt and Negri

I've emphasised the fact that complex networks produce hierarchy. In contrast, Hardt and Negri highlight the democratic dimension of biopolitical labour. They claim that the same networked, cooperative structures that produce the common generate new democratic capacities, and even 'make possible in the political sphere the development of democratic organizations' (Hardt and Negri 2009, 354). Given the ways that the exchange value of communicative contributions displaces their meaning or use value, and given the ways that communicative capitalism drives processes that individuate and singularise, on the one hand, and concentrate resources and power in the one, on the other, it is hard to see how their claim for new democratic capacities is anything different from the techno-utopianism of the nineties. The same holds for newly possible democratic organisations, especially in light of Hardt and Negri's rejection of 'vanguard organizations.' They tell us that the vanguard party corresponds to a different, earlier, structure of labour (a different technical composition of the proletariat). According to their periodisation, the vanguard party corresponds to the early twentieth century's professional factory workers. The deskilled workers of the mid-twentieth century fit with that period's mass party. But

today, they argue, the political form appropriate to biopolitical labour must be democratic, cooperative, autonomous, and horizontally networked. The vanguard party is inadequate, ‘anachronistic,’ because it doesn’t look like the networks of contemporary biopolitical production.

This argument is not convincing. Complex networks are not the horizontal, cooperative and autonomous forms that Hardt and Negri imagine. As Albert-Laszlo Barabasi’s work (2003) on complex networks demonstrates, free choice, growth and preferential attachment produce hierarchies and inevitable dramatic differences between the one that is most chosen and preferred and the many that are not (see my discussion in Dean 2016, 12–13). The ostensibly creative, cooperative and democratic character of networked communication doesn’t eliminate hierarchy. It entrenches hierarchy by using our own choices against us. And, as Barabasi’s work on complex networks makes clear, this hierarchy isn’t imposed from above. It is an immanent effect of free choice, growth, and preferential attachment.

A political form mirroring biopolitical production would not be horizontal and democratic. Its democracy would produce power law distributions, unequal nodes or outcomes, winners and losers, few and many. We see this phenomenon on Twitter as people fight through trending hashtags. Hashtags provide common names that serve as loci of struggle; when they trend, they rise above the long tail of the millions of unread, unloved Tweets coursing through the nets. The democratic element – people’s choice to use and forward – produces the inequality that lets some hashtags appear as and even be, for a moment, significant. The fact of emergent hierarchies suggests that an emergent vanguard may well be the political form necessary for struggles under biopolitical conditions, that is to say, communicative capitalism.

The structure of the complex networks of biopolitical production indicates that, *contra* Hardt and Negri, a vanguard party is not anachronistic at all. It is instead a form that corresponds to the dynamics of networked communication. This structure indicates an additional problem with Hardt and Negri’s rejection of the vanguard party. They characterise Lenin’s party as involving an organisational process that comes from ‘above’ the movements of the multitude. Historically, this insinuation is clearly false. The Bolsheviks were but one group among multiple parties, tendencies and factions acting in the tumultuous context of the Russian Revolution. They were active within the movements of the oppressed workers and peasants. The movements themselves, through victories and defeats, short and long-term alliances, new forms of cooperation, and advances in political organisation gave rise to the party, even as the party furthered the movements.

For Hardt and Negri, the goal of revolution is ‘the generation of new forms of social life’ (Hardt and Negri 2009, 354). They describe revolutionary struggle as a process of liberation that establishes a common. Such a process, they argue, consolidates insurrection as it institutionalises new collective habits and practices. Institutions are then sites for the management

of encounters, extension of social rupture, and transformation of those who compose them.

The resemblance between these institutions and the vanguard party is striking. The party involves a common name, language, and set of tactics. It has practices that establish ways of being together. Its purpose is to occupy and extend the gap within society that class struggle denotes. As Georg Lukács insists, Lenin's concept of party organisation prioritises flexibility and consistency: the party has and must have a capacity for self-transformation. What Hardt and Negri describe as the extension of insurrection in an institutional process is another way of theorising the party.

Hardt and Negri outline instead a platform of demands without a carrier, without a body to fight for them. Their model of institutions suggests that a party or parties could be such a carrier, but rather than present their platform as a party platform, Hardt and Negri present it as a series of demands to be made to existing governments and institutions of global governance (but who makes these demands?). The demands are for the provision of the basic means of life, global citizenship, and access to the commons. Hardt and Negri acknowledge that 'today's ruling powers unfortunately have no intention of granting even these basic demands' (Hardt and Negri 2009, 382). And Hardt and Negri's response is laughter, 'a laugh of creation and joy, anchored solidly in the present' (Hardt and Negri 2009, 383). No wonder they don't present their demands as the platform of a party. The demands are not to be fought for. They mark potentials already present in the biopolitical production of the common, limits to capitalist control.

Hardt and Negri imply that the party form is outmoded. I've argued that not only do contemporary networks produce power law distributions of few and many, but that emergent hierarchies – particularly when understood in terms of the vanguards and practices that already emerge out of political movement – point to the ways that party organisations emerge. Current examples of this tendency include the adoption of common tactics, names and symbols that bring together previously separate, disparate, and even competing struggles. When local and issue politics are connected via a common name, successes in one area advance the struggle as a whole. Separate actions become themselves plus all the others. They instil enthusiasm and inspire imitation.

Many of us are convinced that capitalist crises have reached a decisive point. We know that the system is fragile, that it produces its own grave-diggers, and that it is held in place by a repressive international state structure. Yet we act as if we did not know this. The party provides a form that can let us believe what we know. As we learn from Lenin, revolutionary political consciousness is the collective perspective organised in the party, oriented by its theory and far-reaching historical tasks. Without the party the people can be hard to see. Their acts become co-opted and displaced, channelled and packaged so as to buttress the system they oppose. In communicative capitalism, multiple resistances blur into a menu of opinions and choices, options disjoined from truth. The legacy

of peoples' struggle and their crowd event are conveyed by university, culture, and momentary organisations, subjected to the demands of capitalism and deactivated as living resource. The power of systems re-emerges as the locus of the power that matters – communication, circulation, accumulation. If we want to defeat these systems, we can't repeat or reinforce them. We have to seize them. And that requires political organisation.

To return, then, to the thematics of survivor and system: these tendencies in contemporary theory occlude the space of the subject, preventing us from acknowledging contradictions in communicative capitalism – but the long tail is a crowd, and the crowd can be organised, concentrated, politicised. Further, some emergent hierarchies – hashtags, common images, common political forms like occupations and even parties – become important means of contestation, of political struggle. Beyond critique is collectivity.

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