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Chapter 5

The conditions of the common: a Stieglerian critique of Hardt and Negri's thesis on cognitive capitalism as a prefiguration of communism

Pieter Lemmens

To reclaim political agency means first of all accepting our insertion at the level of desire in the remorseless meat grinder of capitalism. (Fisher, 2009: 15)

Introduction: the comeback of communism

After three decades of neoliberal triumphalism and the collapse of the communist alternative, communism – sometimes renamed as ‘commonism’ – is back on the agenda of leftist political thought. Since the sold-out Birkbeck conference on communism in London, in 2009, organised by Slavoj Žižek and Costas Douzinas, the idea of communism has seemed to be in the air again, slowly (re)gaining serious attention, and not only within radical academia, but also outside, among a growing population that sees the neoliberal capitalist system as definitively ruined, bankrupt, devoid of all future prospects other than iniquitous austerity, towering debt and further devastation of the social fabric and ecosystems. Especially since the financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent series of mass protests and uprisings in Europe and the Americas, the call for more radical alternatives to capitalism has returned. In the introduction to the volume of the collected contributions

to the Birkbeck conference, Douzinas and Žižek applauded this renewed interest in radical ideas and politics, arguing that it should be answered philosophically as well as politically by a reanimation of the communist idea, as best suited to revitalise leftist political thought as well as action in our time (Douzinas & Žižek, 2010: viii).¹

Alain Badiou, one of the key speakers of the conference and provider of its title and principal motive, most emphatically argued for the rehabilitation of the communist idea as the guiding principle for the emancipatory struggles currently underway (Badiou, 2010: 236). For Badiou, only communism, whose generic characteristics were laid out canonically in Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* and whose principal telos consists in the collective emancipation of mankind conceived as the proper destiny of the human species, provides a genuine alternative to the selfish and animalistic war of all against all to which the inherent logic of capitalism ultimately reduces the human endeavour (Badiou, 2008: 100). Bruno Bosteels, a disciple of Badiou who wrote a book proclaiming 'the actuality of communism' (Bosteels, 2011), and Jodi Dean, who is deeply influenced by Žižek, also committed themselves to the communist cause, claiming that communism is our 'future horizon'.²

Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, a post-Marxist thinker associated with the autonomist tradition, also argued that communism is back on the stage of history, initially due to the new commons-based practices of production made possible by the digital networks but more recently also because of the collapse of the unsustainable growth-and-debt economy of the last decades (Berardi, 2009c). 'Communism is coming back', he claims, because of the increasing commonality of knowledge, the growing irrelevance

of private property and the mandatory commonisation of needs in today's conjuncture (Berardi, 2011: 151). The late André Gorz perceived in the Free Software and Open Source practices thriving on the Internet the emergence of a new communist model of production, describing these practices as a kind of 'protocommunism' that has the potential to overcome the capitalist system altogether and create an alternative society based on cooperation, autonomy and sharing instead of competition, exploitation and profit (Gorz, 2009: 14–15, 21).³ As Jason Smith wrote in his preface to Berardi's book *The Soul at Work*: 'We're starting to talk again about communism these days. We don't know yet what it is, but it's what we *want*' (Berardi, 2009a: 16). Even a postmodern author like Gianni Vattimo, proponent of so-called 'weak thought', argued for a return to communism (Vattimo & Zabala, 2011; Zabala, 2012), along with many other authors who make the case for a reconsideration of the communist project in the twilight of a crippled and crumbling capitalist system.

Hardt and Negri and the coming of communism

While it may be the case that Badiou and Žižek were the prime theoretical instigators of the revival of the communist idea, a 'coming of communism' was already explicitly theorised and passionately affirmed by the post-Marxist duo Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. Their communism is explicitly related to the notion of the common. In their collaborative works from the mid-1990s, this notion of the common and the possibility of a communist 'revolution' born from the new conditions of labour in the context of today's cognitive capitalism has gained ever more prominence.⁴ Although the word 'communism' appears only sporadically in *Empire*, the book that was enthusiastically

hailed by Žižek at the time as the *Communist Manifesto* for the twenty-first century, it is increasingly present in the later books of the *Empire* trilogy, *Multitude* and *Commonwealth*. And although references to the common(s) are still scarce in *Empire*, in *Multitude* and a fortiori in *Commonwealth* this notion is ubiquitously present. Thus did it become one of the central concepts of Hardt and Negri's work, together with empire, multitude, immaterial (or biopolitical) labour and production, the general intellect, constitutive power and absolute (or radical) democracy.

In this chapter, I will focus on this recent, post-Marxist strand of discourse on communism, which is explicitly politico-economic in nature, revolves around the notion of the common and perceives today's cognitive capitalism as a prelude to a communist future. I want to critically assess Hardt and Negri's thesis of cognitive capitalism as a prefiguration of communism, their perception of cognitive capitalism as creating a 'communism of capital' that breeds in its own bosom the possibility of a 'communism of the multitude', or, in other words, which creates the possibility of a liberation of the common from capital. Hardt and Negri claim that today's immaterial or cognitive capitalism is generating the socioeconomic and technological conditions that will eventually allow the overthrow of the capitalist order and enable the transition towards another society, one that they frequently identify as communist, a society in which capitalist exploitation and domination will be abolished and in which the global multitude of immaterial workers – today's proletariat – will commonly manage production and rule itself autonomously in a radically democratic way. Cognitive capitalism, so to speak, provides the conditions – or prerequisites – for a transition towards and into communism.

According to Hardt and Negri, but to (post-)autonomist and (post-)operaist thinkers in general – including Virno, Vercellone, Lazzarato, Marazzi and Fumagalli, as well as the already mentioned Gorz, who has been much influenced by the (post-)autonomist tradition – it is the becoming-common of labour in today's cognitive capitalism – as characterised by a growing centrality of immaterial (or biopolitical) labour – that provides the condition for the global multitude to break itself free from its domination by capital and to found another, presumably communist, society. Immaterial labour tends towards communism because cooperation is completely immanent in it: 'In the expression of its own creative energies, immaterial labor ... seems to provide the potential for a kind of spontaneous and elementary communism' (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 294).

The increasing centrality of the common, as the ultimate foundation of economic production, opens the way to communism for the multitude. As Negri (2008c: 63) suggests, it is the common at the heart of the multitude that contains the seed of the freedom and autonomy characteristic of a communist society, because it is this foundation in the common that makes the multitude both subjectively efficient and objectively antagonistic to capital. Similarly, Hardt writes in his contribution to *The Idea of Communism* that it is through the increasing centrality of the common in capitalist production – in the production of ideas, affects, social relations and forms of life – that the conditions and the weapons for a communist project are emerging (Douzinas & Žižek, 2010: 143). Because of this explicit reference to the common and the commons, Hardt and Negri's version of communism could be designated as 'commonism', a term perceptively coined by the Canadian autonomist Marxist Nick Dyer-Witheford (2007: 28–9).⁵

Doubtless, today's increasingly 'immaterial' nature of labour and production does, in principle, appear to offer plenty of opportunities for the multitude to wrest itself free from capitalist domination and to assert autonomy. However, one must have serious doubts about the (post-)autonomist assertion that immaterial labour is becoming ever more autonomous vis-à-vis capital in today's conjuncture; I am particularly critical of the seemingly boundless optimism of Hardt and Negri as regards the inherently emancipatory and liberatory potentials of the multitude. In this chapter, I want to question this optimism by critically reflecting on what they designate as the contemporary 'conditions and weapons for a communist project' (Hardt, 2010: 144). Is it really true that the current politico-economic conditions of production are already effecting a transition from capitalism to communism? What is the nature of these conditions according to Hardt and Negri? Are these conditions as described 'real', do they pertain? Is the account of these conditions adequate, and if so, is it also sufficient? And what are the 'weapons' that can be used to fight *against* capitalist domination and *for* the preservation and expansion of the common, with the goal of creating a communist society? What is the nature of these weapons? And how must the 'battlefield' of the 'battle for the common(s)' be conceived?

In the following, I first present Hardt and Negri's arguments for their thesis of today's cognitive capitalism as a prefiguration of communism. Then I criticise these arguments from a perspective derived from the work of the French philosopher Bernard Stiegler and the Italian post-autonomist thinker Franco Berardi. Basically, I show that Hardt and Negri's diagnosis of cognitive capitalism as a proto-communist configuration is far too rosy and

fails to adequately address the technological and libidinal conditions for the creation of a communist society. Primarily, it fails to acknowledge – indeed, explicitly denies – the deeply proletarianising nature of cognitive capitalism by remaining blind to what is termed the organological and pharmacological impact of digital networks on cognitive labour. Finally, I argue that a communism of the multitude presupposes a struggle against the processes of proletarianisation that are the prime characteristic of cognitive capitalism's subsumption of the mind under capital.

Cognitive capitalism as a prefiguration of communism?

Hardt and Negri on the conditions for communism

To support their thesis of an emergent (or even inherent) communism, Hardt and Negri essentially give three, closely related arguments, the first two of which I will focus on here. The first argument is that, due to the hegemony of immaterial labour and biopolitical production – which is fundamentally based on the common and continually expands it – the multitude becomes ever more autonomous and independent from capital.⁶ This argument of the growing autonomy of labour under cognitive capitalism is one of the central mantras running throughout the *Empire* trilogy, especially in *Commonwealth*. Basically, it rests on two premises: (1) the growth of the role of the common in immaterial production as both foundation and product, and (2) the growing excess of the productivity of labour power with respect to the bounds set in its employment by capital (Hardt & Negri, 2009: 151). These two developments increasingly empower the multitude:

The excedence of production (which has immaterial labor as its technical base and the self-forming of the multitudes as its

political base) cannot be enclosed within the form and processes of control which the organisational methods of modern capitalism [have] constructed, in relation to massified or Fordist labor. (Negri, 2008b: 76)

What is typical of immaterial labour is that it is intrinsically social and cooperative, that it ‘immediately involves social interaction and cooperation’ (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 294). Unlike material labour, immaterial labour organises itself and does not have to be organised from the outside, by external means, as cooperation and communication are immanent to its very activity. The more autonomous immaterial labour is, the more freedom it is allowed and the more productive it becomes. Capital’s techniques and strategies of control are in complete contradiction with the necessarily autonomous character of immaterial labour, so capital has to remain increasingly external to the process of production.

Immaterial labour does not need the intervention of capital; it is no longer dependent on the capitalist to be able to produce, as it was in the age of industrial capitalism, when workers could only be productive in the factory environment, where the necessary means of production were uniquely present. In the industrial capitalism of the time Marx was writing, it was the capitalist who provided the workers with the means and the site of production. The progressive deskilling or proletarianisation of workers during the process of industrialisation, in particular since the introduction of the assembly line in the twentieth century, reduced the possibilities for the self-management of labour. Today’s post-industrial workers, however, are endowed with all the skills and knowledge necessary for collectively managing production themselves (Hardt & Negri, 2004: 251–2).

Due to its foundation in the common, immaterial labour produces the means of production – that is to say, the means of interaction, communication, collaboration and cooperation – directly and spontaneously. Ideas, knowledges, codes, information, images, languages, affects and suchlike are commonly produced *and* constantly expand the common as the foundation of production. In all forms of immaterial production, ‘the creation of ‘cooperation has become *internal* to labour and thus *external* to capital’ (Hardt & Negri, 2004: 47). As stated in *Commonwealth*: ‘People don’t need bosses at work. They need an expanding web of others with whom to communicate and collaborate; the boss is increasingly merely an obstacle to getting work done’ (Hardt & Negri, 2009: 353).

The self-organising and auto-cooperative character of immaterial labour implies that the control and exploitation by capital frustrate its productivity and creativity, forcing capital to allow it increasing autonomy and to position itself at an ever greater distance from the production process:

Labour tends to be increasingly autonomous from capitalist command, and thus capital’s mechanisms of expropriation and control become fetters that obstruct productivity. Biopolitical production is an orchestra keeping the beat without a conductor, and it would fall silent if anyone were to step onto the podium. (Hardt & Negri, 2009: 173)

Capital is compelled to remain increasingly external to the process of production and its functional role is constantly diminishing. Whereas material, industrial labour functioned heteronomously as an organ contained within the body of

capital, immaterial labour is becoming increasingly free and autonomous and capital ever more dependent and parasitic, forced to block the movements of knowledge, communication and cooperation (e.g. through intellectual property rights) in order to survive (Hardt & Negri, 2009: 142). Whereas the multitude 'is the real productive force of our social world', therefore, 'Empire is a mere apparatus of capture that lives off the vitality of the multitude – as Marx would say, a vampire regime of accumulated dead labor that survives only by sucking off the blood of the living'; it is nothing but 'an empty machine, a spectacular machine, a parasitical machine' (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 62). Capital thereby loses its historically progressive force and can continue to exist only through direct expropriation of externally produced value – that is, through expropriation of the common (Negri, 2008d: 64–7).

Immaterial production is structurally 'incompatible' with the logic of capital and therefore cognitive capitalism will ultimately destroy itself through its inherent contradictions. Capitalism's traditional mechanisms of exploitation and control, both the intensive and extensive, increasingly contradict and fetter the productivity of biopolitical labour and frustrate the creation of value. Biopolitical labour in all its forms – cognitive, intellectual, affective, etc. – cannot be contained by the forms of discipline and command that were developed during the era of Fordism. Therefore, the integration of labour within the ruling structures of capital becomes increasingly difficult (Hardt & Negri, 2009: 264, 291). Capital's strategies of privatisation and control destroy the common that is at the base of biopolitical production, so biopolitical productivity is hampered every time the common is destroyed. A good example is the impediment of innovation

in agriculture and biotechnology and the blocking of creativity in cultural production due to excessive intellectual property regimes in the form of patents and copyrights (see Drahos & Braithwaite, 2002; Lessig, 2004; Aigrain, 2005; Jefferson, 2006; Boyle, 2008; Hope, 2008; Kloppenburg, 2010).

The disciplinary strategies of precarisation of work and flexibilisation of the labour market are also counterproductive, depriving cognitive and affective workers of precisely the time and freedom on which the creativity and productivity of cognitive and affective labour depends (Hardt & Negri, 2009: 145–7). All attempts of capital to intervene in the production process and to appropriate the common frustrate that which it tries to capture: the productivity of the common. And the more the capitalist economy becomes a knowledge economy, the more it embarks on the path of value creation through knowledge production, the more that knowledge escapes its control and the more it produces and nourishes that which ultimately undermines its own existence: the common.

Of course, as Hardt and Negri admit, ever since Marx uncovered the logic of capital, the critique of political economy has pointed to the contradiction within capitalism of the social nature of production and the private nature of accumulation. However, in the context of today's cognitive capitalism, this contradiction is becoming ever more extreme and consequently ever more destructive for the capitalist endeavour, reaching a point of rupture: 'This is how capital creates its own gravediggers: pursuing its own interests and trying to preserve its own survival, it must foster the increasing power and autonomy of the productive multitude', Hardt and Negri (2009: 311) contend. 'And when that accumulation of power crosses a certain threshold, the

multitude will emerge with the ability to rule common wealth.' Indeed, capital today is 'facing increasingly autonomous, antagonistic, and unmanageable forms of social labor-power' which embody an inherent potential for autonomy and have the capacity to 'destroy capital and create something entirely new' (Hardt & Negri, 2009: 136, 288, 311).

The second argument developed in support of the thesis of a new communism claims that, due to the fact that the means of immaterial production increasingly reside on the side of the workers (inside the worker's brains, that is), capital is increasingly unable to control these means, which implies that the so-called 'dialectics of the instrument' (Hegel) no longer functions and, consequently, that the process of proletarianisation typical of industrial material (Fordist) production comes to an end. Although Hardt and Negri are very much aware (and this is especially apparent in *Empire*) of the fact that the emergence of digital networks not only opens up new spaces of liberation and autonomy for the multitude, but has also inaugurated new forms of domination and exclusion, they insist on the inherently progressive and emancipatory character of these new technologies.

Indeed, it almost seems, as Danilo Zolo suggests in an interview with Negri, that Hardt and Negri 'see the technological and digital revolution as the vector of an imminent communist revolution' (Negri, 2008a: 28). What is crucial here is their contention that cognitive capitalism entails 'the *reappropriation of the instrument of labour*' by the workers, and that, moreover, cooperation becomes the crucial factor of valorisation and knowledge and information the most important forces of production. This, Negri claims, is undeniably a positive development with respect

to the possibility of a transformation towards commonism (Negri, 2008a: 29). What is meant by the reappropriation of the instrument of labour by Negri is the fact that in cognitive capitalism, the means or capacities of production are (again) on the side of the workers themselves, since they reside in their brains. In cognitive capitalism the principal means of production are human brains.

As already mentioned, the fact that the prime forces or instruments of production have become attributes of living labour in the post-Fordist age implies, for Negri, that we witness a withering away of the 'dialectics of the instrument' – that is, the dialectics between capital and labour *through* the instrument (Negri, 2008a: 65). This is the case because cognitive capitalism is no longer capable of articulating command over the instrument in order to control labourers. In the post-Fordist situation, after all, it is the labourers themselves that are the bearers of the immaterial capacities of production. The instrument of labour (the brain, the human nervous system) is now reappropriated by labour:

Here one can speak of a reappropriation of the tools of labour by the worker. ... Capitalism, according to Hegel, was based essentially on the dialectics of the tool, in other words on the fact that the capitalist offered the worker the instrument of labour and life in common was constructed around this instrumentation. Well, today this Hegelian instrumentation is removed. (Negri, 2008b: 175–6)

Given this reappropriation of the means of production by living labour, Negri argues, capital tendentially loses its ability to discipline individuals and collectives *within* the process

of production and reproduction. This means that the process of proletarianisation, which operates via the instruments of production, becomes dysfunctional.

In material labour, the instruments of labour are preconstituted by the bosses and only used by the workers. Labour has to adapt itself to capital's machinery of production, to its logic and to its rhythm: classical material labour relies on the production instruments offered by capital. In this situation, as Marx has shown, labour becomes 'variable capital'; fixed capital (machinery) is imposed upon variable capital and the worker exists *within* capital, he is subsumed under and subject to capital, becoming the object of proletarianisation. However, in immaterial, cognitive labour – the labour of the general intellect – intellectual labour power liberates itself from this relation of subjection, which means that 'the productive subject – the multitude – appropriates for itself those labour instruments that capital preconstituted before' (Negri, 2008d: 167–8). Variable capital now represents itself as fixed capital – or, in other words, labour power has internalised elements of fixed capital, which means that it is henceforth able to circulate and be productive outside of its relationship with constant capital, thereby evading the mechanism of proletarianisation (Negri, 2008c: 66). So it is that, as general intellect, the productive singularities of the multitude contain the potential to break free from the capitalist relation. It has gained the capacity to produce outside of its relation with capital. Its cognitive and social capital can exist independent from the apparatuses of constant capital (Negri, 2008d: 168).

On a similar note, Paolo Virno also argues that the centrality of the general intellect in immaterial production means

that the process of proletarianisation is coming to an end.⁷ In *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Virno (2004: 109) argues that the traditional distinction made by Marxists between simple (i.e. unskilled) labour and complex (i.e. skilled) labour no longer applies to immaterial labour. Based as it is in the intellectuality of the masses, he contends, immaterial labour is complex, skilled labour throughout. This complexity follows for him from the fact that immaterial labour needs the constant mobilisation of linguistic-cognitive capacities, and although these capacities are generically human, their cooperative quality cannot be reduced to simple labour.

Virno argues that in our day, the general intellect – which Marx conceived of as exclusively an attribute of dead labour or fixed capital (as co-extensive with the ‘system of machinery’) – has become an attribute of living labour. Today, the relation between knowledge and production is not exhausted by the use of machinery in the productive process (as objectified or materialised knowledge). On the contrary, it is primarily articulated today by linguistic cooperation between workers acting in concert. Post-Fordist workers employ an infinite variety of ideas, procedures, schemes and more on the job that can never be totally materialised, computerised or informationalised into machinery (and thereby turned into fixed capital). Even less objectifiable are the informal knowledges, imaginations, ethical propensities, mind sets, language games and creative capacities that are indispensable to immaterial production. These can only be executed on the spot by a plurality of living subjects. The general intellect of immaterial labour functions as a productive force, according to Virno, ‘without having to adopt the form of a mechanical body or of an electronic valve’; it consists of a ‘depository of cognitive

and communicative skills *which cannot be objectified within the system of machines*' (Negri, 2008d: 106–7).

The third and last argument states that the multitude is becoming ever more political, that it has not only the capacity for autonomous production but also of political decision-making. It is ever more capable of self-rule and embodies the potential for a genuine global democracy in the sense of an absolute or radical democracy, a government by all and for all. Briefly recapitulating this argument (which will not be the main focus of the present critique), what Hardt and Negri basically argue is that the immaterial (informational, linguistic, communicational, cooperative, etc.) nature of production under cognitive capitalism implies that work is becoming intrinsically social, so it is also becoming more political; or the self-organising and auto-cooperative characteristics of immaterial or biopolitical production imply an increasing potential for political self-organisation. Typically, in biopolitical production the economic and the political tendentially coincide, since biopolitical production is the production of society itself – of social relationship and subjectivities. Also, the networked form of immaterial production provides a model and an institutional logic for a communist society (Hardt & Negri, 2004: 336, 350; 2009: 174–5).

Now, what I want to argue in the following sections is that although these three claims undeniably register deep evolutionary (and crucial) developments in the history of capitalism and the transition to post-Fordism, they nevertheless do not adequately reflect the real, actual conditions of the contemporary multitude with respect to capital, that is to say with regard to its possibilities of liberating itself from capital and instituting an autonomously governed, communist society. Basing myself

mainly on Bernard Stiegler's account of cognitive – and especially his account of today's consumerist – capitalism, but also on Franco Berardi's recent analyses of the labour conditions of the cognitariat in the context of what he calls 'semiocapitalism', I will qualify these claims and show that Hardt and Negri's analyses of the multitude fail to adequately take into account both the technological and the libidinal conditions (and particularly, their interrelatedness) of today's 'general intellect' and its potential to constitute a true, autonomous common.

A critique of Hardt and Negri's diagnosis

In what follows, I express the view that, first, instead of becoming ever more autonomous with respect to capital, as Hardt and Negri have it, the multitude finds itself ever more subjugated to the heteronomising tendencies of a global technological development largely dictated by the automatically functioning imperatives of financial capital. Second, instead of experiencing the end of proletarianisation, as Hardt and Negri as well as Virno claim, we find a dramatic intensification of the process, and not only on the terrain of production but also on that of consumption and even within the domain of theory, of science. And third, despite its engagement in immaterial work – communicating, cooperating and collaborating all the time – the multitude is *not* becoming more politically capable and assertive. On the contrary, the last few decades have seen a decline in active and especially radical engagement and an increase, rather, in political apathy.

Autonomy and heteronomisation

Far from gaining more autonomy, the multitude seems to become ever more entangled in the automatic operations –

Berardi's automatisms – of the digital networks set up by the biopower and psychopower of capital. It is increasingly fractalised and desocialised due to the fragmentation, cellularisation and precarisation of labour, including the cognitive and affective (Berardi, 2009b: 7, 33, 38).⁸ Today the digital networks are predominantly a heteronomising not an autonomising force, as not only Berardi and Stiegler but also authors as different as Nicholas Carr (2009, 2010), Jodi Dean (2010), Jaron Lanier (2010), Mark Fisher (2009) and Giorgio Agamben (2009) have pointed out. Our time is one of massive adaptation, not of increasing multitudinous autonomy.

Berardi shares the autonomist insight that whereas traditional industrial capitalism was based on the exploitation of bodies, today's post-industrial or cognitive capitalism thrives on the exploitation of the intellect or, more comprehensively, on the 'soul'. In cognitive capitalism – or *semiocapitalism*, referring to the valorisation of cognitive labour by capital (especially through informational technologies) – it is the entirety of human beings, referred to in our essence of being as 'soul', that is put to work: 'Not the body, but the soul becomes the object of techno-social domination' (Berardi, 2009a: 200). The soul is the seat of desire and it is precisely our desire, in all the ways it expresses itself (as intelligence, imagination, creativity, sociability, etc.), that is captured and controlled by capital to be submitted to economic exploitation. Capitalist valorisation today is based primarily on the 'channeling of Desire' (Berardi, 2009a: 24).

Although Hardt and Negri will probably not deny this, they never give it much attention or examine its consequences. In general, the libidinal aspects of immaterial production are not dealt with in their work, at least not explicitly. Like Stiegler,

however, whose analyses of cognitive and consumer capitalism I will discuss below, Berardi has centralised these aspects in his research; whereas Stiegler concentrates on the libidinal investment in consumption, Berardi's analyses are concerned with the investment of desire in production, that is to say, in cognitive (and to a lesser extent also affective) labour.

Cognitive capitalism involves the exploitation of the libidinal energy of what Berardi calls the *cognitariat*, those who sell their cognitive capacities to capital. When the intellect is set to work, its functions (knowing, creating, imagining, expressing, communicating, collaborating, etc.) are submitted to the goal of capitalist accumulation. The cognitariat does not work for itself but for capital, which expropriates both its cognitive activity and its products: capital expropriates the general intellect. This means that the general intellect becomes alienated and separated from the bodily and social life of the workers, making it increasingly difficult for them to seek autonomous existence outside of capitalist relations. And although cognitive work is certainly less gruelling than was traditional factory work, it also deeply impoverishes the cognitive experience of workers because the submission of cognition to economic imperatives systematically erodes its playful, imaginative and creative characteristics. In general the submission to non-cognitive principles of competition and profit maximisation devalues and degenerates the intellect (Berardi, 2009a: 86–7).

Today, technical automatisms systematically overrule psychic and social autonomy. Workers' and consumers' time and attention are controlled via the virtual networks, especially *the* network, the Net. The real process of capitalist domination today has become automated, exercised through the networks, which

have become ‘conductors’ of blindly operating techno-financial automatisms (Berardi, 2009a: 89). In today’s semiocapitalism, Berardi (2009b: 143) writes, the speed and limitless expansion of ‘cyberspace’ overwhelms ‘cybertime’ (the limited time of the psyche, of living consciousness):

Cyberspace is the virtual space of the global Internet produced by all the cognitive workers involved in semiotic production. It is the collective result of the ever increasing productivity of the ‘general intellect’ and it can – and does – expand and speed up indefinitely. Cybertime on the other hand is the mental time necessary for the processing and interpreting of the semiotic fluxes crossing through the Net. It is intrinsically related to the human psyche and to the conscious and sensitive organism supporting it. Cybertime, i.e., the time of living consciousness, is not available in unlimited quantities and its processing capacity and speed are limited by organic, emotional and cultural parameters.

Because cyberspace is expanding much faster than the human psyche’s capacity to process information, cognitive workers are increasingly subjected to an overflow of information and thus an overstimulation and over-solicitation of their consciousness and attention. This induces a constant stress on the psyche which erodes its capability for reflexive elaboration and impoverishes its affectivity. The human psyche simply cannot keep up with the avalanche of information that it is forced to process in ever greater quantities at a constantly accelerating speed. In short, ‘Cyberspace overloads cybertime’ (Berardi, 2011: 55).

Far from progressively escaping the control of capital, the general intellect is ever more completely captured in the

automated fluxes of the global system of digital network technologies, stifling its autonomous potential. It is these new conditions of immaterial labour, as Berardi (2011: 14) explains in the introduction to *After the Future*, that frustrate the process of social recomposition that is a prerequisite for the becoming-autonomous of the multitude.⁹ Labour has been too fragmented by the new technologies and precarisation strategies of capital to be able to construct a common ground, to create common cultural flows and common desires and to gain a common consciousness, despite the fact that it is ever more based in the common and despite the constant expansion of the general intellect. In the absence of social recomposition, workers lose their sense of togetherness and solidarity and cannot come to form a collective subjectivity.¹⁰ Neoliberalism, with its relentless programme of privatisation, deregulation, marketisation and universal competition, has destroyed the social fabric as such and it is this that prevents the becoming-autonomous of the multitude.

As Berardi shows convincingly in his analyses, the multitude does not show itself as autonomous at all today but, on the contrary, as increasingly captured in the blind automatisms of the digital networks employed by capital. As a consequence, there is a growing divorce between the cognitive work and social life, or between the general intellect and the social body. Whereas Hardt and Negri insist on a growing autonomy of cognitive labour from capital, Berardi observes the exact opposite: a growing control on the part of capital of the life and the 'social psyche' of the cognitariat, primarily through the reign of automatisms. As he writes in the introduction to *Precarious Rhapsody*: 'In our time of digital mutation, technical automatisms are taking control of the social psyche' (Berardi, 2009b: 7). The develop-

ment of multitudinous autonomy is severely hampered by chains of automatisms that are first of all technological (but by extension also financial and economic) in nature. Such 'automatisms' are defined by Berardi (2009b: 141) as occurrences in which a succession of two states (of language, labour, society or action) follows an automatic, inescapable logic or appears as one inevitable chain). In cognitive capitalism, the behaviour of human agents is automatically regulated via a whole architecture of such automatisms – economic, financial, political and technological.

Cognitive work is captured inside the automatisms of the digital networks. Although it is true that the multitude produces autonomously in a formal sense, its concrete activity is in fact highly coordinated and controlled *through* the network. It might be non-hierarchically organised and seemingly independent, but it actually obeys a strict command. This command no longer comes from human actors though (from bosses, managers, etc.), it resides in the automatic fluidity of the network: 'Control over the labor process is no longer guaranteed by the hierarchy of bigger and smaller bosses typical of the Taylorist factory, but it is incorporated in the flux' (Berardi, 2009a: 89). It is only an ideological fiction, he argues, that cognitive labour in the networks is independent and spontaneously self-organising, a matter of free and autonomously cooperating singularities. In reality, there is strict interdependence of subjective contributions based on the objective chain of automatisms that act both external and internal to the labour process and that completely control it.

Following this argument, cognitive capitalism has gone beyond the old mechanisms of discipline and control, with network labour directed virtually, mostly via the Net, through diffuse but

omnipresent systems of techno-linguistic automatisms. In Stieglerian parlance, we could say that this proceeds from the process of technical individuation. It is through the reign of linguistic and operative automatisms that the process of capitalist valorisation appears more and more as a completely automatic process, functioning independently from human conscious decision and withdrawing itself from political influence:

Devices of social control are incorporated in automated systems: political governance [is] thus replaced by chains of automatisms and incorporated in the productive, communicative, administrative and technical machinery. The living collectivity has no decisional role anymore, on fundamental issues like production and the social distribution of wealth, since the access to the social game requires the adoption of automated operational systems. At a linguistic level, chains of interpretation are automated in such a way that it's no longer possible to read enunciations that don't respect the preventively inscribed code, that is to say the code of capital accumulation. (Berardi, 2009a: 162–3)

Control through techno-linguistic automatisms is invisible and largely irreversible and therefore cannot be ruled by the multitude. Because these automatisms structure the way the networks function, the multitudinous psychosphere finds its potential autonomy overruled by the heteronomy of the 'technosphere' (Berardi, 2009a: 200).

Proletarianisation

Stiegler explains how proletarianisation – understood as the loss of knowledge and know-how and the dissociation between

subjects and the technical milieu in which they operate and on which they depend – extends over the whole of society, becoming characteristic of social life in general, sterilising all social bonds (Stiegler, 2010a: 35).¹¹ And the multitude, rather than becoming ever more creative and intelligent, is confronted with the destruction of its cognitive and affective capacities and affected by a massive process of ‘unlearning’ (*désapprentissage*) and deskilling, resulting in stupidity (*bêtise*), disaffection and carelessness (Stiegler, 2010b: 56, 45). In short, cognitive capitalism simply destroys cognition and knowledge (Stiegler & Ars Industrialis, 2006: 123). Contrary to Hardt and Negri and also Virno, cognitive capitalism has not only not liberated itself from constant capital, it is argued, but the place of producers is constantly shrinking and the role of labour (of variable capital) diminishing. The process of automation Stiegler shows as having only widened the field of proletarianisation, which is applied now to theoretical knowledge – the knowledge of scientists, engineers, designers and ‘creatives’.

Cognitive capitalism essentially consists in the proletarianisation of the nervous system, the brains of workers, since today’s income-earners from the effort of the nervous system (the knowledge workers) are just as deprived of their knowledge and know-how as were the nineteenth and early twentieth century wage-labourers of the muscular system: each were/are proletarians. Indeed, cognitive capitalism leads to the proletarianisation of the cognitive *as such*. According to Stiegler, the cognitive labour of today is a labour devoid of any knowledge. Concretely, this means that the cognitive has been reduced to pure calculability; *logos* has become *ratio*, in the sense of pure calculation. Truly skilled professions hardly exist anymore, and most of the

so-called 'creative work' today only consists in entropic adaptation to the market wherein what it creates is only market value. It is not work that opens (*ouvrier*, *œuvre*) new worlds (Stiegler, 2010a: 45–6).

In their praise for the increasing intelligence of the multitude – 'the subaltern classes are already classes with a fixed capital richer than that of the bosses, a spiritual patrimony more important than what the bosses boast, and an absolute weapon: the knowledge essential for the reproduction of the world' (Negri, 2008d: 178) – Hardt and Negri downplay what Berardi refers to as the exhaustion of the libidinal energy of the cognitariat and Stiegler as the destruction of the libido of the *consumer*. In their analyses of the (power of the) multitude, Hardt and Negri, like all other (post-)operaist thinkers, almost totally neglect the perspective of consumption: what the cognitariat desires to have and to use. Crucially, as Stiegler emphasises, the processes of subjectivation within and among the multitude today are not only, and not even primarily, played out on the terrain of production but also, and more decisively, on that of consumption.

Through the means of marketing and public relations, it is consumption rather than the machines of production that is the principal target of control in today's capitalism; thus, it is not biopower that is decisive today but psychopower: 'It is no longer a question ... of controlling the population as a producing machine, but rather as a consuming machine, and the danger is no longer biopower but psychopower as both control and production – production of motivations' (Stiegler, 2009: 131–2). Marketing has become the instrument par excellence of social control today; it is the principal instrument of control of our 'societies of control' (Stiegler, 2009: 181, referring

to Deleuze). And thus it is the consumer who has become the prime object of proletarianisation in today's service economies, affecting all of us. As Stiegler writes in the first volume of his *Disbelief and Discredit* (*Mécréance et Discrédit*) trilogy, *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies*: 'The consumer is the new proletarian figure, and the proletariat, far from disappearing, is a condition from which it has become nearly impossible to escape' (Stiegler, 2011: 35).

Taking into account these processes of consumerist (de) subjectivation gives a wholly different, less promising, picture of the prospects of a liberation of the common from capital. The capitalist creation of consumer need – and it very much is a felt need, identified with at the core of being – extends throughout the lifespan, manipulated and managed, for example, through TV ads aimed at toddlers through to sophisticated, systematic presentations of life and health insurance to eradicate danger and minimise the risk of life itself. It does not apply merely to the material and our physicalities, but also to the emotions – capitalising all relationships in present-giving, including our relationships with our environments in home building, wherein our place of residence becomes an expression of self-respect and self-love – and to the intellect and the aesthetic.

Thus the urbane become the consumer of culture, expressed in contemporary colloquialisms such as 'must-dos' (must-see films, must-read books, etc.); in the spheres of education productive of the property of nationally and internationally determined required attainments and certifications; in academia, as with the targets of points scored for publishing; and in the domain of theory, of science, with the technical milieu (below). Ultimately, at the level of the individual, we

narrate our lives to ourselves as product, literally in the satisfaction of filled-in *curricula vitae* and metaphorically through normative life-event milestones that reflect how we judge ourselves to ourselves. And thus, at the level of society, do we fill the ranks of the new proletariat (see below).

Political engagement

Despite its engagement in immaterial work, goes the third counter-argument, the multitude is not becoming more politically capable and assertive. On the contrary, the last few decades have seen increased political apathy and a decline in political interest and participation. The multitude has not, it must be stressed, established any kind of a common ground and developed a common consciousness that might form the basis of its political subjectivation or its 'becoming for-itself'. The multitude is incredibly active and productive, frenetically working to the point of total exhaustion, but it is doing this compulsively, automatically, seemingly blindly, without a shared consciousness of its collective activity beyond that of competition, which merely fuels more of the same. Today's cognitive networkers are extremely productive but they are not conscious actors of their own doing and do not seem able to unite their feelings and thoughts into a common space of consciousness. Effective conscious collective action, therefore, is almost completely lacking today.

The mostly summers of protest on the city streets seen in many capitals may appear to have offered a rebuttal to the Stieglerian counter-thesis and even represent something of a turning point in this regard. Unfortunately for the vision of Hardt and Negri and their ilk, however, this (occasional)

phenomenon is rather easily contained and managed, in the end heuristically functioning as a social safety valve, a political catharsis rather than expression. In fact, it is argued, the multitude in general suffers from a loss of the symbolic and linguistic resources needed for genuine political action and has fallen into the grip of a regressive political populism primarily caused by the constant, systemic manipulation of its libidinal energies by the mass media of the programming and culture industries, by what Stiegler (2006a: 14) refers to as an 'industrial populism'. Democracy is overruled by telecracy and capital controls collective and individual desires.

Although Hardt and Negri frequently admit that the digital networks that they usually praise for their autonomising and emancipatory potentials are also ideal instruments for new forms of control and exploitation of labour (they sometimes speak of empire's 'network power' in terms of a 'virtual panopticon'), they nevertheless, I would argue, gravely underestimate the overwhelmingly heteronomising and disempowering effects of these networks under cognitive capitalism, effects which render the prospects of 'a becoming-prince of the multitude' rather bleak to say the least. The networks may indeed provide the primary condition for the formation of the common and the creation of institutions of the common, but they can also act as a barrier to it, and they do obstruct the common and prevent its (self-)organisation and institutionalisation.

The libidinal economy of the multitude and the technological conditions for communism

Even more than Hardt and Negri, I would assume, with Stiegler, that the role of networks (and of technology in general) is and

will be crucial to the coming constitution of the common and the emancipation/autonomisation of the general intellect. The global network of digital information and communication technologies indeed represents a crucial condition for the becoming-autonomous of the multitude and for the political project of instituting the common and creating a 'communist' society in the sense of an absolute democracy 'by all and for all'. In order to really understand this condition, however – which is fundamentally and irrevocably ambivalent (below) – it is necessary to realise that the digital networks not only provide the technological infrastructure of the economy of production and consumption but are also the technological supports for the 'economy of desire' that underlies the economy of production and consumption: that is, they are crucial also for the constitution of what Stiegler calls, after Freud and Lyotard, the 'libidinal economy' – sometimes also the 'spiritual economy' or 'symbolic economy' – of which the political is, of course, a central aspect (Stiegler, 2010b: 30).

What is insufficiently taken into account by Hardt and Negri is the fact that the constitution of the desires of the multitude – of the individual and collective libido – is crucially conditioned by the 'mnemotechnical milieu', as Stiegler describes it, the system of mnemotechnologies or 'technologies of the mind' (writing, printing, radio, television, computer, Internet, etc.) that form the material support structure for every 'life of the mind'. Hardt and Negri underestimate the extent to which the systemic annexation of this milieu by cognitive and consumer capitalism is exhausting and ultimately destroying the libidinal economy of contemporary society, thereby annihilating what Aristotle called '*philia*', the 'social energy' that is the 'glue' of every form of social

and political life, the 'binding agent' of every form of community (Stiegler, 2006a: 15).

More generally, I would argue that Hardt and Negri's account of the nature and conditions of the multitude, in particular the existing conditions for potential collective struggle, tends to neglect precisely that condition which – as I would like to suggest with Stiegler and Berardi – is the most important, most fundamental with regard to the transformation towards another possible communist society: that of desire, that is to say of individual and collective desire. More precisely, what Hardt and Negri fail to consider or at least insufficiently address, I believe, is the libidinal economy underlying the knowledge economy of immaterial production, and, more specifically, the brutalising and regressive effects of the latter on the former under capitalist conditions.

As Stiegler (2006a: 63) makes clear, capitalism is first of all a libidinal economy and it is the libidinal energy of people – of producers, consumers, entrepreneurs and investors – that constitutes the driving force behind the capitalist dynamic, its very motor. This libidinal energy, according to both Stiegler's and Berardi's diagnosis, has suffered from a process of exhaustion during the last decades due to its continuous mobilisation and exploitation through both managerial and marketing strategies and techniques that seek to enhance workers' performativity and promote and increase consumption. In order to capture the libidinal energy of producers and consumers in the course of the twentieth century, capitalism has taken hold of the so-called mnemotechnological milieu on which society and culture ultimately rest (and which forms the support of all symbolic milieus), transforming it into the global information and

communication network that we all know and that almost exclusively serves the goals of capitalist accumulation.

It is through the systemic annexation of the mnemotechnical milieu that capital manages to control the desire of the multitude, as both Stiegler and Berardi show. What these authors also both emphasise is that desire is not a natural given, but something that is constructed, the result of practices of cultivation. Referring to Baudrillard, Berardi (2009a: 118) in particular emphasises that desire is not an inherently positive force, as Hardt and Negri seem to assume under the influence of Foucault and Deleuze/Guattari, but a *field*. More precisely it is a battlefield, one on which many conflicting forces meet animated principally by *techné*, as Stiegler (2010b) has theorised extensively. According to Stiegler (2006b: 13), and this is one of his crucial insights, the formation as well as destruction of desire – as a result of processes of sublimation and desublimation – is technologically conditioned through and through. That is to say, a libidinal economy is crucially dependent on a mnemotechnical milieu, a technical ‘milieu of the mind’. This means that intelligence, creativity, sociality and the imagination – the ‘faculties’ constituting the general intellect – depend on a certain state of the technical milieu (Stiegler, 2006a: 34). As the highest forms of sublimated desire, these faculties are all fruits of a libidinal economy – and they deteriorate under the condition of a desublimatory libidinal economy, or better ‘dis-economy’, which is characteristic of contemporary cognitive and consumer capitalism as it destroys all objects of desire, Stiegler argues. Today’s cognitive and consumer capitalism has turned the libidinal economy into an economy based on drives, of both consumers and speculators (Stiegler, 2010a: 84).

For Stiegler, the individual and collective libidinal energy constitutive of something like a general intellect is formed within processes of psychic and collective individuation or, more precisely, in processes of co-individuation between individual psyches and social groups. These processes of co-individuation, he shows, can only take place within a shared technical milieu that co-evolves with society: psychosocial co-individuation proceeds in tandem with a process of technical individuation on which it intrinsically depends. In other words, the psychic organs can only socialise (co-individuate with the process of individuation of the collective) by passing through the technical organs, by co-individuating with the individuation of the technical system. That is to say, the technical 'organs' that make up the mnemotechnical milieu play a fundamental, decisive role in the articulation of psychic organs and social organisations.

Intelligence cannot be understood as a purely individual phenomenon, as Hardt and Negri rightly emphasise. It is socially constituted. Stiegler, however, emphasises that intelligence is also dependent on the existence of a technical system that *thoroughly* conditions it. In fact, intelligence can only be understood in terms of a process of co-individuation in which three different organ systems permanently interact: psychic organs, social organisations and technical organs. To view intelligence in this way is to view it as an organological phenomenon, in Stiegler's terms. What organology studies is the logical, specifically transductive – that is, co-constituting or co-determining – relationship between these three organ systems and in particular the flows of libidinal energy (constitutive of sociality, intelligence, creativity, knowledge, etc.) that cross between these systems, that is, in the circuits of *transindividuation* constituted by these systems.

The organology and pharmacology of the general intellect and the common

What I want to suggest here is that we consider the general intellect and the ‘mass intellectuality’ of which Hardt and Negri and the other (post-)autonomists speak, from an organological perspective – and, by extension, that we consider the emergence of the multitude and the common and the prospects of a communist society also from an organological perspective. What is most significant about Stiegler’s organological view of intelligence is that it conceives of the technical organs – in particular the mnemotechnologies – in terms of *pharmaka*, meaning that they are intrinsically ambivalent with respect to their conditioning effects on the mind.¹² They can, for instance, be both positive and negative, creative-productive or destructive of social bonds; they can act as instruments of discipline and control, but can also function as tools of self-constitution, self-valorisation, autonomy, emancipation and the elevation of intelligence. According to Stiegler’s analyses, today’s *pharmaka* function primarily as technologies of labour and consumer control. They are the central factors in the generalisation of proletarianisation and heteronomisation of the multitude. Under cognitive and consumer capitalism, these *pharmaka* have become totally poisonous, thereby liquidating every libidinal economy.

However, the new digital *pharmaka* also offer the possibility of fighting against these processes of proletarianisation and of initiating a process of de-proletarianisation; indeed, they carry the promise of a ‘pharmacological turn’. The question is whether and how such a turn might become one towards communism. Following the line of argument expressed here, a liberation of the common from capital and a consequent turn to communism at

the very least supposes (and therefore must first of all be thought of) as a process of de-proletarianisation of the multitude. To understand this, it is necessary to approach the problematic of the common and the general intellect from an organological and pharmacological perspective.

A liberation of the common from capital presupposes the constitution of a collective, 'commonist' desire – or at least local circuits of commonist desire – and with this, the initiation of commonist processes of psychosocial individuation or subjectivation counter to the neoliberal processes of disindividuation predominant today. The 'struggle for the common' has to be waged first of all on the plane of desire, the terrain of libidinal economy, and the principal arena of struggle is the global technical system at the basis of this libidinal economy. The liberation of the common from capital and the realisation of autonomy by the multitude supposes first of all the liberation of multitudinous desire from its desublimated and heteronomised state under today's cognitive and consumer capitalism.

A communist society will never materialise when even the basic condition for the manifestation of a society, a common desire for a common future, cannot be realised. As Berardi (2009a: 139) rightly emphasises, politics is first of all a question of the social investment of desire and thus the formation of a political will formed on the basis of flows of the collective desire. Such flows are constructed, in Stiegler's terminology, within processes of psychic and collective individuation. However, and deserving of more attention within the debates about the 'communism to come', these processes are fundamentally conditioned by a process of (mnemo)technical individuation, the individuation of a (mnemo)technical milieu. Politics, according to Stiegler,

is above all about the motivation and organisation of psychic and collective individuation processes, which, in our epoch, are produced essentially via information and communication technologies, mainly via television and now, increasingly, via the globalised system of digital networks. Currently, the milieu of information and communication technologies is colonised by the programming and culture industries of capital.

Liberating the common from capital: the need for de-proletarianisation

In order to imagine the potentiality of a ‘becoming-prince’ of the multitude, to consider the self-emancipation and liberation of the common from capital, it is necessary to think about the construction of a ‘communist desire’, to use the expression introduced by Jodi Dean, and to consider the possibility of ‘communist’ processes of individuation. To do this, it is necessary to consider the constitution of the multitude and the common – as well as the general intellect – from an organological and pharmacological perspective. A communism of the multitude first of all presupposes a struggle against the state of generalised proletarianisation – of producers and consumers, but also of scientists, engineers, artists and ‘intellectuals’ – which is typical of our current societies, notwithstanding Hardt and Negri’s assertions to the contrary. This state of generalised proletarianisation is primarily sustained and aggravated through the heteronomising effects of a mnemotechnical system that is exclusively subordinated to the logic of – increasingly short-term – profit which has social systems adapt to its ‘development’ without allowing for an alternative that would allow the invention/emergence of new modes of autonomy and practices of freedom.

As André Gorz (1982) observed in his *Farewell to the Working Class*, only a de-proletarianised ‘proletariat’ will be able to collectively appropriate and autonomously manage the production system. Or, only radically changing the system of production – both its structure and its means – will make it collectively appropriable and autonomously manageable. According to Stiegler, the historical failure of communism is principally linked to the fact that it proved unable to think – and therefore to fight against – proletarianisation as the dissociation of the workers and the technical milieu and the loss of knowledge and know-how this entailed (the bureaucratic totalitarianism of the Soviet planner-state being, in fact, a paragon of general proletarianisation); the state socialist model of Soviet communism thus ruined the libidinal economy on an unprecedented scale. Today’s market totalitarianism, however, is in the process of creating its own version of a libidinal dis-economy, one that is increasingly drive-based and that eliminates motives and motivations and thereby destroys long-term processes of psycho-collective individuation (Stiegler, 2010a: 60–61).

As Stiegler argues, however, today’s digital networks offer a pharmacological opportunity to reverse this tendency. Although still mainly functioning as capitalist technologies of control, the reticular milieu of the digital network – because of its associative, non-centralised and bidirectional characteristics (as an ‘associated technical milieu’, in the terminology of Gilbert Simondon) – can be appropriated and transformed into supports for new processes of psychic and collective individuation and thence developed as new tools of autonomy, socialisation and practices of freedom. This is what ‘ad-option’ is, according to Stiegler, as against the ‘ad-aptive’ mode of relating to technology typical of

consumerism (and proletarianised production) (Stiegler, 2010b: 46–8, 79).

The question for a twenty-first century communism is how this process of adoption can be ‘seized’ by the multitude to turn the digital networks into supports for recomposition (to use a term from the [post-]autonomist tradition) and the constitution of a common – and common(s)-oriented – consciousness and desire. How can the digital networks be transformed into instruments for processes of psychosocial individuation in the form of collective – and commons-oriented – singularisations that empower and elevate the multitude instead of enslaving and brutalising it? How can the new processes of psychosocial individuation principally enabled (but still to be invented!) by the digital *pharmaka* be made into processes of *commonisation*, into processes in which the common is protected from expropriation and exploitation by capital and instead collectively assumed and appropriated? How can these processes form the basis of practices of *care* for the common and the commons?

De-proletarianisation for Stiegler means the restoration of care – of taking care of the world and of the self and of others – and the re-emergence and re-valorisation of responsibility as the central stake of the economy to come (which he opposes to the essential carelessness of today’s ultra-capitalism) (Stiegler, 2010a: 108, 2010b: 151). A communist – or commons-oriented – process of de-proletarianisation should translate this into care for the common and the assumption of collective responsibility for the common. And although this may (also) be initiated by public authorities, as Stiegler concedes when he calls for a state-organised ‘industrial politics of the mind’, it is fundamen-

tally and overridingly important that they be initiated 'from below', by the multitude or cognitariat itself.

Given the exhausted and pathologised state of the multitude's libidinal economy, however, such a politics needs first of all to take the form of a profound therapeutic intervention, that is to say, a sociotherapy (Stiegler, 2010b: 80). This would aim at shifting libidinal energies away from the obsessive and egoistical competitive drive for status, possession and addictive consumption – the key attributes of the neoliberal subject – and refocusing it on more collectively and autonomously lived modes of existence, oriented towards sharing, living in common and taking care of the common. The ultimate challenge here for the general intellect is to conquer the overwhelming psychopower of the mass media of the culture industry.

For Stiegler, the 'therapeutics' here – or, the weapons for such a politics – are given precisely by the new digital *pharmaka*, provided that they be transformed into supports for a new sublimatory libidinal economy, new 'spiritual' and cultural practices and new emancipatory collective projects. Stiegler argues that current initiatives in commonisation, like free software, commons-based peer-to-peer production and creative commons – which have all originated 'from below', from the practices of production itself – represent pioneering cases of such a therapeutic – and as such de-proletarianising – economic practice. Although these initiatives may be described in terms of 'multitudinous entrepreneurship' (as Hardt and Negri might say), until now they have not been able to mature into genuine sociopolitical projects seriously threatening the capitalist order, let alone into solid harbingers of a new 'communist' society. What is still lacking is a 'common

cause' and the sublimation and unification of singular desires into what Stiegler calls a consistency, a long-term protection of infinite 'scope', of a collectively affirmed and lived 'ideal' (Stiegler, 2010b: 85, 94, 105).

The same goes for the so-called 'social networks', which turn out to be mainly supports for hyper-consumerist, addictogenic and mimetic behaviour patterns today – as well as the communicative life-force of the cathartic street protests that on deeper analysis do little other than facilitate the status quo (i.e. dominance of capital). For the moment, as Jodi Dean (2010: 4) has shown quite rigorously in her *Blog Theory*, social media like Facebook, MySpace and Twitter behave predominantly as desublimatory attractors through which the libidinal energy of the multitude is captured and diverted in 'affective networks' that act as the prime generator of surplus value for what she calls 'communicative capitalism' – in the guise of which capital deftly goes on expropriating and exploiting the 'surplus common' continuously produced by the multitude (Casarino & Negri, 2008: 22). As such, digital networks have come to function as 'circuits of drive', in which the multitude becomes fragmented, dispersed and narcotised instead of unified, concentrated and conscious of itself (Dean, 2010: 124). The true pharmacological potential of these networks is still to be invented and realised. If the great democratic challenge of the twenty-first century, the challenge of radical democracy, is the 'invention of the common' (Negri & Revel, 2008), its foremost task will be to reflect upon its organological – and that is to say, pharmacological – conditions of possibility and fight for their institution.

Notes

1 A second conference entitled 'Potentialities of Communism. Of What is Communism the Name Today?' was held in Paris in January 2010. Another was held in Berlin that June, entitled 'The Idea of Communism: Philosophy and Art'. The fourth conference in the series, 'Communism. A New Beginning?', was held in New York in October 2011, and a fifth in Seoul, September 2013. For the Paris conference, see Badiou and Žižek (2011), and for New York, see Žižek (2013).

2 The expression 'communist horizon' comes originally from the Bolivian sociologist and then vice-president Alvaro García Linera; cf. Dean's (2012) work with this title.

3 As such, according to Gorz (2009: 55), 'cognitive capitalism is itself the crisis of capitalism'.

4 Actually, in *Labor of Dionysus. A Critique of the State Form* Hardt and Negri (1994) had already given an analysis of the 'prerequisites of communism' in the current state of the development of the mode of production (see Chapter 7, esp. 270.2–282.3). In this work, although they sometimes refer to the 'multitude of workers', the notion of the multitude had not yet replaced that of the 'social worker'.

5 It must be said, however, that Žižek is also relating the current revival of communism to the struggle for the reappropriation of the various forms of commons (social, ecological, cultural, etc.) that is occurring everywhere nowadays. He thereby explicitly refers to the work of Hardt and Negri; interestingly, Žižek describes the privatisations or 'enclosures' of these commons as processes of proletarianisation in which workers are excluded from their own substance (Žižek, 2009: 91) – but see below.

6 Labour has become immaterial principally due to the informatisation of production. Whereas Fordist or modern capitalism was characterised by the *industrialisation* of production, post-Fordist or postmodern capitalism is (most) characterised by the *informatisation* of production (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 284). Today's capitalist economy is an informational economy in which the so-called 'tertiary sector' has become dominant and where knowledge,

information and communication play a foundational role in the production process.

7 Along with Stiegler (who bases himself on both Marx and Simondon), I understand proletarianisation in this chapter essentially as the loss of knowledge and know-how in human subjects resulting from the passing of this knowledge and know-how – via a process of grammatisation – in technical prostheses, which has the tendency of dissociating these subjects from their sociotechnical environments and thereby engendering dissociated technical milieus (see below).

8 See also Beradi, this volume (Eds.).

9 Originating from the operaist tradition, ‘recomposition’ refers to a process of (re)unification (of the social body, class, labour, the proletariat, etc.) through the convergence of social flows of desire and imagination.

10 ‘[T]he expansion of the productive potency of the general intellect coincides with a schizoid fragmentation of the collective brain, incapable of recomposing as conscious subjectivity; unable to act in a conscious, collective way’ (Berardi, 2011: 130).

11 For a listing of English language translations of Stiegler’s works, see <http://www.samkinsley.com/stiegler/stiegler-bibliography/>

12 The German (and Greek) ‘*pharmaka*’ refers to medicines, drugs, but also to spells, enchantments.

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