

DePauw University

## Scholarly and Creative Work from DePauw University

---

Education Studies Faculty publications

Education Studies

---

Spring 2022

### "Spreading Stupidity: Intellectual Disability and Anti-Imperialist Resistance to Bioinformational Capitalism" in Bioinformational Philosophy and Postdigital Knowledge Ecologies

Derek R. Ford

*DePauw University*, derekford@depauw.edu

Megha Summer Pappachen '20

*DePauw University*, summerpappachen@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarship.depauw.edu/educ\\_facpubs](https://scholarship.depauw.edu/educ_facpubs)



Part of the [Education Commons](#), and the [Philosophy Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Pappachen, M.S.\*, & Ford, D. (2022). Spreading stupidity: Disability and anti-imperialist resistance to bio-informational capitalism. In M.A. Peters, P. Jandrić, & S. Hayes (Eds.), *Bioinformational philosophy and postdigital knowledge ecologies* (pp. 237-253). New York: Springer.

This Chapter in a Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Education Studies at Scholarly and Creative Work from DePauw University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Education Studies Faculty publications by an authorized administrator of Scholarly and Creative Work from DePauw University.

## **Spreading Stupidity: Intellectual Disability and Anti-Imperialist Resistance to Bioinformational Capitalism**

Megha Summer Pappachen, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, 46135, USA, [summerpappachen@gmail.com](mailto:summerpappachen@gmail.com), & Derek R. Ford, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, 46135, USA, [derekford@depauw.edu](mailto:derekford@depauw.edu)

### **Abstract**

We are aware that to resist in the coming age of bioinformational capitalism, we will require new knowledge ecologies. These knowledges must be socialist: able to resist the dominance of productivist and imperialist pedagogies that are saturated with capital, and now bioinformational capital's aims. These knowledges must also be stupid: able to refuse bioinformational capital's lust for visibility and access to the working class biology. Stupidity is able to resist primarily because it can't be quantified, articulated, or rendered transparent. To express the importance of this refusal, we visit concepts of colonialism and disability. Disabled and colonized struggles animate the importance of protecting anti-value: and using anti-value in the struggle against oppression. In this paper, we propose a theory and practice of stupidity as anti-value: a socialist and anti-imperialist form of resistance.

**Keywords:** knowledge socialism, stupidity, anti-value, anti-imperialism, critical disability studies, autism, bioinformational capitalism.

### **Introduction**

Capitalism is by its very nature dynamic. As a social relation between labor and capital, between the dispossessed and expropriators, capitalism is a constant struggle over not just the production of value, but the conditions of life itself. The latter is the reason why capitalism, to exist as a proper mode of production, had to not only dispossess people from the means of subsistence—and therefore to produce a class compelled to sell their labor-power—but also to dispossess us of our skills and knowledges by transferring them to machinery (dead labor, or fixed capital). Bioinformational capitalism can be seen as a further step in this process, with capitalist innovations 'that control, change and experiment with the material basis of life' (Peters 2012: 98). This material basis is more than our social relations and ways of life: it is our very biology.

Faced with this configuration of capitalism, some critical theorists and activists find an antidote in open source or common ownership over knowledge and information. At first blush, this seems appropriate as it works to reduce or eliminate the private ownership of the contemporary means of production. Yet this path, as we show below, is not only inadequate but *on its own* can also work to reinforce the underlying pedagogical logic of bioinformational capitalism, or what we call, following Melissa Gregg (2018), productivist pedagogy. Gregg uses productivist pedagogy to refer to apps, self-help books, and other media that assist in raising personal productivity, but leaves the pedagogical aspect of productivist pedagogy unexamined. We conceptualize productivist pedagogy as an orientation to the world that positions the unknown as

that which not only *can* but *must* be known, the opaque as that which *must* be articulated, the mute as that which *must* be spoken. Bioinformational capitalism clearly approaches the material and biological life in this way: the body is a puzzle to be solved.

Finding recourse to the common as the remedy to exploitation, however, operates along the same pedagogical axis. In fact, it can deepen and intensify it as the commons is legitimated by being *more productive* than capitalism. This is, for example, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's (2009) main argument for the common as it relates to education: 'The central tools are no longer the spinning loom or cotton gin or metal press, but rather linguistic tools, affective tools for constructing relationships, tools for thinking, and so forth.' This latter set, which 'humans already have', need 'to be developed. 'That is why basic and advanced education is even more important in the biopolitical economy than it was previously. Everyone needs to learn how to work with language, codes, ideas, and affects—and moreover to work with others, none of which comes naturally' (308). Providing free and open access to training in these areas is one part of expanding our ability to fully cooperate in and produce the common. Because the privatization of knowledge 'limits access to ideas and information', it thereby 'thwarts creativity and innovation' (Hardt and Negri 2004: 185). As such, increasing access to and training in immaterial production will unleash the true surplus of our productive capacities.

Productivist pedagogy is grounded in the need for communication, which is what bioinformational capitalism's *private* (or quasi-private) databanks as well as alternative *common* databanks of open-source facilitate. As Phoebe Moore and Andrew Robinson (2016: 2775) note in their study of the quantified self, '[c]apital encourages universal communication, but only in quantified terms, and thus, anything that cannot be quantified and profiled is rendered *incommunicable* — meaning that it is marked and marginalised, disqualified as human capital and denied privilege'. Under bioinformational capitalism, however, these marginal spaces are colonized and mined for value by technologies and practices that measure and quantify 'what were formerly treated as immeasurable, qualitative aspects of the labour process or the self' (2779).

In what follows, we show how such a productivist pedagogy is the fundamental educational motor of not only capitalism (in its bioinformational, colonial, and imperialist forms) but also its attendant oppressions such as ableism. In what follows, we show how such a productivist pedagogy is the fundamental educational motor of not only capitalism (in its bioinformational, colonial, and imperialist forms) but also its attendant oppressions such as ableism. In response, we propose a theory and practice of stupidity as a socialist and anti-imperialist form of resistance, one that is subversive precisely because it is *not* productive. Stupidity as a knowledge thwarts bioinformational capitalism's attempts and ability to valorize and exploit knowledge: thereby repelling its increasing command over labor and life. The primary reason is that stupidity can't be quantified, measured, communicated, articulated, or rendered transparent. This means that stupidity is not a *lack* of determinate knowledge because such a lack would always refer to something that is already known. Stupidity, then, is not 'opposed to knowledge' but rather entails 'the absence of a relation to knowing' (Ronell 2002: 5). Viewed this way, the current struggle is

not merely one of *ownership* but one of *pedagogy* as well. Stupidity becomes a key aspect of a knowledge ecology oriented against bioinformational capitalist exploitation and oppression.

### **Bioinformational Capitalism and Actually-Existing Artificial Intelligence**

While the ethical and political implications of bioinformational capitalism continue to be explored and struggled over, the role of knowledge in this struggle has been given scant attention thus far. This is an interesting and problematic omission, given that the very thrust of bioinformational capitalism is precisely to *know* and *understand* ‘biological processes through the development of computationally intensive techniques including pattern recognition, data mining, machine learning algorithms, and visualization’ (Peters 2012: 104). Bioinformational capitalism is precisely concerned with the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of this knowledge, as each is an integral node in the production of surplus value. These processes entail both the digitalization of biology as well as the biologization of the digital. The first concerns the harvesting and storing of biological information in ever-expanding databases, while the latter—which is the primary focus of this chapter—concerns the creation of new digital networks and technologies that work like ‘the inner mechanisms of the human brain’ (105).

The capitalist biologization of the digital manifests most clearly in Artificial Intelligences (AI), a term coined in a proposal for a 1956 Dartmouth College workshop by mathematics professor John McCarthy (who taught at Dartmouth), researcher Marvin Minsky (a Junior Fellow at Harvard University), computer scientist Nathaniel Rochester (employed by IBM), and information theory founder Claude Shannon (who worked at Bell Telephone Laboratories). They proposed ‘to proceed on the basis of the conjecture that every aspect of learning or any other feature of intelligence can in principle be so precisely described that a machine can be made to stimulate it’ (McCarthy et al. 1955: 1). It is not a coincidence that the only aspect of intelligence mentioned in the proposal is learning, although they later include the use of language, abstraction, and calculation, as well as ‘self-improvement’, ‘randomness and creativity’ (3). The primary obstacle was to move beyond input-output procedures at the level of the machine to the machine’s ability to detect or ‘sense’ changes in the machine’s environment.

Yet there are different kinds of artificial intelligence as well as numerous aspirations for such technologies. Both the definitions of existing and aspirational AI revolve around the ability to define ‘the parameters of artificiality, or the ways in which computers are unlike human intelligence’ (Cope et al. 2020: 2). Existing AI is simultaneously subordinate to human intelligence—in that it can only calculate—and superior to human intelligence—in that it can calculate bigger and more complex formulas at faster speeds. Thus, our current era of AI intelligence is ‘more accurately labeled the binary age’ instead of ‘the digital’ (2).

For Nick Dyer-Witheford, Atle Mikkola Kjøsén, and James Steinhoff (2019: 9), ‘the essence of AI—indeed, the essence of intelligence—is the ability to make appropriate generalizations in a timely fashion based on limited data’. They refer to ‘actually-existing-AI-capitalism’, which denotes ‘a phase of experimental and uneven adoption of the technologies in which so many hopes are invested’ (2). The largest form of AI here is machine learning, in which

machinery takes in data, processes it, builds models on it, and uses these models to make predictions. Some forms of machine learning entail ‘deep learning’, in which networks do the aforementioned while at the same time continually modifying the weight given to different factors of data.

To speak of an *artificial* intelligence is to restate and re-entrench its distinction and separation from *non-artificial* or *human* intelligence. Thus, another problem is to what human intelligence refers at any given moment. One result is the ‘AI-effect’, whereby ‘as soon as AI can do something, it is no longer considered to require intelligence’ (9). The artificial-human divide changes, although there hasn’t been sufficient inquiry into what counts as intelligence in the first place. If one can’t make calculations, abstractions, or predictions based on data, are they *neither* machine nor human? More fundamentally problematic on our reading, however, is the very desire to render the human visible in order to biologize the digital. Capitalism has *always* been driven by this desire. We should remember that capitalism only grew into a proper mode of production with the development of large-scale industry and machinery, or when capital moved from the *formal* subjection to *real* subjection of labor. This transition, for Marx (1867/1967: 425), is complete as soon as ‘it is now no longer the labourer that employs the means of production, but the means of production that employ the labourer’. During capital’s early years it took existing forms of production (handicraft and manufacture) and only modified them under its command. The problem it confronted was that both forms of production were regulated by *labor* because the knowledges and skills required for production were held within workers themselves.

With the development of machinery, the relationship between living labor and dead labor (as manifested in machinery) is inverted such that the latter become the driving and regulating force of production. For this reason, as Marx (1939/1993: 694) wrote in his *Grundrisse* notebooks, ‘*machinery* appears... as the most adequate form of *fixed capital*, and fixed capital, in so far as capital’s relations with itself are concerned, appears as *the most adequate form of capital* as such’. The reason machinery is the most sufficient form of capital is because it absorbs ‘the accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain... into capital, as opposed to labor’ (694). The English translation is *appearance*, but as Mario Tronti (2009: 179) observes, Marx actually wrote *erscheinen*, which is translated as *appear*, but often ‘should be translated as “presents itself”, a meaning very close to the verb “to be”’. In other words, the appearance isn’t an ideological distortion we can clear away but works on the very *ontology* of the process. It is, after all, workers who *produce* machinery.

Yet the fact that machinery regulates the production process is both an appearance and a reality, as anyone who works machinery will confirm. Nature doesn’t produce machinery: ‘they are *organs of the human brain, created by the human hand*; the power of knowledge, objectified’ (706, emphasis in original). Within these pages between the sixth and seventh notebooks, Marx introduces the concept—written in English—of the ‘general intellect,’ which refers to the extent to which ‘general social knowledge has become a *direct force of production*’ (706, emphasis in original). While there are important debates over the general intellect and the contradictory tendencies Marx charts in these two notebooks (where fixed capital produces wealth and

undermines labor-time as the source of value while at the same time forcing workers to work longer hours under worse conditions), there are two that interest us here.

One is Paolo Virno's reconceptualization of the general intellect under contemporary capitalism. For Virno, while the general intellect is composed of *particular* knowledges, ideas, capacities, inclinations, and so on, he puts his emphasis on the *generality* of the general intellect. The *particular* manifestations of the general intellect, that is, are less important than the *general* capacities of the intellect. Rather than designating 'the aggregate of the knowledge acquired by the species,' the concept indicates 'the *faculty* of thinking; potential as such, not its countless particular realizations' (Virno 2004: 66). The resources of the general intellect include 'the faculty of language, the disposition to learn, memory, the capacity to abstract and relate, and the inclination towards self-reflexivity' (Virno 2007: 6). In other words, Marx fixed the general intellect in machinery, but Virno insists it is also a part of the overall social totality and finds its most adequate expression in the human.

Dyer-Witheford, Kjosen, and Steinhoff (2019) find Virno's reconceptualization too anthropocentric by noting that these human capacities can be properties of AI. AI machinery possesses the ability to manipulate language, to cooperate, and to produce and negotiate infinite combinations of concepts and models. And while AI can't 'feel', it can nonetheless 'interpret feelings as data' (66). Missed in this critique is a definition of communication, however. This leads us to David Harvey's (2019: 97) recent observation of Marx's general intellect, which is that Marx's use of the concept is only focused on particular forms of 'knowledge and mental capabilities' that can be 'incorporated into the fixed capital of production of value so as to raise the productivity of labour to the point where labour, the agent of value production, becomes redundant'. Harvey smooths any gap between Virno's concept of the general intellect and the aforementioned critique because he notes that the general intellect is open to any knowledge that *can* be embodied in fixed capital. The flipside is that 'all those knowledges that cannot be embedded in fixed capital are irrelevant' (97). More than that: they are *anti-values*.

Under capitalism, value is a constantly expanding process in which value is produced, circulated, and realized through purchase and consumption. Any interruption or blockage results in *non-values*, while anything that blocks the movement of value is an *anti-value*. Tronti's (2009: 254) strategy of refusal consists in 'the organisation of the working-class "No": the refusal to collaborate actively in capitalist development, the refusal to put forward a positive programme of demands'. By refusing to advance demands, the aspirations of the working-class can't be absorbed into or accommodated by capital. Such refusal also entails the refusal of intellectuality itself. 'There is no culture, no intellectuals', he writes, 'apart from those who serve capital' (254). Put differently, the production of *anti-value* is the production of *stupidity* as the other of the intellect. This is exactly the issue that Dyer-Witheford et al. (2019) avoid insofar as they uncritically accept capital's definition of intelligence as that which operates according to capitalism's demands of *timeliness* and *productivity*. Indeed, throughout their book they equate intelligence with the ability to perform.

## Disabling Capital

We return to stupidity as anti-value at the end of the chapter, and for now delve deeper into capital's insatiable desire for intelligence and demands for communicability, articulation, and visibility. We will feel the oppressive outcomes of capital's lust for intellect, and thereby animate the importance of refusing it all together. We can understand many activist disability groupings and individuals as the vanguard of such refusal, embodying Tronti's 'No'—whispered everywhere amongst the working people. Disability, an exceptionally broad category, presents alternative ways of being, thinking, and living that repel capital's desire for intelligence and communicability, productivity and visibility. In many ways, the 'severity' of disability revolves precisely around the *degree* to which one is slow, unintelligible, and can or cannot meet the demands of productivity under capitalism. One of us, for example, is medically diagnosed with learning and behavioral disabilities, but does not identify as disabled because they don't experience their exploitation and oppression under capitalism as a determinant factor in their lives. Generally speaking, however, disability is subjected to a burning scrutiny under the lens of bioinformational capitalism, however. Organic-digital technologies (Peters et al. 2020: 4) are directed toward their biological materiality, as capital marches forth to control and conquer the material basis of labor (Peters 2012: 98). The working people's biology can either enable or disable the production of surplus value, which explains this emerging capitalism's obsession with disabled biologies. Rather than relegate disability to the margin, it is salivated over, understood, exposed, and strip searched for new reservoirs of value.

Capital's twenty-first century obsession with bioinformation leads back to its desire for intelligence. Saturated with capital's aims, intelligence adopts an arrogant view toward the unknown, and becomes synonymous with answering questions, eliminating confusion, and mastering certainty. It also allows for communication: which constitutes the means of production for the immaterial economy, and has become hegemonic within the totality of capitalism (Ford 2020: 104). Immaterial commodities such as language, codes, data, and ideas constitute a vortex for capital. The global north harbors this hegemonic center, where you will find the babbling, articulate worker of the communicative age rather than the silent worker of the industrial age. As the north deindustrialized, it pushed the silent subject into the margins of the global south: pointing to how the demand for intelligence and communicability affects the global working class in gradients. But increasingly, everywhere, working-class jobs revolve around engaging in conversation and collaboration with customers, coworkers, and management. Even the culture is dominated by raving news anchors, debating experts, talk shows, podcasts, devil's advocates, and hot takes: the demand to speak and *feel* intelligent is overwhelming.

Capital lusts after intelligence and communication because, on the one hand, these are its hegemonic means of production. On the other hand, articulation helps make the unknown known. Communication skills are developed within the multitude to 'empower' us to speak aloud innermost thoughts, hopes, and dreams: rendering our secrets transparent to the eyes of capital. Only that which is expressed can be surveilled, controlled, and appropriated. We serve capital by

turning the multitude inside out. However useful intelligence has been to capital, that much more destructive stupidity has been to it.

Stupidity is weaponized by those who are unknowing and will not communicate, who are mute and will not cooperate, who are slow and will not hasten. Capital has no use for lost, wandering subjects whose knowledge and intelligence cannot be recruited against labor (Harvey 2019: 97). Neurologically different, disabled people stand in the way of capital's drive for surplus value, for which they face an intense oppression. Under bioinformational capitalism, disabled knowledges and biologies are slated for annihilation and extraction.

### **Feel The Oppression: The Bioinformational War on Autism**

Of particular interest to our research and organizing agenda against bioinformational capitalism are disability labels and diagnoses that are or entail the label of 'intellectual' disability. Autism is one particularly important example. Around the same time that bioinformational capitalism was emerging in the neoliberal world, an 'autism epidemic' was announced by every major institution in North America. In Anne McGuire's (2016) historically specific study of autism as a neoliberal cultural phenomenon, we feel the effects of bioinformational capitalism on autism—one concrete example of disabled life.

In the early 2000s, autism was suddenly on the lips of the president, of news anchors, medical experts, celebrity psychologists, doctors, and school board trustees. As diagnoses and cases of autism surged, the public was warned about this latest form of stupidity that was seizing upon the (white, middle-class) children of America. The reason this warning is attached to children is because children, as opposed to adults, can still be good investments. McGuire (2016: 19) recalls that autism was labeled 'a biological problem necessitating a biomedical solution; an illness needing to be stopped, cured, fixed, eliminated'. Nongovernmental organizations amassed millions from wealthy donors to fight the disorder. Autism Speaks<sup>1</sup> became the largest and richest advocacy organization, and till this day, adopts the puzzle piece as its logo: symbolizing bioinformational capitalism's approach to the working body as a puzzle to be solved: to be taken apart and reassembled. Autism Speaks leaders summarized the violent, anti-disability atmosphere of this time perfectly when they announced 'a federal declaration of war on the epidemic of autism' (World Heritage Encyclopedia 2006).

During this 'war', autistic people themselves were hardly consulted: their experience and knowledge of autistic life and being was precluded. This follows the long history of the oppression and exclusion of disabled people, which coincides with the long history of the construction of 'intelligence' and also 'whiteness' and even 'citizenship'. As Anna Stubblefield (2007) notes, 'the possession of intellect, defined as the capacity to produce civilization, has been the principal distinction drawn by white elites to mark the difference between white and nonwhite races' (169). In the service of racial capitalism, research was designed to measure intelligence, but those researching believed in the intellectual superiority of the white race, and so this was the standard to the tests themselves. Accordingly, those labeled as 'disabled', 'feebleminded', 'idiots', and so

---

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.autismspeaks.org/>. Accessed 2 June 2021.



on, were *necessarily* spoken *for* because they were constructed as *lacking* the ability for self- and collective-determination. Relative to autism, non-autistic parents, relatives, professionals, politicians, and “advocates” from corporate-style nonprofits ‘[understood] themselves as speaking on behalf of autistic people’ who had no rationality, credibility, or truth (McGuire 2016: 20). Advocates harnessed financial powers to launch a campaign aimed at remaking autistic children's nature—to separate them from their disability by any means necessary, at as early an age as possible.

One of the popular mechanisms was ‘person first language.’ Advocates would insist that people use the phrase ‘person with autism’ rather than ‘autistic person’ because the latter was, somehow, insensitive (187). While the new phrase seems banal, McGuire attests that it ‘plays an important role in supporting the dangerous biomedical presupposition that autism is somehow separate and separable from a person “with” it’ (227). It performs a separation of a person and their embodied way of being, and simultaneously makes disability an insult. These moves necessarily dehumanized disabled people, as Sinclair (1990) contests:

I can be separated from things that are not part of me, and I am still the same person. I am usually a ‘person with a purple shirt,’ but I could also be a ‘person with a blue shirt’ one day, and a ‘person with a yellow shirt’ the next day, and I would still be the same person, because my clothing is not part of me. But autism is part of me.

Like Sinclair, many disabled people claim their disability as part of their identity. Many push against the process of dehumanization and depersonalization they are subjected to by bioinformational capitalism, and draw solidarity to other identity contexts. For instance, we would not say ‘person with Indianness’ over ‘Indian person’; or ‘person with womanhood’ over ‘woman.’ A person is inseparable from their own subjectivity, and any attempt to wrench them apart opens doors to a host of justifiable violences. Again, however, because disability is such a broad category, there are a range of ways disabled people choose to refer to themselves, decisions that are historically, singularly, and locally contingent.

These injustices have come in many forms. We may look to the vast biomedical industry that has emerged to ‘cure’ autism for some examples. McGuire (2016) documents the wide variety of treatments and therapies that compromise this industry: behavioral programs and schools, neurofeedback therapies, speech and physical therapies, social skills therapies, electric shock therapies; as well as pseudoscientific therapies such as holding therapy and chelation treatments which can be described as nothing short of torture (127). Even the most mainstream behavioral therapies are coercive in that they remake a child’s innate nature. Autistic children cry all day in behavior therapies and schools, as their comfort zones are violated and their boundaries crossed. They kick, scream, and revolt when they are asked to hold eye contact, sit still, speak clearly, and obey instructions. While ‘services’ like these are cloaked as ethical and helpful, in reality, they are coercive and non-consensual: aimed at aligning autistic, capital’s demands for efficiency, intelligibility, and productivity..

Violence against autistic people is normalized and is expressed most extremely in the high rates at which they're murdered with relative impunity. They are murdered most often by their parents, family members, or the police. Every year, a Disability Day of Mourning is held to mourn the loss of hundreds of people with disabilities who are killed each year by their own families (Autistic Self Advocacy Network 2017). In her study, McGuire (2016: 195) collects a lengthy list of names, dates, and details of autistic children who were killed by their parents to 'gesture toward the violent materiality of a cultural desire for "life without autism"'.

Of the many cases, let us look at that of Katie McCarron from Morton, Illinois. Three-year-old Katie was suffocated to death with a plastic garbage bag by her mother, Dr. Karen McCarron, in 2006 (McGuire 2016: 197). McCarron said that when she first found out about Katie's diagnosis, she cried. She became determined to cure Katie of her autism. 'She was not learning at a rate I would expect', McCarron confessed, 'Everything I tried to do didn't help her' — referring to behavioral schooling (206). At her testimony, McCarron said: 'I loved Katie very much, but I hated the autism so, so much...I hated what it was doing to her...I just wanted autism out of my life' (206). At the trial, when her defense attorney asked McCarron whether she thought she was killing Katie, she said: 'No.' When he asked who she thought she was killing, McCarron answered: 'Autism' (207).

We see the violent conclusion of a desire to repress autism in Katie's murder. A separation that begins in anti-autistic language, ends in the literal. McGuire traces how violence continues when the media covers murders like Katie's, and in how the courts litigate them. The media and the courts systematically sympathize with the perpetrators, and locate original blame within the autistic child themselves (McGuire 2016: 207-208). They claim that the root cause of the murder is the victim: something that plays out in filicides as well as police murders. When mourning the loss of autistic victims, Autistic Self Advocacy Network explains that the pattern of violence 'starts when a parent or caregiver murders their child or adult relative with a disability and continues in how these murders are reported, discussed, justified, excused, and replicated' (Disability Day of Mourning 2021).

Anti-disability violence serves to uphold the hegemony of intelligence and communicability, which provide the means of production for the totality of capitalism (Ford 2020: 104). This violence has helped the emergence of bioinformational capitalism, which has found lucrative reservoirs in the effort to destroy uncooperative biologies. A central mission of nonprofits like Autism Speaks was securing funding for biomedical and biodigital 'forms of research looking to cure autism and/or eliminate autistic ways of being' (McGuire 2016: 57). As this emerging capitalism develops deeper into the twenty-first century, its orientation to disability has undergone important updates.

### **Spectrums Of Disability: Biological System Upgrades**

In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) released the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). The new release redefines autism as 'Autism Spectrum Disorder' in a move that belies the system's shift towards spectral thinking. McGuire

(2017: 403) defines spectral thinking as ‘the understanding that our bodies and minds exist on sliding scales anchored by oppositional poles of health and illness, normalcy and abnormalcy’. Defining autism as a spectrum marks the ‘beginning of psychiatry’s migration away from strict categorical approaches to diagnosis, where disorder is either present or absent, and toward dimensional approaches, where disorder is measured by degree’. Although at first this may seem like a liberalizing and positive development, McGuire (2017) argues that it instead increases the surveillance and control of disabled life, and feeds into bioinformational capitalism.

Spectrums rope more people into a disability diagnosis, and ‘empower’ them to slide up the scale of ability. A narrative of ‘upward mobility’ is initiated, without questioning the premise of what is ‘up’ and why it is desired (McGuire 2017: 418). It is an ‘inclusive, optimistic, and highly lucrative narrative of improvement, recovery, and resiliency’ that feeds into an ‘economy of debility and capacity’ (418). As Jasbir Puar (2012) observes, ‘Debility is profitable to capitalism, but so is the demand to recover or overcome it’ (154). Bioinformational industries profit from the need for subjects to recover from abnormalities of unproductiveness. Peters (2012: 105) explains that genomic capitalism, harnessed with a new generation of information processing, comprises a bioinformationalism which ‘expresses a new kind of utopian perfectionism about the possibilities for a new age of genetic self-renewing capitalism that is capable of programming itself’. Contemporary innovations in genetic engineering, prenatal genetic testing, pre-emptive health screening, and stimulation of fetal brain development all aim at biomedically preventing disability before it arrives. Innovations in brain imaging, highly personalized diagnosis and treatment protocols, early intervention services, and therapeutic remediations aim at repressing disability once it does arrive. Further than enabling this ‘economy of debility and capacity’, the spectrum-ization of disability also urges people to increase self-surveillance.

A culture of surveillance and control is enabled in the effort to forge new subjectivities. ‘I argue that notions of spectrum are giving birth to a unique brand of neoliberal subject’, McGuire (2017: 418) writes. This novel subject performs incremental and ‘ongoing (read: unending), acts of (self) surveillance, production and consumption’ to coerce themselves up the sliding scale of ‘bodily value’ (418). Following Robert McRuer, McGuire understands ‘the good spectrum subject’ as ‘one who possesses the capacity, flexibility and capital to move along the pathological gradations of a continuum that is always and forever oriented toward compulsory normativity’ (418). The multitude is made to regurgitate itself in the image of capital, annihilating disability in the process.

At the same time, the system also codes itself for regeneration. Bioinformational self-renewal is witnessed in a curious alteration to the DSM’s title. McGuire (2017: 408) notices that ‘[w]hile the first four editions of the DSM use Roman numeral designators (i.e., DSM-II, DSM-III etc.), the fifth edition uses an Arabic number “5”’. Instead of DSM-V, it was released as DSM-5, or perhaps what they really meant: DSM-5.0. ‘With the help of digital technologies, according to the APA, we can expect to see a DSM-5.1, 5.2, etc. Updates to the manual will now be ongoing, incremental—more like system updates/upgrades’ (McGuire 2017: 408). Like cellphone operating system updates—OS 14.1, 14.2, 14.3—which fix bugs and install new ones, bioinformational

capitalism too will spontaneously update and upgrade the multitude. The APA says that ‘Ongoing revisions of DSM-5 will make it a "living document," adaptable to future discoveries in neurobiology, genetics, and epidemiology’ (DSM-5 2013: 13). The DSM itself becomes ‘a self-replicating organism’ (Peters et al. 2020: 6) on the orders of bio informationalism. The bio and digital fuse, necessarily making disability their central target. We have also witnessed a ‘thickening of the DSM’—which has expanded from 500 to a thousand pages over the last 30 years (McGuire 2017: 405-406). Individual diagnostic categories are expanding and ‘more and more detail is going into describing the minutiae of individual disorders’ (406).

The ‘epidemic’ of autism could instead be interpreted as the ‘epidemic’ of bioinformational capitalism’s war against opacity and unintelligibility. Indeed, Hanna Ebben (2008) writes that the ‘epidemic’ is based on the ‘desire to recognize the undesirable,’ which is ‘manifested through ways of perceiving that assume that autism and disability appear to people, and that such appearances need our urgent consideration in order to prevent further spreading of assumed pathologies’ (160). Put differently, this is the desire for visibility and articulation for, as every minutiae of disability is exposed to the eyes of capital, the demand for visibility and transparency is realized. These are the consequences of embodying the multitude’s challenge to intelligence and communicability. The oppression of disabled life animates the importance of refusing this desire. It animates the importance of developing an anti-capitalist and disabling knowledge ecology that can resist in the age of bioinformaionalism. Stupidity will be a key aspect of the alternative knowledge ecology—and can assist in the struggle toward socialist and anti-imperialist horizons. This, however, will depend on our insistence that stupidity is divorced from and not in a relation with intelligence and knowledge, for as long as they two are approached as intertwined, the former will always be a means to generate the latter.

### **Disability And Stupidity as Anti-Imperialist Resistance**

At this point, we want to pause for a moment to consider stupidity’s specific challenge to imperialism. As a form of capitalism, imperialism too has saturated pedagogy: rendering it not only productivist, but also colonial. We may notice colonial tones in how we often talk about learning: ‘mastering’ a subject, ‘discovering’ a new theory, ‘exploring a topic.’ The learner is imagined as a conquistador invading indigenous unknowns, discovering new lands, ripping the veil off of exotic people, and dragging everything into the light of scrutiny.

As inhabitants of the unknown, disabled and colonized people are taken to war. Across many histories and timelines, empire has waged war against indigenous people. They are mined for value by mechanisms that measure and quantify formerly inaccessible sources of profit (Moore and Robinson 2016: 2779): searching for new markets and natural resources. This is the reason why anti-colonial and decolonial struggles have long protected their unknowns, insisting on inaccessibility of their knowledge systems. Indigenous peoples of Asia, Africa, and the Americas have lived and died in the name of blocking access to their ancestral lands and knowledges. They were right to, for the moment European hands touched their ancient knowledges of medicine, diet,

agriculture, geography, technology, language, and culture, they evaporated immediately into the profit motive.

Instead of mimicking imperialism's arrogance toward the unknown, we require forms of knowledge that allow the unknown to simply *be*. A knowledge that can accommodate confusion, uncertainty, and lack of productivity. Not beholden to a profit motive, socialist knowledge is peaceful toward disability, and is comprised of stupidity. An example and practice of stupidity as anti-imperialism may be found in Beth A. Ferri's (2018) account of her autoimmune illness.

Ferri is diagnosed with a rare blood disorder called chronic autoimmune neutropenia (12). She explains that doctors always describe disease by using war metaphors. Contagion is posited as an external enemy, a terrorist, who must be defeated before it invades. Disease talk invokes 'legacies of war and empire' that rely on 'ideologies of strength and conquest' (2). At this point we are naturally reminded of the war on autism—yet another instance of disability imperialized. Autoimmunity, however, poses a paradox to the imperialist narrative. It forces a shift in the discourse from concern over an external terror to that of internal terror: as Ferri puts it, 'invisible sleeper cells hidden inside the body waiting to strike' (11). Living with an autoimmune illness herself, however, Ferri feels misrepresented by the war metaphors.

She and other autoimmune people describe their biologies in ways that are more 'confounding' than internal warfare (13). They flirt with alternative metaphors such as foolishness, mystery, and paradox. Ferri (2018) offers testimony of one blogger with Crohn's Disease who calls his immune system a 'tool.'

One day he was checking over things and when he got to my digestive tract he was all like, 'Whoa, whoa, whoa. What the hell is going on here? You guys are infected!' And my digestive tract was like, 'What the hell are you talking about. Are you drunk again?' And, so my tool of an immune system sets about 'CURING' my NOT sick digestive tract (13).

This confused biology sometimes leads its person down painful, chronic paths, and sometimes down comical ones. An acknowledgement of confusion, and self-awareness of incompetence feels more accurate to the blogger. Ferri herself offers another metaphor for her biology: that of fantasy and mystery. She writes:

Alternative metaphors like *mystery* or the experience of Alice from the novel *Alice in Wonderland*, who finds herself in a curious new world after falling down a rabbit hole, highlight a common experience of living with an autoimmune disease—one that is very much outside of discursive certainty and medicine's preferred biomedical frameworks of cure (Ferri 2018: 13).

Here, biology finds itself in a state of dreamy stupor: wandering through an inexplicable scape (the unknown) after losing all sense of place and time. In this mystery, there are more questions than answers—as the wonderland exists outside of biomedical certainty. Autoimmunity

might also be ‘a paradox’ Ferri suggests—‘A self-contradiction. A contradictory self’ (15). All these metaphors offer alternative ways to know—stupid possibilities that lead us away from military conclusions. Confusion, mystery, and paradox are all stupid knowledges that emerge when disabled people think through their own experiences. These are all open questions that do not present any path or need to secure answers. The source of stupor’s power is in its rejection of a productive pedagogy; its disavowal of intelligence. We return now, once again to stupidity’s anti-value to more deeply understand its resistance to capitalism (and imperialism).

### **Organizing Anti-Value: Spreading Stupidity**

Productivist pedagogy moves from ignorance to knowledge. In the beginning of Daniel R. DeNicola’s (2017) *Understanding Ignorance*, he quickly separates ignorance from stupidity. While ignorance is ‘a lack of knowledge’, stupidity ‘is a mental dullness that indicates an inability to learn or a sustained disinterest in learning’ and unreason is ‘any type of irrationality, such as intentional but self-defeating actions or the affirmation of contradictory beliefs’ (DeNicola 2017: 8). Learning is the fundamental movement from ignorance to knowledge, which once completed *eliminates* ignorance. The various forms of ignorance, he writes, ‘may be removed or annihilated by *learning*, though different modes of learning may be necessary. The range of learning is as wide as the range of remediable ignorance’ (26). The annihilation of ignorance by learning, however, remains trapped in a cycle of production insofar as learning *creates* ignorance. We learn something, and then we have a host of questions and unknowns that arise as a result, ‘new knowledge has generated new questions, questions that could not have been asked previously’ (184).

DeNicola (2017: 8) sums up the difference: ‘Ignorance can be remedied; stupidity is intractable.’ It is precisely this intractability that interests us as a form of resistance to capital’s command over life and labor insofar as stupidity’s intractability is an intransigent anti-value. Because stupidity can’t be educated, its unknowability, opacity, and muteness endures beyond measure by remaining inarticulable and incommunicable. While databanks can store knowledge and knowledge’s lack or absence, no technologies can quantify stupidity, nor can they discern or articulate it. Stupidity as such is the pedagogical form of working-class refusal. As Tronti (2009: 259) notes, as long as the demands of workers can be ‘recognised by the capitalists themselves as objective needs of the production of capital ... they are not only subsumed, but solicited; no longer simply rejected, but collectively negotiated’. When Tronti asks ‘what happens when the form of working-class organisation takes on a wholly alternative content’ when it ‘refuses to function as an articulation of capitalist society’ (295), he’s posing the necessity of an alternative pedagogical logic, one that is incompatible with productivist pedagogy. In our age of bioinformational capitalism, moreover, stupidity is incalculable, incapable of abstraction, self-improvement, and innovation. We can now finally appreciate why capital’s waged a relentless war against autism, why disability activism is a form of anti-capitalist resistance, and why anti-colonial and decolonial struggles have insisted on the inaccessibility of their knowledge systems.

We would like to end by proposing how writing can be a way of spreading stupidity, first by noting how stupidity infuses Marx's own writings, particularly his writing as research. Indeed, here it's interesting to note that just before he moves to the fragment on machines in his reading of the *Grundrisse*, Antonio Negri (1991: 139) admits he is 'always stupefied to see the power of Marx's intuitions, the extraordinary anticipations of the *Grundrisse*'. What Negri finds so useful about the notebooks is the way they perform Marx's own stupor. The research and writing, he says, is 'open on all sides: every conclusion that takes the form of a presentation of the research opens spaces to new research and presentation' (Negri 1991: 12). As such, 'there is no linear continuity, but only a plurality of points of view, which are endlessly solicited at each determinant moment of the antagonism' (13). It is telling that in the English translation of the *Grundrisse*, the title of the text remains untranslated. While it's typically translated as 'rough draft', Thomas Kemple (1995: 18) notes that another possible translation is 'ruptures-in-reason'. Even as Marx sought to articulate and present the inner logics of capital, he constellated this presentation with constant returns to stupor: by trailing off into digressions, breaking off notes at certain points, and also by leaving certain words untranslated and thereby preserving their intractable incommunicability and refusing to transform their opacity into a transparency.

We can also find such a constellation in the text most generally opposed to the *Grundrisse*: the first volume of *Capital*. While this text is Marx's magnum opus—his clearest exposition of the inner workings of capital—it is by no means defined only by articulation. In fact, the text ends, we argue, by a return to stupor. The penultimate chapter of the volume contains Marx's most succinct and categorical recounting of the transition to capitalism (as the negation of individual private property) to the negation of the negation, when the 'expropriators are expropriated' (Marx 1867/1967: 715). Yet Marx doesn't end the book here, after this clarion call for revolution, one presented in a way that could be read teleologically and even deterministically. Instead, Marx ends with a short and rather dry exposition of Ebbon Wakefield's theory of colonialism. There's no revolutionary conclusion, no call to arms, no declarations of what is to be done. The effect is to return the reader to the openness of capital and to the stupor of thought that persists within Marx's intellect. Marx returns us to a state of stupor and indeterminacy.

Moving outside of Marx and the Marxist cannon, another example of writing spreading stupidity can be found in John Cage's *silent writing*. While many scholars have debated the meaning of Cage's silence about his own sexuality, Andy Weaver (2012) focuses on how silence is blocked together with Cage's articulations. One place this shows up is Cage's 'Where are we Eating? and What are we eating?' It seems to be about Cage's homosexual relationship with dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham, yet we don't learn about this through the poem itself. The poem merely 'catalogues a series of meals that Cage, Cunningham, and members of Cunningham's dance troupe ate while touring' (Weaver 2012: 20). Rather than confess any relationship, Cage merely lists mundane moments of their time together, producing an opaque idiom that resists visibility.

As a result, 'Cage's work shows not only *that* silence can be politically agential and challenging to the status quo, but *how* to make silence an effective tool of socio-political critique'

(20). The idiom remains mute and opaque—we are stupid in the face of it—which is precisely its political efficacy. It remains, as Weaver puts it, ‘alternative without being oppositional’ (34). This is a politics that, in line with Tronti (2019), refuses to articulate a program that capital could accommodate or even understand. The alternative is a silence that we also find in Marx, but what we have in mind here is that Marx leaves us with at the end of the third volume of *Capital*, which as Althusser reminds us, ends with ‘A title: *Classes*. Forty lines, then silence’ (Althusser and Balibar 1968/2009: 214, emphasis in original). Instead, it’s a silence that *inhabits* the form of the writing’s end, one silence inaugurated not by death but by the very indeterminacy of Marx’s thought.

Given capital’s dynamism, however, it would be irresponsible to assert that such opacity represents a *permanent* form of anti-value. Nonetheless, in our current configuration of bioinformational capitalism—no less than its previous forms—capital’s desire for visibility and transparency remains absolutely central to its regimes exploitation and dispossession as well as to its ability to command labor.

## References

- Althusser, L., & Balibar, É. (1968/2009). *Reading Capital*. Trans B. Brewster. New York: Verso.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition: DSM-5*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>.
- Autistic Self Advocacy Network’s Disability (2017). Autism and Safety Toolkit: Research Overview on Autism and Safety. <https://autisticadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Autism-and-Safety-Pt-1.pdf>. Accessed 4 May 2021.
- Cope, B., Kalantzis, M., & Searsmith, D. (2020). Artificial intelligence for education: Knowledge and its assessment in AI-enabled learning ecologies. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1728732>.
- DeNicola, D. R. (2017). *Understanding ignorance: The surprising impact of what we don’t know*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Disability Day of Mourning (2021). Home. <https://disability-memorial.org/>. Accessed 15 March 2021.
- Dyer-Witheford, N., Kjösen, A. M., & Steinhoff, J. (2019). *Inhuman power: Artificial intelligence and the future of capitalism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Ebben, H. (2018). The desire to recognize the undesirable: De/constructing the autism epidemic metaphor and contagion in autism as a discourse. *Feminist Formations*, 30(1), 141-163.
- Ferri, B. A. (2018). Metaphors of Contagion and the Autoimmune Body. *Feminist Formations*, 30(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2018.0001>.
- Ford, D. R. (2020). Communist Theory of Writing: Virno, Lyotard, and a Rewriting of the General Intellect. In M.A. Peters, T. Besley, P. Jandrić, X. Zhu (Eds.), *Knowledge Socialism: The Rise of Peer Production* (99-113). Singapore: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8126-3\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8126-3_6).



- Gregg, M. (2018). *Counterproductive: Time management in the knowledge economy*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2005). *Multitude: War and democracy in the age of empire*. New York: Penguin.
- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2009). *Commonwealth*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press.
- Harvey, D. (2019). *Marx, capital, and the madness of economic reason*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kemple, T. M. (1995). *Reading Marx writing: Melodrama, the market, and the 'Grundrisse.'* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Marx, K. (1867/1967). *Capital: A critique of political economy (vol. 1)*. Trans. S. Moore and E. Aveling. New York: International Publishers.
- Marx, K. (1939/1993). *Grundrisse: Foundations of the critique of political economy (rough draft)*. Trans. M. Nicolaus. New York: Penguin Books.
- McCarthy, J., Minsky, M., Rochester, N., & Shannon, C. E. (1955). A Proposal for the Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence. <http://raysolomonoff.com/dartmouth/boxa/dart564props.pdf>. Accessed 15 March 2021.
- McGuire, A. (2016). *War on Autism: On the Cultural Logic of Normative Violence*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.7784427>.
- McGuire, A. (2017). De-regulating Disorder: On the Rise of the Spectrum as a Neoliberal Metric of Human Value. *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 11(4), 403-421. <https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2017.32>.
- McRuer, R. (2006). *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. New York, NY: NYU Press.
- Moore, P., & Robinson, A. (2016). The quantified self: What counts in the neoliberal workplace. *New Media & Society*, 18(11), 2774-2792. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1461444815604328>.
- Negri, A. (1991). *Marx beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*. Trans. H. Cleaver, M. Ryan, & M. Viano. Brooklyn: Autonomedia.
- Peters, M. A. (2012). Bio-informational capitalism. *Thesis Eleven*, 110(1), 98-111. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513612444562>.
- Peters, M. A., Jandrić, P., McLaren, P. (2020). Viral modernity? epidemics, infodemics, and the 'bioinformational' paradigm. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1744226>.
- Puar, J.K. (2012). Coda: The Cost of Getting Better: Suicide, Sensation, Switchpoints. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 18(1), 149-158. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-1422179>.
- Sinclair, J. (1999). Why I dislike "person first" language. [http://web.archive.org/web/20060213160217/web.syr.edu/~jisincla/person\\_first.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20060213160217/web.syr.edu/~jisincla/person_first.htm). Accessed 4 May 2020.
- Ronell, A. (2002). *Stupidity*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

- Stubblefield, A. (2007). 'Beyond the pale': Tainted whiteness, cognitive disability, and eugenic sterilization. *Hypatia*, 22(2), 162-181.
- Tronti, M. (2019). *Workers and capital*. Trans. D. Broder. New York: Verso
- Virno, P. (2004). *A Grammar of the multitude: For an analysis of contemporary forms of life*, Trans. I. Bertolotti, J. Cascaito, & A. Casson. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e).
- Virno, P. (2007). General Intellect. Trans. A. Bové. *Historical Materialism*, 15(3), 3-8.
- Weaver, A. (2012). Writing through Merce: John Cage's silence, differends, and avant-garde idioms. *Mosaic*, 45(2), 19-37.
- World Heritage Encyclopedia (2006). Combating Autism Act.  
<http://www.self.gutenberg.org/article/WHEBN0006319227/Combating%20Autism%20Act>. Accessed 4 May 2020.