Faces as Commons

The Secondary Visuality of Communicative Capitalism

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Once we accept that capitalism is communicative and communications are capitalist, where might we find openings for critique, opportunities for resistance and possibilities to break free, Jodi Dean asks? She sees one answer appearing in the commoning of faces, a practice that emerges out of the communicative practices of mass social and personal media. To explore this commoning, she develops the idea of 'secondary visuality' as a feature of communicative capitalism. Reflecting on the repetition of images and circulation of photos, Dean presents secondary visuality as an effect of communication that blends together speech, writing and image into something irreducible to its components, something new.

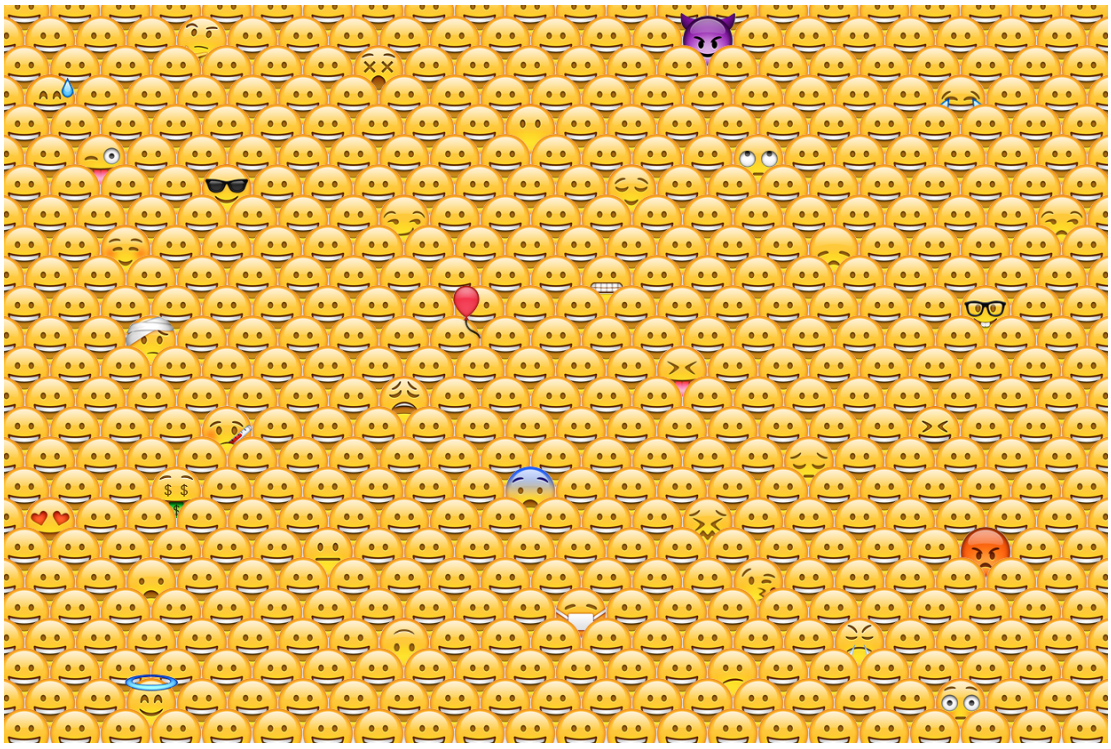


Image: Mind Design, Amsterdam

Communicative capitalism names the intertwining of democracy and capitalism in global telecommunications networks and personal participatory communication devices. Just as industrial capitalism relied on the exploitation of labour, so does communicative capitalism rely on the exploitation of communication. In communicative capitalism, reflexivity captures creativity, sociality, resistance, and critique enclosing them into mediated

networks for the financial gain of a corporate and shareholding class. Within mass social and personal media networks, expressions of dissent enrich the few and divert the many. The media practices we enjoy, that enable us to express ourselves and connect with others, reassemble dissent into new forms of exploitation and control.[1] Once we accept that capitalism is communicative and communications are capitalist, where might we find openings for critique, opportunities for resistance, and possibilities of breaking free? Differently put, if a central contribution of Marx's analysis of capitalism was his identification of the ways capitalism produces its own gravediggers, what elements of the present pointing beyond it does communicative capitalism identify? One answer appears in the commoning of faces, a practice that emerges out of the communicative practices of mass social and personal media. To explore this commoning, I develop the idea of 'secondary visuality' as a feature of communicative capitalism. Reflecting on the repetition of images and circulation of photos as communicative practices, I present secondary visuality as an effect of communication that blends together speech, writing and image into something irreducible to its components, something new. With secondary visuality, faces lose their individuating quality and become generic. Faces in common push back against the individualism of contemporary capitalism, suggesting a way that it is producing new possibilities for collectivity.

My Daughter's Life (or Evidence from Everyday Experience)

I set the stage with three examples.

When my daughter, Sadie, was seventeen, she and her friends used Snapchat to have conversations comprised of photos. Sadie tells me that these conversations, which were constant features of their daily lives, were 'just pics with short captions.' The pic was most often a selfie of a stupid or ugly face ('look at my fucking forehead!'). Receivers would respond with another ugly face and a funny retort ('YOU LOOK LIKE A KLINGON'). In addition to these conversations, Sadie and her friends also posted 'stories', stitched together photos and videos from their daily lives.

In the last six months of 2015, I posted over a hundred pictures of Sadie's cat, Wesley, on Facebook. I posted the photos under the heading 'Daily Wesley' (copying the practice of a friend who regularly posts photos of his dog, 'Daily Koda'). In the comments on the Daily Wesley, friends would write captions: sometimes as hashtags, sometimes in Wesley's voice, as if he were captioning his own pictures, and sometimes as if they were sharing an intimacy with Wesley directly.

After attending a One Direction concert with Sadie and her cousins in the summer of 2015, I started following the band on Twitter. More interesting than any members of the band was the One Direction fandom, the hundreds of thousands of passionate fans from among the band's 26 million followers. When tweeting their reactions to various One Direction-related happenings (the release of a track from the new album, a questionable remark from former band member Zayn Malik, or news of an award or major prize nomination), fans would use photos of the band members, Harry, Louis, Liam, Niall or some combination thereof, to express their feelings. For many fans, words alone could not convey the intensity of their emotions (although at least one came close when she said that she gave thanks every day for being alive at the same time as One Direction). One Direction photos communicated the feelings of One Direction fans to each other, to the world, or at least to Twitter. A happy Harry or surprised Niall expressed the tweeter's own delight. Funny or clever tweets accumulated thousands of retweets and likes. Sometimes there would only be three or four. The overall effect was of immense flows of feeling streaming off the screen.

These three instances of photographically mediated personal communication are not unique. They are common, generic. My examples here could apply to anyone. They point towards the constant generation and regeneration of a visual commons of circulating

images. In mass social and personal digital communication, images supply the raised eyebrow, sidelong glance, and disgusted grimace inseparable from face-to-face communication. Word, gesture and image intersect, overlap and combine: face palm. Visuals accompany and absorb text just as physical gestures augment oral communication. Using photos of others to illustrate a feeling, particularly in a humorous or ironic manner, is as ubiquitous on Twitter as the hashtag. Multiple, repeatable and generic images are less 'of' than they are 'for' – for circulation in the rich media networks of communicative capitalism.

Secondary Visuality

This merging of word, gesture and image is a 'secondary visuality' akin to the idea of 'secondary orality'. Walter J. Ong introduces secondary orality to describe the transmission of spoken language in a print culture. [2] Interested in the effects of literacy on speech, Ong distinguishes between the communicative practices of societies where communication is primarily oral and those where writing is dominant. While the idea of secondary orality remained relatively unexplored at the time of Ong's death, his characterization of orally-based thought highlights attributes that feature prominently in interactions in communicative capitalism's mass personal and social media.

These include:

1. Ideas are combined via addition – and, and, and – rather than in a more qualifying, supporting, or hierarchizing fashion ('although', 'under certain conditions');
2. Repetition is frequent;
3. Connection with actual experience, a shared lifeworld, is more compelling than analytical connection to an abstract field;
4. Ideas express empathy and identification or their lack;
5. Ideas are positioned as poles within a field of oppositions (for or against). [3]

Ong himself mentions secondary visualism in an unpublished lecture he gave late in his life, linking it to virtual reality as he explores the production of immediacy and distance in electronic communication. [4]

I use secondary visuality to designate the incorporation of images into mass practices of mediated social and personal communication. One might think of the slide from face-to-face interaction, to print (the written letter, perhaps with photographs included), to voice (telephone), to immediate text (e-mail, SMS), to photo-sharing (Flickr), to social media incorporating writing and photos, to personal communication conducted through combinations of words, photographs, images and short videos (GIFs). One practice doesn't replace another. They overlay and combine, changing preceding forms and practices in the process.

Communicative capitalism's overwhelming influx of messages, contributions and demands on our attention forces us to respond, cleverly and immediately. Finding the right words to convey complicated, likely conflicting emotions, is challenging. It's hard to do it in person, in writing, and in 140 characters or less. It's even harder to do it quickly and well, in ways that will be funny, charming, interesting, or, at the very least, not inept. Emojis and other images alleviate some of these pressures. Images circulate more easily than words. They condense and displace complex, multifaceted expression. When interpretation is too hard, when making an argument takes too long, little images are ready stand-ins. This is not because their meaning is clear. It's because they sidestep questions of meaning. They keep up the communicative flow by preventing it from getting caught up, bogged down, or sidetracked into preoccupation with what it means. I saw a great example on Facebook: on a long thread filled with detailed and contentious comments, someone posted an emoji to refute another's point. The response: 'Your emoji defeated my argument. Defeated.' In

communicative capitalism's intensely mediated settings where we are constantly enjoined to respond, and when we demand this of each other, visual communicative shortcuts are godsends, useful adaptations to conditions in which detailed analyses and complex arguments are increasingly out of place.

Secondary visuality, or the primacy of the image in technologically mediated mass personal communication, is a key attribute of communicative capitalism. Rather than the privilege of top- down communication (broadcast media, advertising) or a means of expression confined to artists and professionals, visual communication is part of everyday communication in digital networks. With our phones and tablets we converse via images as well as with words. Our phones are only tangentially for voice communication. On our screen appendages, images and words are tactilely identical. Most of the photos we will see today are digital images within a larger communicative flow.

In this setting of secondary visuality, images merge with text, become texts. Text is more than a caption and image is irreducible to illustration. Words and images are equivalent. One does not replace or subordinate the other. They intermix, mash and mingle such that neither alone can be said to be the repository of truth. Because images circulate as conversations, we find ourselves engaging in a new communicative form where the originality or uniqueness of an image is less important than its common, generic qualities, the qualities that empower it to circulate quickly and easily, that make it contagious. Images function as visual colloquialisms, figures of speech, catchphrases and slang. Whereas the critical or philosophical discourse on photography may draw insight from analyses of specific images, secondary visuality subsumes the specific into the generic. What matters is whether an image is repeated, whether it incites imitation, whether it can jump from one context to another. An image's circulatory capacity, its power to repeat, multiply and acquire a kind of force, has triumphed over its meaning (whether that meaning is withheld, inviting interpretation, or a seemingly straightforward and obvious representation of an object).

Under communicative capitalism, images circulate more easily than words and words take on features of images (as in word clouds). This new visualism is not just a matter of advertising, television, brands, mainstream media and the like. It characterizes one-to-one, one-to-few, one- to-many, few-to-many, many-to-few, and many-to-many communication. Social media and texting rely on images of all sorts – emojis, photos, videos, memes – deploying them in multiple combinations. We live montage.

Jacques Lacan uses montage to explain the psychoanalytic concept of the drive.[5] Unlike instinct, which has a biological source, a specific object, and an aim that can be satisfied, drive links together disparate components in a repetitive circuit. The drive isn't satisfied. It consists in a repetitive intensity, one that can cut through or go against what Sigmund Freud and others have presented as natural instincts. For Lacan, drive as such is death drive, a persistence beyond what seems good, pleasurable or balanced. Enjoyment accompanies persistence, repetition, circulation, not achievement or results. Instead of a big bang, there are little charges, just enough to keep us fascinated, to fasten us in.[6]

This psychoanalytic concept of drive helps illuminate the enjoyment that we derive from the repetitive circulatory practices of communicative capitalism. Conceived in terms of drive, networked communications circulate as multiple systems of repetition and capture, delivery systems well suited to the peculiar and uncanny human propensity to become stuck on minor activities and minimal differences. We link and click. Having found one cool GIF, we look for others, without looking for anything in particular. We scroll through our feeds – Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, Twitter, Snapchat – taking pleasure in the smooth surface of the phone, the swiping gesture, the cat photos, the familiar faces. The flow of words and images don't tell stories and they don't make arguments. They rarely appear as separate objects. There's not one image. Instead, out of repetition emerge trends, bubbles and aggregates, common images through which collectivity momentarily shines.

Collectivity and the Commonface

The digital habitats of secondary visuality encourage collectivization. The ostensibly odd or unique image becomes one among many: 49 weird family photos from the seventies; 23 worst celebrity plastic surgery disasters; 10 most beautiful sunsets; '39 Renaissance Babies Who Can't Even'. Websites like Buzzfeed and other clickbait aggregators specialize in the collectivization of the weird, the rendering of what might have once been seen as singular as common. The singular image is isolated and alone. The images that register are the ones that share with others and that others share. Their force comes from being many. The greater the circulation, the greater the force: we know that others have seen it and shared it (the number of retweets and shares is right in front of us). To be sure, the collectivization of the aggregators is a privatization, an accumulation and enclosure of images onto a platform that will attract viewers and sell ads. The privacy of unattractive photos of private people in their everyday lives in the private sphere is subsumed and replaced by the private ownership of corporate property.

The collectivization that accompanies secondary visuality, that renders images as elements of speech and that turns private moments into private property owned by another, extends to photographs of faces. In communicative capitalism, images of others are images of me. Each day, millions of tweets include text saying 'this is me' or 'then, I'm like' with an accompanying GIF of someone who is not actually them. I convey who I am by sharing a photo of someone else. My identity or sense of self is not so singular or unique that it can only stand for itself, only represent itself. It's interchangeable with others. Their faces and expressions convey my own. Not only do I see myself in others, I present others as myself. The face that once suggested the identity of a singular person now flows in collective expression of common feelings. Reaction GIFs work because of the affect they transmit as they move through our feeds, imitative moments in the larger heterogeneous being we experience and become.

Consider celebrity reaction shots. Again the One Direction fandom overflows with examples. Fans tweet photos of Harry Styles, Niall Horan, Louis Tomlinson, and Liam Payne to convey their own reactions. Band faces become fan faces, faces of the fandom. When fans do this, they are doing it for each other. Their likes and retweets let them see themselves seeing themselves. One Direction reaction GIFs are not simply indications of adoration, as if the communication were from fan to band. They are opportunities for the many to experience a collective force. Enthusiasm arises out of experience of collective imitation because the collectivity comes into being as a collectivity by feeling itself amplified, strengthened. [7] And yet our enthusiasm belongs to another not ourselves.

Sharing, repeating, makes us part of a crowd. Pleasure accrues through repetition: the counts of retweets and likes let us know we are not alone; we see with others as they see with us. On Twitter, for instance, the fact of a retweet doesn't tell you where someone stands. A retweet itself may be either for or against, subversive or supportive, sincere or ironic. It might just be a 'look at that!' A trending hashtag usually indexes a division, the struggle over and around a term. It marks a contagious intensity, something about which many people have strong feelings. Crowds, in squares and in media, are generally diverse and tumultuous. Imitation, repetition, contagion do not imply agreement.

Communicative capitalism's circulating images are images without viewers. It's not that images are unseen (although many go unshared, culled, deleted like so many thoughts unsaid). It's that they are not seen as separate, as unique. They flow into our life montage, becoming the visual common through which we converse, the archive or inchoate lexicon of our expression. Digital images don't present themselves as objects for scrutiny and analysis but for repetition and imitation. The less unique, the better. We don't have time to look at them – just a quick glance and then we'll share and scroll down.

Under second visuality, faces are common and private, belonging to those others than their bearers. Circulating, they express the feelings of anyone. As private property, they are claimed by corporations. Just as verbal colloquialisms are expressed as 'commonplaces' so are repetitive visuals 'commonfaces'. We should take this point to its logical extreme: selfies are a communist form of expression, social products appropriated by capitalism.

The critical reflex is to dismiss selfies as yet another indication of a pervasive culture of narcissism. I disagree. The narcissism critique approaches the selfie as if it were analysing a single photograph. It views the person in that photograph as the photograph's subject. Selfies, though, should be understood as a common form emerging out of the communicative practices of secondary visuality. Understood from within these practices, the selfie has a collective subject, the many participating in the common practice, the many imitating each other. The figure in the photo is incidental.

A selfie is a photo one makes of oneself using a mobile phone in order to share the photo on social media. It exists digitally, in that weird digital in-between of instant and forever. It's not meant as a commemoration. It doesn't memorialize what we've done. It's a quick registration of what we're doing. On Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat, selfies flow past, a kind of ongoing people's montage of right now. Multiple images of the same form, the selfie form, stream across our screens, a dispersed crowd like the people we pass walking along a sidewalk or in a mall. When we upload selfies, we are always vaguely aware that someone, when it is least opportune, may take an image out of its context and use it to our disadvantage. But we make them anyway as part of a larger social practice that says a selfie isn't really of me; it's not about me as the subject of a photograph. It's my imitation of others and our imitation of each other. To consider the selfie as a singular image removed from the larger practice of sharing selfies is like approaching a magazine through one word in one issue. A selfie is a photo of the selfie form, the repetition of a repeated practice.

To make the counter-intuitive idea of selfie communism convincing, I enlist Walter Benjamin. In his well-known essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' Benjamin distinguishes between the cult value of a work of art and its exhibition value. [8] 'Cult value' refers to the role of works of art in rituals. Works appear in temples and cathedrals, helping to generate mystery or a sense of the divine. 'Exhibition value' involves the liberation of a work from its ritual context. Instead of being valued because of its magical role in invoking the divine, a work is valued for artistic criteria. It is produced to function as art. Benjamin notes that the shift towards exhibition value involves an increase in the number of viewers of a work and an increase in a work's transportability. Frescos in a cathedral or a stand of sacred icons may be viewed by only a few religious adepts or, at best, by the faithful who congregate at specifically designated times. In contrast, a painting or sculpture can be moved from one site to another, in principle becoming accessible to ever more people. With film, exhibition value – the increase in accessibility and transportability – increases even more. What was distant and unapproachable comes closer.

Photography, Benjamin says, best exemplifies the change in exhibition value. Selfies exemplify a further move, a move to circulation value. Accessibility and transportability don't just increase, they become ends in themselves. That the camera is a phone tells us that images are for communicating. Reproduction becomes inseparable from production: the image posted on Facebook can be on any number of screens at the same time, whether or not it even registers to anyone scrolling through. I was surprised recently when I heard a museum curator discuss a large work of public art. His criteria for the success of the work was the number of photographs of it that appeared on Instagram. For the curator, the value of the work was its degree of circulation. This example isn't about selfies, but it illustrates my point about circulation value.

Communicative capitalism *[onlineopen.org/know-it-all]* subsumes communication into digital networks premised on access and immediacy. Almost any feeling, image or thought can be shared with another, instantly added to the larger flow of feelings, images and thoughts. Our sharing replaces one sort of privacy with another: on social media, private feelings become private property, belonging to the corporation who owns the platforms and traces of our social engagement. In a setting of ubiquitous media, where we are enjoined to participate, contribute and share – and where we enjoy participating, contributing and sharing – the means of literary and artistic production, reproduction and distribution have converged. The technologies we use to communicate and create push our ideas and images into networks and onto screens where they are common yet owned by another.

Benjamin discusses photography as a technique of mechanical reproduction. Mechanical reproduction 'substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence.'[9] Benjamin continues, it 'detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition.' The mechanically reproduced object (like a photograph or audio record) can be inserted into different contexts, associated with different objects, read from the perspective of varying discursive frameworks. As an object of a process of mechanical reproduction, a work escapes its original material condition of having been made to reappear in a new setting orientated to the viewer, listener or spectator. It no longer has a unique existence in a particular time and space but a plural existence, a common existence, in that the appearance of the work is shared by this place and that place, this time and that time. In its multiple appearings, it is common to them.

When images are emancipated from their exhibition value, that is, when they are made to circulate, commonality of images becomes the general milieu. The context of communication is one of a generalized visuality characterized by multiplicity, repetition and association. Again, we live montage. In this montage, patterns emerge when forms repeat. Brands are a commercial version of this repetition. Hashtags, emojis, memes and selfies are the people's version, one way that we try to produce meanings in a setting where capitalism has privatized our basic social interactions and turned them into a storable, mineable resource.

Much interesting and influential commentary on Benjamin's discussion of 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' has focused on his concept of the 'aura' and the extent to which the aura has decayed under conditions of mechanical reproduction. I am more interested in his account of these conditions in terms of the increased significance of 'the masses'. The masses, Benjamin explains, desire to bring things closer; they try to get hold of the object at close range via reproductions of it. The masses are inclined towards 'overcoming the uniqueness of every reality.'[10] This perception of the overcoming of uniqueness is marked by the 'sense of the universal equality of things.' The presence of the many in contemporary life changes how objects appear. Reproduced in popular media (Benjamin's examples are magazines and newsreels), objects become commensurable, like statistics. Any one is equal to any other.

Benjamin observes that even as photography exemplifies exhibition value, it has not been entirely cut off from cult value. Cult value became concentrated in the human face: 'the portrait was the focal point of early photography.'[11] When photography starts to feature images without people, exhibition value trumps cult value. The photograph loses its aura of mystery and becomes a kind of evidence, an accompaniment to stories and texts. Photos are less singular objects or images to be contemplated than they are temporary and replaceable elements.

With the selfie, the face returns to the photo, now emancipated from exhibition value. A selfie is not a portrait. It's not an image of the unique and irreplaceable. It's an instance of how one is like many, equal to any other. The selfie demonstrates further the emancipation of the commonality of the object from the commodity form. To be common and

reproducible is no longer strictly a characteristic of the commodity – especially in a context where commodities are inscribed with individuality (personalized sneakers, designer this and that). To be common and reproducible is a characteristic of each of us, a realization we enact with every selfie and hashtag, even when we may not be fully aware that we are doing it.

Benjamin notes that with the flourishing of print media – the proliferation of newspapers and journals, the prevalence of 'letters to the editor' – readers become writers and literary license becomes common property. In communicative capitalism, viewers become photographers and models, actors and filmmakers; spectators become spectacles, and spectacles become instants, snapshots, nuggets of circulating feeling. Selfies are faces as common property, common property owned by the few.

Circulation, not Toleration

With the secondary visuality of communicative capitalism, communicative utterances that might have once been speech acts – talking on the phone or sending a letter to the editor – now mix words and images: a text with emojis, an animated GIF inserted into a comment thread, a meme. Visual conversations are carried out through photos and short videos. As interactions that flow across our screens, multiple images envelop us in a montage of humour, horror, the mundane, and the bizarre. The repercussion of secondary visuality is that popular politics unfolds as the politics of the crowd. [12]

Networked media don't facilitate democratic deliberation. There's no time to consider every argument or viewpoint. Contemporary commentators thus fret about 'bubbles', 'cascade effects', 'bandwagoning' and 'confirmation bias'. The classic crowd theorists of the early twentieth century considered similar phenomena with a different vocabulary: imitation, contagion, suggestion, de-individuation and affective intensification. Even more: they said that the crowd thinks in images.

Typically, the elite chastises the crowd and all the processes associated with it – imitation and visuality are subordinated to originality and the word. As Jacques Rancière notes, the dominant logic 'makes the visual the lot of multitudes and the verbal the privilege of the few.' [13] Rancière rejects this logic, arguing that words actually are images, 'that is to say, forms of redistribution of the elements of representation.' Rancière makes this argument in the context of a discussion of the intolerable image. His concern is not with the circulation of digital images in social media. Rather he is questioning assumptions regarding the political capacity of images so that he might present politics aesthetically, as the opening to new arrangements of the sensible.

Although not his point, Rancière's observation points to the flattened terrain of networked participatory media, a communicative milieu of rapidly circulating reappropriations of words and images. In this milieu, an awkward facial expression can undermine a cogent argument. A silly caption can detourn a serious or straightforward photograph – and these effects are contingent on repetition and circulation. Creative juxtaposition has been set free from the domain of art to thrive in the digital networks of communicative capitalism. The most powerful word-image combinations reproduce rapidly, contagiously, as people copy and share them. The political content of these combinations is open. Different sides and interests use them in struggle and treat them as sites of struggle. As I already mentioned, trending hashtags generally point to battles, contestations over a meaning rather than its acceptance. If there wasn't a conflict, something at stake in the circulation of the image, why bother?

Rancière says that 'the images of art do not supply weapons for battles.' [14] His idea here is that the presumption of a 'straight line' from the image of an intolerable situation, to an understanding of the reality of that situation, to a desire to act politically to change the

situation is mistaken. This is not how the politics of visibility works, he argues. Artistic images suggest new configurations of the sensible and they do so 'on condition that their meaning or effect is not anticipated.' Less weapons than they are openings, artistic images hinge on the introduction of the unanticipated.

Rancie re might be correct with respect to works of art shown in museums and galleries. When images are emancipated from their exhibition value, however, when they are made to circulate, their political operation is configured according to the dynamics of the crowd. Practices of image-sharing constitutive of secondary visuality suggest the limit to Rancie re's account. Within these practices, images can be weapons. Moreover, their power can come from the mobilization of anticipation, the generic and the common.

The communicative capacity of images – emojis, memes, reaction GIFs – relies on a certain anticipation of effect. To circulate efficiently, an image shouldn't be viewed, that is, contemplated and interpreted. It has to be obvious, fast, with a little charge to incite people to deploy it. When someone uses 'this is me' to caption an image of someone else, the intent is not to surprise a viewer or provoke a viewer into questions regarding the instability of personal identity. The point is quickly to register a feeling using a common visual language. In the politicized interactions raging throughout social media, images are lobbed as so many visual grenades, produced and circulated as means to expose, condemn, humiliate and undermine. A common image (of a presidential candidate, say) is expropriated, text is attached to it (a dank meme), and the image-word combination is released into battle, ready to be duplicated, altered and circulated. Every forward, retweet, share or like is another arrow in an endless epic orc battle.

At the same time, the archive of images and their traces stored in the corporate and state servers misleadingly presented as the cloud provides ammunition for a range of other battles – the knowledge of customers and their interconnections desired by advertisers, the knowledge of terrorists, insurgents and whistle-blowers desired by the state. And in yet another twist, the expropriation and redistribution of images directs us to the contradictory conditions of class war under communicative capitalism: because it is so easily created and shared, digital content is hard to commodify even as it owned. Much of what is posted is offered up for free, and what isn't, people take, their taking itself driving the accumulation and appropriation of traces and metadata owned by another. Cultural producers have a hard time getting paid for their work even as the hold of the commodity form in the realm of affects, images and ideas is diminished. In the words of technology theorist Jaron Lanier, '[o]rdinary people "share," while elite network presences generate unprecedented fortunes.' [15] In class war, everything is a weapon; part of the struggle consists in seizing and knowing how to use them.

The secondary visuality of communicative capitalism directs us to a visual milieu characterized by imitation, repetition and circulation. In this setting, the power of images comes from the crowd, the many who give them their force. Political tactics adequate to this setting will find ways to seize and deploy the common in the service of a divisive egalitarian politics. Instead of repeating the individualist worry over being just another face in the crowd, they will champion the face as a crowd, recognizing the increasing force of collectivity and the common and the necessity of seizing for the many what is claimed by the few.

Jodi Dean is the author of numerous books and articles. Her books include *Solidarity of Strangers* (1996), *Aliens in America* (1998), *Publicity's Secret* (2002), *Žižek's Politics* (2006), *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* (2009), *Blog Theory* (2010) and *The Communist Horizon* (2012). Her most recent book is *Crowds and Party,* published by Verso in 2016.

Footnotes

1. For a more thorough discussion of communicative capitalism, see my *Publicity's Secret* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002) and *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
2. Walter J. Ong *Orality and Literacy* (New York: Routledge, 1982).
3. For more detail see my *Blog Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010).
4. Walter J. Ong, 'Secondary Orality and Secondary Visualism,' presentation at the Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, Missouri, October, 1995, available in the St. Louis University Libraries Digital Collections, cdm.slu.edu.
5. See my discussion in *Blog Theory*.
6. See my discussion in 'Apps and Drive,' *Theories of the Mobile Internet,* ed. Andrew Herman, Jan Hadlaw and Thom Swiss (New York: Routledge, 2015).
7. See my discussion in *Crowds and Party* (London: Verso, 2016).
8. Walter Bejamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Shocken Books, 1969), 217–252.
9. Ibid., 221.
10. Ibid., 223.
11. Ibid., 226.
12. For more detail, see *Crowds and Party.*
13. Jacques Rancie re, *The Emancipated Spectator,* trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), 97.
14. Ibid., 103.
15. Jaron Lanier, *Who Owns the Future?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 15.

Crosslinks

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Aesthetics, Capitalism, Commons, Image

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