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On Stupidity as a Pedagogical Commitment A Constructive Engagement with Derek R. Ford

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Abstract

This paper undertakes a sustained engagement with Marxism, Pedagogy, and the General Intellect by Derek R. Ford (2021). The pedagogical form of stupidity, as developed by Ford, is given particular attention as one that is actually not pedagogical, but should rather be understood as a tactical force utilized by capital and the state in making subjects legible to it. I propose that stupidity is a potentially violent and dangerous suspension of thought that leaves a subject bare to the forces of capital self-valorization and state power. My analysis braves stupidity in order to bear the pedagogical form of intuition as one that can sustain life, that can provide relief, and alternate tactics for confronting both capital and state power. Stupidity is a fundamental technique used in the making of corpses. Intuition cultivates life in our children and does so with the aid of Karl Marx's articulation of a 'social brain'. My hope is that my engagement be a call to begin a consensual contract with the general social forces that produce and sustain all of our lives in common.



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Introduction

Pedagogy is the bedrock of wellbeing. Means et al. (2017) show that the commons are inherently educational and Watkins (2019) effectively illustrates that mutual accompaniment, and its subsequent healthy common, thrives on sensitive pedagogy. The folding and unfolding of learning are crucial to how thought, ideas, and ideals become scaffolded in the architecture of our lives. What political recourse or power do we have when that cycle becomes captured by markets or by the state? How can we speak out or write through hope, joy, or grief when the language required to build solidarity between disparate groups is extracted and ingested by large models of fixed capital?

Derek R. Ford attempted an answer on how to approach the cognitive turn of capital extraction in 2021 with his book, *Marxism, Pedagogy, and the General Intellect*. The height of the Covid-19 Global Pandemic ensured that the budding questions for education in the 21st century, and academia, could not go unanswered or be ignored. Ford, as an Academic, was perhaps confronted by the redundancy of ‘publish or perish’ ecologies. Alongside uneasy, chaotic, and decentered requirements for learning remotely, one can understand the need to return to Marx and other pedagogues in conflict with how to reinform and conform class formations during the late stage of capitalist development.

Few have been as attuned to the consequences of education in class formation or in its subsequent possibilities of thought than Karl Marx. Undoubtedly, Marx has inspired a significant lineage. Robust discourse has been formed around his masterwork, the three volumes of *Capital*. My goal within my short time with you, dear reader, is not to squabble over the inheritance of Marx or Marxism. I choose instead to return to Marx after Marxism with questions that concern our contemporary political and historical juncture. Brilliant as they are, those three volumes of *Capital* have been trod hard. Ford, much like myself here, favor returning to Marx’s *Grundrisse* (1993). Personally, I find these notebooks to be a source of vitality and serve as an example of the kind of self-pedagogy required to succeed against forces that would aim to malevolently bind our will to the will of another.

The seven notebooks comprising the *Grundrisse* were written over the course of 1857 to 1858 for the purpose of “self-clarification” (Nicolaus, 1993, p. 7). They were homework for what would eventually be three separate volumes of *Capital*. Marx was determined, fiercely so, to write these notebooks for his own edification and elaboration of his ideas. How inspiring! But we should not forget the domestic labor Jenny von Westphalen undertook to ensure his focus on Karl’s unimaginable project. She raised their children, suffered through several exiles, and countries to support Marx attain a near unreachable dream. There is no *Capital* without Jenny.

The *Grundrisse* was published for the first time in the 20th century and presents itself as a text without the same polemical baggage from Academics or political projects as those of *Capital*. Within these seven notebooks lie some of the very few notions and hints of ‘sociality’ shared by humans Marx ever wrote. The ethical commitments Marx made, or did not make, in the *Grundrisse* are an open invitation within academic scholarship to return to Marx with a 21st century sensibility. I visit with the *Grundrisse* in order to make sense of my own world and life alongside a man doing the same but in a different time. Like myself, Marx was just a man trying to figure ‘it’ all out. Wanderings, contradictions, indignations, dead ends, insights and all else that arise from generative scholarship.

Contemporary educational studies would refer to the *Grundrisse*'s style of research as falling well within the genre of study (Meyerhoff, 2019; Ford, 2022; Means, 2021; Harney & Moten, 2013). Alexander Means described study as opposite to learning in that "[Study], in contrast, resists a will to measure and extract. When one studies one enters into a practice of freedom, a creative and unpredictable labor of intensity" (2021, p. 974). Study is "a restless agitation to know, think, and feel differently; to dwell otherwise in common with others" (Means, 2021, p. 975). One does not know where they will end up when embarking on a study. That is the difference within these authors between study and learning: study is immeasurable, unpredictable, and involves a persistent pursuit of possibility in both thought and action. Political projects become evoked by study in a way they are not always called up by learning.

Parsing the theoretical differences between study and learning can quickly become similar to splicing hairs. Not least because one is often involved with the other. I consider here that study is intimately intertwined with action in a way that learning need not be. One can learn that the leaves of eucalyptus trees shed poison into the soil so that other plants cannot grow without doing anything with that knowledge. It is an entirely different modality to investigate how, when, why, and where eucalyptus grow so that one does not mistakenly plant them as a Fireline. One is the undertaking of a project (doing), much like Marx had to write up his equations and proof them out time and time again; while the other requires acquiring fact.

I position this work clearly within the genre of study. Derek R. Ford may well be within that footpath as well with his 2022 publication of *Communist study: Education for the commons*. In short, Marx, Ford, and myself share an alignment of momentum: learning is not enough to save the future (Means, 2018). We must play, discuss, emerge, and modulate what we know, what we learn, with what we can do.

I certainly have my own particular commitments to Marx; thus, why I write this work in the spirit of hermeneutic fidelity to Ford. To Ford, I send this in solidarity to the responsibilities we share towards building a world in common devoted to relieving, even healing, the wounding burdens of capital. Yet, Ford's articulation of stupidity does not rest easy with me. I do not fully recognize Ford's authorial intention or logical movements regarding when stupidity might be implicated outside of his book. How, for instance, is exodus different from the absolution of responsibility found in anti-humanism? Where does responsibility, accountability, or the burdens of care lie within stupid arrangements?

My first introduction to Ford was encountering his 2022 article "Marx's inquiry and presentation." I was instantly confronted with the same kind of questions others have brought to the *Grundrisse*: How was I to read the *Grundrisse*? Do I see myself here in this discourse? Am I being implicated here in this text from 1857-8 originally written in three languages and compiled in 1953? Where are my students in this text? To borrow from Louis Althusser, as Derek Ford did, I was embarking on a 'guilty' reading (Althusser et al., 2015, p. 13; Ford, 2022, p. 1888). A "guilty reading" requires "the mere question of its innocence: what is it to read?" (Althusser et al., 2015, p. 13). A guilty reading is an effort in developing a "discovery of and training in the meaning of the 'simplest' acts of existence: seeing, listening, speaking, reading – the acts which relate men to their works" (Althusser et al., 2015, p. 13). It is both a metacognitive and transactional style of reading. The self is implicated on every line and the social on every page.

Ford's 'guilty' reading of the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* within this 2022 article extends the distinction, for Ford, between inquiry and presentation. The text is rather confusing. Jumping from

4 Critical Education

Althusserian discourse on composition and reading to the political agenda of Antonio Negri (pp. 1888-89). It can be difficult at first to see where he will land. Ford distinguishes inquiry (read: study) from presentation (read: learning) in such a way that inquiry represents the process wherein:

the method of inquiry, is one that examines material in all of its nuances and relationships, tracing out the different lineages, past, present, and future potential forms of development, and how they each interdepend on and transform each other (p. 1889).

Marx himself refers to this as ‘the *Forschung*’. Inquiry is an intense form of thinking. A *how* not a *what*. Presentation is only accomplished “after the work is done” (p. 1889). Presentation is what Ford refers to as ‘learning.’ But what is learning? Ford offers that learning “is a developmental process that moves from the former (ignorance) to the latter (intelligence) by various means (constructivist, student-centered, dialogical, etc.). It is about the actualization of a pre-existing potential” (p. 1888). I fail to see how *study*, as has been articulated by Ford and Means, is outside the umbrella of *learning* as Ford has prescribed; which is the shuttling between knowing and ignorance.

There is also the issue of how learning is implicated within the method of inquiry and the method of presentation. *Capital* was written and undertaken with the audience of Academics and political economists. A different audience, certainly, than the German working class, but learning still resides within the method of presentation. Marx was not writing all of this for nothing. I wonder if the parsing of inquiry vs. presentation is not an unnecessary splicing of hairs. What is the real difference of learning between the two?

These are uninteresting distinctions to me. My interest is rather in the kind of sociality involved in *study* as compared to the student-centered, or now world-centered education proposed by Gert Biesta (2021); which emphasize externality. Of being with the world and hold attention outside of oneself. These pedagogies revolve around encounters between self and social. There seems to be no difference between learning (presentation) and inquiry (study) as they are implicated within the *Grundrisse*; which was never ‘presented’ during Marx’s lifetime. So, what exactly is the pedagogical content of the *Grundrisse*? The pedagogy comes from whichever political or ethical questions one brings to the *Grundrisse* when reading these notebooks now.

Pedagogy and politics are coextensive. Ford forces his own hand in extricating Althusser’s *guilt* to categorically plead that the *Grundrisse* is a more open-text than *Capital* but that *Capital* is no lesser because of it. There is a general antagonism here between how scholars have *read* Marx in the past and how scholars are *reading* Marx now. Ford uses this tension to propose that the generative, innovative landscape of study was essential for Marx in writing *Capital* and that what Marxism needs now is a ‘return to study’ (2022, p. 1896). Both study and presentation are utilized within *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*. The difference between study and learning is situational, subtle, and marginal.

Placed here, inquiry and presentation are political tactics more than they are pedagogical logics. They attempt to sow a dialectical relationship between ‘intelligence’ and ‘ignorance’ beyond the spiral of capital as a defensive tactic by the working class to remove themselves from neoliberal, post-Fordist logics (p. 1896). I refuse such tactics. They reify the boundaries and divisions between the ‘working-class’ and cognitive laborers. I believe it essential to ask what use these distinctions are on the floor of an advanced optics factory? A union can certainly take a form

from group study. But where is the presentation? Ossified into the commodity? Perhaps it is enough to simply affirm that there is no such thing as an innocent reading and to go on reading anyways.

Reckoning with the mark Ford has made on Marx in educational philosophy and theory is necessary in order to return to Marx after the very real failures of Marxism. Here in this essay, I offer a maneuver against stupidity, not Ford's reading of Marx in general. Unabashedly, I interrogate *Marxism, pedagogy, and the general intellect: Beyond the knowledge economy*; written by Ford and published in 2021. I do so in efforts of moving beyond stupidity before the feet of Marx.

The Passage from Ignorance to Intelligence

Before a sustained interrogation of Marxism, Pedagogy, and the General Intellect can take place, the dialectical relationship for Ford between ignorance and knowing must be revealed. In doing so, Ford's eventual proposal of stupidity will begin to make sense. How ironic! "Labor", as Marx reminds us, "is the living, form-giving fire" (1993, p. 361). Study is the intense labor that gives a form to learning, so let us study Ford.

Ignorance, according to Ford, can be 'cured.' Ignorance, to Ford, occurs when someone does not have access to information, does not have access to language, or to the content necessary to form a relationship with knowledge. Learning bridges the gap between ignorance and intelligence. Ignorance, here, is presented as a cognitive form wherein even if someone does not know something, does not have a competency, there is still a way to attain that competency. Intelligence, for Ford, is the accomplishment of attaining that competency. Intelligence is a storehouse of knowledge successfully attained.

Learning, within the context of the Grundrisse and as Ford describes it, functions a great deal like the investment of capital and of energy into a fixed position. Learning and the "general social labor" present themselves "not in labor but in capital" (Marx, 1993, p. 694). Ford offers the insightful implication that there can be a 'dead' form of learning much the same as there can be a 'dead' form of labor. One should note, however, that a great deal should perhaps be owed to Paulo Freire (2018) with his notions of banking education in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Ignorance and intelligence serve as the dialectical spiral of a student's journey. Learning leads this pathway from ignorance to intelligence and leads again from intelligence to ignorance: "Learning is the fundamental movement from ignorance to knowledge, which once completed eliminates ignorance" (Ford, 2021, p. 78). Study as Ford described it certainly takes on this fluctuating shuttle of questioning, searching, finding, compartmentalizing, and contextualizing findings.

Ford writes his commitment to the idea that learning "is guided by pre-determined ends, upholds binary distinctions between ignorance and intelligence, amateurism and professionalism, students and teachers, and so on" (2022, p. 1888). He continues to name his task - and the task of the Communist Party of which he is a card-carrying member - as one that shuttles between learning and studying. Ford refers to these pedagogical logics as the "constellations" of Marx's project. I believe he is correct to do so and admirably posits, alongside Walter Benjamin and Tyson Lewis, that the tensions between one discourse or logic of Marxism with that of another should be maintained.

I wonder at the intellectual move Ford makes in offering a contentment with non-partisan understandings and equanimity for different interpretations of Marx. For instance, Ford (2021) poses that:

To be faithful to Marx is to learn *and* study works of not only Marx but also his interpreters - and most importantly the ongoing history of the international struggle of working and oppressed peoples - in order to organize and prepare for a revolutionary rupture and build the dictatorship of the proletariat (p. 1890).

He does not refuse the polemical debates between discourses, but instead favors non-stifling discourse to enable the ‘agency’ of Marxism (Ibid.). One can see clearly the lines of *study* within this intense, and ambitious articulation, especially as Ford prepares for a revolution. If it were not clear before, allow it to be so now: *study* as Ford has articulated it is only possible in the context of capitalism. *Study* is necessary to realize and imagine, to organize and sustain alternate worlds and futures. Divesting ourselves of capitalism and the pedagogy that sustains its contexts is foundational to imagining a new context in the first place. Ford makes *study* into a perpetual war room.

The context and criticisms on the ‘Knowledge Economy’ are now far-reaching and owe a great debt to the work of Italian Marxists of the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Ford is aware of his indebtedness to their political project of envisioning the overproduction of capital by labor and the capacity for workers to organize: “This is where the *autonomy* thesis emerges: capital needs labor but labor doesn’t need capital” (Ford, 2021, p. 13). The ‘general intellect’, as it has come to be called, refers to the indeterminacy, indeed the very force of sociality itself, that capital relies upon for succor.

To Ford, the general intellect offers itself up as a fine new battleground for class politics and for working-class struggle. Firstly, the general intellect, if indeterminate, represents imagination, innovation, and ways of organizing society that cannot be fully captured by capital and actually oppose its maneuvers for self-valorization. Secondly, because the general intellect takes on an adversarial posture towards capital, it reflects the working-class struggle for autonomy and self-determination. But how does one go about teaching workers how to organize themselves, how to put language to their experiences or how to negotiate power?

Education, particular to Ford, is taken on as a major aim of *Marxism, Pedagogy, and the General Intellect*. Pedagogy, like knowledge, has always been essential in the propagation of Capitalism. Ford does a fine job of sketching the entangled, complicated history of post-Fordism and the ‘knowledge economy’. He makes clear that the stakes could not be higher for subjects in post-Fordism wherein “education isn’t just a component of the knowledge economy but its fundamental *motor*” (2021, pp. 7-8).

Education as the *motor* of post-Fordism is an immensely provocative insight. Ford’s proposition holds weight when one considers the increased investment in ‘human capital’ undertaken within both public and private schools in the United States of America in the 20th and early 21st century (Bowles & Gintis, 2011; Means, 2018). Bowles and Gintis eloquently made the case that personality traits prized, deemed virtuous, by the government of the United States of America were being fostered in schools first. What this suggests is that education is not merely relegated to the cognitive sphere but to behavior traits overall. They originally published *Schooling in Capitalist America* in 1976 which was over 30 years before Maurizio Lazzarato wrote that, under ‘immaterial labor’, the “worker’s personality and subjectivity have to be made susceptible

to organization and command” (1999, p. 133). As one labors using one’s subjectivity as the ‘raw material’, so too does one’s personality become more adequate to capital.

Education is a terrain for capitalist intervention and cultivation. The professionalization of disciplines in higher education to the integration of mass-standardization in k-12 public Schools illustrates efforts to control or modulate the ‘skills’ and ‘virtues’ of youth that will one day most certainly be ‘workers’. Ford is keenly attuned to the coextension of pedagogy and politics in this way. I commend him for undertaking a project that attempts to bring a cohesive sketching of post-Fordism to education. Ford makes clear how the shuttling between learning and intelligence, as he has defined them, operate in driving the motor of education which drives the motor of capital. The capitalist function of learning begins with ignorance and moves into learning in a never-ending spiral; thus, creating a constant expansion of the general intellect that capital can profit from (See Ford, 2021, pp. 78–79, for more).

What hope, then, does a student have for escaping this cycle? Of escaping the self-programming, self-modulating ‘society of control’ (Deleuze, 1990). If pedagogy is a driving force of capital, how then does one go about teaching towards the end of capital? The answer Ford gives may surprise you.

Stupidity as a Pedagogical Commitment

Embedded within the knowledge economy is a pedagogical logic of ‘learning’ as Ford has articulated. I believe Ford to be referring to the particular evidence now required to provide proofs of learning: degrees, certificates, renewed training, etc. The presentation of learning is more important than what was learned, but of course this is trivial and contested along many lines of stakeholders in education. The ‘general intellect’ must be wrestled away from the capitalist economy and models of primitive accumulation. To this challenge, Ford issues that stupidity should be taken up as an adequate tactic and ‘pedagogical form’ (2021, p. 81).

Stupidity, for Ford, is not unintelligence, or the absence of knowing, but rather “the absence of a relation to knowing” (2021, p. 81). Stupidity is a state of being in stupor, of being insensible, in a suspended state where the momentum of thought is frozen and time no longer moves. Stupidity

never has an answer precisely because it undermines the question asked. When we’re in a state of stupor, we’re not even sure what the reference points for any discussion are (Emphasis original. Ford, 2021, p. 81).

Stupidity requires no realization of its processes; indeed, it is an inability to produce. To be in stupor is to be without thought such that knowledge is impossible. Ford mistakes the cart for the horse. A *stupid* subject is a subject without thought before one without knowledge. Not having knowledge is contingent on not possessing thought. Stupidity is thus an “anti-value” to capital (p. 82). Stupidity cannot be subsumed into fixed capital because any “interruption or blockage results in non-values, while anything that blocks the movement of value is an anti-value” (p. 82). Ford recognizes that he cannot determine or define fully what stupidity is given its nature but aims to ‘gesture’ towards its approximation (p. 76). How should we as educators envision the model of stupidity for our classrooms? Can students find pride and fund solidarity in absent spaces? Spaces relieved of thought are the breeding grounds of fascism.

Stupidity represents a ‘pedagogical exodus’ from both capital and the state (p. 76). Ford is very much along party lines of the Italian Marxists here, specifically Paolo Virno. But he does something interesting when he posits that:

Stupidity as such is the pedagogical form of working-class exodus and refusal. When Tronti asks ‘what happens when the form of working-class organization takes on a wholly alternative content,’ when it ‘refuses to function as an articulation of capitalist society,’ he’s posing the necessity of an alternative pedagogical logic, one that is incompatible with the pedagogy of realization and learning and that can’t be expropriated by capital or governed by the state” (Ford, 2021, p. 83)

I fail to see how stupidity may pose as a necessary, alternate pedagogical logics, especially one that is not a logic at all. Further, is stupidity incompatible with the ‘pedagogy of realization and learning’ because it is an alternate pedagogical logic?

Or, is stupidity incompatible with pedagogy in general because it is an evacuation of sense? Sara Carpenter is finely attuned to this issue in her review of Ford as she interprets *stupidity* to be an “embodied political position” rather than point of arrival or point of departure (2022, p. 440). Where do you go from where you are? Exodus cannot occur successfully without somewhere to go or somewhere to enter into. What kind of politics is possible without sense, without thought, without work?

Ford would have done well to lean on Maurizio Lazzarato’s insightful 1996 essay “Immaterial Labor” when relying on both stupidity and exodus as forms of opposing capital by wrestling the general intellect away from the knowledge economy. Knowledge production, if Ford’s analysis is to be supported, would need to be the predominant mode of production *and* would need to take priority over distribution, consumption, and circulation. Lazzarato fluently points out that consumption has outstripped production, namely the consumption of information.

Lazzarato advances Hochschild’s (1979) *The Managed Heart*’s thesis that emotions, affects and behaviors, become subsumed under capital when one labors in service work. Lazzarato (1996) does this in the following ways: firstly, by posing first that a ‘worker’s soul’ become ‘part of the factory’ (p. 133); secondly, that the product of immaterial labor (the commodity) is not “destroyed in the act of consumption, but rather it enlarges, transforms, and creates the ‘ideological’ and cultural environment of the consumer” (p. 137); and lastly, that consumption “is then first of all a consumption of information. Consumption is no longer only the ‘realization’ of a product, but a real and proper social process that for the moment is defined with the term *communication*” (Emphasis original. p. 140).

Social media did not exist when Lazzarato wrote those words or when Hochschild wrote *Managed Heart*, but one can see very clearly how *communication* itself is an act of consumption and self-valorization for capital. Artificial Intelligence, too, is built upon the extraction of language and behavior characteristics. The commons, the ‘general intellect’, is increasingly being extracted upon precisely in order to levy more efficient algorithms, acquire more data, and predict human behavior. David Theo Goldberg (2021) further illustrates the dangers of state control and usage of biometric scanners and algorithms that reinforce racist boundaries.

Production has been outstripped by *communication*. Information, as Byung-Chul Han (2021) addresses, has become the predominant form of control with transparency as its leading logic:

In truth, transparency is an ideology; it is a neoliberal dispositif. It violently drags everything out into the open in order to transform it into information. In the context of today's immaterial mode of production, more information and communication mean greater productivity, acceleration and growth (p. 29)

Han holds that today, "transparency is, accordingly, an instrument of control and surveillance" (p. 34). Lazzarato (1996) corroborates this as he understands immaterial labor to be the "labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity" (p. 132) wherein the laborer "has to express oneself, one *has to* speak, communicate, cooperate, and so forth" (p. 134). Under the 'infocracy', none are outside of this network of extraction.

The collective potentiality of learning together and in common is very present in Derek Ford's analysis of the Italian Marxist tradition. In the 'phase' of post-Fordist production:

workers are expected to become 'active subjects' in the coordination of the various functions of production, instead of being subjected to it as a simple command. We arrive at a point where a *collective learning process becomes the heart of productivity*, because it is no longer a matter of finding different ways of composing or organizing already existing job functions, but of looking for new ones" (Emphasis added. Lazzarato, 1996, p. 134).

The *socialized* worker is one embedded in and embodying networks, training, and conduct adequate to succeeding in professional contexts. Humans become a resource. Innovation becomes the company slogan. I wonder how *stupidity* is to combat a collective subjectivity rooted and reified by architecture, by the 'content of commodities', and the internalization of the principles of transparency.

Subjects must be made legible *en perpetua*. Fordist cultural logics ensured the subject conform through disciplinary means. Post-Fordism, 'infocracy', 'knowledge economy', however one wishes to distinguish these contemporary times, require that subjects make themselves legible both to the state and to capital. When I walk through an airport, my face is being scanned, I am being tracked by security computer protocols, I am scanned both biologically and physically for weapons, my baggage is put through penetrating rays. The airport is the 'glass cube' of fascism that Byung-Chul Han proposed as the pinnacle of transparency. The authoritative state of hyper-communication.

Ford (2021) is not unaware of the risks entailed by transparency, though is aware from an adjacent side:

to counter the knowledge economy by merely refusing articulation or transparency would work to reinforce it. This refusal would accept the alternatives present: know or don't know, say or don't say, work or don't work, learn or don't learn (p. 80).

Stupidity makes the subject opaque - illegible to capital or to the state. The subject is suspended in a state without sense, locked, frozen, inaccessible. Ford recognizes that transparency is just as dangerous to worker movements because in being made legible, they can be subsumed by capital. What room is there for a subject to strike out from these logics?

A subject cannot 'strike' from transparency. Certainly, a subject can choose voluntarily not to consume social media or to sign waivers, participate in research, or complete customer service surveys. A subject cannot, however, choose to remove themselves from the rigid bureaucracy of state or capitalist control without submitting to violence, enclosure, precarity, or surveillance. That

“[Stupidity] is figured as the lack of production, as the incapacity to generate new knowledge by the failure to understand” means nothing when the subject is legible through processes of transparency (Ford, 2021, p. 85).

Legibility itself is reliant on strategies that code learning in specific ways, I can admit that much to Ford’s argument. Literacy itself is one such strategy. Consider the laundry list of competencies students must now be ‘literate’ in from financial to content to wellbeing or social literacy. Stupidity, “is an educational challenge that requires a pedagogy that mobilizes” ... “*without* the demand to *learn* from and produce *knowledge* through actualization.” (Emphasis original, p. 78). Ford is not *against* learning - indeed, I fail to see how study/inquiry or any other form of pedagogy is possible without learning as he has described it: a developmental process categorized by “the fundamental movement from ignorance to knowledge, which once completed eliminates ignorance” (2021, p. 78). The interesting proposition here is that learning be *suspended* as a pedagogical goal. I wonder then what the qualitative difference is between the dynamics of *stupidity* as a pedagogical form and those that *play* offer.

Derek Ford illustrates how the dynamics of stupidity may work in practice as a pedagogical form at the end of Chapter 5. Ford suggests that, “[To] read stupidly is to *encounter* language, not to *grasp* it” (Emphasis original. p. 84). The placement of the verb ‘*to grasp*’ may seem an odd one, but Ford is intentionally inheriting Édouard Glissant’s understanding of ‘grasping’:

‘The verb to grasp,’ he writes, ‘contains the movement of hands that grab their surroundings and bring them back to themselves. A gesture of enclosure if not appropriation.’ The subject is one who not only has the right but the requirement to reach out and bring the world into themselves and their understanding.” (Ford, 2021, p. 11)

Grasping is seemingly tied to the colonial drive for accumulation and appropriation of peoples, cultures, environments, and life-worlds into the realization of capital. Transparency as an ideology *grasps* the subject, encloses the subject through an erasure of boundaries and its promise of truth. The state *grasps* its citizens as subjects – owns them through passports, identification cards, voting registrations, and health exams for vaccines.

Grasping texts means to ‘bring into oneself as belonging to oneself’. If I am to understand Ford correctly, grasping in the capitalist modality of learning occurs when a student takes ownership – and must take ownership – over a particular manifestation of knowledge or logic. *Encountering* a text, on the other hand, does not take ownership of language, but enables one to converse with a text. No small amount of sensitivity is needed to see that encounter through. But, if stupidity is the suspension of thought and of sense, an inarticulable, dissonant, and undefinable state of psychosis, then how is “stupid reading” a reading in which the reader *encounters* anything? Stupidity is the ‘failure to understand’ (Ford, 2021, p. 85), so how would one recognize they were even *encountering* a ‘text’ in the first place?

Stupidity transcends the individual according to Ford because anyone can fall into stupor. None are safe from its effects; “Moreover— and this is why stupidity transcends the individual— it’s a totally *selfless* collective, which is what distinguishes the stupid from the bandit” (Emphasis original. Ford, 2021, p. 88). ‘Selfless’, I assume, because one is no longer a ‘self’ when thought is suspended. Similarly, and to dig deeper into his analysis, *stupidity* appears to be brought on by engagements of the subject to others and the world; which would suggest that *stupidity* is a socialized process. A subject can only be ‘stupid’ from, by, and within *encountering* the world.

Stupidity presents itself more of a tactic *by* capital *and* the state than one necessary or advantageous for the worker's struggle.

Has stupidity become ubiquitous? I mean that question in its discursive sense. Language surrounding 'stupid' actions or 'stupid' people are rampant in our current age of USA politics. The label of 'stupid' is levied against Left and Right without care. Trump himself levies labelling opponents as 'stupid' or its variants in order to undercut their authority as knowers. At the same time, Trump's opponents levy accusations of 'nonsense', 'stupid', 'demented', and 'mentally unfit' for office.

When I write that stupidity is a tactic of the state, I mean that labels of nonsense, and stupid are pushed upon individuals and groups by the state. Stupidity is also the non-consensual, nonsensical force the Trump administration has so effortlessly pressed upon our politics. Actions that do not always make sense, even from Capital's standpoint, as is the case with tariffs, plague systems. The dissolution of the Department of Education is at the forefront of such actions. Stupidity has become more than simply an affective, discursive practice with material outcomes (such as failing the SAT, thereby not qualifying for certain undergraduate degrees). It has become a functional practice of the state to overload a system with feedback such that no communication (sense) is possible.

The politics, not merely 'the science', "which compels the inanimate limbs of the machinery, by their construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton does not exist in the worker's consciousness, but rather acts upon him through the machine as an alien power, as the power of the machine itself" (Marx, 1993, p. 693). Sociality may well be the very force of production. The sleight of hand for capital and the state is in having us believe it does not reside within each of us first, shared labor second, and in capital last of all.

Ford approaches this realization himself when he sketches the history and risks of 'stupidity' as an intervention on subjects:

Stupidity is always ahead of us, always a threat; hence why capital and the state have worked so hard to segregate disabled people or those categorized as such, a category that has often intersected with and justified the oppression of poor and working-class people, especially those of oppressed nationalities. (2021, p. 88)

Stupidity, as 'wondered' upon here even if it is unreasonable by Ford's own standards, presents itself more as a discursive practice of the government than it does an intervention capable of combating the state or capital via exodus. See here, "[Segregation] and institutionalization is thus a response to the "spread" of stupidity, to its contagiousness" (p. 89). There are serious tensions here between the different articulations and definitions of stupidity from Ford that must be dealt with.

Ford would have been far better off in this analysis if he had separated 'stupidity' as a faculty from 'stupid' as a discursive practice contributing to the subjugation of 'disabled' and 'colored' bodies. Notably absent from his analysis are the indigenous struggles over attaining political, legal, and symbolic recognition of their intelligence. The absence of discussions on eugenics or phrenology in this regard is a disastrous oversight. Their omission only contributes to a force of *stupidity* over discourses, pedagogical forms, and practices of care that are capable of sustaining life beyond and despite capitalism or state control.

Stupidity, the stupefying pedagogical form of exodus, similarly needs to engage in a more robust conversation with ‘pedagogy’. If *stupidity* is the suspension and absence of a relation to knowledge, can teaching or learning occur in such a state? Ford adds that one “can never know stupidity, they can only ever wonder about it and, in that sense, it remains true to the definition of idiocy as a connected and common *incommunicability*” (Emphasis original. p. 89).

Nothing is *incommunicable* in an era of fetishized transparency. Ford may ‘wonder’ at rather than ‘know’ stupidity, but I believe that *stupidity* is just another name for exodus. One in which only those privileged with the luxury of time and security may drop into being stupid for a day.

Stupidity, if we are to support its transcendent properties (and I do not, but I shall suspend my disbelief) would necessarily act as a ‘process of *real abstraction* no different from those employed by capitalism. *Real abstraction* is the “ontological flattening of differences and singularities, which is what makes different use-values exchangeable” (Ford & Jandrić, 2024, p. 2). Real abstraction names how cognitive or mental processes such as the social forces of production become material and made object (See Toscano, 2008, for more). Real abstraction names how thought becomes architecture. If the self is suspended in such a way that there is no self then force as it encounters the non-self has a far greater potency in delivering capital’s ends of flattening its differences and singularities.

I realize that Ford is not entirely favoring stupidity over learning. He is clearly advocating for alternative pedagogical forms to ‘traditional’ k-12 public education. Possibility needs to be given a chance to thrive or be practiced. Ford, in my view, attempts to balance the general forms of both in opposition to capitalist capture of learning; which, again, for Ford, is the accumulation and grasping of knowledge for the sake of capital valorization. Ford’s caution and acrobatic do not dissolve the fact that stupidity is immensely dangerous.

The suspension of thought (cognitive, sensual, spiritual) can signal a trauma response. Much like fight or flight, but only, in this case, the subject freezes. To intentionally leave oneself open to intelligent others when you are incapable of thought, to physical dangers, to violence that can and will kill, as well as the refusal of any relation to knowledge is an act of cowardice. Most subjects do not have the luxury of laying themselves bare to the world. Subjects throughout history have been denied *any* relation to knowledge. Ford’s folly is believing that *stupidity* - despite his refusal to romanticize it - as a socialized and collective anti-value, is capable of anything other than the death of the subject. *Stupidity* is the other side of *transparency*. Dead learning, dead labor, dead children. Fascism rots the roots of a nation.

Intuition from the Social Brain

Karl Marx left a resounding legacy and inheritance. The passion, precision, and dedication of his work is admirable. Figuring Marx after Marxism beckons a return to the *Grundrisse* as both I and Ford have argued above. ‘The Fragment on Machines’ as it has come to be called represents just a short portion of the sprawling notebooks, but packs a great deal of imagination into its lines. Marx allows our conversation to continue beyond stupidity or imagination into intuition as a shared social capacity.

The short passage on a ‘social brain’ begins the necessary legwork to conceive of intuition as a shared social capacity which allows it to build ground for the common:

The development of the means of labour into machinery is not an accidental moment of capital, but is rather the historical reshaping of the traditional, inherited, means of labour into a fixed form adequate to capital. The accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the **social brain**, is thus absorbed into capital, as opposed to labour, and hence appears as an attribute of capital, and more specifically of fixed capital, in so far as it enters into the production process as a means of production proper (Emphasis added. Marx, 1993, p. 694).

Ford's vision is for the 'general productive forces of the social brain' to be absorbed into labor rather than into capital. The 'social brain', as I understand it now, are the 'conscious linkages' that make up the 'general intellect' (Marx, 1993, p. 692). The general productive force of the 'social brain' is all technology, all laborious activity, the imagination and sustenance of life itself. The general productive forces are also the commons and the bedrock of mutual accompaniment. Marx is gesturing here towards a discussion as to what degree "general social knowledge has become a direct force of production, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it" (Marx, 1993, p. 706). Innovation, training, learning, fabrication, etc. become congealed into fixed capital (machines) in such a way that this knowledge appears alien to the worker (Marx, 1993, p. 695). Dead learning, suspended in a fixed position, the worker is struck stupid when 'confronted' with knowledge "physically as capital" (Marx, 1993, p. 695).

Because stupidity is unproductive, it is seen as outside of the general productive forces of the social brain. Stupidity is incapable of maneuvering beyond the fetishization of transparency because it lays bare, open and compliant because it is suspended. But what does intuition, something often viewed as individual or internal to a subject, have to do with the social brain?

I pose that if one considers intuition alongside the lines that Christopher Watkin does as he expounds and expands the philosophy of Michel Serres, then the jump between a social brain and intuition as a social capacity is not so ridiculous to conceive of.

Intuition is corporeal: not a concept but a sensibility, and not a way of thinking but a way of living in the world" ... "An intuition is not something that we experience in the world but a way of looking at and making sense of everything we experience in the world: a how, not a what (Watkins, 2020, p. 29).

If we take Lazzarato, Hochschild, Han, Ford, and Marx at their word. then the process of 'making sense of everything we experience in the world' is first and foremost an *encounter* with the content and information of the generalization of a social force of production. Intuition is immediate and mediating for Serres and is a robust answer to combatting oppressive knowledge systems built on exclusion.

If Deleuze and the 'society of control' is to be taken at its core, then the subject is coded by capital in such a way that language, affect, and potential are intimately tied to capital as linkages of social relations. Intuition is a filter far deeper and more intimate than ideology - not a something or a what but the immediate yielding of information through the senses. If intuition is 'a way of living in the world', then the social brain is the sociality resulting from living the world in common. They maintain a difference in degree, not a difference in kind.

Sousing out to what extent the ‘general intellect’ has become subsumed into capital requires usage of an intuition capable of making profound sense even if it does not strive to always be correct. The social brain has the capacity to make capital seem sensible when its corporeality is given over to myth or alienation. Consider a red stoplight or sign along a busy intersection; or the bright red “stop pump” button encased in glass within automobile gas stations. Consider, too, the bright red “fire” button on launchers or within nuclear silos. These functional tools represent fixed capital, but particularly fixed capital that when realized can be immensely volatile. A child could intuit that the big red button on a rocket launcher is a signal for caution more than a signal for glee. The social brain, the general productive force of sociality, becomes congealed in the symbols, mechanics, safe-holds, and measures of realizing capital’s potential. The social brain collects into an architecture of thought. The abstract made real.

A profound intuition, once individual but now global, retains the possibility for making sense of capital as it reaches out and reaches within - as it bolts through the edges of the general intellect. Intuition in this way reminds me of Wendell Berry’s (2000) immensely treasurable novel, *Jayber Crow*, in its steadfast fidelity to the idea of ‘sitting in faith.’ Sitting in faith is the ritualization and dedication of a specific range of time to hold oneself ready and accessible for whomever or whatever may walk through the door. Nothing may come through, as happened at times in the barber shop of *Jayber Crow*. The point is not to visit but to hold the chance to share in life with one another, but to do so using intentional and controlled procedures so as not to overwhelm. Intuition is not a set of procedures or liminal space. Jayber shows us how to hold possibility as a discipline so that our unconscious actions reflect a social responsibility.

Stupidity as a pedagogical commitment may very well miss the relationship between how our social founds itself and forms of thought. Intelligence is not simply the raw material for cognitive capitalism. Intelligence is our way out of the unconscious behaviors that bind us to capital. Sensing and overcoming those margins is the primary objective of intuition connected to the social brain.

A great deal of research could, and perhaps should, range into the work of John Dewey and early pragmatists in their relationship to intuition. Experience rests, for pragmatism, in the transactional rather than representational relationship with nature (Legg & Hookway, 2004). Intuition is, as I have described it, a modality for transacting with nature for the creation of experience. Intuition bridges the gap between theory and lived experience.

Achille Mbembe aptly rejoins this ‘sitting in faith’ when he offers those borders, those that allow one to ‘sit in faith’, “are no longer merely lines of demarcation separating distinct sovereign entities. Increasingly, they are the name we should use to describe the organized violence that underpins both contemporary capitalism and our world order in general” (2019, p. 9). There is a severe risk for a subject in being “exposed to the risk of the outside entering the inside” (p. 11). A confrontation with the complexities of ‘technologies moving towards general intelligence and self-replication’ and the granting of technology the “powers of reproduction and independent teleonomic purpose rather than having them taken away” (p. 14) requires subjects to feel and “act with one’s guts, viscerally rather than reasoning, is fast becoming the new norm” (p. 15). Nationalist movements enclose who can, and cannot, be human with the weight of their own girth. Technofascism similarly codes the production of life itself. These are boundaries and encounters taking place where capital is more mobile than humans.

Intuition, however, is not to let passions take sway over reason. Intuition is the often ineffable but immediate yielding of information through the senses, yes, but it is also how this information becomes reasoned upon. Intuition, unlike stupidity, is ineffable but not in a stifling or insensible way. Following intuition and simply embodying it are not the same thing and it does not follow that one must always realize that intuition. Understood as the necessarily realized potential of information immediately being yielded to the senses provides a great deal more deliberation than stupidity is capable of (it is capable of none). One can intervene in systems of labor, of capital extraction, and accumulation that harm lives after having intuited their harms for oneself. People are not dupes. Cultivate rather than suspend sense! Otherwise ‘borders’ become manned by corpses.

Stupidity is the exact moment of being confronted with a corpse [dead labor]. What learning is there to be had at the bed of a corpse? When we can no longer sense ourselves among the thicket of barbed language models. *Stupidity* is the moment that tear gas is released on college campuses - perhaps it is the moment of release just before action. Certainly, it names the threshold where meaning will either be made or not. *Stupidity* is the absence of a relation to knowledge, but if knowledge is social then stupidity is an absence of a relation to the social brain; which makes encroachments on the common possible for capital. Rendering workers, clients, customers, and even some administrators stupid is the process by which capital is overtaking the ‘general intelligence’. Indeed, alienation itself may be a forced stupor. When educators are tired, fatigue frays the edges of ethics, of duty, and of courage. The borders Mbembe refers to are invisible because “[Only] what is dead is transparent” (Han, 2021, p. 37).

Intuition breathes, it does not suffocate. Stupor suffocates. Within intuition, I see a great flame capable of soldering living labor with the dead labor of fixed capital in such a way that provokes questions, provokes profound shared deliberation, and affirms the liberatory potential of technology and communication to embody the sensibilities of a less violent world. We can return to the once generalized social force of production with vigor. Intuition cultivates but does not coerce. Intuition must be cultivated but cannot be coerced. The drive towards death cannot be allowed to take hold in our very hearts, spirits, minds, souls, or however else one conceives of that intimate and private domain of the self.

Karl Marx ends the notes that would eventually serve as an introduction to the *Grundrisse* with the profound rhetorical question regarding Ancient Greek Art, “[Does] not the true character of each epoch come alive in the nature of its children?” (1993, p. 111). He was not referring to children, but to the vitality of human meaning which reach far beyond the social conditions which wrought them. What meaning would the future make of stupid children?

Should stupidity grasp hold, the nature of our children would be dead. As dead as the labor congealed in the artifacts of our social brain under capitalism. When all our children are dead, what virtue is possible? Intuition shows the steps towards conceiving of a life in union and contract (read: consensual relationship) with the social brain - one that sustains and enables our liberation from the business of corpses.

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