COMPUTATIONAL CAPITALISM AND THE INDUSTRIALIZATION OF LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

One of the primary findings of this thesis, arrived at through an analysis of the political economy of Google's patents, privacy sandbox initiative, and AI-powered search engine, is that there is a gap between how Google positions itself discursively and how it operates economically, and that the closure of this gap reveals the progressive, industrial-scale alienation of humanity's technical means of symbolic cognition. This economic alienation of human curiosity, or cognition in general, is accomplished through the continuous surveillance, capture, and lucrative sale of language data to brokers and advertisers. This circulation is analyzed through two theoretical prongs: the liaison between language and technology, as sketched out in the work of Bernard Stiegler and Italian post-*Operaismo* thinkers, and the liaison between language and politics, as sketched out through my reinterpretation, or supplementation, of Alain Badiou's theory of political truth procedures. Given the ways that technologies of language transmission have come to condition modernity's ambitions for both human autonomy and the egalitarian transformation of the world, this alienation is rather severe: it threatens not only another victory for capitalist ideology, thus prolonging the ongoing global crisis of class oppression, but also the liquidation of mass dialectical thought in favour of mass impulsive signalling (a new frontier of reification), and with it the abeyance of an international communism that can make enough sense of the world to bifurcate away from capital's most destructive contradictions.

Re-situating the political economy of Google within contemporary French post-Marxist theory (specifically Alain Badiou's nonprogrammatic communism) leads to six preliminary discoveries: (i) the strange, Edwardian-Calvinist flavour of how platforms like Google imagine the human subjects who use and thereby sustain their business cycles through the matching of digital writing with advertisements; (ii) the way decades of language-data expropriation, as the

formal subsumption of symbolic cognition, has laid the groundwork for attempts at the real subsumption of symbolic cognition evinced in today's large language model arms race; (iii) the significant ideological function—in a classic Althusserian sense—of Google's vertically integrated language capture systems; (iv) the way big tech patents regenerate capitalist relations of production through the surveillance of systems of digital writing; (v) how the quietude of 21st century emancipatory politics is partly explainable by capital's intensive, industrial scale domination of the labour of thought in the form of cognitive rentiership; (vi) that a bracing return to avant-gardist notions of political and techno-linguistic universality is not only philosophically persuasive but strategically necessary in order to reckon with how capital is melting into thin air the bonds that previously tied symbolic labour to mass political thinking.

DEDICATION

To Tilda and her *vita modesta*.

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Chapter One: Introduction

"[To think for oneself] is the maxim of a never-*passive* reason. To be given to such passivity, consequently to heteronomy of reason, is called prejudice; and the greatest of all prejudices is that of fancying nature not to be subject to rules which the understanding by virtue of its own essential law lays at its basis, i.e. superstition. Emancipation from superstition is called enlightenment" (Kant, 2007, p. 124).

"[Desacralization] is obviously the only thing we can and must welcome within Capital: it exposes the pure multiple as the foundation of presentation; it denounces every effect of One as a simple, precarious configuration; it dismisses the symbolic representations in which the bond found a semblance of being. That this destitution operates in the most complete barbarity must not conceal its properly *ontological* virtue. To whom must we be grateful to be delivered from the myth of Presence, the guarantee which it grants to the substantiality of the bonds and to the durability of essential relations, if not to the roaming automaticity of Capital? To think over and above Capital and its mediocre prescription (the general computation of time), we must still have as a departure point what it has revealed: Being is essentially multiple, sacred Presence is a pure semblance and truth, as with anything if it exists, is not a revelation, much less so the proximity of that which withdraws itself. It is a regulated procedure resulting in a supplementary multiple" (Badiou, 1999, p. 56-57).

One of the key findings of this thesis is that computational capitalism, through the refinement of its language-data surveillance at industrial scales, has desacralized language. And it has accomplished this desacralization by severing the generation of linguistic symbols from a localized, intentional human consciousness, or by mechanically separating the bond between mind and sign. As the rise of so-called 'generative AI' indicates, this desacralizing of language has also been interpreted in popular circles as the demystification of performative intelligence itself (Goodyear, 2023). But this is an overstatement: all that AI has demystified is the individualization of performative intelligence. As Marxist scholars like Pasquinelli (2023) have long pointed out, and as capitalist firms implicitly acknowledge in their endless appetite for pirated e-books (Reisner, 2025), intelligence is really rooted in ensembles of social existence, both in the artifacts produced by those ensembles, such as books, and in the living bodies that constitute them. This is because language only exists as a social fact. Language, as Vološinov

(1986) pointed out almost a century ago, is communistic. It belongs to nobody—to anonymous collectives—and cannot be privatized. It is no small irony then that capital's barbaric "roaming automaticity" (Badiou, 1999, p. 56-57), as typified through Google's commitment to the destruction of language in the name of private property, private profit, and private rents, has forced into contradiction our commitment to human speech as a solitary Cartesian act belonging to an individual empirical consciousness. It is the "ontological virtue" of capital, its monstrous prerogatives aside, that has permitted the liberation of the Being of language from its individual apparitions into multiplicities of dispersal, and liberated cognition from private contemplation to collective anonymous reason, or reason as the articulation of a post-dialectical *Geist* (Badiou, 999, p. 56-57; Hegel, 1977).

One of the questions that late modernity asks of us today is what to do with this unbounded language so generously gifted to us by big tech companies whose value chains sit astride the world. We already know the answer given by these profaners of the symbolic (answers explored during the empirical analysis in the penultimate chapter of this thesis): the elaboration of the epistemic infrastructure of the advertising industry (Nieborg & Poell, 2025) and its corollary, the proliferation of merchandise; the extraction of valorizable data as a form of rent; the training of large-language-models that impersonate and bewitch human beings (Grifoni & Ferrario, 2025) in order to sustain these rents; and the prolongation of a fractured image of the individual consumer at the same moment that the historic cognitive-linguistic substrate of this individuality is actively undermined. To this we thankfully have our own counter-proposals, one of which can be posed in Althusserian (2017, p. 79) terms: despite its ordinary foreclosure into systems of technological rentiership, language can have, and has always been capable of having, an "active relationship to the real" on behalf of anonymous collectives, particularly in those

moments when the masses vindicate the existence of what is ideologically proscribed as impossible in a given situation. To explain more fully what this means requires a brief summary of the chapters that follow, and an outlining of the rather dense philosophical propaedeutics concerning language that over the course of this thesis eventually give way to a kind of technocapitalist ideology critique grounded in what Google has done to language data (existing protocols), what it plans to do to language data (patents and white papers), and what it has decided not to do with language data (privacy sandboxes).

The matter in this thesis thus flows, like in El Lissitzky's constructivist painting *Untitled* (1919-20), as a series of amputated blocks, irregular in size, stacked one upon the other, with a thin, sometimes barely perceptible string travelling through their shapes, frayed at the top and sliced off at the end. What you are reading now is the incipient fray, in which the most salient factor to never lose sight of is the material fact of Google's desacralization of the bond between language and concrete social existence, a process undertaken as an avatar of cybernetic or computational capitalism. What will follow after this introduction is finished is a set of two literature reviews, a brief explanation of research methods, an empirical analysis of Google's treatment of language, and a conclusion that tries to make sense of how Google's particular operations signal moments of crisis, opportunities for intervention, and difficulties for the future of human thought as an activity that in our still-literate epoch is conditioned by the capacities of language as it is datafied.

In the early chapters the prominence of Google as an object of study is sometimes less visible, as a careful groundwork is being laid for the experimental clashing of two philosophical systems that reckon with the material realities of language, politics, and technology today. This defect is part of the larger investigative trajectory of this project as it was written, and the

readers' indulgence in these overtures is requested on the basis of the roadmap that makes up the remainder of this introduction, and the pre-emptive glimpse at research conclusions that they contain.

How the Chapters Hang Together: A General Orientation

Human knowledge moves through its own history like a rodent through the belly of a giant snake, swelling and thinning as it goes. The primary research question posed by this dissertation is concerned with the material conditions of this capacity for self-consumption, and thus asks: what remains to be shown for our means of popular cognition, the globally prevalent yet "antagonistic" system of information retrieval offered up to humanity through large capitalist firms on internet platforms (Fuchs, 2012)? Secondarily, how does the largest of these firms, namely Google (as a subsidiary of Alphabet) intend to prolong the lucrative alienation of our technical means of collective cognition, here understood as the private ownership of these information systems and their operation under the profit motive of capitalism (this being the source of their antagonistic structure)? And lastly, what does it mean for the struggle for universal human emancipation, as a deeply rational attempt to overcome the superstitious finitude of capitalism, that the most highly developed and thoroughly globalized conditions of collective human rationality—the intense concentration of human curiosity offloaded into Google search systems hourly, daily, annually—operates solely in the service of the accumulation of capital by rerouting said human inquiry, via a vast surveillance apparatus, into the channels of advertising and consumer culture, a process that, after Pasquinelli (2009), I refer to as 'cognitive rentiership'? These three questions are political, economical, and epistemological, with varying degrees of emphasis on each term. This is important, as part of the wager of this research is that the socio-economic domination inherent to capitalist modernity is

maintained through the mutual constitution of modes of production and forms of knowledge, especially as formal (and then real) subsumption technically mediates and then absorbs the latter.

In the work of contemporary philosopher Alain Badiou, whose work will be explored in the first literature review chapter, this technological situation is nearly absent. In fact, in his *Manifesto for Philosophy* (1999) he expresses a kind of disdain for our Heideggerian obsession with the question of technology that he finds ultimately irrelevant to our present political situation. On the other hand, there is perhaps no thinker more sober about the prospects of egalitarian politics in the twenty-first century than he who, under the still-taboo name of 'communism', asserts that the Marxist referents of the twentieth century have been thoroughly destroyed, and that the subjects of a communism to come will no longer be identifiable in the same working class which, as a historical force and sociological bloc, has experienced a dramatic decomposition of its agentic power during the reactionary interregnum of the past forty years (Badiou, 2018a)[1]. This is in no small part, I argue, due to the technical-media apparatuses of capitalism that this thesis investigates. Yet the risky pursuit of an 'impossible' Idea, the regulative idea of human equality which Badiou identifies with communism, remains the vital task at hand regardless of the vanishing of the previous century's subjective predicates (Badiou, 2008, p. 99-100). To think the practicality of Badiou's non-programmatic communism alongside the predatory nature of Google, our most popular technical means of cognition (which, as will be argued in the second chapter, actively disables post-capitalist thought) requires several things. The first is an open attempt to experimentally read Badiou into a technological and linguistic context to which he is somewhat hostile—a large part of the early thesis is devoted to this

[1] Workers movements, the party form, and the state have all been saturated, according to his account in *Can Politics Be Thought?* (2018a); although this thesis primarily focuses on the general intellect traditionally associated with worker movements.

exercise of seeing what happens when we take the (somewhat unfashionable today) universalist egalitarianism of his communist political philosophy and apply it to the concrete problem of Google's corporate capture of the distributed cognition that we use to navigate the world. This portion of the investigation has its revelations as well as its stopping points, because it is lacking a contemporary thinker of technology to clarify some quite obvious aporias surrounding the status of digital writing in technical networks. Hence the second theoretical task of this thesis, equally as difficult as the first: to bridge two seemingly incompatible thinkers, Bernard Stiegler and Alain Badiou, the former being a Derridean thinker of the written supplement, in the deepest anthropological sense, the latter being a platonic thinker of "the post-dialectical dialectic" that transforms Hegel's *Logic* from "a regulated adventure of spirit" as *history* into an unregulated adventure of spirit as *politics* (Badiou et al., 2011; Bosteels, 2014, p. 142).

In order to stage a conflict between these two thinkers (Badiou and Stiegler) who offer, in turn, profound diagnoses of the contemporary impasse of emancipatory politics and the barbaric obliteration of human faculties by capitalist mnemotechnical systems, one must broach a third topic that is a slight source of discomfort for both thinkers: language. Despite Badiou's preoccupation with language's ideological and poetical functioning, and Steigler's synthesis of Leroi-Gourhan's archaeological linguistics with Heidegger's *Haus des Seins*, language in a strictly philosophical sense remains ambivalent and unsettled in both thinkers. In Badiou (2006b) there is a Platonic suspicion of its political salience, in Stiegler (1998) a rigid focus on its material exteriorization as a civilizational fact. Both thinkers prefer to locate the atomic core of their projects on the para-psychological 'subject', whether this be the Lacanian-Althusserian disciple of truth in Badiou, or the relay of Simondonian individuation in Stiegler.

Language is also the topic that exposes how each thinker, Stiegler and Badiou, sees the other's blind spot: it is regrettable that Badiou, despite his insurmountable audacity in the thinking of ontology and politics should be such an indifferent thinker of technology; it is likewise occasionally embarrassing how Stiegler, despite the great vocabulary of mnemotechnics and reticular protensions that he introduces to our cognitive map of contemporary capitalism, should end up with a view of politics that, beyond its gestures to the Frankfurt school, remains somewhat vague and noncommittal regarding the autonomy of politics outside of its technological overdeterminations and the possibilities of radical emancipation today.

It is in pursuit of enjoining, and to some extent playing off of each other, these two seemingly incompatible yet essential thinkers that the chapters proceed as they do, with a philosophy of language forming the bridge between Badiou's philosophy of politics and Stiegler's philosophy of technology. This philosophy of language is sketched from a patchwork of analytic and continental traditions and bears the name *langage-au-générique* or language in the generic. What is at stake in this bridge-building, and what makes it more than an aimless mapping of two thinkers, is how Google as a capitalist technology of language extraction has altered the material conditions of our collective discursive rationality through the technical desacralization of language. This has in turn harmed our ability to both grasp political truths as ideas and commit ourselves to the discipline of their procedures. Put even more simply: the most intense systematic use of human language (in datafied form) on our planet in the year 2026 is not found in the planning of healthcare systems, or in the deliberations of global governance, or in ecstatic choruses of poetic musing, but as grist for the propagandizing of capitalism through almost unimaginably vast advertising networks (Bonfils, 2025; Miller, 2025). Language, in its desacralized form, in its false-universality (the universality of an economic behemoth) has

become so wedded to the extraction of surplus-value that it is necessary to counterpose a new vision of language, still desacralized, in its proper universality which is unconfined and indifferent to the prerogatives of data brokers and oligarchic bankers.

Breakdown of Chapters

The first chapter thus commences by introducing Badiou's political thought and how it could relate to a philosophy of language without sacrificing its axiomatic rigour: this chapter results in the coining of two neologisms, flocculation and deflocculation, which name the gathering and assembly, or dispersal and covering-over, of conceptual elements in a truth procedure as shared in language among that procedure's participants. This is by no means a straightforward experiment, and its results are taken as somewhat provisional.

The second chapter takes the results of the first chapter and passes them through the filter of Stiegler's philosophical system in order to take Badiou and language-in-the-generic away from these moments of rare emancipatory politics and drench them in the technological systems of concrete political oppression that they really exist in. An eye is kept to this place of overlap: for the rare and exceptional are always immanent, for Badiou, to the mundanity of a persistent situation. The key concept of this oppression is 'lingopower'; its mirror opposite, extruded through a filtering of Badiou through Stiegler, is "parlepsis", a linguistic operation of anticipation-cognition, or experimental curiosity, that clinches the subjectivization of a subject of truth (in Badiou's terms) and/or the collective effect of transindividuation (in Stiegler's terms). Here I also dedicate a whole subsection to juxtaposing the theory just produced to an already existing theory of the politics at play in how written language interfaces with technical systems, namely Yuk Hui's (2020) theory of cosmotechnics. This critique of the politics of cosmotechnics goes hand in hand with the elaboration of *langage-au-générique* and includes an attempted

genealogical placement of Hui's work along the undercurrents and presuppositions flowing from medieval Nominalists to Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida.

After this theoretical heavy lifting is over, we turn towards our methodology which outlines how this study attempts to apply this theoretical machinery in an allegorical case study with the goal of sophisticating our understanding of Google's role in computational capitalism as the largest exploiter of human cognition (in the form of digital writing) and possibly the most far-reaching ideological obviator of political-economic emancipation. The subsequent empirical analysis of Google patent acquisitions, LLM protocols, and abandoned 'privacy sandbox' initiative gives us a comprehensive x-ray image of how Google operates as an agent of the industrialization of linguistic capital and serves as an empirical ballast to validate the claims made in the preceding two chapters about the significance and centrality of language-data as such. It also summons a spectre that haunts the remainder of the dissertation: Lukács' (1971) categories of reification and totality.

The key finding of the empirical analysis is that Google is preparing—as signalled in its patent acquisitions, public announcements concerning the integration of large-language-models into its search engine, and its strategic abandonment of privacy sandbox ambitions—an intensification of the rentiership that underpins the existing alienation of our technical means of discursive cognition. The devastating upshot of this fact, revealed by the research, is that the dismantling of the technical conditions necessary for the mass cognitive accrual so integral to political truth procedures (culminating in our bifurcation away from global capitalism) has itself become a source of profit, another data stream integrated into the existing circuit. In this context, the ascent of LLM-powered Google search represents a sort of worst nightmare from the point of view of Lukács' theory of reification, in which at a technical level the digital association of

nearly all human thought with a concomitant commodity-purchasing action becomes possible. The conclusion of this thesis explores the theological underpinnings of this new species of reticular reification and offers the hope that the transformation of our technical means of cognition—their disalienation from the mass of anonymous thinkers who keep it alive—might itself realize the reignition of the communist Idea that it currently prohibits. The goal of this thesis is then, really, to produce an account of language as the substance of social cognition, the industrialization of which signifies the subordination of mass human thought—mass thought which, as the case of Google highlights, always begins with curiosity—to the endless fine-tunning of a globalized commodity fetishism.

A simpler way to summarize the above is that this thesis stages a productive encounter between two contemporary French philosophers normally held at a distance (Stiegler and Badiou), and through this encounter sketches out a communist philosophy of mind where mind is understood as a linguistic phenomenon in which 'language-thought' partakes in the interpretive interruptions of emancipatory political procedures as much as it fuels privatized language-data extraction.

The twist of this analysis is that this extraction inhibits precisely those aforementioned political procedures by integrating the residue of our consciousnesses into the daily production of a totalized digital enclosure for human curiosity. The purpose of this enclosure is the fuelling of industrially commoditized nonthought. This is how it happened that our language serves, as in Goldoni's (2010 [1746]) great play, two masters: one being the purveyor of a restless matrix of confounding and fatiguing financial abstractions, the other who respects in language the basic dignity of human thought.

These contributions to a theory of 'cognitive reification' end with a comparative analysis of the theological epistemology of computational capitalism and the void that unbinds its attempted domestication of human language into nothing more than a resource of lingopower. A crisis-theory of the breakdown of this lingopower in terms of the rising inorganic composition of the labour of thought in automated systems is also explored. Our conclusion ultimately amounts to the relatively simple idea that any twenty-first century politics of nondomination requires the freedom of language-as-thought from economic prerogatives. It follows that a communication system not geared towards commodity production would itself crucially partake in the instillation in this world of that politics of which it is a requirement.

In order to justify this claim, I will spend two chapters establishing exactly how "we are living through the revenge of what is most blind and objective in the economic appropriation of technics over what is most subjective and voluntary in politics" before turning our eye to the troubling new forms that this revenge of technics has taken under the emblem of Google—the world's most popular search engine, and capitalism's deftest apparatus of reification (Badiou, 2007, p. 9). Under the global desacralization of language—first through its transformation into a data-commodity, and then through the animation of those assets into large language models—a politics of language is needed, one that neither attempts to re-sacralise language nor accepts its capitalist subordination as inevitable. This thesis is an attempt to chart that third path by apprehending the generic capacities of language that abide in both its rapid, quotidian decomposition (to manufacture the glue of commodity fetishism) and its gradual, ruptural composition (to think situations anew).

Finally, a central claim to novelty in this thesis is that it represents one of the few sustained engagements between seemingly incompatible thinkers (primarily Stiegler and Badiou,

but also many others) from seemingly incompatible traditions: thinkers belonging to orthodox Marxist, Italian workerist, post-Maoist, phenomenological, German idealist, American analytic, French structuralist, psychoanalytic, and post-structuralist philosophical schools are variously and with varying intensity invoked alongside media theorists, communication theorists, economists, sociologists, and theologians in what amounts to a deliberate attempt to think the present conjuncture—specifically the new material reality of language—with everything pertinent at my disposal. Putting Badiou's post-structuralist account of politics in dialogue with Stiegler's post-Heideggerian account of technics proved as fruitful as it is uncommon, as did the greater project of straddling both this immense theoretical edifice (of post-Marxist 'theory') and the empirical realities of big tech's ever-shifting political economy. As a result of this straddling, this work contributes concretely to at least two fields: first, what might be called 'computational philosophy', and second, to the study of the political economy of communications media broadly speaking, and 'platform studies' more narrowly speaking. Contributions to critical theory and philosophy of language are present as well but comparatively minor.

Just as the endeavour, in the 20th century, to ignore the presumed distance between Marx and Freud proved highly generative to multiple generations of thinkers seeking to understand the mutations of capitalism, the distances between the various thinkers at play in this thesis are routinely disregarded in favour of finding points of synthesis that sophisticate our understanding of the present in a fearlessly interdisciplinary manner.

Chapter Two: The Toil of Thought—On the Role of Language in Badiou's Political Truth Procedures

"We have more Power than Will; and 'tis only to disculpate us to ourselves, that we often think Things impracticable" (de la Rochefoucauld, 1749 [1665], p. 184-185).

"The toil
Of thought evoked a peace eccentric to
The eye and tinkling to the ear […]" (Stevens, "Academic Discourse at Havana", 1997, p. 115).

"In all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily 'from the masses, to the masses'. This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action. Then once again […]" (Mao Tse-tung, 1943, para. 4).

One of the postulates of this thesis is that Google is the data-centric engine of a sprawling, invisible, highly lucrative ideological apparatus in the Althusserian (1971) sense. This apparatus—the advertising industry—hails ordinary people into meagre worker-consumer identities and in so doing reifies capitalist social relations. For this reason, among others, it has been referred to as a system of political propaganda, perhaps one that is without rival in human history (Jhally et al., 2017). Google's innovation in this system is to build an information retrieval service around the collection and processing of language data—data about the language we input into its search engine—in order to sell this data, through a process of bidding and brokerage, for the purpose of plastering advertisements all over the internet; on news articles, on social media feeds, before and after video clips. Google is an ideological apparatus because its function is to establish harmony between our thoughts about the world and our behaviour in the world as workers and consumers. More specifically, it seeks to establish a harmony between our thoughts as de facto employees of digital capitalism (for we all supply the data that fills up Google's ad revenue coffers, satisfies its shareholders, appeases its investors) and our behaviour as information-seekers, or, more broadly, as thinkers. We think in conjunction with the

technologies at our disposal, and it is hard to ignore the political economy of one of these technologies when it is the medium of 5 trillion global acts of questioning per year—roughly 14 billion per day, or 500 million per hour (Srinivasan, 2025). This capture of human curiosity, and the way it exists as part of our cognitive infrastructure or scaffolding (Evans, 2014), defines the new terrain of our contemporary political situation. Thankfully, we are in no way doomed to repeat the rituals of its ideology forever.

At the turn of the last century, emerging from the great flourishing of French philosophy that extends from Sartre through to Foucault, Lacan, Deleuze, and Althusser, there is a preeminent thinker of the counter-ideological process, the process that could, in the words of Jean-Jacques Lecercle (2018), "storm" a communal language that has been turned into the substrate of ideological power. This thinker of counter-ideological avant-gardes is Alain Badiou.

Accordingly, this opening thesis chapter concerns the philosophical liaison between language and thought and its augmentation of nonprogrammatic communism in the Badiouian tradition; I refer to it here and elsewhere as 'nonprogrammatic' to establish its separation from the programmaticity of the orthodox Marxist tradition with which Badiou breaks on several key points, particularly in his focus on the absolute autonomy of active politics relative to the economic and administrative constraints of the 'political' (Badiou, 2018a). This theoretical excursion tries to reveal the ratiocinative basis of such nonprogrammatic communist projects; in other words, how the cognition of the particulars of an oppressive situation, and the imagination of emancipatory alternatives, are indissociable from militant fidelities to political truth and essential to their longevity. This chapter also attempts to tease out a 'hidden' trajectory within philosophy of language that places the anti-Kantian work of Hamann in concert with major twentieth century thinkers who together form a spectral school of linguistic "indication" built

around their shared emphasis on the anteriority of indexicality. This will be important later on when I use philosophy of language to filter Badiou's counter-ideological metapolitics through the technopolitics of Bernard Stiegler. The purpose of this longwinded theoretical experiment is to find a counter-ideological politics that detonates the contradictions of capital's technological desacralization of language.

Thought & Event: The Role of Language in Nonprogrammatic Communism

In trying to understand the political economy of linguistic industrialization, our theoretical investigation is immediately undercut by the quintessential Marxist obligation to problematize (in order to change) the world. In our case this amounts to declaring the status of 'situation': something is happening here, this is why it matters, and these are its repercussions. It just so happens that the situation I will attempt to limn in the ensuing pages has its bearings in *situationality* itself, which is to say: subjects, places, ideologies, and what once may have been referred to—in a flowery Heideggerian register—as the destiny of thought.

The decision to anchor this theoretical analysis in the work of the French philosopher Alain Badiou is a result of three factors: the surprising paucity of communications studies research that incorporates the insights of his monumental philosophy; the evident applicability of his post-Althusserian, post-Lacanian oeuvre to the question of mass thought, or thinking as shared work done on a communal scale; and lastly, the strange and unresolved contradiction between his refusal of the relativistic "linguistic turn" in both continental (Derrida) and analytic (Wittgenstein) philosophy and the ample evidence that language (what I call "language-in-the-generic") and thought cannot be disentangled. This is not to mention, of course, his oxymoronically intensive use of language—and continual valorization of poets—throughout his

philosophical tractates. As this chapter progresses, these factors will collapse backwards into one another, such that the relation of language to communal thought as a noetic resource will be weighed and measured in the context of the real subsumption of language data.

In some sense then, this thesis is primarily interested in the material preconditions of any communal thinking whatsoever (but especially the thinking of immanent political truths and the actions they call for *in situ*), with an understanding that the mutually inclusive fabric of language is itself the principal precondition for the communality of thought. Language-in-the-generic, as we shall see, is that which establishes the communicability of immanent truths. In fact, I will make the claim that the fact that truths are "accessible" at all depends on our ability to share them and think through them with others. Communal thought and its principled decision-making stands against the finitude of Heideggerian poiesis-towards-death as elaborated upon in Blanchot's (1988) discussion of the unavowable community, or what we might call, in our best Lacanian voice, the "barred" community.

Materialist Dialectic Against Democratic Materialism

Alain Badiou's famous objection to the modish (and still regnant) "democratic materialism" of the 1970s-2000s comes from his critique of the logical syntax "there are only languages and bodies" (or "individuals and communities"); a theory, an axiom, and a fundamental presupposition, he claims, of contemporary ideology (Badiou, 2006b, para. 2; Badiou, 2009). Badiou's "materialist dialectic", developed over the course of a lifetime of engagement through and past Lacan, Althusser, Sartre, Mao, Hegel, Heidegger, Cantor, Gödel and others, is presented in direct opposition to democratic materialism. His primary concern with the otherwise agreeably sober and parsimonious materialist slant underlying the ideology that there are "only" languages and bodies is that it looks never to the welkin and always to the cave.

In a decidedly Hegelian manoeuvre, Badiou seeks to disrupt this ideological cave-gazing through the contribution of a third term, and a new operator, to the equation, one that reveals the profound depths of the dualism expounded by Descartes in *Principles of Philosophy* (1988) that Descartes himself was unable to fully grasp: "There are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths" (Badiou, 2006b, para. 18; Badiou, 2009, p. 6-9). The grand exception, the unforeseeable anomaly, is his point of departure.

This dory in which Badiou sets sail leaves behind a chaotic part of the sea overpopulated by vessels bearing the names Deleuze, Negri, Derrida, and many others. The voyage of his three core texts—*Being and Event* (2013 [1988]), *Logics of Worlds* (2009), and *The Immanence of Truths* (2022)—demonstrate the extraordinary philosophical pertinacity necessary to uphold the commitments to ontology, appearance, epistemology, politics, and truth that are incurred by a rejection of hollowed-out democratic materialism. One consequence of Badiou's radical departure is that his philosophy, according to Žižek's perspicuous reading of Livingston in the introduction to *Hegel in a Wired Brain* (2020), bifurcates the tree of twentieth century continental philosophy into two distinct branches. The first is the "paradoxico-critical" branch, which buttresses everyone from Lacan to Foucault to Wittgenstein to Deleuze in a position of "totality at the expense of consistency", thus subsuming structuralism and poststructuralism both under what Boris Groys in *The Communist Postscript* (2010) describes as the affirmation of paradox, a condition that whelms, according to him, all of philosophy, relegating it to the production of "[…] iconic paradoxes, in which each radiates its own evidence without contradicting the others, for paradoxes cannot contradict each other. That is why the so-called theories of philosophy can coexist peacefully—so called because they are not in fact theories at all" (Groys, 2010, p. 17; Žižek, 2020, p. 5). On the second branch, diverging from its "logos is

paradox" neighbour—which is essentially the structure undergirding the paradoxico-critical stance—we have Badiou's "generic" position which affirms "consistency at the expense of totality" (Groys, 2010, p. 7; Žižek, 2020, p. 5). One of the explicit goals of this thesis is to graft onto this generic, non-totalized branch other philosophers, specifically thinkers of language and thought, who may—much like the poets and mathematicians Badiou so loves—overcome the apparent resistance to inosculation that gives his philosophy its singular and superconsistent quality. It is worth mentioning from the outset that Badiou's polemics against the dogma of the linguistic turn do not in any way preclude the adulation of linguistic resources, but only require their reorientation. As Badiou himself puts it, "One will only democratically return to the poem if one subordinates it, in the guise of the pure Idea, to the matheme's arid power of illumination", meaning that the culpability of language lies only in its improper ordinality relative to a process of illumination, with its redemption lying, likewise, in the voicing of singularities that are themselves not linguistic but worldly (Badiou, 2006a, p. 40). This Platonic gesture—poised as it is towards the shared labour of the real, and its unanimous illumination—bears the weight of political commitment.

Of interest to us moving forward then, at the cost of greatly reducing alethic quartet of art, science, love, and politics to just its final member, are the political consequences of Badiou's dialectical materialism as articulated in *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (2013), *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (1997), and his core 'Being and Event' trilogy. In particular, we will focus on the manner in which events *subjectivize* on the stage of mass politics by impelling fidelitous works, how these works can constitute what Peter Hallward (2002, para. 9) dubs "non-programmatic Marxism", and what the role of language is in this collision between thinking subjects and unanticipated events.

Italian Neorealism: Mass Politics and Mass Thought

There is a scene in Luchino Visconti's *La terra trema* (1948) where two brothers, the youngest fishermen in a poor family, realize that they and practically every fisherman on their small Sicilian coast are routinely exploited by rapacious wholesalers. These wholesalers covertly fix prices to maximize profits and minimize the wages paid out for the fishermen's treacherous nocturnal labour that brings in each morning's catch. The two brothers' realization comes with a militant conviction; the elder brother served in the armed forces, and his revolutionary zeal for halting the wheel of poverty in his community (an economic grindstone that killed his father at sea, immiserated their grandfather for his entire life, and kept three generations of women under the yoke of onerous and unvalorized house-labour to sustain their nightly fishing expeditions) is attributed to his time in uniform. However, even upon seizing the truth of their quintessentially capitalist exploitation (that of social desolation brought on by the domination of market forces and oligopolist cabals), the brothers fail to realize the communal potential in their revolt (despite the wholesalers' slanderous condemnation of their supposedly communistic hubris, it must be added). Rather than galvanize the widespread discontent among not only their fellow fishermen—who are well aware of the price-fixing machinations meant to ensure their continued impoverishment—but also among the sympathetic mothers, wives, and elders whose invisibilized labour is a necessary supplement to their fishing…rather than organize a general strike around this multiple, thus halting the exploitative apparatus and denuding it of power, the brothers set off into their own private sardine fishing business, with predictably—this is Italian neorealist cinema after all—tragic results.

A Marxist filmmaker of his own particular stripe, Visconti's film (replete with a cast of non-actors who authentically behave in the way that fishermen and their families might act in

such circumstances) poses the exact type of dilemma that Badiou's political philosophy is concerned with: mass thought, "communal" thought, or a Rousseauian "general will" harbouring an "egalitarian norm" that stipulates: politics *is* equality, and inegalitarianism is apolitical (Badiou, 2013b, p. 365; Bosteels, 2011). The difference between the strike that never happens in *La terra trema* (1948), and the brothers' failed rival fishery, is that their ultimately doomed libertarian strategy folds into the very logic of capitalist exploitation that they sought to escape: their means of subsistence are made even more unattainable because they are still playing the profit game, simply by a privatized set of rules that involve circumventing the wholesalers. Of course, when their independent fishing vessel is wrecked by a storm during one of their earliest expeditions, tragedy ensues. A general strike of the exploited villagers, by contrast, would have indicated what Badiou calls 'living under the sign of an idea', and posed a real threat to the system of exploitation (Badiou, 2009, p. 497).

Visconti's film raises a question, however, that is central to the Italian Neorealist school (and that both links and distinguishes it from the Soviet and Germanic schools preceding it): namely, the question of mass thought superimposed over individual thought. Notable examples include the underground resistance (including its traitors and adherents) against the Nazis in Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* (1945) or the joyous and tensile fraternity (including deserters and believers) in *The Flowers of St. Francis* (1950), and of course the wounding parable of De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) with its famous closing scene in which a father, having become what he despises, weepingly drifts into a throng of pedestrians, hand in hand with his son, marking the site of the failure of an ethic of individual justice against the backdrop of poverty-stricken, mass-political impotence. This same strain would be taken up more allegorically in Antonioni's trilogy of alienation, as well as in the second half of Bresson's career, and all across the oeuvre of the

indomitable duo Huillet & Straub. But perhaps its most vital moment in the European milieu was the rebirth it experienced through the dialectical films of Jean-Luc Godard, which began exploring mass thought in earnest during his most prodigious year of filmmaking: *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (1967) explored the relation between the capitalist transformation (territorialization) of an urban terrain and those living within its limits, *La Chinoise* (1967) executed an embryology of francophone Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and how it forms a social lifeworld, and finally, *Week End* (1967) raised the problem of how the anarcho-communist *sublation* of capitalist superstructures and modes of production into their corresponding postcapitalist systems—this sublation requiring a monstrous cannibalization of currently existing society—requires a transitionary interval resembling an indefinite carnival of horrors, a situation tersely analyzed by Godard in his 1978 Conservatory of Cinematographic Art lectures in Montreal (in explicitly vampiric terms) as: "I mean, between sucking blood and scooping up money there isn't a lot of difference" (Godard, 2022, p. 319).

Mass movement engendered by mass thought in dogged pursuit of justice relative to a post-evental horizon, and the contrasting ineptitude of disorganized or individualized movement engendered by reactionary frustration, lies at the heart of Badiou's philosophy, and has resided there from the beginning. As Bruno Bosteels apostrophizes in his summary of Badiou and Balmes' "De idéologie" (1976):

> "'The masses think, and, what is more, in the general historical movement of their uninterrupted resistance to exploitation and oppression, the masses think justly' […] If film, for Jean-Luc Godard, produces just images, then politics, for Badiou, produces just thoughts" (Bosteels, 2011, p. 17-18).

To understand Badiou's stance here, we need to clarify two points: a) What is the nature of "just" political thought? What are its modalities and distinguishing characteristics, those qualities that link it to the generic truth procedures that spring out of his novel ontology developed more than a decade after the above pronouncement?; and b) How is mass thought *mass*? That is to say, what prevents mass thought from being restricted at the level of the individual and, likewise, enables it to be interpersonal (communicative)? And how might we answer this without capitulating—and thus betraying Badiou's entire political system—to the democratic materialism he so reviles? I will now answer each in turn.

Just and True: The Power of Thought Against Evil

In his most popular early text, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (2013a [1993]), Badiou makes a clear case for what constitutes just political thought by contrasting it with a status quo in which politics is subordinated to "ethics", a Kantian melange of juridical sympathy in which the good is defined as that which "intervenes visibly against an evil that is identifiable a priori" (Badiou, 2013a, p. 8). This orthodoxy (constitutive of symbolic humanitarianism, 'Third World' pity, and a preventative mania that fits hand in glove with the forces of global capital) leads, for Badiou, to a kind of victimized non-subject. The status of this non-subject is perfectly enunciated in Voltaire's *Brutus* (1803 [1730]) during the first scene of the second act of the play, which is a retelling of the historico-mythological overthrow of the tyrant Tarquin, the last of the early Roman kings, by the titular consul Brutus, who goes on to found the first Roman republic. In this scene, the duplicitous Messala offers a remarkably modern forecast of Titus' prospects should he continue down the path laid by his rebellious father, suggesting that he will become a…

« Citoyen sans pouvoir, amaut sans espérance,

Je vous verrais languir victime de l'Etat […] »

(Voltaire, 1803, p. 147).

I offer my shoddy translation:

"Powerless citizen, hopeless lover,

I would see you as a languishing state-victim"

Similarly, Badiou's assessment of the ethico-political statist orthodoxy finds that it is defined by the abhorrent requirement that above all else "man is *the being who is capable of recognizing himself as a victim*" (Badiou, 2013a, p. 10).

Against objections from the culturalism and theology that subvene the philosophies of alterity and subjecthood native to Levinas, Heidegger, and others, Badiou configures his own ethics of what he will (much) later come to call "works": an ethics in which "Man is to be identified by his affirmative thought, by the singular truths of which he is capable, by the Immortal which makes of him the most resilient and most paradoxical of animals", a corporeal eternality founded upon "our positive capability for Good, and thus from our boundary-breaking treatment of possibilities and our refusal of conservatism" (Badiou, 2013a, p. 16). Important for us is that this position necessarily entails transformational, emancipatory politics, and rests firmly on the presumption that "All humanity has its root in the identification in thought of singular situations. There is no ethics in general" (Badiou, 2013a, p. 16). This identification *in thought* of 'situations' in order to realize positive, resilient, and indeed joyous transformation recalls the convoluted Althusserian debates concerning "structural causality", particularly the trifecta of real/subject/ideology put forth by Laclau and Mouffe, which Badiou rejects in favour of the trio Being/Truth/Subject—in that order (Badiou, 2022, p. 449; Bosteels, 2011, p. 58). Protecting ourselves from the Lacanian papercuts typically suffered upon broaching this topic

(by sidestepping many of the volumes dedicated to the logic of the absent cause) we will shortcut straight to Badiou's germane reinterpretation, which began in earnest with "Mark and Lack" (2012), originally published in 1969, a veritable attack on Jacques-Alain Miller's concept of "suture" and his "logic of the signifier" (Badiou, p. 151). Setting aside for the moment its rehabilitation by Laclau and Mouffe under the ideological law of productive postponement incurred by the absence of an "ultimate suture", we can say quite plainly that it is the presupposition of foreclosure in Miller's notion of suture—foreclosure at the level of the dichotomous mechanism, derived from Frege's concept-object-number system, which ostensibly produces a psychoanalytically significant remainder—that Badiou finds objectionable (Badiou, 2012, p. 152; Bosteels, 2011, p. 71; Miller, 2012, p. 41-42). To reduce a stupendous work of young philosophy to its sharpest coign: fundamentally, in logic, a lack that is not itself a signifier *has* no signifier; it is foreclosed *there*, and not at the level of some trans-logical suturing obtained through Fregean substitution and assignation, such that, contrary to Miller, 0 can never equal 1 in a logical or alethic scheme, and the non-reciprocal circularity (spiralling) of the subject as merely an effect of the signifier, and the signifier as "the representative of the subject" in perpetual anteriority all along the signifying chain is impossible to redeploy "for" the chain itself—that is, for the scientific, logico-mathematical structure behind the structure (Miller, 2012, p. 49; Badiou, 2012, p. 156). In fact, for Badiou, the *only* time a signifier is sutured is in the ideological domain of the barred subject—that is, when an ideological signifier is at play (Badiou, 2012, p. 156). 'Scientific' signifiers, meanwhile, are:

> "[…] neither sutured nor split, but [infinitely] stratified. And stratification repeals the axiom by which Miller, in another text, characterized foreclosure: the lack of a lack is also a lack. No, not if that which comes to be lacking was always already marked: then

the productive difference of strata suffices to name the interstice. The halting points are always prescribed" (Badiou, 2012, p. 161).

Given its proper home, Miller's suture now helps distinguish between the representable and unrepresentable in thinking (ideological and scientific significations, respectively), a thematic that Badiou never relinquished in the half-century that followed this paper: stratification as a motif becomes later woven into the stratified work of truth-subjects and designates their labour as, in some sense, un-ideological. In addition, the logic of the infinite stratification of the unpresentable, which earlier we referred to as a consistency that sacrifices totality, means that the 'real' for Badiou is not solely an absent or "evanescent" cause, but also the source of entirely new, often previously unimaginable consistencies (Bosteels, 2011, p. 86). That is, the real moves from being a mere causal force in the algebraic sense, to a knotting force (of "torsion") in a topological sense, thus allowing for the assertion that "formalization is the impasse of the real" rather than just its Lacanian obverse (that the real is the impasse of formalization) (Bosteels, 2011, p. 81, 88).

The psychoanalytic implication (and the implication for a theory of political truth or just thought, the two of which will later be made synonymous) is that one must move away from the skeptical finger-wagging against master-discourses that Lacan teases out of his Freudian lineage, with its infamous Sophoclean-Oedipal resource, and instead venture into an anti-Lacanian position that draws from an Aeschylusean-Oresteian resource—or even Aeschylusean-Theban, Aeschylusean-Promethean, Voltairean-Brutusian resources (Bosteels, 2011, p. 91-92). It is the oscillation between (i) anxiety, a function whereby the real *kills* the symbolic via the vanishing "object-cause of desire", rather than productively splitting it, and (ii) superego, as the restoration of archaic law via the "word", that, with sinusoidal regularity, establishes a repetitive,

compulsive, destruction-restoration dynamic which prevents qualitatively new orders from emerging (Bosteels, 2011, p. 88-89). This is an impasse at the level of the subject. The anxiety-superego couplet is understood well enough through the Sophoclean vagaries of tragic ignorance and untimely knowledge that continue to inspire psychoanalysis. But Badiou's introduction of the terms (iii) courage, as a passing through of the symbolic order where there appeared to be no passage (which in retroaction becomes hope and fidelity), and (iv) justice, a non-law that may "serve as law" under the aegis of a new event and the finite works that testify to its inclusion in a sequence of truths, realign the prior two terms into a quadrant (Badiou, 2022, p. 75; Bosteels, 2011, p. 89, 90). On the one hand we now have a subject possessed by either anxiety and courage, which are actually both destructive and disorderly orientations, and, on the opposing side, by either superego and justice, which tend towards "recomposition"; the first two are algebraic, placed within the confines of an objective structure or situation ("a position of internal exclusion"), the latter two are topological, exercising the ability to perch at an exteriority in "excess" of their "assigned placement" (Bosteels, 2011, p. 90). A courageous Grothendieckian traversal, we might say, from the domain of Lagrange (eliminative algebra) to that of Poincaré (productive chaos and topology), by the fact of the synthesis of the two, or the injection of the latter into the former, thereby permitting the alteration of the state of affairs.

The force of justice is thus defined by a power of productive distortion that harnesses courage against the seemingly ineluctable agency-drain of anxiety and the restrictions of obedient superegoism. The force of the just, however, proceeds only along the sharp lines of the recognition of true events, signalling what is the perennial problem of Badiou's philosophy as a model for praxis. The dilemma of (mis-)recognition was anticipated early on in his work in the

context of ideology, but rather than settle for explanation by way of false consciousness or libidinal economy, misrecognition emerges prominently as the fulcrum of evil itself.

As outlined in *Ethics* (2013a), the manifestations of Evil display three cascading attributes: a "simulacrum" which imitates, with all the misguided trappings of totality, the arrival of a genuine event; the fatiguing of fidelity to truths, known as the "betrayal" of causes; and, finally, the forced nomination of that element of the real which must remain "unnameable" lest it corrupt the power of a truth procedure—one of the examples provided being "the reactionary usage of the word 'French'" to persecute 'foreigners', thus falsely forcing the "naming" of community, a sin on par with the errant biunivocalization (a squashing of the scene of the two) entailed in the naming of love as *jouissance*, or even the nomination of non-contradiction in a mathematical system, a formal breaching of Gödel's famously forbidding theorem (Badiou, 2013a, p. 86, 87).

The prior insistence of "truths" as the 'third term' corrective to the hegemonic 'language and bodies' formula is integral to the thinking of justice as the rearranger of structures (to include a new truth), and courage as its engine of causality—without which, it must be added, evil (as violent dissimulation, betrayal of causes, and the oppression of nomination) is either nihilistically or religiously accepted as inevitable. Any analysis of the justice of mass thought thus entails an inquiry into political truth, for which we will turn to (primarily) the first and last entries in the *Being and Event* trilogy (Badiou, 2013b, 2022).

Thinking Political Truth Procedures: Discernibility and Indiscernibility

The character of a truth procedure, and the generic form of its operation, is identical across all four recognizable of domains of truth-appearing, which means that the following

explanation, while focusing on political action (to prepare ourselves for the consideration of political economy) contains much that applies equally to the other three 'truth procedures' of art, science, and love. Bypassing for a moment the ontological buttress, including important diatribes on the "errancy" of the void and its role as the "the unpresentation operating behind and on presentation", we shortly arrive at the vital juncture between knowledge and truth (Badiou, 2013b, p. 58, 60). It is at this juncture that we reveal not only the socket occupied by the disparaged organ of language, but also the essential lexicon for thinking the unfolding of a truth procedure.

The first terms of significance here—relating to the distinction between the alethic and the veridical—are 'discernible' and 'indiscernible'. The indiscernible is that which is "subtracted from knowledge or from exact nomination", or included but not yet belonging to the "the encyclopaedia of the situation"—this is its "negative" characteristic (Badiou, 2013b, p. 345). The encyclopaedia here is a name for the "fixed state of knowledge" that the appearance of a truth "makes a hole in" through "post-evental fidelity" (Badiou, 2013b, p. 345). It is especially important that the encyclopaedia—the holy book of numbers, letters, names, relations, dates, and indications comprising knowledge as such—is ignorant of truth *not* because of a truth's deviant specificity (its own peculiar numbers, letters, names, and so on, as if it were simply differently discernible) but because of its *genericity*. This genericity refers to the "general truth of a situation, the truth of its being, as considered as the foundation of all knowledge to come", or an indiscernible (not yet included) element which latently subtracts itself "from knowledge or from exact nomination" (Badiou, 2013b, p. 345). So, while it is true, in Badiou's account, that truth (as the indiscernible) is never—to borrow an isomorphic conceptual schema from Laurence BonJour (1980)—"epistemically justified" by some internal arrangement of knowledge and belief (and

thus, for BonJour, susceptible to a vicious *regressus ad infinitum*), it is likewise *not* dependent, either, on any absolute, inaccessible, external foundation (such as the divine), because a truth's clandestine inexistence lies generically *within* a multiple of multiples (p. 363)

Genericity here also relates to the 'nonconformity' of the universal (the universal being the guarantor of truth) which, when possessed by thought, requires "an uninterrupted labor, an inventive traversal" against the "ordeal of conformity" that seeks to suppress truth through some particularity or identity (Badiou, 2003, p. 110). There is a sensitive Kantian schema at play here—transmuted, of course, into Badiou's own system—wherein the discernible stands in for worldly phenomena, as accessible through the famous three-quadrant matrix of synthetic *a-priori*, analytic *a-priori*, and synthetic *a-posteriori* judgements, and the indiscernible stands in for the "thing in itself" underlying appearances, forever inaccessible to deduction (Kant, 2004 [1783], p. 26-27). Consequently—ignoring for a moment the immense epistemological divergence between the two thinkers regarding, for starters, the category 'truth'—language ends up being related to the knowledge of what is discernible in a given situation, while the event pertains to the ruptural force of the indiscernible (Badiou, 2003, p. 346). The invocation of Kant here, shoehorned in as it may be, serves as a key point of reference later on when we will exfoliate and augment Badiouan post-evental work in the same manner Hamman (2007), through untrammeled ridicule, sought to correct the Kantian transcendental ego. Intimations and anticipations of this augmentation can and should be detected in the following passages.

For the moment, let us stay with language. For Badiou, there are two kinds of connective operation open to language—two steps even—that proliferate within the discernible of the encyclopaedia: discernment, which concerns how language expresses what is presented as a judgement about "properties"; and classification, which concerns how language identifies *parts*

of a situation, or its representation, and thus acts as a linking together of the judgements comprising initial discernment (Badiou, 2003, p. 346). Events, let us reiterate, (mostly) fall outside of this network because the name of the event is not encyclopaedically determined due to its being "supernumerary *as a name of the event*" (Badiou, 2003, p. 347).

What of the event, then? Can truth, ostensibly excised from the encyclopaedic techniques of discernment and classification, be served by language? Contrary to first blush, the answer is affirmative.

The two concepts of vital importance here are "enquiry" and "work". As explained in *Being and Event* (2013b), enquiry is "a finite series of minimal reports" that constitutes "the basic unit of the procedure of fidelity, because it combines the one of discernment with the several of classification" (Badiou, 2013b, p. 349). Which is to say, it collects the "big picture" of what is presented during the emergence of some superabundant multiple that is an event ("a multiplicity in excess of itself", as Badiou calls it in his book on Saint Paul) and combines this nominative account with serious interpretations of how to understand what is thus represented by its arrival and the ensuing wake it causes—or fails to stimulate (Badiou, 2003, p. 78). This reportage grants the fidelity of enquiry the veneer of knowledge, when in fact it is closer to a *decision* to follow a set of consequences in their unfolding, come what may, than a logical digestion of novelty around the organizing apparatus of an *a-priori* framework (Badiou, 2013b, p. 349). In *The Immanence of Truths* (2022) Badiou clarifies with some finality how this enquiry—as an essential moment of fidelity to a truth event—can be thought of as a "work".

This transformation of the concept of enquiry, which began with the procedural stratifications in *Logics of Worlds* (2009), now occurs within the dialectic of the infinite hierarchy of infinities on the one hand, and the "operative intersection" between two different

types (sizes) of infinities that gives rise to "the ideology of finitude" on the other (Badiou, 2022, p. 20-21). This ideology of finitude has four basic claims that should sound familiar to any reader of this text: (i) What currently is is all that there is, and we should be 'realistic' about this fact; (ii) Since this current existence of things and occasions is all that there is, it *de jure* determines all that there will ever be, such as implicitly impossible utopias; (iii) We have a duty—perhaps our only common duty—to respect what there is based on these prior two assumptions about the present and the future; (iv) Finally, nature is capitalism (as in the most insidiously eugenic flavours of right-Darwinism) and capitalism is natural (Badiou, 2022, p. 20).

Contrary to the ideology of finitude, Badiou rather succinctly claims that "[f]initude does not exist", while in contrast *infinities*—as constructions that are absolute yet local, eternal yet determinately temporal, a-subjective or universal yet dependent upon subjectivization, and ontologically generic-multiple-inexistences yet phenomenologically maximal-existences—do indeed exist, but either as "waste product" or "work" (2022, p. 19, 21-22).

Given the above qualifiers for constructions of infinity, it is understandable why Badiou posits them as ontologically dynamic forms of labour (much like how enquiry straddled the line between the discernible and indiscernible). Regarding the role of the work of truth within a truth procedure:

> "*A work of truth is a finite, but dynamic, fragment of such a procedure*. 'Fragment' means that it is a finite subset of the (infinite) generic set; 'Dynamic' means that, although finite, this subset bears the trace of its belonging to a truth *procedure*, which develops, under the authority of a subject, in the field of consequences of an event" (Badiou, 2022, p. 451).

Any precise or static definition of a truth ("enumerating the elements that compose it") exists outside of its arrival, so to speak, and at that critical juncture misses the point of the infinite unfolding of the truth that the vanished event introduces, a point only captured by the intervention—to the internal sphere of an event—by enquiry-fidelity (Badiou, 2013b, p. 451).

The "dynamic immanence to the procedure" that a finite work captures "is marked supplementarily in the form of an index", which, merging texts, we could call the product of a tenacious enquiry, or better yet, an inscription bearing "a surplus trace" (Badiou, 2022, p. 451, 452). Language now rushes in.

The Encyclopaedic Gap: Flocculation & Corpusculation Contra Deflocculation and Inosculation

Discernment and classification, the two connective processes that allow enquiry—as an intervention into the named event—to aspire to fidelity, are ratiocinative. As such (and as Badiou readily admits) they involve languages of some minimal situational adequacy. The key point here is that this situational adequacy is ruptural. Badiou's political thought requires that truths destitute norms which means that, contra-Habermas (2015), for whom language 'detranscendentalizes' reason and gropes towards consensual social norms, we must focus on linguistic supplements that detranscendentalize the *non-normative*, ateleological decision-making of an open, vanguardist collective over time.

Here we may pose a preliminary rhetorical question: what is an event without discernment or classification? That is, what is are the prospects of an event if the situation it scissors into is one that inhibits the resources presupposed in the act of discernment and classification, which is to say lingo-cognitive resources? This stripping-away of the roots to

prevent the growth of shoots, in the form of the preconditioned indiscernibility of discernment itself, and the declassification of classificatory drives, is a hallmark of the industrialization of language that we will soon discuss.

To prop open for good this space for language that we have found in Badiou's philosophy we must address, finally, a crucial property of the relation between truth enquiries and the encyclopaedia. Namely, that the divide—between an extant truth as an "infinite part of the situation" and the already discerned and classified terms as finite parts of that same situation—does not prohibit the necessity for "the results of an enquiry [to] *coincide* with an encyclopaedic determinant" (p. 349, 351).

That the necessity of coincidence (as a general principle) does not make any one coincidence necessary fends off truth enquiries from superfluous nominalism and Saussurean linguistic interdependency, which would artificialize any emergent contingency, or else demote any coincident part to the status of arbitrary and swappable linguistic token, thereby commencing a game of mereological whack-a-mole (Saussure, 2013, p. 114). Conversely, the necessity of coincidence invites a *flocculation* of encyclopaedic language, including its librarial correlates, which bear the same retroactive justification afforded to any work of truth. Indeed, the infinite fragment of a truth procedure's work "contains an infinity of [corresponding] enquiries" of just such flocculate growth, hence the continual replenishment of the worldly sediment that is coagulated upwards in every new investigation of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (2012 [1857]), or experimental revisitation of the effects of quantum spin, or survey into molecular modelling, or analysis of fatigued revolts against a para-parliamentary raising of the national retirement age (Gatinois and Goar, 2023), or, finally, in a gesture of amorous affection (Badiou, 2013b, p. 352).

By amassing together (flocculating) "all the terms of the situation which are positively connected to the event", meaning all the terms that coincide with it, a truth-enquiry bisects all connections into either a negative cohort of pre-evental irrelevancy or a positive cohort of post-evental relevancy—and *a new discernibility* (Badiou, 2013b, p. 353). This polarization creates a technically infinite set comprised of "terms of the situation which are positively connected to the event" and is guided by the "trajectory of the enquiries" that the encounter between these terms and the truth procedure sparks into life (Badiou, 2013b, p. 354). The conflagration of vital enquiries returns us to our previous concern for the disruption, short-circuiting, and curtailing of enquiry as such. That is, a situation in which the substrate of thought overdetermines the trajectory of enquiry-as-moving-thought, or proscribes and delimits thought by chaining it to a corpulent, marketized encyclopaedia, thereby (to borrow a phrase from Kant's third critique) enervating the imaginary impetus which "makes reason think more" (Kant, 1987, p. 183). For it is, after all, the imaginative leap into a new idea (in the Platonic sense) that truth procedures beseech. This super-natural faculty is one that surpasses the recombinatory "law of association" that forms the material-empirical base of freedom-in-thought (and acts as its unthinking obverse), a meagre domain the totality of which to this day acts as the sole legitimator of machine learning and other senseless proficiencies notably absent from the dome of human dignity (Kant, 1987, p. 182, 183).

The avoidance, via diagonal movement—we might say even via a dialectical liberation of thinking, as in Wallace Stevens' "liberty of the mind", through the sheer force of negation—of encyclopaedic determinants ensures continued contact with the infinity of a faithful truth procedure (Badiou, 2013b, p. 355; Stevens, 1997, p. 727). "Ensures?" you may ask, "How could it possibly ensure such a contact?" The answer is that a work of truth is "the infinite positive

total—[a gathering together of 'positive' terms]—of a procedure of fidelity which, for each and every determinant of the encyclopaedia contains at least on enquiry which avoids it" (Badiou, 2013b, p. 356). This *one enquiry* which for each corresponding determinant avoids encyclopaedization is at once the aperture that permits post-evental intervention and the *only* insurance against forces which cement thinking in the encyclopaedic determinant, thus anchoring thought to the subterranean domain of knowledge, and to the ideology of finitude (Badiou, 2013b, p. 355). It is worth proclaiming again here that *thought bears no obligation whatsoever to the encyclopaedia as such*. That the two coincide—in a truth procedure or outside of one—is a symptom of the pleonectic refraction typical of the confinement of linguistic resources (around specialized jargon and so forth), and not proof that mentation is condemned to endlessly reshuffle, like a machine, what has already been spoken and written. That is to say the resources of the vast global-historical encyclopaedia, despite subvening self-conscious cogitation, do not exhaust it, as evidenced by an event's ability to compel the flocculation of enquiries which avoid its determinations (the eventual thinking of the previously unthinkable through a gathering of positive terms).

Truth, as an "indiscernible *inclusion* [that] has no other 'property' than that of referring to belonging" because each "indiscernible part" is capable of possessing the properties of literally any part of a multiple, exerts a pull on the pre-existing situation at the site of a rift in the established order (Badiou, 2013b, p. 357). The spatial question of evental sites notwithstanding—although the suggestion will be made later on that what Parisi (2019, p. 29) describes as the global "[…] cybernetic network of communication" may satisfy the criteria of an evental site—we have a procession across time in which "[…] love, art, science and politics

generate—infinitely—truths concerning situations; truths subtracted from knowledge which are only counted by the state in the anonymity of their being" (Badiou, 2013b, p. 359).

The culmination of the effects of "an evental caesura" by a militant intervention is that the situation is *forced* to accommodate the previously indiscernible yet included truth (Badiou, 2013b, p. 361). This is a transubstantiation from a position of *inclusion*, in the naïve set-theoretical sense of the word, where the truth occupies, as we just mentioned, literally any representative part of a multiple and is utterly transitive, to a position of *belonging*, where it is now a distinct element of the multiple, or part of its presentation, and universally reconstitutes its shape from within (Badiou, 2013b, p. 361). A "faithful generic procedure" will thus normalize a truth, or change its ontological status from exception to rule, by "forcing" a transformation in the situation itself: this is how an "anonymous excrescence" (represented but not presented) becomes normalized (both presented and represented) and in doing so radically changes the language of a situation, as the pressure of its indiscernibility warps existing knowledge to accommodate it. This internalization—which I call 'corpusculation'—"renders the indiscernible immanent" by accommodating and finalizing its place within a situation, as a newly singularized corpuscle (Badiou, 2013b, p. 103, 361). The attainment of this state-change is relatively rare. It is also worth noting, however, that the change caused by the validation of a truth procedure—as the corpuscle engorges with the help of flocculation (art exhibits, confirmations of scientific discovery, reciprocal proclamations of love, the institution of egalitarian governance)—is utterly distinct from the 'natural' rhizomatic intertwining or inosculation favoured by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). The methodology of inosculation (or identitarian conjoinment) as it manifests itself today—in phony syncretism and dogmatic secularism—increasingly resembles a perfect emblem of ordoliberal complacency and apolitical sloth. Likewise, deflocculation, or the

atomizing and ungathering of enquiries, represents a modality of de-evental dispersion, usually by an appeal to nature—of isolation, destitution, 'the hard life', the essential relativity or unreliability of subjective accounts—that is integral to the ideology of finitude.

Politics at Last

The subtractive, subjectivizing political truth procedure (that is, the procedure of post-evental fidelity that transforms someone into a political subject who was hitherto not a subject whatsoever) consistently takes on the following equivalence for Badiou: that "the route of political change" is identical to "the route of the radical dispensation of justice" (Badiou, 2013b, p. 114). This synonymy points again to the dialectic of finitude and infinitude that preoccupies much of *The Immanence of Truths* (2022) and guides its consideration of mass political events, their ethical exigency, and the interventionist transformation that complicates our understanding of temporality. As Badiou somewhat famously writes in the conclusion to *Logics of Worlds* (2009), "History does not exist. There are only disparate presents whose radiance is measured by their power to unfold a past worthy of them" (p. 509). In the context of just politics against evil, this proclamation of the retroactive capacity of truth procedures reveals a Robespierrean tenor, by which one wagers on the righteousness of a popular government comprised of "[…] virtue and terror both: virtue, without which terror is disastrous; terror, without which virtue is powerless" with the additional insistence that terror is "nothing but prompt, severe, inflexible justice […] an emanation of virtue" (Robespierre, 2017, p. 115). This formulation relies on an astringent *modus ponens* by which the justness of a political achievement (the overthrow of absolute monarchy, for instance) in turn validates, resolutely, the interval of transitionary struggle.

Implied in this retroactive structure—which is recursive and reflexive in movement, but not a *hysteron proteron* à la Tyrone Slothrop's "beyond the zero" Pavlovian orgasm-rocket-strike stimulus response in Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (2012 [1973], p. 85)—is the unfashionable idea that a political truth procedure is not *deducible* per se from the knowledge of a given situation, even if it is inherent, in its generic, universal ramification through all points of contact to said situation.

The sensitivity and pertinacity required to recognize and intervene when a "consistent multiplicity"—the apparent fullness of everyday life—gives way to a rupture from the "inconsistent multiplicity" of the void, or what is unpresented, in the location of a "place" in immediate experience, is not minor (Badiou, 2013b, p. 81). If it were not for his fulminations in *The Immanence of Truths* (2022) against the 'bad' infinity of "oppression by religion"—which is built around the inaccessibility of god and "humility" as "the virtue of finitude" that entails self-recognition of a waste-product as a waste-product—one could almost mistake this attuned pre-evental disposition for the Calvinistic, preterite expectancy venerated in the Marian annunciation and other biblical scenes. This would be misguided, as the anonymous, voided, inconsistent multiple hiding behind a presented multiple accepts no predestined election-for-truth among any singleton, element, or persons. This equipollence (or non-preference) of appearance is partly a result of the voided status of the "human animal", who for Badiou is empty and not subjectivized *except* in their encounter with a truth event and in their ensuing fidelity to said event (Badiou, 2009, p. 113-114).

However, more often than not, a truth procedure fails, or is abandoned, betrayed, left incomplete, and the exhumation of its failure is revealed in posterity by philosophy. One such notable example of a discontinued and etiolated revolt against the "oppressive" infinity of the

state (an archetypal finitude-maker of citizens) is the medieval anti-feudal movement outlined in Federici's monumental *Caliban and the Witch* (2004) (Badiou, 2022, p. 77). In her survey of labour, medical practice, and social discourse of sexuality among women and the medieval proletariat, she exposes how the latent political force of the anti-feudal movements—as heresy, millenarianism, refusal to pay extortionary tallage, abandonment of farm land, and flight to the city or countryside—led to a resolution of the "master-serf conflict" in the form of contractual monetary agreements, a "momentous development" that marked the end of feudalism *as such*—that is, feudalism as the pecuniary obedience of labourers in the name of sanctified customs (Federici, 2004, p. 28, 32). However, as she is quick to note, this 'victory' satisfied "only in part […] the original demands" of the exploited workers, and the contractualization of their relations, rather than vindicate their struggle and spur it militantly onward, functioned "as a means of social division and contribut[ed] to the disintegration of the feudal village", the margins of which had never seen so many "landless" or dispossessed peasants (Federici, 2004, p. 29). Besides setting the stage for the primitive accumulation undergirding the transition to capitalism, this historical example illustrates how political truth procedures still run up against the barrier of the state. The state being that which is *not* "founded upon the social bond, which it would express"—in this example the bond of legal and economic fealty to some throned baron clad in a mantle of heraldic tincture—"but rather upon un-binding, which it prohibits", which would be the punitive measures meant to dissuade would-be land deserters (better known as peasants seeking emancipation). It is the keeping at bay at all costs of this "danger of inconsistency", or of a representation that might corpusculate into a presentation, thus deforming what is presented, that grounds the state in un-binding (the strategic separation of protestors in the streets by baton-wielding police is its unrivalled image today) (Badiou, 2013b, p. 113). Even the ostensibly

homogenizing farce of foolhardy nationalisms (flags, anthems) is built on the un-binding integral to settler-colonial renunciation, and the maintenance of categorical undesirables (under the name 'foreigner', 'migrant' and so forth) that must be denied legitimate status as well as dissuaded (often by force) from undivided assembly (binding).

As inheritor of certain feudal (and primeval) finitudes, the epoch of global capitalism presents the following stakes for any political truth procedure to contend with:

> "[…] under the infinite, transcendent and complete law of unfettered capitalism, human individuals either commit to the work of communism, which can be described, regardless of whether it is local or more general, as a change in the filter by which human endeavor is measured (from money to shared principles), or, they are the waste products of the dominant infinity. And what exactly does it mean to be the finite waste product of the triumph of the monetary filter over the principled (or thinking) filter? It is the moment when one's subjectivity is controlled, not only in terms of its material existence but in terms of its thoughts, by everything within it that has to do with money. There are, however, only two active determinations that fit this definition: wage labor, which transforms labour into money, and consumption, which transforms money into consumer goods. To be a worker-consumer, which in some respect we are forced to be, is to inhabit modern finitude; it is ultimately to be a waste product of Capital" (Badiou, 2022, p. 80).

Teasing out the historical lessons of emancipatory political struggle and failure from the prior century and using them to overturn the oppressive infinity of capitalism and thus transform masses from waste products to embodied 'labourers' of a truth procedure is a concrete if daunting task. As elaborated above, this task's completion relies, in the earliest stage, on the strength of an intervention enabled by the trajectory of enquiries (made up of discernments and

classifications) that are not encyclopaedically *determined* (do not deductively emerge from a relation of existing terms in recombination). The necessary *coincidence* or overlap of these enquiries with the encyclopaedia itself however—especially of those underdetermined terms gathered around a truth event—indicate that it is ratiocination, of thought-in-terms, that must coincide with what is legible to mobilize the masses first as a grasping of their situation, and later as the proliferation of slogans. The important point here is that unlike in Habermas' (1985) communicative action, there is no need for a threshold of anaemic public sphericality. The only necessary precursor to subjectivization and the work of enquiry is the encounter between thought and event; persuasion, or the leading of others out of the cave, is the *after* step, the second step, the subterranean return to implore others to see for themselves the coruscation of a truth event. This displacement of the democratic materialist 'mass opinion' with a dialectical materialist 'critical mass' of truth-militants alters the expectations of political movements but does not remove the exigency surrounding the redistribution of enquiries. Nor does it eliminate the grasping of true events and the difficult deciphering of its ensuing work—these two vital junctures—by a generic language that subtends thinking itself. If left disincorporated or unaccommodated, the regime of significations remains unaltered by a truth which is not completely thought, and the ideology of finitude reigns on.

Fidelity, or The Platonic Redistribution of Sense

In order to answer the question of how mass thought is mass—or better yet, how thought of the event reaches *critical mass* through the organization of adamant militancy—we must understand that a 'work' of truth can be either completed or left incomplete, abandoned. As Badiou writes towards the end of *The Immanence of Truths* (2022), a work of truth's completion is "historically [...] generally not the case" (Badiou, 2022, p. 450). The tipping point in this

matter is fidelity. Fidelity is also, as we will see, what disinhibits thought from restriction at the level of the individual (or even class) and allows it to be interpersonal or communicative. In *Logics of Worlds* (2009) Badiou forms this idea into an explicit thesis: "*To the extent that it is the subject of a truth, a subject subtracts itself from every community and destroys every individuation*" (p. 9, italics original). A critical mass then must be comprised of something that is neither communitarian nor individualist, but interpersonal in a way that is utterly impersonal. This communicative impersonality is consummated by fidelity (a unanimous term among all four truths, not solely political or amorous truths) defined as neither a "general faithful disposition", nor a "capacity, subjective quality, or a virtue", but rather a "functional relation" to the particularities of an event that marks those (the "one-multiples") who respond to an "evental happening" (Badiou, 2013b, p. 246). The functionality of this liaison is one of construction and friction: tenacious or fidelitous procedures are essentially the construction of "counter-states" that, in a rather colloquial usage of this terminology, alters the existing state of affairs *from* within *to* without (Badiou, 2013b, p. 246).

The constructive functionality of fidelity is thus the agent of movement from flocculation to corpusculation—which we can say, against Spinozist readings of Badiou, is an *epistemological* movement. The successful coagulation of this functional core at the level of critical mass-thought is externally maintained by, first, hope (which is the group-psychological disposition of "fidelity to fidelity") and, second, the *meta-ontological* movement of activity itself—assembly, uprising, revolt—that establishes a connection between "presented multiples" and "a particular multiple, the event" via the circulation of the latter within a situation "by its illegal name" (Badiou, 2003, p. 95; Badiou, 2013b, p. 249-250).

Not every human being exposed to an event will muster fidelity to it. For Badiou, human beings who work to "organize, *within* the situation, another legitimacy of inclusions" and "[build], according to the infinite becoming of the finite and provisional results, a kind of *other* situation" fall into the side of a "subject", while the "mass of multiples which are indifferent to the event", remain, after the cutting in two of the "primitive situation", firmly on the non-subjective side (Badiou, 2013b, p. 251-252). The germane political question is whether or not, in seeking to obtain a critical mass, non-subjects can be converted to subjects, and whether the initial phenomenological proliferation of subjectivity itself depends on something like a Platonic redistribution of sense—by a language-in-the-generic that coincides but is not determined by the encyclopaedia—for those whose encounter is either temporally delayed or spatially distant.

Subjects of a truth procedure (for Badiou there is no other kind) are not holy fools. Their activities—conscious, determined, contemplated—pass through the filter of cognition-in-language and shared principles. This means that the risk of the incompletion of a truth procedure has two definable stages: (i) Deflocculation, or the dispersal of terms causing the misrecognition/unrecognition of an event—which, as will soon be argued, is built into the general effect of the lingo-cognitive reification implied in the industrialization of language by capital, a force that is unprecedented in severity and scope during the internet age, and (ii) Inosculation, or the interruption—and subsequent abandonment—of truth procedures mid-process by way of encyclopaedic suppression, merging, or 'covering-over' (to paraphrase Badiou's term) that eliminates, in the manner to typical of capitalist reterritorialization, the space of cognition required for the full construction of a work of truth—the "index" of which, if for example a true political movement took root, would be "the consciousness of a victorious *orientation*, of inclusion in a historic 'way forward'" that enables any tactical seizure of power

(Badiou, 2022, p. 448, 452). It is worth noting that this "index", which is a fragment of infinity that distinguishes works of truth from waste products, is the only measure by which it can finally be said that flocculation and corpusculation have overcome inosculation and deflocculation (Badiou, 2022, p. 451). The latter two operations follow closely the cybernetic law of Deleuzian (1992) societies of control, their systematic methods of depotentiation by a homeorhetic regulation that seeks to divide and nullify the spontaneity and disruption of events. A conflict is erected here between the ability of thought to follow "the sign of an Idea" wherever it may go, and the anti-dialectical stimulus-response loops typical of cybernetic capital (Badiou, 2009, p. 497; Tiqqun, 2020).

Lastly, we may say of deflocculation and inosculation that, as strategies of capital, they are *supplementary to* ideological apparatuses but are not themselves such apparatuses. They act as containers, or as receptive forms, but supply no contents, instructions, or indoctrinations. Rather, the cognitive reification entailed in deflocculation and inosculation—as will be discussed in greater detail later in this thesis—represents the technological establishment of a *material inextricability* between the indexicalities of thought and the regnant socioeconomic order. This can obviously accelerate ideological processes and behaviours, but mostly acts in the other direction: the immunization of capital through an infrastructural relation between thought and finite representations of the world, which results in an increase in the base-level speed and flexibility of reification as such.

A Critique of Political Economy in Miniature

Despite Badiou's explicit determination in *Immanence of Truths* (2022) to "*move from political economy to an economic politics*"—a sentiment which mirrors the Marxian "move from

the exploitation of persons to the administration of things", there is some ambiguity surrounding the role of political economy in his oeuvre (Badiou, 2022, p. 80).

As Ray Brassier puts it, across Badiou's work "politics are severed from political economy" such that they form the exact methodological obverse of Marx's earliest critiques; that is, Badiou's politics bestows a catalogue of directions for strategic intervention whereas Marx's analysis refuses even the pretense of such prescriptions, instead pointing out merely (and we can forgive him this enormous 'merely') the fact of economically contingent social reproduction and the suggestion of its inversion being more desirable (Foreign Objekt, 2021). The ensuing dilemma, as Brassier frames it, is of an abstraction that invites "the temptation of decisionism", presumably meant in the Schmittian sense, that the equivocal character of some supposedly historic events unbearably muddles, even in healthy retrospect (Foreign Objekt, 2021). The theory of the event, powerful antidote though it may be against the perpetual deferral of revolutionary preparation and consequent postponement of class struggle for when the 'time is right' fails to adequately address this modal disconnect from said class struggle in the Being and Event trilogy (Foreign Objekt, 2021). Part of the work of this thesis is therefore to reconnect Badiou's politics of radical, spontaneous intervention with class analysis and political economy—specifically the political economy of language. It is our wager *du jour*, if you will, that the linguistic freighting of cognition is what reintegrates the implicit post-Marxism of Badiou's philosophy into a concrete political economy. This theoretical reintegration, which re-grounds his work, bears a historically contingent character due to its dependence upon our present technological moment within global capitalism; that is, a moment when the "means of cognition" (meant here as the capacity for languaging) finds itself caught between necessary enquiries of prior truth events on the one hand, and the deracination of language itself as a

precursor to the machinic "dissociation of intelligence and consciousness" on the other (Dyer-Witheford et al., 2019, p. 31, 112). Moreover, it seems plausible to suppose that *enquiry safeguards against decisionism* in Badiou's political philosophy, thus salvaging its pragmatic force and demarcating the essence of enquiry as a site of historically serendipitous relevancy, and historically pressurized struggle.

This is extremely important in the context of Google's desacralization of language and the subordination of our language data to the algorithmic, infrastructural, panoptic domination of human lives. For us it means that, *pace* Galloway (2016, 2018), we should not construe Badiou as a 'digital philosopher' when, as we will explore in the following pages, his model of politics does not entail an abandonment of discursive rationality or a mimicry of algorithmic recursivity. The 'incalculable' element so integral to political truth procedures is neither wholly libidinal and unconscious (irrational) nor wholly informational and formulaic (algorithmic); rather, it abides in the *poiesis* of sudden creation and the traversal of reason—in language—across the shock of novelty, and the communicable Idea this novelty brings forth. Only such a humble and pliable intermediary such as language coordinates between the disciplinary rigour of fidelity (in the 'digitality' of its constant decision-making) and the courageous risk of the event itself, in which an ungrounding of the thetic 'I' is given as ransom for the emancipation of the collective. Constructing this bridge of language out of Badiou's work is an intellectual struggle. To access this struggle, we must walk through the door of language.

Badiou and Language

Badiou's Cratylusian (which is to say Socratic—which is to say Platonic) orientation towards language—i.e., that names should not be (etymologically and philologically) studied because such backwards glancing at our own footsteps impedes philosophical investigation—

bypasses with unusually pragmatic haste the centrality of language to his own work, in both the literary examples he utilizes—Mallarmé and Balzac are recurring favourites—and of course the fact that it is through common language, not recondite mathematics, that he chooses (for good reason!) to share his philosophy books and lectures with the world. His dismissal of linguistic concerns was already amended somewhat in the above exegesis of his philosophical output, but now we will turn to the foundation of enquiry—isolated as a pivotal element of the transformation of situations—in order to: a) articulate exactly the dimensions of the ineliminable language-in-the-generic (or capacity for languaging) that presides within the triplet 'languages, bodies, truths' that connect it, and thereby connects the more-than-knowledge of dialectical enquiry, to cognition, and b) set the stage for a section intervention in the following chapter, which will examine the political-economic stakes of the real subsumption of language-thought (Badiou, 2006b).

Language and Structuration in Hamann

Johann Georg Hamann's posthumous "metacritique" of Kant's first critique insists quite humorously that the purity yearned for in the 'pure reason' under examination evinces little more than a psychological reflex, a preference for mathematical cleanliness that, at its own peril, forgets the linguistic underpinnings of metaphysics, and claims that human reason, in this meagre calculative state, is indistinguishable from the "instinct of insects" (Hamann, 2007, p. 211). The Kantian erasure of "the genealogical priority of language" from the schema of the transcendental ego, and its clumsy inclusion later on as a limited aesthetic-object of determinate consciousness, is therefore a metagrobolizing abstraction of the faculties of reason away from language, one that fails to address the question of what it is that enables thinking to happen in the first place (Hamann, 2007, p. 211).

Hamann suggests, in a passage that anticipates the work of Leroi-Gourhan and Derrida, and Stiegler's idea of exosomatic "tertiary memory" in particular, that the locus of the Kantian spatiotemporal split consisting of outward sense (objects occupying space) and inward sense (the mind intuiting the passage of time) is actually language itself (Hamann, 2007, p. 217; Stiegler, 1991, p. 270). According to Hamann, all atavistic language was actually music, which by the "palpable rhythm of the pulse and of the breath in the nostrils" generated "all temporal measures and intervals", just like the oldest writing was actually painting and drawing "occupied as early as then with the economy of space, its limitation and determination by figures" (Hamann, 2007, p. 211). This reorientation of language as a series of *internalizing* practices that itself produced—or in a properly Stieglerian sense, actively and technologically produces, still, to this day—the spatiotemporal matrices of our minds is the first step in thwarting the originary divorce of sensibility and understanding that is surgically undertaken by Kant only to be later annulled in Hamann's synthetic reunion—a suturing of representing and representation (Hamann, 2007, p. 212). Entailed in Hamann's provocative account is the presupposition that not only was *homo sapiens*' capacity for understanding barred prior to the advent of language, but so too was its basic structuring of sensibilities. This paints a picture of creatures whose pre-linguistic sense perception involved the inhalation of shambolic, atemporal swirls of unstructured phenomena: an unbroken, supersaturated, gorgonian daydream that in truly pre-scientific fashion resembled unrepeatable and strictly private hallucination. Sidestepping for a moment whether Hamann's conjecture beggars the question of causal rectification (that is, in his account, does language structure sensibility alchemically by their mutual encounter, or is language—as derived from music and drawing—structured *a-priori*, so to speak, such that its structuration-effect is a wholesale *filtering* of the real by linguistic import of mark and meter alone?) we can see that it

leads to a tantalizing upending of Kant's transcendental schema—one that is vaguely reminiscent of Sellarsian philosophies of experience, such as McDowell's, which refutes the belatedness of spontaneous judgement[2] and insists on "conceptual mediation all the way down", even during the interval of sensible receptivity of objects which Kant marks as passive (2007, p. 76, 77).

McDowell's account of experience removes the wedge between sensibility and understanding that was formerly essential to the Kantian unity of consciousness, and in so doing permits "genuinely objective purport" (p. 85); Hamann stresses that this free activity of understanding, and the intellective capacities it evinces (such as judgement), are always-already linguistic (or at least language-like, especially in their pictorial and musical states), because conceptual mediation requires linguistic mediation.

The only way to undo the hypostatization of reason away from language is to reify reason towards language. This involves refusing the idea that sensibility and understanding occupy different spectra without in turn ascribing any kind of normativity to the paradoxical states of (empty) nonconceptual sense and (formless) unintuitive understanding. Hamman ridicules Kantian rectitude in this regard by positing that:

> "[…] hosts of intuitions ascend to the firmament of pure understanding and hosts of concepts descend to the depths of the most perceptible sensibility, on a ladder which no

[2] McDowell repositions his argument as a resolutely Hegelian corrective to Kant during later revisitations of the titular *Mind and World* (1996) hypothesis, specifically in "Hegel and the Myth of the Given" (2007), wherein an even greater emphasis is put on the ability for "subjective states" to "make gap-free contact with genuinely objective reality" (p. 78, 88). The 'hooking' onto reality that McDowell proposes is antithetical to Adorno's romantically Kantian stance that philosophers must abandon the very idea that "the power of thought is sufficient to grasp the totality of the real" (2000, p. 24), and in this sense reaffirms by contrast the type of Hegelian sympathies that Badiou's stratified works-of-truth paradigm entails. Coupling language and conceptuality necessitates, however, a reassessment of this 'conceptuality' all-the-way-down.

> sleeper dreams—and the dance of these Mahanaim or two hosts of reason—the secret and vexing chronicle of their courtship and ravishing—and the whole theogony of all the giant and heroic forms of the Shulamite and muse [...]" (Hamann, 2007, p. 214-215).

What engenders the *transformation* of sensibility into contemplation and allows the understanding to receive intuition as more than a vortex of scattered penumbra is language—an antecedent structuration that ensures the univocity of what he mockingly calls the "two hosts of reason" (p. 36). The mediation of language in Hamann can almost be thought of as a super-symbolic order in the sense of Lacan—super because it contains the symbolic and the imaginary at once (Fink, 2017). Language's capacity for conjoining sense and understanding bestows the common root of language—and its individual units, be they oral enunciations, alphabetic words, ideogrammatic inscriptions, or unpresented data strings that enable the digital presentation of any of the above—with both "an aesthetic and logical faculty" (Hamann, 2007, p. 215). He elaborates:

> "As visible and audible objects [units of language] belong with their elements to the sensibility and intuition; however, by the spirit of their institution and meaning, they belong to the understanding and concepts. Consequently, words [read: signs of any human origin] are pure and empirical intuitions as much as pure and empirical concepts. Empirical, because the sensation of vision or hearing is effected through them; pure, inasmuch as their meaning is determined by nothing that belongs to those sensations" (Hamann, 2007, p. 215).

Under this paradigm, the liminality of language—as both materially intuitive (marks, meters) and immaterially conceptual (ideas)—generates its own schema, one that from the

eighteenth century prefigures by nearly two hundred years the arbitrary hemispheric connection of signifier and signified in Saussure's (2013) "speaking circuit" (p. 13, 67, 73):

> "This meaning and its determination arises, as everyone knows, from the combination of a word-sign, which is *a priori* arbitrary and indifferent and *a posteriori* necessary and indispensable, with the intuition of the world itself; through this reiterated bond the concept is communicated to, imprinted on, and incorporated in the understanding, by means of the word-sign as by the intuition itself" (Hamann, 2007, p. 216).

Even the Saussurean "psychological imprint" of the signified is accounted for—but with a key difference, and one that betrays the "Platonic overtones" of his work: namely, the insufficiency of poetry and cognition to grasp or articulate, rather than create, an "(extra-rational) truth" (Saussure, 2013, p. 66; Sparling, 2016, p. 198). This anti-dialectic is flawed, as we will soon see, but importantly fixes Hamann between a romantic material probing and a set of inaccessible, eternal truths. In sum: rather than taking the fact of social institution and normative linguistic obligation to mean that there is a closed loop, or contiguity, between, as Saussure puts it, some "indefinite plane of jumbled ideas" and an "equally vague plane of sounds", Hamann asks us to consider how the full extent of the faculties of language as a conduit for ratiocination remain veiled despite his partial unveiling of their conjunction of the *materially intuitive* and *immaterially conceptual* domains (Saussure, 2013, p. 112).

Getting beyond this highly speculative bidirectional root—which is missing a great deal of connective tissue—to the tetrad of categories that condition the language-thought conjunction means moving beyond idealist biopsies of syntax or philology and towards a genuine consideration of language as the organon of thought. Hamann himself appeals to this when he

asks the reader to consider "the sacrament of language, the letter of its elements, the spirit of its institution" in our lives (Hamann, 2007, p. 217-218).

The Labour of Thought in Four Conditions

Across the twentieth century, two thinkers—Ernesto Grassi and Jerry Fodor—filled the gap left behind after Hamann and Saussure (though it is unclear that they were aware of this accomplishment). To the distinction revealed in Hamann between the materially intuitive and immaterially conceptual appendages of the language-thought nexus, Grassi supplies the missing element of the *immaterially intuitive* i.e., the rhetorical, while Fodor, with an iron bond that closes the four quadrants together, supplies the *materially conceptual* i.e., the neurocomputational. Let us briefly summarize each of these.

Immaterially Intuitive: Rhetoric and Poetry

The idea that language undergirds an alethic-epistemic split—a wager that is pertinent to our augmentation of Badiou's philosophy of the event—has ramifications for thought as *poiesis*. When Heidegger says that "Every thinking that is on the trail of something is a poetizing, and all poetry is a thinking" he is making a generalized claim about the purview of language-as-thought, but one that remains oddly circular and self-enclosed (Heidegger, 1993, p. 425). This is where, as an extrapolation of Heidegger's later poetical thinking, Ernesto Grassi's work, formalized in a series of lectures in America occurring long after his split from Heidegger during world war two (due to a sudden and understandable political enmity towards his former colleague) clarifies what for him links poiesis to rationality.

In *Rhetoric as Philosophy* (1980) Grassi argues that the criterion of rational thought—"to show something to be something, on the basis of something"—cannot be applied to its own

substrate, or the basis of rational thought itself (p. 19). If it could, then the deductive substrate of rationality would not in fact be a substrate, but would be derivable from some still more archaic first principles. This never-ending spiral staircase beneath demonstrative or apodictic thought, if it is to avoid true groundlessness, requires that the medium through which theoretical knowledge is generated be neither demonstrative nor apodictic, but rather *indicative* and *rhetorical* (which is to say prophetic)[3]. This recasts rhetoric (and the work it compels) as the bedrock of ratiocination rather than some deceptive garland adorning the pristine surface of unrhetorical logical expression. Rhetoric is in this sense the poetical underside of Hobbesian "reckoning", and the immaterial, intuitive astringent which retreats ideas back into the aesthetic spatiotemporal reservoir of bare sensation demarcated by mark and meter—the raw material of language *tel quel* (Stekeler-Weithofer, 2008, p. 82). Grassi's account leaves open the indeterminate *size* of the "archai" or nonrational (*not* irrational) first principles that ground rational deduction, even gesturing briefly to the audacious idea that "fundamental metaphors reveal concrete reality" (Grassi, 1980, p. 25-26, 100). This assertion invokes the metaphors of colossal, atmospheric magnitude that Blumenberg (2010) called "absolute metaphors"—rhetorical archai, such as the famous scholastic and enlightenment equation of illumination with truth—which, being "nonconceptualizable", act as para-encyclopaedic proxies for future works of truth, parentheses that adumbrate, apophatically, the Badiouian indiscernible (p. 9, 122). For now, it is enough to understand how the poiesis of rhetorical indication re-anchors concepts to the material intuition of mark and meter, or musicality and insinuation.

[3] This is also a major deviation from how large language models, such as Google's Gemini, operate (Amaratunga, 2023). What Grassi explains as the rhetorical groundlessness of human language is directly opposed to how that language is then used to 'ground' LLM training data, and points to one of the massive differences between language as dialectical thought and symbol-production as the simulation of thought.

Materially Conceptual: Neurocomputation and Compositionality

In "Perils and Pleasures of Interpretation" (2008) Donald Davidson argues that there is no way of knowing whether a "creature is conscious and it is thinking" other than through communication with it about your shared surroundings (Davidson, 2008, p. 791). What is striking about this claim is that it relies on an absolutization of Hamann's shrill battle cry: "reason is language" (Hamann, 2007, p. xiv). As Davidson explains, "conceptualization and thought" must evolutionarily "emerge in company with the development of language" if we are to make sense of the closed-loop formed by their mutual predication: propositional thought and language are so utterly interdependent that they refuse any "entering wedge" (Davidson, 2008, p. 790) Taking Davidson (and Hamann) at their word in this way raises the question of the evolutionary internalization of language-as-thought.

Noam Chomsky, seeking to wake linguistics from the green fury of its behaviourist slumber, put forth one of the heaviest and most unlikely explanations imaginable for the language-thought circuit by positing a generative, inchoate "linguistic competence" (or universalizable cognitive grammar) in humans that accounts for the fact that in quotidian speech "much of what we say […] is entirely new, not a repetition of anything that we have heard before and not even similar in pattern", and that this nearly infinite discursive virtuosity (from finite elements) pairs with an uncanny ability to *understand* things we have never heard uttered before (Chomsky, 1968, p. 4, 11, 112-113). The "universal grammar" he posits—which requires a universalizable syntax, semantics, and phonetics—provides a bracing continuation of Humboldt's earlier inquiries and unintentionally grounds J.L. Austin's performative pragmatics in firm cognitive innateness (Chomsky, 1968, p. 112).

Jerry Fodor's vociferous neo-Cartesianism, emerging decades later, swims in the splash left by Chomsky, as he himself ambivalently acknowledges near the conclusion of *LOT 2: The Language of Thought Revisited* (2008). In a gesture of reduction—not elimination—Fodor naturalizes intentional psychology, including private languages (against Skinner, Wittgenstein, Lyotard, and notably even inferentialists like Brandom) by pledging allegiance to a Representational Theory of Mind wherein the tokening of mental states and their corresponding representations allows thinking to happen in everyone's head (Fodor, 2008, p. 5). The unavoidable corollary to this argument is that "the productivity of concepts goes hand in hand with the productivity of concept possession; neither is the slightest use without the other, and compositionality is the essence of both", which boldly asserts that every postulate of linguistic pragmatism is wrongheaded and backwards, starting with its (more or less) circular account of concept possession (Fodor, 2008, p. 41). This "compositionality" he mentions boils down to the argument that having a concept is being able to think about it (Fodor, 2008, p. 48). This means that being able to think about something is intrinsically compositional while sorting and inference, while useful, do not themselves compose thoughts (Fodor, 2008, p. 48). As his defiant anti-pragmatist stance puts it: "Thought about the world is prior to thought about how to change the world. Accordingly, knowing that is prior to knowing how" (Fodor, 2008, p. 14).

Indeed, the "possession conditions for concepts must compose", or else we struggle to account for Chomsky's insights regarding systematic and productive linguistic novelty and comprehension from childhood onwards—the evolutionary caveat being that we must be born with some rudimentary inventory of concepts; *ex nihilo nihil fit* (Fodor, 2008, p. 45, 131). Fodor is willing to go a step further than Chomsky, overcoming the latter's apparent dichotomy between the association and production of mental processes using computational mind

modelling—the logic of concatenation—as his basis (Fodor, 2008, p. 103-106). In sum, Fodor's muscular thesis leaves us with this provocative Cartesian challenge: "[…] can you say something that you can't think?" (Fodor, 2008, p. 73).

…And The Media Theorist Laughs

For all its peremptory humour and decisive conjectures, Fodor's *The Language of Thought Revisited* (2008) retains an amusing error from its predecessor-text that only a media theorist, or someone otherwise preoccupied, perhaps, with the works of Kittler or McLuhan might find amusing. His pratfall is of course that the anointing of a computational theory of mind relies (just like with Grassi's archai) on what Blumenberg (2010) would call an "absolute metaphor", or the superimposition of an image—achieved by the metaphorization of the unknowable—in the place of a "conceptually unfillable gap and lacuna" (p. 17, 122). The result of this process is always an approximation, in the richest sense of the term. For Fodor (2008), both the artifact of the computer, which is retroactively cast as an ahistorical *explanans* for the operations of mind since before the advent of anything resembling modern computation, and language itself, which is invoked in the "language-like" structure of mentalese, are *hypostasized metaphors*[4]. Hypostasized metaphors that, we must add, come rather close those used by Google researchers Schain and Goldstein (2025) in their mechanistic understanding of neural pathways related to language. As with Google's LLM-related research labs, this deployment of a mechanical metaphor in Fodor's work challenges his thinking on the grounds of technical historicity as well as philosophical commitment to simile. Hazarding the image of computation and the rhetoric of a Chomskyan (1968) "language-like"-ness betrays a Pascalian compromise

[4] This is also associated with connectionism, and its central claim, according to Evan Thompson, that "the mind is essentially the skull-bound cognitive unconscious", concerned only with the manipulation and computation of representational symbols (2007, p. 10).

rather than the ostensibly anti-pragmatist, Cartesian fervour summoned with true ferocity in the opening passages of his book (Fodor, 2008, p. 8, 18, 20).

Poetry and Creative Destruction: The Decomposition of Concepts

The second major shortcoming, which stems from the artifactual and metaphorical invasion of the first, is that Fodor struggles to account for the decomposition of concepts entailed in poetry and rhetorical speech. Poiesis not only alters our "conceptual repertoire" through a confrontation with the material world, in the same way dementia, puberty, concussions, studying biochemistry, learning Japanese, or "moving to California" might (Fodor, 2008, p. 131-132). The rhetorical and poetic instead takes the cognitive, material-conceptual substratum as it stands, already "at hand" to mental computations that draw it upwards into coherent strings of ideas, and unravels those ribbons of thought, forcing, through immaterial intuition, a retreat back into the materially intuitive realm of musicality and insinuation. Therefore, while it may be true that "the semantics of thought is prior to the semantics of language", the semantics of language can corrupt and break apart the semantics of thought (Fodor, 2008, p. 198). This is roughly what Deleuze means when he says that a particular work of literature "makes language stutter" or "makes language stammer" (Deleuze, 1998, p. 55, 108). Poiesis, through what Grassi might call its "ingenium", confounds and confuses the neurocomputational mentalese, exciting in them a heightened delirium (Grassi, 1980, p. 45).

Consider what the following verses do to the concept of celestial indifference to earthly pain:

> "No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
> More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
> Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
> Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?

> My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief
> Woe, wórld-sorrow; on an áge-old anvil wince and sing — […]"
> (Manley Hopkins, 2009, p. 167).

For comparison, see how Ashbery, in this excerpt from "The Skaters" (1986) confronts the same (rather complex) concept of the absence of divine accountability for terrestrial suffering:

> "Old heavens, you used to tweak above us,
> Standing like rain whenever a salvo … Old heavens,
> You lying there above the old, but not ruined, fort,
> Can you hear, there, what I am saying?
>
> For it is you I am parodying,
> Your invisible denial. And the almost correct impressions
> Corroborated by newsprint, which is so fine.
> I call to you there, but I do not think that you will answer me"
> (p. 71).

Their poems are "about" the same concept, but each, by their own insinuating mark and musical meter disintegrate the notion into fragments of image that *resist linear noetic (re)composition*. Ashbery's pleading expects no reply, only "invisible denial", and Hopkins, universalizing his woe to the greater sorrow of the world (as Ashbery does with the newspaper audience) accepts in the poem's (not included above) terrifying end that there will be no comfort for the troubled mind except eventual death. Their language, *in different ways*, is aesthetic and indicative, or archaic, first. This indicative conceptuality is precisely what language, when desacralized as a data-commodity or trained into LLMs, holds against capitalist instrumentalization and holds *for* its generic application in truth procedures: it navigates novelty. Google's use of copyrighted books (Vismaya, 2026) to train its Gemini LLM, for instance, only

gives it the illusion of navigation, which renders it both impotent when dealing with novelty and politically harmful for those who believe the illusion.

This decomposition of concepts in Ashbery and Hopkins can (and does) replenish the well of said material-intuitive resources by a diagonal movement across the space of thought: the decomposition of thoughts into fragments—whether done by oneself, alone, in an empty room, or by a great poet, or a TV actor's garbled lines—provides, contra Fodor, the raw material for the returning composition of thoughts. If this were not the case, "composition" would be impossible, *because every thought would already be composed*, and what, then, would explain those agonizing moments of research at a standstill, writer's block, or "not finding the right words"—and conversely, those rare moments of unexpected epiphany.

Decomposition may seem an unorthodox approach to artistic works of language, which appear to involve immense compositional investments. Looking more closely, however, at a more quotidian example proves the opposite to be true. Let us consider, as a final exercise, Rimbaud's "Le buffet":

> "C'est un large buffet sculpté ; le chêne sombre,
> Très vieux, a pris cet air si bon des vieilles gens ;
> Le buffet est ouvert, et verse dans son ombre
> Comme un flot de vin vieux, des parfums engageants […]
>
> […] - Ô buffet du vieux temps, tu sais bien des histoires,
> Et tu voudrais conter tes contes, et tu bruis
> Quand s'ouvrent lentement tes grandes portes noires"
> (Rimbaud, 2005, p. 42-43).

Old cupboards are not the same after one has read Rimbaud. The shadow of this cupboard, the stories it would like to tell when its old black doors slowly open, the time it

possesses, all decompose the concept "cupboard" into a disarray of musical insinuations and (evident here in the original French) rhetorical indications regarding memory, age, wood, clothing, family (in the middle verses omitted above), each of which may recompose the concept "old cupboard" differently, but none of which may congeal with all and every part into some hyper-baroque totality that the singular designator "cupboard" could hope to preserve. Decomposition, at last, is a Hegelian striking out towards particulars that, in momentary suspension, stands across from the universal, yet fattens it along the axis of thinking time (only to be rent asunder once more).

Notwithstanding these two objections (media-theoretical and poetical-rhetorical), we can see the usefulness in Fodor's compositionality argument. The contemplation of novel ideas—if language and thought share an axis, as they seem to—must depend on the internalizing force of neurocomputationally quickened composition; and it would make sense that this has evolutionary bearings. It remains unclear, otherwise, how thought could not only assimilate perceptions, in real time, of the world around it—after an instinctual squint against brightness, for example—and then translate them into propositional declarations like "Gee, it's sunny" if this were not the case. This is also why Fodor believes thought is not an action per se, but more like "something that happens to you" (Fodor, 2008, p. 203). We now have our complete taxonomy.

Figure 1.

Taxonomy of Four Possible Conditions of Language-Thought

Hamann Material Intuition (MI) — mark, meter, superabundance of extension, duration	**Hamann** Immaterial Conception (IC) — the Platonic realm of ideas
Grassi	**Fodor**

Immaterial Intuition (II) — rhetoric and poiesis	Material Conception (MC) — neurocomputational compositionality

The two topmost categories—which for Hamann allow sensation and understanding to achieve commerce (or be mutually presupposed) through the common root of language alone—rely on the bottom two for transit. Put another way: it is the transitive quality of material conception (MC)—or a neurocomputational substratum—which causes material intuition (MI), upon their intersection, to *internalize worldly sense*, or to ascend and compose, in an almost purely biological momentum, from its gesture, scribble, and mark to the contemplation of ideas (IC) by cancelling out the material element. To put it in rough set theoretical terms: $(MC \cap MI)' = IC/M$

This idea of the *sui generis* character of thought as that which surpasses the material to encounter the realm of pure ideas is both in line with Badiou's sophisticated Platonism, and his identification as a "partisan of [the] emergence theory" of mind (Badiou, 2013c, p. 100). His refluent definition of emergence theory: "Life is a universe that cannot be reduced to matter, while thought is a universe irreducible to life" (Badiou, 2013c, p. 100). It is evident how this emergence pertains to the first, compositional traversal of thought.

Travelling in the other direction, it is the equally transitive quality of immaterial intuition (II)—rhetoric as primary indication—which, upon an intersection with the Platonic realm of ideas or immaterial conception (IC), permits concepts to descend, through the sphere of cultural signification, back down to the physical impulses of extension and rhythm (MI)—an *externalization* of sense—this time by cancelling out immateriality, and in turn replenishing the upstream resources that subvene the conceptual pursuits of ratiocination: $(II \cap IC)' = MI/I$

Rather than muddying the waters with an even more obtuse mathematical formulation[5] we can simply state the following in plain language: in both directions of this chiasmatic formula, a conceptual or intuitive yield must acclimatize to its new domain by sacrificing either materiality or immateriality in order to rejoin with or "regain" intuition and conceptuality, respectively (Grattan-Guinness, 2000, p. 238, 243). This is indicated by the exclusion of either materiality or immateriality in each movement's complimentary result, a remainder or residue which then galvanizes the countervailing reflection back into its opposite form. The coexistence of these two processes is one of rapid dynamic imbalance, not antiphonal harmony; the internal difference introduced by twentieth century philosophy to Hamann's bidirectional intuition-concept pillar is thus akin to the figural gulf between cubism's vertiginous volatility and romanticism's mythic naturalization.

Perspicacious readers may notice that, taken as a whole, these opposite tendencies across the four conditions of language-thought resemble the dynamic of conceptual accumulation and irrational dispersal—flocculation and deflocculation—posited earlier as integral to Badiouian enquiry. The key difference being that deflocculation short-circuits the chiasmus by either freezing concepts in transcendent isolation (allowing ideological inosculation), or scattering thought to the stupefying plethora of sensory intuitions—in both cases prohibiting cognitive replenishment. When atomized and contained in suspended disconnection, thought struggles to gather and grow into a critical mass of ideas. In the political realm, this is exhibited in the feeble unthinkability of novel egalitarianisms that extend prior experiments—an ailment far more serious than some pedestrian lack of imagination. The evaporation of great movements in art (Danto, 1998), the slavish subservience of what Jean-Pierre Séris refers to as "infinite" science to

[5]Though De Morgan's law of "inclusive disjunction" could be rather pertinent here (Grattan-Guinness, 2000, p. 238, 243).

amoral, utilitarian technoscience (Hottois, 2018), and the probabilistic elimination of risk from would-be amorous encounters (Badiou, 2012) are additional symptoms of a finitude whose imposition immiserates conceptualization, confining the thinkable to precisely the very obstructions that obviate the infinite. This incapacity represents a wounding of thought.

The Propensity of Language-Thought: Dialectical Freedom

Taken in its totality, the linguistic regeneration of thought articulated above forms a dialectic. The explicit "scientific" image that this dialectic approximates, from the point of view of Hamann onwards, establishes the co-extensivity of language with thought, an idea that Coward and Ellis (1977) summarize as: "Language and thought are inextricable: thought conceptualises through language, and it is not a matter of one being the instrument of the other but of each engendering the other: language makes thought possible, thought makes language possible" (p. 79). This account clearly maps onto the taxonomy we have just worked out, but it fails to hammer home the significance of the Hegelian material-immaterial translation that constitutes this very engendering.

When Hyppolite (1997) calls language "the very medium of the dialectic" he is invoking Hegel's idea of the accessibility of the absolute through a "universal instrument of mutual recognition" (p. 7, 10). As he puts it, "From the *Phenomenology's* first pages, solipsism is refuted" (p. 14). This elevation of language, and the conscious thought enabled by language, beyond the confines of a sense-certainty and perception, which are not yet self-recognising, allows for—and in fact presupposes—"established communication between singular consciousnesses who, in language, mutually recognize one another and aspire to this recognition" (Hyppolite, 1997, p. 14). Language enables the mutual recognition of subjects, the

very fundament of cooperation, and in some sense of politics, and by doing so—contrary to the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, which Badiou (2017) deconstructs in the context of actually existing slavery as neither historically accurate nor logically necessary to the unfolding of spirit—opens the channels of the intersubjective communication of ideas. The interpersonal is *impersonal*, existing as the absent centre, a language in the 'generic' sense of harbouring the very possibility of language, and in it the gregariousness of thought.

Finally, the intuitive-to-conceptual transference we described as an internalization and externalization of worldly sense reveals itself in its true subjective character: "Language is not only a system of signs alien to the signified, it is also the existing universe of sense, and this universe is the interiorization of the world as well as the exteriorization of the 'I'" (Hyppolite, 1997, p. 24). This is why the internal chiasmus of language-thought bears the power of the dialectical. Each of the moments of composition, decomposition, and recomposition—"essential moment[s]" of its process, much like the essential arbitrariness or contingency of the signs it inhabits—goes beyond the self into communication, and goes beyond communication into discourse (Hyppolite, 1997, p. 31). That "language is the Dasein of spirit" for any one individual accounts for "the transformation of thought into Being"—and this "thought of being", in transcending to "the thought of thought", collapses experience and logos, allowing the latter to, however fallibly, reconstruct and guide the former (Hyppolite, 1997, p. 18, 33-34, 36). Thought of thought represents, in this picture, something like a discourse with oneself that has the propensity to traverse the self. This formally unlimited capacity, which is a pre-requisite for the subjectivization of truth events to obtain, is irreducible—contrary to the claims of hermeneutic philosophy (Gadamer, 1980)—to the horizons of dialogue it routinely effectuates. The four taxonomic conditions testify simply that language's mediation of the collapse and restructure of

experience grants thought the ability to overcome individualism—to sublate it, to emerge from it—and ripple throughout various points of a multiple.

This communicative strength of the open dialectic that language-thought wields—and which it depends upon for thinking worlds that are not evil—will rather cruelly prove to be its greatest vulnerability. It is precisely the language that "precedes the thought of which it is nevertheless the expression" that will be brought under the real subsumption of capital in the twenty-first century, forming a marketized tension between the dialectical liberty of thought, and the systematic cultivation of the technological outputs of this very same thought, in order for capital to immunize itself against revolt, and cognitively reify the oppression of worker-consumer finitude (Hyppolite, 1997, p. 31). What are the prospects for human existence if the thought of being loses the ability to raise itself to the thought of thought in order to 'think the event'? That is, what happens when that which conditions the very possibility of *thinking what to do* is continually impaired by financial submergence, in this case as the industrialization of the linguistic indices of thought?

Chapter Three: Cognitive Economies and Technical Organization—On the Role of Language in Computational Capitalism

"It is through the disciplined sharing of a common Idea and the use of a homogenous language, spreading little by little everywhere, that the situation itself becomes clarified. And this is also how it becomes possible for everyone to see what can be done to transform this situation" (Badiou, 2018b, p. 28).

"[…] a truth cannot lose anything by being written down" (Hegel, 1977, p. 60, para. 95).

Introduction: One Possible Prelude to *Langage-au-Générique*

The previous chapter attempted to outline the preconditions of 'thinking a truth' by establishing a relation between philosophy of language and philosophy of mind in the context of Badiouian mathematical ontology and its concomitant conception of politics as a generic truth procedure. Our major interest was setting the stage for a reckoning with the fact that a "communist" philosophy of mind[6] (which of course must focus on 'the labour of thought', where 'mind' is styled as a materially-emergent 'language-thought') is essential for avoiding vulgar decisionism in the political realm (and likewise reductive economic fatalism) while at the same time retaining the forcefulness of Badiou's addition of 'except truths' into the ideological formula 'there are only bodies and languages'. The gambit here—of having to choose a way forward, point by point, with an always incomplete, partial, and insufficient conceptual arsenal—requires balancing the rational kernel of aleatory reason with an aspirational (not predictive) fidelity to what is *undecidable*, all in a manner that is strikingly similar to the subordination of intellect to will (the former as passive informant of the latter) offered in Henry of Ghent's famous *Quodlibetal*, in which it is stated that "[…] the good as known moves the person who wills, but

[6] Note: *not* a Marxist philosophy of mind, meaning the following entails a certain flirtation with German idealism, and results in a hybridized materialist-idealism.

reason itself as knowing does not move the will" (1993, p. 29). Inarticulate slothfulness, as opposed to articulate action, is always lurking.

In the previous chapter we also saw how the suturing of the intellect and will via language during the eruption of a truth (as a hole in the existing field of knowledge) is necessary in order to ward off naked random choice (which would reduce fidelity to mere brute force computation) and likewise the vertiginous regress of fidelity-to-fidelity that Düttmann (2004) rightly identifies as the danger of unsubstantiated faithfulness, of faith without reason—a Pascalian predicament if there ever was one, since "fidelity appears to be constantly in search, in lack or in excess of itself" (p. 205). We can thus say that language is what *incorporates* fidelity into the thrownness of the event, to which we have no choice of relating (either as a denunciation against, and occultation of, its taking place, or as an affirmation that truth has indeed pierced existence) and thereby populating an "avant-garde minority" who, against the conservative remainder, transforms their fidelity into a new (communal, fraternal, institutional, dual) *materialization* of the event itself (Düttmann , 2004, p. 206). It is here that human activity artificially extends the duration of the event's evanescent appearance, and of that initial coruscating and localized union of, for the Badiouian, being and thought; for the Hegelian, existence and logic; for the Lacanian, the real and speech. Language, in some sense, locates an a-teleological infinity in the space of reasons, while fidelity implicates and avows itself to the very exceptionality of the event.

In the prior chapter the Badiouian suspension of bodies and their milieus was used as a filter to discover what is truly universal in politics, namely: the act of organizing the maximal inclusion of that which hitherto anonymously and minimally belonged to a situation. "Flocculation" was posited as the dialectical act of linguistic-cognitive accumulation required for

post-evental organization (a suturing of intellect to will) in the wake of an evanescent truth-event, while its ideological antithesis, "deflocculation", represented a dispersal of cognitive resources into novel methods of reification and occultation (a de-suturing of intellect and will, causing either impotence or disorientation). Deflocculation can be more properly understood as "the objective randomness of Capital's non-computable dysfunctions" systematically reclaiming and integrating, through surveillance of our means of communication, the disconnections and hiatuses of common rational empiricism, such that "capitalism – blind, monstrous, acephalic polymorph – thinks", or does its best imitation of thought, using Deleuzean methods: an undialectical 'disjunctive synthesis' between intellections and volitions that are materially segregated *en masse* (Brassier, 2004, p. 58). This social effect can also be described as being made a 'subject-to-simulation', rather than a subject-to-truth.

Another way of explaining *flocculation*, meanwhile—its human, dialectical counterforce—is that for the Badiouian subject, who consists in "an empiricism of the encounter and an aleatory rationalism", it is *language*—in particular writing—that links and binds empiricism to rationalism by *preserving the encounter* through epiphylogenetic means and allowing it to recursively define the conceptual change in knowledge that will retroactively become necessary upon the success or failure of the materialization of a work of truth (Brown, 2021, p. 200). Another way of putting this is that without some preservation of the encounter, truths cannot not risk success.

It is also in the moment-to-moment unfolding of political truths in particular that writing and speaking sustain the Idea, like a valuable resource, without which affect seizes the rudder and chronic movementism sets in—the contrast to this is not, however, a purely analytical adjudication of causes and effects, but the maintenance of a *constructive reason* for doing

anything at all. To live under the sign of an Idea in its unfolding thus requires active thinking, and as Rancière rightly points out, "[…] the activity of thinking is primarily an activity of translation and […] anyone is capable of making a translation" (2023, p. 35). Let us now hoist a banner emblazoned with this assertion.

The linguistic relay not only allows us to grasp and theorize in real time the decisions made by no-one in particular and everyone in general during a political revolt, but also to *preserve* the "void of the gulf between knowledge and truth" that a subject occupies, to carve in lithic monuments the subject's particular habitation (Brown, 2021, p. 201). The suspension of the subject moving diagonally between knowledge and truth (between the antagonistic gravities of "the earth" and "the sun") is, I wager, fundamentally linguistic (Brown, 2021, p. 203). Maintaining the tension between each term and resisting the reactionary collapse into prior knowledge (the distant encyclopedia) or, conversely, the simulacral evil of asserting absolute immediate knowledge of truth, requires, in politics, science, art, and love, a *language of the void* to construct a dwelling where the "coordination of the empirical and the rational" may occur (Brown, 2021, p. 201).

As Brown (2021) rightly points out, it is not the affective indulgence of decisionist might, but the exacting demands of a "form of *reason* involved in love, or art, or politics, or scientific breakthroughs that render their ruptural force at once compelling and nearly incommunicable"—badly in need, in other words, of a speech which speaks the void (p. 201). The "heightened forms of rationality (often collective)" required and experienced in truth procedures and their various sequences—forms that destitute facticity itself—imply this fragile yet ineradicable anthropological capacity (Brown, 2021, p. 201).

Lecercle (2004) comes close to finding this postulate when he states, in his appraisal of Badiou's poetics, that "the unnameable event must be named, and a new language, adapted to that naming, must be forged. It is a violent process […] There are revolutions in language, as there are in society", which is to say that "the unnameable is not the ineffable" (p. 211, p. 214). But the language of the void is distinct from the language of poets, of Badiou's champions (Mallarmé, Hölderlin, Rimbaud, Beckett) and the "singular operations of poetry qua thought", of which there are four: "dis-objectivation, dis-orientation, interruption and isolation" (Lecercle p. 214). It is the rather the image of language occupying a "form of thinking" tangential to knowledge, not without it, and yet, like the poem, language as "a properly incalculable thought" that comes nearest to what we are after and will soon elaborate (Badiou, 2014, p. 33). After all, as Düttmann (2004) reminds us, "once an event and my relation to it are transformed into objects of knowledge, once fidelity becomes a memory of an event whose existence it presupposes and […] once its manifestations are comprehended as so many interpretations of an object or as so many view of a subject, fidelity vanishes" (p. 204). Thus, a language of the void *anticipates* what has not yet transpired (the permanent inclusion of a suddenly appearing generic multiplicity) as if it could transpire, meaning "fidelity relates to an event as if it belonged to past and future at the same time, as if it had already taken place precisely because it has not yet taken place" (Düttmann, 2004, p. 204). An anticipation, in plainer terms, which creates what it anticipates, as in a Larsen effect of responsiveness to the event—this is, evidently, the logic of the 'as if'. Flocculation and deflocculation seize or release crucial moments and decisions within this process either in the accumulation or scattering of a language of the void, enabling or disabling a thinking and doing *as if*. In this chapter, these two movements are revealed as registers of 'parlepsis', or the anticipation within language of novelty in thought. Parlepsis relies on a

preparatory openness facilitated by the composition and destruction of reservoirs of thinking, or archives, in which, to quote Lyotard, one can "make thought without a body possible" through an exteriorization of memory that Stiegler refers to as "the pursuit of life by means other than life"—whence the latent inhumanism of this theoretical construct (Lyotard, 1991, p. 13; Stiegler, 1998, p. 17). Stiegler, in other words, establishes the mechanism of the mnemotechnical supplement of fidelity to truths *in language-thought*, or the preservation of thinking. The significant point here is a Hegelian one: nostalgic remembrance kills fidelity, but a truth cannot lose anything by its being written down, an exosomatic act that holds in place the alethic index of the book of the world so that it may be consulted in the long voyage along the gulf between knowledge and truth (Hegel, 1977, p. 60, para. 95).

Against this supplement is the poison of 'lingpower', which subordinates literate mnemotechnics, and therefore the raw material of language-thought itself, to a great concealment of truths that *memorializes their death* by pretending to hold their experience hostage in the unscientific, the pornographic, the artless, and the apolitical. These latter four are also, notably, the primary domain of Google: to what does it grant quicker access to than pseudoscientific posturing, catalogs of vulgarity, smears of AI-generated images, and avenues for commodity consumption?

When the argument is made, later in this chapter, that 'language is the technics of thought', it is indeed implied that the economic, religious, statist, or philosophical-ideological strangulation and subordination of language—any language at all—entails the same for thought and thus prohibits the organization of novel forms of life. This is because such domination destroys the 'retroactive activity' of cognitive flocculation that entails the construction, point by point, of a future around universal truths as links in a sequence (which thankfully need not be

initiated from scratch each time); truths as precisely *those things which are independent from milieus*, that create holes in the epistemological and material weave of their environments, and which, in their obliteration of difference are "anobjective" so that they may only be "experienced through the militant practice that effectuates [them]" (Badiou, 2004, p. 143). The intransitivity of a truth is what begets the *transitive* (we can even say *translative*) quality of a universal truth, its applicability in any milieu. It is this technical connection between language-thought and forms of life (in the guise of the reserve) that is, during this new brazen zenith of financial capital, exploited by its computational systems so as to *systematically impede* successful organization around genuine novelty in favour of a directionless plurality that repeats the same, i.e. that threatens nothing but endless market titillation and undue respect for doxastic prattle. This chapter begins in some sense a cyber-Badiouian account of the intensification of techniques of ideological concealment and cognitive reification (a new type of infrastructural ideological apparatus)—intensified because they contaminate a process that however indispensable provides no more guarantee, on its own, of emancipation than a violin does, on its own, of a beautiful concerto. This also implies that the lethargy of contemporary 'movementism' is a political symptom of a mnemotechnical situation under global capital, of how global capital has damaged our rational instruments, and *not* (simply) a punishment for insufficient subjective tenacity.

The benefits of this Badiouian account are obvious: in a time where class antagonism is no longer met with an adequate socialist rationality, and where the category 'truth' is abused and disregarded in favour of dissimulation and disorientation, a politics organizes around the infinity of the event provides a path forward on both fronts, and an ethical injunction to *partake in the unfolding of truths* rather than the painful sociological 'wait and see' of revolutionary patience, which so often turns us into passive spectators of horror (Gorz, 1997, p. 15).

The wager of this chapter, finally, is that a *formalism* of language in its absolute genericity—but not a necrophilic vivisection à la analytic linguistics, as criticized by Kristeva (1985)—describes the social locus of sequences of universal political emancipation. This 'platonic' description can rightly be adjudged idealist only insofar as the phenomenon of language-thought is not reducible to the material that subtends it. It also takes the actuality of events and their consequences as *rational* precisely because a kind of improvisational (or aleatoric) rationality is, in a Hegelian sense, *actual* in post-evental discipline, even when its outcomes are never inevitable victories, but frequently abject failures, and sometimes merely promising rehearsals of future triumphs. The question that this theoretical edifice seeks to answer differs from so-called correspondence theories of truth typical in the Anglo-Saxon sphere (concerned with the validity of knowledge in terms of the conjunction of language and fact), and instead is solely concerned with the following: what would a theory of language need to look like for it to be able to explain how the conceptualization of a universal Truth, as that which cuts a hole in knowledge, is possible? That is, how are human beings able to receive, and think, the gift of a truth? Without a suitable explanans for this explanandum, truths and their procedures become foregone conclusions (truth deflates into triviality—into its opposite), or else dissipates into vapour (to speak of truth at all becomes a category error, and we re-enter Nietzsche's twilit world of endlessly shifting strong-armed sophistry).

Establishing the status of language within truth procedures as the carrier of not only historical intellectual resources but also new-concept-forging propensities fends off this affective irrationalism as the only method available to us for overcoming the conceptual saturation (often ideologically purported) of a given state of affairs. Our answer then, to the question of how it is possible to conceive not only of a grand navigating Idea adequate to the arrival of a truth, but the

complex tissue of minor ideas needed to tug that dream of the future into a living present, is the ability of language—any species of language—to vocalize and transcribe what is absolutely generic by way of the invention, in a duration of time that is co-extensive with the work of truth itself, of a new understanding of its radical exceptionality. This ensemble may be called 'living an idea', and only the ratiocinative genericity of language-thought, the ability to express the universal, enables its persistence.

A Brief Genealogical Critique of Cosmotechnics

In the aftermath of Stiegler's (1998) and Hui's (2020) scholarship on the relation between writing and technology, an unhealed wound in the history of communications studies reappears: that of the supposed antagonism between universality and diversity. Hui's work provokes a fresh dehiscence when he asks if the dominance of digital writing "[...] will eliminate the diversity of writing because digital technology today is the medium of synchronization" (Hui, 2020, p. 22). Synchrony here implies an industrial 'barbarizing' of collectively differentiated intelligence, in the same sense of Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of capitalist 'culture industries' and their tendency to 'program' mass consumption (1998). For Hui, digital synchronization entails an ethical challenge regarding the destruction of alternative techno-lingual ecosystems and the organizations of life that they both index and engender: "Will it be possible," he asks, "to find strategies to liberate us from this apocalyptic end of technological singularity and reopen the question of the future?" (Hui, 2020, p. 30). His solution—what he calls "technodiversity"—is built, however, on asserting the absolute incommensurability of phonetic and non-phonetic forms of writing (Hui, 2020, p. 29). This technopolitics of fundamental relativity between writing techniques—or what Stiegler (2019, p. 17) calls "tertiary retentions", meaning external deposits of collective memory—is not only philosophically flawed, I argue, but politically dangerous:

How can a shared global future be tenable if there are insurmountable (which is to say untranslatable) cultural differences in how different forms of writing encode the "existential relations" of human life? (Hui, 2020, p. 27). What hope is there for thinking a shared future if writing, as a medium of thinking par excellence, intrinsically separates us? And, in the realm of pure epistemology, how is it that we know—or even *can know*—that these writing systems ontologically differ, given that any claims regarding their supposedly incommensurable difference would necessarily foreclose any comparative adjudication? (Dasenbrock, 1993; Davidson, 2006). Put another way: to claim such foundational difference between forms of writing, as in Hui's cosmotechnics, one would disqualify the possibility of there existing a yardstick by which to measure the extent and quality of their difference in the first place. In light of this, pointing out the supposed contrasts between writing systems seems to belie its own conclusion of ontological incommensurability.[7]

The epistemological and political shortcomings of this framework, as an abstract system, are not disconnected from one another. They put one in mind not only of colonial discourse, but also early sociology: from Hui's cosmotechnical perspective, it seems to me that we are forced to entertain the assertions of one of Émile Durkheim's masters, Émile Boutroux, whose argument in

[7] The ironies here are also pragmatic: how is it possible to evaluate the quality of a translation of Balzac into English or Mandarin if there are subtle and untranslatable forms of thought that remain trapped in the prison house of their respective 'language of origin'? The cosmotechnical approach, which seeks to affirm insurmountable differences between geographies of language-thought as an ecological matter of fact, contravenes a long history of writing in translation, which demonstrates a surmountable ontological multiplicity, all the elements of which are able to grasp and share ideas no matter how rare and difficult the task may sometimes be. What cosmotechnics may really be arguing for is an *aesthetics of mistranslation*—one that runs counter to the aim of Walter Benjamin's (1979, 2009) famous essays on translation and language—in which rhetoric and pathos divide humanity according to culturally specific forms of affect and sentiment that are bound up in language as a tool of cultural worlding. But the dubiousness of such a claim about regional affect as the ground of cross-cultural incommensurability would perhaps disqualify its very assertion, for only the total alienation of cultural sentiments would justify the discreteness of its categories.

Philosophy and War (1916), a book written during the main onslaught of World War One, and containing the appropriate nationalist fervour and thinly veiled animosities that one might expect a Frenchman to harbour at that time, culminates in thoughts such as: "It is anything but certain, a priori, that the roots and synthetic methods at the disposal of the German tongue will at all times suffice to render every idea capable of being conceived by the human mind" (p. 176) The argument from this grandfather of modern sociology is that the German language is too poor to allow every possible thing to be thinkable in it that could be thinkable by human minds in general—or better yet, in conceptually richer languages such as French. Here lies, in the dark amber of history, the eternal temptation of particularism and its enduring danger, to paraphrase the famous conclusion of T.S. Eliot's (2009) fire sermon, of connecting nothing with nothing. In a word, parochialism. It is worth asking if we really want a politics built upon the anecdotal reassurance, from those rolling meadows of Alsace, that *générosité* and *Schadenfreude* belong to mutually exclusive realms of thought, and have no adequate translatability in either direction. Do we want to believe this myth of the self-sufficiency of languages, the monolithic mother tongue as it were lolling like a phantom organ in mouths of hoi polloi? Do we want our epistemological snapshot to be just as confined, in just the same shape and proportion, as Boutroux's burning, vaguely Pétainist resentment?

Boutroux's war-torn insistence casts doubt on the notion that all of this is a hyperbolic misunderstanding of what is really a benign respect for difference. It is only by digging deeper into the philosophical roots of cosmotechnics that we get a clearer picture of its lineage as a concept. Indeed, it appears as though these roots are to be found in Heideggerian attempts the historical deconstruction of modernity, as well as (and this is somewhat more concealed,

disavowed even) a Nietzschean valorization of perspective as the irreducible limit of human understanding.

Heidegger and Nietzsche: Maestros of Cosmotechnics?

Our starting claim is that Heidegger's concept of *Machenschaft* is present in Hui's, and to some extent Stiegler's, disdain for capitalist "hyper-synchronization" where the "automatisms" of "global companies […] *prevents the power of calculation from being socially individuated by the incalculable*" (Stiegler, 2019, p. 46, emphasis original). To see this, it is best to turn to Heidegger's *Contributions to Philosophy of the Event* (2012), where we find the following passage:

> "What does machination mean? That which is released to its own fettering. What are the fetters? The schema of thorough and calculable explainability, whereby everything draws equally close together to everything else and becomes completely foreign to itself, indeed altogether other to itself and not just foreign. The relation of unrelatedness" (p. 104-105).

This mechanical 'relation of unrelatedness' defines calculation and synchronization as the bad abstracted infinity of capitalist modernity (even if Heidegger is unwilling to add this political-economic adjective). Later on in this same text we find a different but related idea, that of the "last god", which pertains to the eschatological moment within a secular world where Being is properly apprehended and "[…] the future ones of the last god will reach the event through the strife and in the broadest retrospect will recollect the greatest created thing as the fulfilled non-repeatability and uniqueness of being" (Heidegger, 2012, p. 316).

Through the concepts of *Machenschaft* and the last god, Heidegger articulates a principle of the truth of Being as its non-repeatability and uniqueness (we could even say its haecceity) which can be contrasted with the calculation and control of capitalist modernity and its attempts to render Being repeatable and homogenous, as evidenced by the uniformity of sewage disposal systems or serialized commodities lining department store shelves. The question of course is whether or not this is, after we take Marx into consideration, a false dichotomy. Is it so unthinkable that there could exist an incalculable yet repeatable universality that is good (the progressive unfettering of the means of production from the prerogatives of capital, for example) and that retains this goodness despite structuring itself above the ontological swerve of uncontrollable quiddities?

This question of whether the bond between repeatability and universality can stem from the sovereignty of the incalculable without crushing it into the mulch of mere calculability dates back through Heidegger to a thinker he studied deeply: Nietzsche. If we take Nietzsche to be a normative thinker, a tricky proposition seeing as his whole project both aims at refuting normativity and anxiously frets over its own uptake into a normative field… if we nonetheless take him as such a thinker (a Kantianization of Nietzsche as it were) he is something like a Fragmentary Perspectivalist, a position which makes sense across from Hegel, who is a Totalized Absolutist that argues for a perspective of all perspectives (Stace, 1955). Nietzsche's particular brand of perspectivalism has two motifs that loom like great shadows across his corpus and that Heidegger (1991) analyzes in his books on Nietzsche. These two shadows are anti-universalism and interpretive agon. His most famous passage linking these two themes, penned in Sils-Maria in 1885 and recorded in the opening pages of *Beyond Good and Evil* (2001), states that "[...] talking about spirit and the Good like Plato did meant standing truth on its head and disowning

even *perspectivism*, which is the fundamental condition of all life" (p. 4, emphasis original). He goes on to argue, in the vein of Schopenhauer, that every philosopher has a rather embarrassing point in their disputations at which they fall back on an emotional conviction rather than rational argument, in that moment revealing themselves as "sly spokesmen for prejudices that they christen as 'truths'" (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 8). This is all a consequence for Nietzsche of a wrongheaded and dogmatic will-to-truth that hides the fundamental partiality of all human judgement (contingent on one's personal life history, one's standing in society) and the agonistics of assertion, the arena where this mythical impulse embarrasses itself in an endless shifting of opinions. And then, in one of the greatest inventions in the history of sophism, he derives its antidote: the will-to-power, a complete ownership of this agon borne of a partiality that is itself borne of the perspective granted to each person through the accident of their biography.

Heidegger's reading of *Beyond Good and Evil* traces the consequences of this shattered landscape of bare will-to-power[8] as its ascent became intelligible over the course of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and arrives to the conclusion that modern technological conditions have ensconced this will-to-power in what he calls a "will-to-will", that is, a will to reproduce the ontological conditions of will-to-power through the technical domination of nature and the world, or *Machenschaft* (Heidegger, 1991, p. xix, 253). There is a connection then, in the Nietzschean-Heideggerian lineage that is taken up across the previous century by, in turn, Blanchot, Derrida, Stiegler, and now finally Hui, between a perspectivalist epistemology and an anti-universalist politics (be it egalitarian or aristocratic) that views technology as oppressive insofar as it is the systematization of a singular worldview to the level of existential condition.

[8] For Heidegger there is in Nietzsche a fundamental unity between will and power: "[…] the fundamental character of beings is will to power, willing, and thus Becoming" (1991, p. 19).

The counter-gesture to this tradition is quite obvious and need not fall into either hermeneutic piety or techno-capitalist apologetics.

We begin by positing that there is a commonality between all human languages and writing techniques: and it is the fact that they are all sheer inconsistent multiplicities of enunciation[9]. From this basis, we can then also claim that local idiomatic differences within languages are immeasurably greater than the global average differences between languages. It is our contention that it may not be preposterous to suppose that the novels of Henry James are more radically displaced from the common American vulgate, in terms of vocabularic pyrotechnics, sentence weight and stress, syntactic structure, and most importantly as *forms of thought* than the speech of the average Missouri soybean farmer is from that of the average fisherman working in the Yangtze River Delta. This claim is rooted in the work of Donald Davidson (2006), with whom we can once again reiterate, against the cosmotechnical divide between phonetic and non-phonetic languages that Hui (2020) inherits from Derrida, that if conceptual schemes in, say, American English and Mandarin, were really different enough to belong to different 'worlds' properly speaking, and thus entails vastly divergent conceptual schemes that bear a Heideggerian 'relation of unrelatedness' to one other, at least as much as they do to the synchronic *Machenschaft* of the data flows of global capital, then we would not

[9] The purpose of this assertion, contrary to the work of Stengers (2010, 2023), is not to find commonalities that emerge from differing prior positions or beliefs; our contention is that this reflects a tendency, however disavowed, towards minimally-sufficient consensus-formation of the Habermasian stripe, precisely the kind of program that this thesis is interested in avoiding. Neither, however, is the goal here to create a universal subject on the basis of one language as its homogenous predicate, as this would be, in a Badiouian sense, totalitarian. Rather, we are thinking of radical avant-gardes which can appear anywhere in the world and at any time and in such a way that they: (i) articulate a singular antagonism against the installed powers of a situation in the name of human equality; (ii) marshal counter-ideological forces whose praxis (the seizure of a government office or a factory, for example) subjectivizes the practitioners and imbues them with an aleatoric understanding of thoughts only thinkable under the conditions of the occurrence of that which was putatively impossible (the Event); (iii) communicate the Idea borne of this experience, which is transversal to other places and contexts.

even be able to identify or recognize these other conceptual schemes as linguistic in the first place. Belonging to epistemologically incommensurable worlds precludes, *inter alia*, any knowledge of the criteria of that incommensurability. This is why I believe the cosmotechnical position relies on something like a linguistic black box, and why the conceptual groundwork of its pluri-worlding perpetually risks being epistemologically isolationist, even if its avowed politics of community downplay this risk.

The counter-gesture to this position however needs to go back even earlier than Heidegger or Nietzsche and consider carefully the medieval case for the existence of objective universals as applied to techniques of writing and recording language. My argument here is that a universalist account must be able to stand not only upon a theory of meaning but also upon the apparent identity of languages, exhibited by expressions or units in those languages, as well as the universality of capacity, which is to say the sheer unbound potentiality of speech.

In the parlance of medieval scholasticism, a 'realist' position regarding the apparent identity of languages proves difficult for nominalists to explain away. This argument may be presented in terms of predicates, for instance when we ask how it is possible that the same conceptual predicates can apply in various different languages, concluding that "it must be in virtue of the properties and/or relations" which these particular languages share in common (Armstrong, 1978, p. 12). The ethics of translation undergirding this view—the view that any language is ultimately translatable into any other language—are therefore rooted in an equally fundamental ontological asseveration: "that different particulars may nevertheless be identical in some respect" (Armstrong, 1978, p. 12)

The cosmotechnical, pluriversal approach to writing as a technology of language in the context of capitalist synchronization misses the opportunity to launch an equally encompassing

counterattack on the capitalist desacralization of language because it inherits a nominalist, Nietzschean, and Heideggerian metaphysics that capital itself has falsified in its ability to, in the immortal words of the communist manifesto, melt all that is solid into thin air. Indeed, this approach wrongly forgets what Badiou, in the quotation that prefaces this dissertation, calls "the only thing that can and must be saluted in capital" which is that it "exposes the pure multiple as the ground of presentation; it denounces every effect of oneness as a merely precarious configuration" (Badiou, 1999, p. 56-57). Lest we think his assessment of capital too celebratory he goes on to say "that this deposition of Oneness, orchestrated by capital, operates according to the most complete barbarism should not distract us from its genuinely ontological virtue", which is the virtue of delivering us from metaphysics of presence, from myths of the transcendence of social bonds and existential relations; we owe all of this de-mythologizing to the very "errant automaticity of capital" and its anarchic attempts at forcing a total synchronization of the world by making virtually everything exchangeable (Badiou, 1999, p. 56-57). To think language without oneness, to think language as a pure multiple of multiples, as an effect of the void, this is the challenge: what we should be after then, truly, is a universality in language that, to paraphrase Brassier (2004), not only matches but surpasses "the abstractions of number and the value-form" that underpin commodity exchange (Brassier, 2004, p. 97).

That is to say, the ethical response to the 'bad universal' of digital synchronization is not a Nietzschean abandonment of universality *tout court*, nor a retreat into a Heideggerian metaphysics of presence and ipseity, but rather a renewed emphasis on the ratiocinative kernel common across writing techniques, and the diachronistic resynchronization of the one world that we all share, the world denied by false capitalist globalization (Badiou, 2017a).

This means paying careful attention to demonstrations of "form[s] of thought" unaffected by translation rather than insisting that there are ontologically segregated ways of writing—a formal reconciliation of universality and diversity abides in the generic 'void' of all writing, and in the dialectic of discursive thinking more broadly (Badiou, 2014, p. 28).

In this paradigm, every 'type' of writing can be seen as what Agamben (1993, p. 10.1) calls a "whatever singularity", a mere "example" of a more generic capacity for writerly technique that, however emblematic of any particular language, always serves more—and contributes to more—than just this particularity. Our goal in this paradigm becomes writing the social emancipation of our thinking without either retreating behind hypostasized appearances or submitting to the oppressive economic totality that only valorizes difference in the name of commodity exchange. This requires us to think again that "there is only one world", to quote Badiou, and to find a language and technics of this proposition that does not require subjective homogeneity or make the mistake that "what oppresses the world is ontological and epistemological sameness, and what will liberate it is ontological and epistemological difference" (Badiou, 2017a; Davidson, 2024).

None of this prevents us from agreeing with Stiegler either that "[s]ociety is constituted through the transindividual construction of social systems" which de facto means the translinguistic construction of social systems, within a metastabilized technical milieu. The trouble is that, in a cosmotechnical framework, in order to be free enough from the synchronization of capital to construct the technological systems we want, we need to be free enough from the synchronization of capital to construct the technological systems we want. I fail to see how anything except the modernist dream of universal emancipation—which requires that absolutes be thinkable across all languages with an utter indifference to particularity—will lead

us to an epochal technical autonomy. Hyper-localized 'escapes' from computational capitalism will not deter or repair anything. Neither will putting technology head of politics (which does not mean we must abstain from thinking their conjuncture). We must instead return to the primordial relationship between language and thought, specifically "form[s] of thought" unaffected by translation, to uncover an alternative to this vision of ontologically segregated ways of writing that in my view is politically otiose[10] (Badiou, 2014, p. 28). The first return is through Badiou, and the exceptionality of truths, wherein it is negligible that "the cultural traits of this or that population are particular"—or that their technical milieus are particular—because when a truth is "traversing these traits and deactivating every registered description, [it] universally summons a thought-subject, [that] is singular" (Badiou, 2004, p. 144).

This reconciliation of universality and diversity abides in the generic 'void' of all writing, and indeed all language. What I call 'language-in-the-generic', or, for sake of abiding by principles, *langage-au-générique*, is this void of the immediate. It is not a "metalanguage" or an "infinite regression" but something like a "*vision of language itself*" (Agamben, 1999, p. 47; italics original; Virno, 2011). This vision is arrived at not through a "regularization of the particular or of differences, but as a singularity that is subtracted from identitarian predicates; although obviously it proceeds via those predicates" (Badiou, 2004, p. 145). This procedural "subtraction of particularities" (Badiou, 2004, p. 145) in the name of a future of perfect equals means affirming with Tupinambá (2016), via Stiegler, that it is also possible to free thought from thinkers. This gesture of formalized inhumanism does not mean that we reject Hui's original impulse—we retain from him the desire to establish a technological relationship in language

[10] Google's synchronization of digital writing is certainly not cosmotechnical, but the results of its abstract domination require us to sublate the difference between absolute synchrony and absolute diachrony.

(that is, in 'writing') that is different from the synchronization currently proffered by computational capitalism.

Langage-au-générique

From this exercise of thought we will hazard to propose five basic principles of *langage-au-générique*, which we can more precisely name 'the language of the void'. It is important to note that we say 'generic' because a vision of language in its 'essence' reveals that is not "determined by any of the predicates of encyclopedic knowledge" but is precisely that which recursively acts upon those very predicates, a property that explains its restless permutation and its power of cognitive transformation (Badiou, 2004, p. 151). Here are five principles of such a language (there could very well be more, barring the introduction of contradictions):

1. Untranscendability

From Hamann's (2007) metacritique, which disdains to obliterate Hui's (2020) 'phonetic divide' by announcing the pan-lingual, ancestral antecedence of a musical, pre-linguistic mark and meter, it is asserted that the experience of language is not "transcendable" by some purified Kantian human intuition, and thus that the 'social'—and therefore the historical—necessarily grounds the spatiotemporal forms of impure intuition (Alexander, 1966, p. 144). Hamann is in a sense wagering that our forms of basic experience were contaminated by the advent of archaic languages, which until the present have continued to shape, in their musicality, the anthropological facticity we mistake for the necessary conditions of any experience whatsoever. This immanentizing of the transcendental ego in the social and historical field of *the fact of language* is a stepping block on the way to reasserting, as Hamann so often does, that reason *is* language, and that reason is therefore communally consubstantiated through the very existence of languages. We can therefore add to the Badiouian assertion "the masses think" that, in reality,

only masses think, or that human sociality and human cognition are coterminous (Bosteels, 2011, p. 17-18). The other upshot of the untranscendability of language is that language cannot be subtracted away from truth procedures, but rather, as the vestibule of reason, it (to borrow a phrase from Brassier) "supervenes on the historial (sic) contingency of its evental conditions" (2004, p. 51). Communicability then—including the last word, the final appeal, the mutter of lackluster consensus—is also the final limit of a decision and dutifully trails after it.

Where this formulation breaks harshly from the Wizard of the North however is in its wholesale rejection of the idea that reason (as language) is reducible to convention or custom—or worse yet, to nationality (Beiser, 2009, p. 18). Likewise, as is evident from the preceding paragraphs, we must attempt to attack a dichotomy that Hamann—himself the great demolisher of the Kantian dichotomies of understanding and sensibility—fails to interrogate, viz. the static metaphysical dichotomy between 'pure' and 'impure' reason (Beiser, 2009, p. 41; Alexander, 1966, p. 143). The disenchantment of the world during the Enlightenment, as a "purification" of reason from myth and tradition, never *concludes*, and neither does the Kantian purification of reason from its dependence on inductive experience, or—fatally, in Hamann's eyes—the empirical purification of reason from the convention, custom, and philological accident of language, so as to access synthetic *a-priori* categories, a gauntlet he flamboyantly threw down before Kant's feet on more than one occasion (Alexander, 1966, p. 143). Rather, in all three cases these processes ignite a dialectic—one judged by Adorno and Horkheimer (2002), for example, to perpetuate the domination of humans by humans, and humans over nature in the case of the Enlightenment; one that sets off, in the case of Kant's rebuke of Hume and his ensuing noumenal-phenomenal split, the post-critical turn in German idealism, culminating is Hegel's speculative logic, which no more purified intuition than further developed its very concept; and

finally our own aim here, a treatment of language as *langage-au-générique* that in abolishing the Saussurean segregation of signifier and signified activates the stalled dialectic in Hamann's paradigm: that of the internal mediation of the universal in the particular, without which neither is conceptually valid. Language (as reason) is untranscendable, but its own resources are no poorer than (because belonging to) the conditions of truth in which their language participates. The fundamental *adequacy* of language to express the universal is as much a testament to its infinity as to its social-historical embeddedness, the latter of which need not require historicism, just as the former need not warrant a lapse into ahistoricism. The Hegelian update of Hamann must proclaim instead: language, like consciousness, has no opposite. Our Badiouian addition: the historical procession of languages is punctuated by a saying and thinking of the universally exceptional from the moment they appear in a world (but no sooner), making language's untranscendability ultimately liberatory, not stifling.

2. Indexicality of What Inexists

Blanchot (1993) instructs us that "impossibility" is what we must call the fact that "[t]here cannot be an immediate grasp of the immediate" (p. 38), and that language thus, in its abstractness, constantly refuses the real[11] in its passionate appropriation of the real's obscure emanations, thus relegating linguistic humanity to an Outside. This great refusal, common to all symbolization for Blanchot, even in its most tautological performances, means that language does not, as Hui (2020) suggests, simply encode "existential" relations (a benign journalistic truism that is, as we have already established, constitutive of the inert 'encyclopedia' for Badiou), but also encodes:

[11] The Lacanian resonance is intentional.

(i) A continuous series of *speculative relations* (ergo 'language-thought' or 'parlepsis'—these are largely abductive, anticipatory, and hypothetical inscriptions);

(ii) In the case of truths, *inexistent relations* that are absolute and universal (not merely locally existential) despite how "constitutively uncertain" and evanescent they may be (Badiou, 2004, p. 147).

Whence Blanchot's oddly Badiouian ethic of "[n]aming the possible, responding to the impossible"—the impossible being that which is prohibited by the state of a situation, the "one-effect" of the "count-as-one", but which nonetheless appears during the Badiouian event, a turning inside-out, or perhaps outside-in, of Blanchot's outsideness, allowing refusal to become unexpected embrace (Badiou, 2013a, p. 78). This operation for Blanchot behaves as "a response to what is not yet heard, an attentive response in which the impatient waiting for the unknown […is] affirmed", and for Badiou then has its arrival indexed inside a work of truth, in preliminary reports, or in the labour of thought more generally (Blanchot, 1993, p. 48). It is remarkable how snugly this proscription, deprived of its Heideggerian metaphysics of presence, fits into Badiouian ontology where the inexistent resides within an "inconsistent multiple" at its minimal value (inconsistent because "the One is not") as a "[…] potentiality that lies within the situation like a phantom", that only in a post-evental space requires an "evental statement" which then "fixes the present for the subject-thought out of which the universal is woven" (Badiou, 2004, p. 147; Badiou, 2013, p. 54, 56; Badiou, 2022, p. 447). *Langage-au-générique* proves capable of indexing existential relations yes, but also *inexistential relations*, and thereby forges in tertiary retentions an "aleatory supplement" which grounds the speculative process of invention (Badiou, 2004, p. 151). One must not underestimate the difficulty of creating this

aleatory supplement. It entails charting a diagonal path where language is neither purely dianoia—remaining in the discursive pages of the encyclopedia—nor purely poetry, or language as pure act (Badiou, 2004, p. 240). The ability for *langage-au-générique* to make simultaneous use of the poetical and discursive while succumbing to the gravity of neither is necessary for rendering intelligible true evental rifts, which in presenting a generic multiplicity, and revealing the inconsistency of the situation, or its division into two states (that of the count-as-one, and that of the counter-state), needs something beyond mere affect to help us "think what was unthinkable" which, as we have maintained so far, is to "say what it is impossible to say" (Badiou, 2004, p. 241). In our jargon we will come to call this mode 'parlepsis' and think of it as Hegelian opening-up of the Kantian closedness of Stiegler's "protension" (Stiegler, 2019, p. 39).

3. Cognitive Indecomposability

In the work of Fodor (2008) we find the strong neo-Cartesian hypothesis that the tokening of cognitive states must always correspond with an identical tokening of mental representations (p. 5). This means that 'thinking' as a symbolic activity can always be discretized into a root language-like process of 'mentalese' that facilitates said atomistic tokening using a mechanism that is invariant across languages, and that in some sense cognitively 'contains' the phenomenon of speech and the instantaneous triggering of conceptual acquisition that underlies all belief (Fodor, 2008, p. 139). This is more of a material 'logistics' of thought than it is a logic of thought. The mentalistic 'bottom half' of Fodor's dyad is sub-linguistic and lawlike (not metalinguistic and conventional) and internally stratifies the domain of the symbolic into its compositional relays *along the surface* of expression, or from concept possession to concept possession, from sense to sense. Put another way: even in the extreme tautness of concrete poetry such as Apollinaire's "Il Pleut" (2004), or Eugen Gomringer's "wind" (Solt 1970, p. 93), or

Seiichi Niikuni's "mouth / empty / lie" (Solt, 1970, p. 161), language *cannot be composted* into non-language—or better yet, into non-thought—no matter the inscrutability of its permutations. This is because all inscription and elocution, simply by dint of their composition, retains the cognitive biconditionality of mentalese. Putting aside issues surrounding interpretability for a moment, we can note that it is for this reason that we find it exceedingly difficult to say things we cannot think (Fodor, 2008, p. 73).

A crucial emendation occurs here when we attack the boundary of the indecomposable using Grassi's (1980) argument from *regressus in infinitum*. Here we see that a lexical-logical deduction of new complex concepts (capitalism, specularity, photosynthesis, Archimedes' principle of flotation) from a prior stock of more basic concepts (exchange value, the visible spectrum of light, metabolism, weight) must reach orientational halting points both above (conceptual representation) and below (in mentalese) which are strictly speaking *metaphorical* and mark the edges of the encyclopedia of a given situation. These merely indicative (rather than logical) "archai" as Grassi calls them serve as the *rhetorical* buttress, or encyclopedic binding, for probabilistic inter-conceptual coherency, but also immunize this structure from conceptual collapse at the cost of prohibiting novelty (1980, p. 25-26). As a rudimentary poetic substrate (under-tokened and nonconceptual) filling the gap between the constellation of indecomposable thoughts and the Pascalian abysses of unreason both infinitesimal and colossal, these archai that Grassi invokes are themselves decomposable, recomposable, and otherwise amply mutable, which is what makes them both assets to the elastic ideological status quo sketched by Deleuze and Guattari (2009) in terms of capitalist representation, but also vulnerable to events which shatter their master-metaphors and completely reroute the compositional chains that standardize thought. The degree to which the mechanism of cognitive tokening that archai subtend remains

immobile is far more opaque than the rather simple idea that chains of tokens are undecomposable: one need not discover the concept 'emptiness' from scratch, as it were, every time one slurps down the last of their peppermint tea; but by the same principle, let it be admitted, as a self-evident Hegelian truism, that thinking turns thoughts over and over not only through the recombination of tokens, but by means of genuine non-derivable leaps of invention. This is how it comes to pass that one's concept of 'emptiness' may suddenly differ drastically in richness and character upon a millionth cogitation compared to that first and earliest childhood consideration, and how a move from emptiness to a concept of 'zero' or 'void' is ever possible. It is not temporality alone which ensures this non-standard mutation of mentally tokened thought, but that which subtends even the subtending of mentalese, its ancient pre-Cartesian element: libido, which cannot but shout.

4. Libidinal Reflux

If Hamann gives us a phylogeny of human language, Kristeva gives us its ontogeny. The difference in each of their attempts at historicizing Fodorian mentalese (which is implicitly evolutionary) lies in their scope, which nevertheless eventually intersects: Hamann's archaeological dig into the absolute forms of species-wide prelinguistic activity, the rhythms of mark and meter, inevitably come to bear on the prelinguistic receptacle instantiated in any individual psyche that is formed by libidinal drives—a "nonexpressive totality" that Kristeva (1985) calls the "chora" (p. 25-26). It is not unreasonable to assume that this 'chora' belongs to an ancient part of our corporeal apparatus already nascent in the prelinguistic era, and that we were for an undefined stretch of time predominately semiotic, rather than symbolic, beings. In a classical Freudian turn, we can say that Kristeva, through her psychoanalytic lens, isolates the

preservation of this archaic prelinguistic portion of the human mind that is most visible today in childish echolalia and poetic amble, or what Kristeva calls "instinctual glossolalia" (1985, p. 58).

Hegel, during the decades after Hamann, sought to retain the procession of history so integral to the latter's rejection of Kantian critical philosophy, but without the relativization entailed in Hamannian historicism, which resulted ultimately in his model of dialectical progress as a mode historical intelligibility (Beiser, 2009). The picture of language offered in such a framework is best captured by Hyppolite (1997) in his dialectic of sense, where sense only endangers further sense, and the interminable climb up a relational linguistic ladder continues unabated and, one must assume, asymptotically. Kristeva's (1985) account of Hegelian "negativity" (p. 109) cracks this dialectic in half. This fissure allows her to posit the libidinal reflux of the chora as that ineradicable, materially historical remainder which, as "the precondition for signification, i.e., the precondition for the positing of language" intrudes into all speech and constitutes an *undialectical* element counterposed within the same space as the dialectic of language and thought (p. 48). The idea here is to break the circularity of Hyppolite's account, and the idealist loop of Hegel more broadly, along the lines proposed by Badiou (2009) in his *Theory of the Subject*: "[…] we will oppose (materialist) *periodization* to (idealist) *circularity*" (p. 18, italics original). Kristeva grounds the post-dialectical thinking *of* the dialectic of language and thought—itself a ripening strawberry—in the material *seeds* of the fruit. Some notion of the temporal honing of linguistic resources is thus replaced with exceptional and unforeseeable breaks in expression. Likewise, a march towards the absolute is substituted for situationally underdetermined explosions of absolute expression in which a language—any language—is able to cognitively grasp the appearance of a generic multiplicity. The subjectal awareness that follows when one conceptually wields the rapturous presentation of a generic

multiplicity is what allows people to force the inclusion of its singularity into the pre-existing representational order in a way that changes this order and reveals certain invariants that are always commutable to other situations elsewhere and later on. This grasping rests on the species-being of sociality itself, *not* social history in the form of tradition. It is perhaps here more than anywhere else that we approach the rudiments of a communist philosophy of mind. What about Kristeva's theory allows us to posit this spiralized post-dialectic as an integral capacity of generic language?

Kristeva articulates—by pursuing, it should be noted, an entirely different course from the work of Avanessian and Hennig (2017)—how a movement in "symbolic economy" can occur such that the reproduction of signifiers accesses the chora, which lies on "[…] the other side of the social frontier" (Kristeva, 1985, p. 79).

But what does it mean for the chora to speak, from this threshold between the unconscious semiotic realm and the conscious realm of symbols schematized by Fodor? Does the chora merely garble, like those elderly folks in Alice Munro's "Lichen" (1987, p. 51), whose words are "a conversational offering" where "the core of each syllable […is] presented, a damp vowel barely held in shape by surrounding consonants"?

The answer lies in the twofold psychoanalytic fact that, on the one hand, for enunciation to exist, "the ego must be posited in the signified", but that this ego must simultaneously posit its own absence—under the guise of total transparency—in the system of signification (Kristeva, 1985, p. 48). Kristeva styles this as: "[s]ignification exists precisely because there is no subject in signification" (p. 48). Why this disappearing act? Following Lacan, it is still the phallus which "initiates the symbolic field", but due to the inability to eliminate itself from the process, its own incipient presence causes a permanent lacunae in the symbolic matrix, which like an indentation

on a vast sheet firmly positions the signifier at a zero-node or void, a gap which is precisely "between the imaged ego and drive motility [chora], between the mother and the demand made on her" (Kristeva, 1985, p. 48). The everlasting break between Sausserean signifier and signified, however culturally contingent its manifestations, is related backwards to this anterior split that haunts the point of enunciation, the split between us and the guarantors of our desire, and the irresolvable tension between who we want-to-be and our public citation (Kristeva, 1985, p. 48). This anterior split enables the passage from one sign system to another, or what in Fregean terms we would call an alteration of our thetic position (Kristeva, 1985, p. 59). This *positional* alteration, in which even an uprising or a revolt may be transposed into text, thereby ensuring the material preservation of truths by means other than life itself (and potentially in all manner of different signifying systems) also accounts for what exactly is taking place *at the level of libido* when a truth subjectivates a group of artists, a lab of scientists, a pair of lovers, or a political mass, council, cell, etc. One of the constitutive qualities of *langage-au-générique* then is "the abandonment of a former sign system, the passage to a second via an instinctual intermediary common to the two systems, and the articulation of the new system with its new representability" (Kristeva, 1985, p. 60). The intelligibility of truths that lie outside the encyclopedia of a situation, and the peculiar aleatoric epistemology they entail, demands such a libidinal basis for the conviction that accompanies the intelligibility, and indeed the translatability, of said truth. A supreme retrojection almost approaching anamnesis occurs here where language has no choice, simply no choice, but to recharge its choric reservoirs should it wish to comprehend genuine novelty so as to transform its reasons into consequences.

This is not to say that language cannot be recombined, in its shimmering expressivity, for oppressive ideological purposes—in effect, this is what Google's surveillant apparatus achieves,

with all the titillations of libido that capitalist consumerism has perfected over the last century. Concerning this point, one further clarification is necessary regarding the analogy Kristeva makes between genotext as topology and phenotext as algebra (Kristeva, 1985, p. 87). Badiou's (2009) adoption of the Lacanian sense of 'topology' to refer to a subject caught between a spatially destructive position of either courage or anxiety maps quite nicely onto Kristeva's paradigm and subtly enflames its edges. For Kristeva, sociopolitical constraints stultify the semiotics side of the signifying process—"they knot it and lock it into a given surface or structure"—through a series of fixed practices, each with their own "symbolic matrices", that "obliterate the infinity of the process" and fossilize in "phenotext" those obliterations (Kristeva, 1985, p. 88). The phenotextual constraining, nullifying, and obliterating of the infinite potential for a genotypic-phenotypic transmutation of subjective topography—which taps into a universal prelinguistic libidinal reflux—already has four names in Lacan: "the hysteric, the academic, the master, and the analyst", to which Kristeva adds "narrative, metalanguage, contemplation, and text-practice" (1985, p. 88). This breakdown contains three terms that we will strive to avoid in our conception of *langage-au-générique*, and one we will embrace. In *narrative*, familial structure coerces language into a naturalization of the existing order; in *metalanguage* the signifying process is 'sutured' so as to eliminate "negative charge […] by subordinating negativity to affirmation, and by reducing instinctual dyads to positivity"; and finally in *contemplation* language becomes an inert, insular, self-legislative discourse incapable of and uninterested in materiality (Kristeva, 1985, p. 91, 93, 96).

Text, meanwhile, "differs radically from its contemplative simulation for in the text the *instinctual binominal* consists of two opposing terms [the chora and the thetic position] that alternate in an endless rhythm" (Kristeva, 1985, p. 99). There is an "entire gamut of partial

drives" that text-practice draws from by explicitly tapping into our psycholinguistic choric substrate, thereby realizing its inherent capacity to strive after a *materiality* that *exceeds* encyclopedic meaning, thus becoming a generative locus of anaphoric signification, which in its most literal sense means realizing the ability to posit *new species of thingness* for the thetic I to behold (Kristeva, 1985, p. 99, 100). This generative subject, which is the subject of the discourse of the text, is Krsiteva's famous subject "in process/on trial" (1985, p. 101). The necessarily subversive *and* generative element of choric potential also means that revolutionary subjects, or subjects of political truth, are likewise necessarily subjects 'on trial'—the verdict being decided, for us, on the basis of success or failure in commitment to a truth procedure, come what may (Kristeva, 1985, p. 100-101). Kristeva summarizes the relation of the chora to political revolt quite nicely in the following passage:

> "*Revolutionary practice,* the *political activity* whose aim is the radical transformation of social structures, is no doubt one of the most obvious manifestations of this [textual] process. In bypassing the very materiality of language, and therefore without disturbing the forms of linguistic exchange, revolutionary practice initially locates the signifying practice within the social realm, but the landslides it produces there completely change all signifying structures as well. We shall therefore say that the explosions set off by practice-process within the social field and the strictly linguistic field are logically (if not chronologically) contemporaneous, and respond to the same principle of unstoppable breakthrough; they differ only in their field of application" (1985, p. 104).

Here we have the startling hypothesis that the time of the linguistic field and the time of the social field are logically but not chronologically contemporaneous.[12]. While it is undoubtedly true that the reification ofcapitalist relations "makes it almost impossible for the signifying process to attack material and social obstacles, objective constraints, oppressive entities, and institutions directly" there are *other* spaces of social production—specifically those contested by large capitalist tech firms—vulnerable to its transformational force on a quotidian scale (Kristeva, 1985, p. 105). Indeed, as Kristeva points out, just as capitalism for Marx produces its own gravediggers, the subjectively generative processes of the text "belongs not to this established society, but to the social change that is inseparable from instinctual and linguistic change" (Kristeva, 1985, p. 105). Text then operates as a form of maximally choric social scripting either in the form of ideological preparation, ideological severance, or the invention of new social forms altogether. In a longer passage shortly after, Kristeva seemingly reinforces a chronological antecedence that just moments before she was hesitant to prescribe:

> "Since, as Marx notes, it [textual practice] lies outside the sphere of material production per se, the signifying process, as it is practiced by texts—those "truly free works"—transforms the opaque and impenetrable subject of social relations and struggles into a subject in process/on trial. Within this apparent asociality, however, lies the social function of texts: the production of a different kind of subject, one capable of bringing about new social relations, and thus joining in the process of capitalism's subversion" (Kristeva, 1985, p. 105).

[12] The laws governing this discrepancy are congruent with the Badiouian framework of nonprogrammatic communism, which demands that ideas work in pre-evental and post-evental zones.

Far from being a capitulation to revolution 'from above' in a vaguely Honnethian or Habermasian sense, the semiotic chora reveals itself as the unstable, motile crucible of prelinguistic positionality whose concentration in the symbolic field means, in effect, the utterance of something un-representable in the deadlocked state of the situation. Choric utterances unlock the global transference of a local subjective split, of a decision to live autonomously from the homogenizations of the state. These passages from Kristeva explain why and how there are evental intervals during which we speak not as animals, but as subjects. We can ratify this proposition along Badiouian lines: if human animals can ever speak as subjects, they can speak of the impossible..

Furthermore, we can see why the choric undermining of meaning is an essential moment of any truth procedure: a hole must be burned through the midsection of the encyclopedia. The ability for the choric element in language to "unfold the unicity of the thetic" so as to prevent its ideological "theologization" in self-identical significations is the "subversive kernel" that permits the utterance of truths, and the continued utterance of their consequential and rational organization, outside the static regime (Kristeva, 1985, p. 61). It almost means that grasping a truth necessitates a *difference in self-conscious self-differentiation* that begins with a libidinal rewiring of the I as a linguistic subject.

One intriguing disclaimer is that the chora need not be explicitly engaged with social and political struggles to access the "infinity of the process […and] reach the semiotic chora, which modifies linguistic structures" (Kristeva, 1985, p. 88). This is how it can be argued that while Joyce never wrote a treatise on communism, his *Ulysses* awakens and vindicates the choric undercurrent of postcapitalist subjectivity (Steven, 2021). Ultimately, there is a 'realist' argument to be made that texts are capable of these changes because only texts occupy that time and space

where the mundanity of exploited labour ceases. However, for a *political* vision of the nonprogrammatic subject on trial (the subject-to-truth), any true choric subversion of our oppressive status quo requires an event—it requires an ignition that is itself non-textual, but a worldly appearance (except, it must be noted, in the case of literature as art). The belatedness of a poiesis that is nevertheless parleptic appears to be a confounding paradox. But the simple and profound point is that it is in fact never possible to completely determine if a text, in Kristeva's sense of the term, is merely registering social change or in fact inventing new subjective forms, hence the suspension entailed in speaking of a subject 'on trial', and hence her wavering on the point of 'contemporaneous' logical connections between the two. The interesting fact is that texts, since they share the same logical form as all social interactions, hold the same risk: namely, the risk of having one's mind and even one's social instincts irreversibly changed, the risk feared by all censorious regimes. In any case, it is now sufficient to reiterate Kristeva' primary description: the revolt of the semiotic chora, resulting in novel *signifiance*, places a generic psycho-linguistic reflux at the heart of subjectivation. That this unconscious economic principle which produces signifying positions has become, in all of its esotericism and deviance, integral to the decrepit flourishing of post-industrial capitalism, will be discussed shortly (Kristeva, 1985, p. 121).

5. Interpretability

The fifth and final quality of *langage-au-générique* is that our constraints on symbolic interpretation are so flexible, absent nomic metalinguistic guarantees, that one need not wait for the encyclopedic codification of a series of slogans or ideas to act with interpretive rigour and vigour, a fact which transforms Hegel's owl of Minerva from passive twilight witness to active hunter of mice (Badiou, 2009, 19). This dimension involves a Davidsonian account of radical

interpretation, without which the appearance of a generic multiplicity could never be interpreted as truth, and the *message* of its interpretation never relayed to others. There are three steps to interpretation, according to Davidson (2006): the identification of "predicates, singular terms, quantifiers, connectives, and identity", which establishes, symbolically, the common logical form of a situation (almost like a preparatory mapping of mentalese); the analysis of utterances containing "indexicals", or existences whose verity depends on "discoverable changes in the world" that may recursively act upon the pattern of logical predicates—this pertains to the encyclopedia of the situation; and finally, the undecidable Mallarméan remainder, sentences—often Blanchottian indexes of the inexistent—"on which there is not a uniform agreement, or whose held truth value does not depend systematically on changes in the environment", a mode surely activated when grappling with anti-systematic singularities which are absolute yet evanescent (p. 192, 193). In the first stage of interpretation, we learn how to use our faculties; in the second we practice perception and apprehension, cataloguing objects as they appear; in the third we cast our dice and follow the consequences come what may.

This third class of *formally undecidable* locutions and writings, which I am inclined to described in my own jargon as "parleptic", breaks the encyclopedically-guaranteed uniformity between the logical grid of predication and the indexical constant of speech undergirding the daily habits and practises of natural consciousness. They pertain, instead, to the event, to things that cannot be ignored, exigencies that require intellectual courage: they pertain to errancy, variation, to the evaluative inconstancy of the predicative grid during the haphazard, unsystematic cut of an event and our attempts to systematize, regulate, and organize in a highly improvisational manner the consequences flowing therefrom. The upshot of Davidsonian radical interpretation is that generic language withholds something resembling scientific rigour in the

way that it gives us licence to construct, in real time, any number of theories of truth that "yield an acceptable interpretation" of the event in question because constructing an interpretive framework for something that abolishes prior interpretive frameworks is necessary *for any understanding of any novel truth whatsoever* (Davidson, 2006, p. 165). In the context of love, one can only understand what has happened to them through a radical re-evaluation of the course of one's life; in art, a radical re-interpretation of the limits of figuration or sensibility; in science, the disposal or emendation of entire, often longstanding, paradigms; in politics, the radical determination that it is no longer true and just to live this way, but only *that* way, and to field an "encounter between emancipation and policy in the handling of [such] a wrong" (Rancière, 2023, p. 36). This linguistic pliability also means that cultural essentialization is not only wrongheaded but uncharitable. As Dasenbrock puts it, in his essay on the application of Davidson's philosophy to literary analysis: "It is not our different interpretive communities that keep us apart; it is simply our different interpretations" because—and this is equally true when it comes to the intensely localized singularity of an event—"there is at most one text just as there is at most one world, and we share that text just as we share the world" (Dasenbrock, 1993, p. 25). There is no room, in other words, for old democratic paeans when it comes to the potential for radical interpretation that generic language harbours.

Radical interpretation also opens the door to an ethic of translation—and of the guarantee of translatability—beginning with material externalization in codified script, setting enormous spatial and temporal connections in motion. The question of translation, the ethic of translatability, and the logic of the appearing, takes on even greater importance when an event happens, for example, in a metropole where multiple languages are spoken. Here it is important

to maintain, with Davidson, that nothing prohibits, *de facto* or *de jure*, the acceptable yielding of what Badiou calls the "form" of a thought (Badiou, 2014, p. 28).

A Five-Pointed Star

Untranscendibility, Indexicality of what Inexists, Indecomposability, Libidinal Reflux, Interpretability. These represent five modal properties of language-in-the-generic, and it is my contention that their transposition into writing—their exteriorization—carries with it these five qualities without sacrificing their potency. In what follows, we will see how computational capitalism, through methods of synchronization, utilizes the logic of deflocculation to obstruct and subordinate the speculative potential of multitudinous *langage-au-générique* into a force of cognitive reification. In more precise terms, to reinforce by Mithridatic means—that is, using its own poison as an antidote—the transcendibility ('those are only words'), existentiality ('all that currently is, is all there will ever be'), instant composability (datafication), unidirectional flux (global consumerist apparatus), and untranslatability (falsely absolutizing a difference whose status and stature cannot be maintained without internal contradiction) of the world.

Returning to my prior critique of Hui's 'phonetic divide' by way of Hamann's (2007) theory of language, I reaffirm that the ethical response to this 'bad universal' of digital synchronization is a renewed emphasis on the ratiocinative kernel constitutive of any image of language as such, and attempt to map out the diachronistic resynchronization mentioned in the first intervention. But first, we will take a sober look at the system of lingopower and the political economies of language data that our empirical analysis will shortly colour-in for us in vivid contemporary detail.

Intervention: Lingopower and Political Economies of Language Data

"Across early capitalism, the term "Black" referred only to the condition imposed on peoples of African origin (different forms of degradation, dispossession of all power of self-determination, and, most of all, dispossession of the future and of time, the two matrices of the possible). Now, for the first time in human history, the term "Black" has been generalized. This new fungibility, this solubility, institutionalized as a new norm of existence and expanded to the entire planet, is what I call the *Becoming Black of the world*" (Mbembe, 2017, p. 6).

Entering the Language Machine

About a third of the way into Evan Dara's monumental work of eco-fiction, *The Lost Scrapbook* (1995), there is a radio broadcast that runs across nearly one hundred pages featuring several news bulletins, one of which advertises the advantages of a new form of energy extraction born from the fusion of language and technology. Told in a series of ellipses (between which readers can imagine the soft atmospheric hum of a radio-receiver's white noise) the following snippet transpires:

> "…In Rochester, New York, a privately-funded communications institute associated with the Xerox Corporation, which has a base in that city…
>
> …has announced a project to produce energy from flows of language…
>
> …The project, called SemanTechs 2000, will be based on geothermal models, Xerox spokesman Vernon Duke told reporters…
>
> …According to a preliminary outline released today, the project will explore means of extracting units of energy from language as it passes from its producer to its consumer…
>
> …The technique, the outline said, will utilize the differential between the amount of meaning invested in the language by its originator and the invariably lesser amount of meaning withdrawn from the language by its recipient…

> …As Duke told reporters: For the first time we will be able to put inattention, incomprehension, and indifference to productive use…
>
> …For instance, Duke continued, we envision a time when a brief chat about car-pooling will power a window-style exhaust fan for as long as four hours…
>
> …Xerox spokesmen added, moreover, that they saw the project applicability growing, quote, at least exponentially in the future…
>
> …Ticka…" (Dara, 1996, p. 76-77).

The satirical presentation of this technology (the pun on 'semantics' and so forth) hardly diminishes the insight it offers into the post-internet, corporate-platform system in which we currently find ourselves lodged (Terranova, 2022). Three themes are clearly evoked: a political-economic critique of the private ownership of the means of communication; the entropic dividend proposed by early information theorists to describe informational loss across media channels (Weaver and Shannon, 1949); and, finally, the idea of the extraction of value *and* energy—a quasi-material production—based in the regenerative harvesting of "inattention, incomprehension, and indifference" as they are spawned and indexed in human speech acts (Dara, 1996, p. 77). Putting to one side for a moment the Benjaminian sentimentalism implied throughout *The Lost Scrapbook* (1995) regarding the resuscitation of some perfect, antediluvian human communication (which thereby reconnects our social fabric under the existing order—an ideological fantasy only too at home in neoliberal regimes of capitalist oligopoly)—we can notice Dara's sly positing of an economic *linguistic power*. This linguistic power is: a) under the purview of a capitalist political economy (which implies a surveillant apparatus), and b)

technologically contingent, or must be extracted from the very grain of its entropic decay, from the interval between its spoken potential and actualized reception.

Taking Benjamin's (1979) diagnosis of linguistic alienation in "On Language as Such and the Language of Man" at face value (but not his messianic remedy or biblical origin story), and adding to the fallenness of our speech (contrary to that of bees or foxes or whales) the Saussurean upshot that this linguistic alienation is a condition from which we have absolutely no recourse, we can see how Dara's 'linguistic power', as a metaphor of communication, deliberately forms a circuit out of the flawed (postdiluvian) material basis of language. It is a question of the *teleology* of the mediation of our alienated language: linguistic power in Dara's fictional scheme is a veritable *voltage of meaning* that pushes an ampere of information against an ohm of interpretive resistance. If we hypostasize this metaphor, any communication whatsoever becomes physically miraculous. We travel much further by considering the originary voltage of language not as meaning, in the sense of some nebulous, culturally overdetermined logocentrism, but as a conduit for sense, for the sense in which the dialectic of language-thought develops however alienated from the world any language may be. Likewise, the "inattention, incomprehension, and indifference" that for Dara enable the capture of some residues of meaningfulness as they escape during the frictive movement from person to person are better de-metaphorized as residues of language-thought, as wisps of curiosity and saplings of individuation that its capturers may *reconstruct into fungible knowledge* against the background radiation of everyday, ambient incomprehensibility (1996, p. 77). Here we get a clearer picture of what I propose to call 'cognitive rentiership', the contemporary practices of which we will soon examine in our case study.

What Is Lingopower?

Flows of language are transformed into linguistic power, or lingo-power, through their abstraction as "intangible assets" that serve the accumulation and assetization—through the absorption of big data—of "predated knowledge" (Rikap 2021, p. 10). This a *reification* of language-thought: its enclosure and dispersal along private, global, capitalized networks technologically imposes a set of 'necessary' economic relations—which is to say ideological relations—between expropriated thought and the surrounding world. The post-*Operaismo* wager that the opposite tendency is equally possible, or that a *positive reification* is already latent to linguistic power and accessible through an annulment of its technical subjugation under capitalism and thus a liberation of its nuncupatory proficiencies (Virno 2015)—a move borrowed from Marx's *Grundrisse* (1973)—risks absolutizing a material relation that language only assumes under the auspices of capital, and that is entirely contingent on its exploitation. This is to say that language has no necessary relation[13] to power, as implied in Dara's mystical-satirical metaphor, nor a necessary *form* as lingo-power incarnated in either negative or positive reification. Barring the immediate Badiouian (2006a) rejoinder against the fraternity between casuistry and language (and *for* the fraternity between truths and mathematics instead), this lack of 'powered' necessity is everywhere evident in the melancholy *insufficiency* of language to transubstantiate word into flesh as promised in theological doctrine. Clutching to this crestfallen mythology of human inadequacy, as Benjamin often does (1979), romanticizes the symptom as cause (our language is alienated from the world because we are alienated from the world because our language is alienated from the world, and so on). A thoroughgoing aetiology of actually existing lingopower demonstrates that the capitalist generation of said lingopower—as based on

[13] We would do well to note that the only seemingly necessary thing about language is that it speaks. Further commitments, such as Hamann's insistence that the experience of language is not "transcendable" by some purified (Kantian) human intuition, and thus that the 'social' necessarily grounds every individual's impure intuition, will be revisited in later chapters (Alexander, 1966, p. 144).

capture, extraction, and negative reification (or a disarticulation of articulation)—represents an attempt to overcome linguistic alienation in a (as we have already mentioned) fundamentally ideological manner. Namely, by asserting: 'nothing is alien to capital'. The opposing position, meanwhile, makes the mistake of blurring the Hegelian truism that language-thought and world are in some way necessarily 'hooked into' one another (another kind of refutation of Benjamin's alienation hypothesis) with the view that this commingling has a necessarily teleological structure, which after Marx is that of the reproduction of the social conditions of existence, or of the material world.

If language-thought and world are necessarily comingled it is only insofar as the orientation of their comingling is strictly *unnecessary*, which is why, according to Benjamin, our *mediate* language resides in "the abyss of prattle", alienated from the immediate Adamite language we have lost (1979, p. 120). However, the absence of an *a-priori* modal necessity between language-thought and world does not forbid *tendency* (towards extraction or commodification for example) under certain worldly conditions any more than it guarantees the purification of the entanglement of language-thought-world in, say, an otherwise ostensibly dis-alienated, utopic, communist techno-sphere. The fantasy of the absolute transformational liberty of language-thought-world (emphasis on 'world') is an unwarranted dilation of the freedom inherent to language-thought. The reason for this is that the hyphenate language-thought, and its swimming dialectics articulated in the previous chapter (between Hamann, Grassi, Fodor, and Hyppolite, who show the compositional interplay of expression and cognition) is itself a technique—a meta-technic—that despite standing over and above all other techniques has no unique disposition for direct 'worlding' outside of the aesthetic inventions of literary fiction, which—*pace* Rancière (2006)—do not form the basis of class conflict, and *pace* Honneth

(1992), do not licence a regression from the material fact of, say, starvation, to the recognition of its wrongfulness, as if such phenomenological-dialogical uptake were the sole guarantor of the reality of misery and hardship[14]. Only in *Don Quixote* (2005) and his progeny do thinking and speaking make things so[15]. Following Stiegler, this is finally to state, somewhat modestly, the inchoate hypothesis of the preceding chapter: *language is a technic of thought*. We might hazard to fortify and pluralize this statement: language is *the* technics of thought.

This characterization of language-in-the-generic, or a language that is "immediately all language", as technics formalizes a meta-technical position that will prepare us for an analysis of its real subsumption under computational capitalism, a subsumption that transforms it into the ideological supplement *lingopower* (Steigler, 1998, p. 166; Stiegler, 2019). But first we must clarify what we mean by 'the technics of thought' and how exactly language fulfils this role. A brief overview of Stiegler's project is required.

Language in Stiegler's *Technics and Time*

Benjamin's assertions regarding the onomatopoeic-mimetic origin of languages in "Doctrine of the Similar" (1979 [1933]) are summarily refuted by Stiegler towards the end of his anthropological tractate, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (1998): "There never was a 'concrete language'; to express a situation is always to abstract it" (p. 179). This commitment to the inherent abstractness of language—its disposition towards upward conceptualization rather than banalization or grounding—is coupled with what he views as the

[14] An absurd postulate that derives from a veritable 'myth of the sociological given' that is deserving of criticism along the lines of Gillian Rose's (1981) Hegelian invective, if not outright scorn.
[15] Although a note must be made regarding Kripke's description of entities as taken up by Umberto Eco (2011) to argue for the singular existence of notable fictional characters, his primary example revolving around the unchangeable nature of the death of Tolstoy's invention, the unique 'person' Anna Karenina.

foundational Husserlian-Derridean-Heideggerian moment of language, which he only arrives at via Leroi-Gourhan and Bertrand Gille, namely the idea that "If paleontology thus ends up with the statement that the hand frees speech, language becomes indissociable from technicity and prostheticity: it must be thought with them, like them, in them, or from the same origin as theirs: from within their mutual essence" (1998, p. 145).

This anthropological genealogy of language, which emerges from a lost origin of the human—suddenly bipedal, hands free, and face to face all at once—suggests a twin-birth and symbiotic regeneration of both technical prostheticity and language, specifically in the form of what Stiegler calls, referencing Husserl, "retentions" and "protensions" (2019, p. 13-14). Retentions are at first broken down into a rough triplicate. The first two are found across Husserl's phenomenology, but through Stiegler's rereading of Husserl they are linearized and extended to include a third term of ultimate significance. As philosopher Helena De Preester (2021) superbly summarizes: 'primary retentions' refer to an individual's immediate receptions of the world from experience and perception (a basic presentation of phenomena to the mind in a Kantian sense); 'secondary retentions' refer to an individual's selective repetition at any given moment of memories from long after these experiential and perceptual occasions have passed (a re-presentation of phenomena to the mind); 'tertiary retentions', finally, refer to those *externalizations* of experience, perception, and memory which "[…] transcend the individual but in contrast to genetic information transmitted by the genes [which is a mute, biological, "phylogenetic" transmission…] are epi-phylogenetic" (p. 104-105). This third, nongenetic transference is for Stiegler constitutive of humanity itself and is as profoundly technical as it is linguistic, for technics and language are "two aspects of the same property", this property being their common root in the process of exteriorization—an epiphylogenetic transmission of

thoughts and ideas across time (Stiegler, 1998, p. 171). Following Heidegger, this technical arrangement, for Stiegler, not only structures our intergenerational behaviour, but the very existence of time qua time as we know and live it: "The temporality of the human, which marks it off among the other living beings, presupposes exteriorization and prostheticity: there is time only because memory is 'artificial,' becoming constituted as already-there *since* its 'having been placed outside of the species'" (Stiegler, 1998, p. 172).

As soon as the door opens to nongenetic memory—or "the *inorganic organization of memory*"—the human as we know it exists (and exists *in time*), and gives an answer to Arno Schmidt's snide query in *The Stony Heart* (1997 [1954]) that prefaces this chapter, namely: "Why are we endowed with somewhat more reason than animals?", with the hysterical war-fatigued rejoinder being: "*Oh, you're not ? !* – Well, in that case !", a quip that returns us to Stiegler's condemnation of our contemporary mnemotechnical barbarity— (Schmidt, 1997 [1954], p. 23; Stiegler, 1998, p. 174; Stiegler, 2019).

From the primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions come another triplicate that piggyback on top of it. Primary and secondary retentions can be threaded together into the single weave of individual experience and individual memory, which must be symbolically encased in socioethnic cultural memory in order to endure beyond death, since it cannot persist at the genetic level via somatic procreation[16]. The symbolic, in acts of what Stiegler will later,

[16] It is clear that a future collision of genetic engineering, biosemantics, and the *longue durée* of eugenics will greatly complicate this barrier which only for the present moment strongly divides the phylogenetic from the epiphylogenetic. The nature of this deliberately denaturing collision remains so ambiguous and indeterminate however that it does not jeopardize the rigour of Stiegler's conceptual scheme in advance. Further research on the role of *genetic signs as natural signs in the case of eugenic gene-manipulation*, in the sense of Millikan's (2012) use of "natural sign", is sorely needed, with a focus on the vicious loop this creates between biological function, historical-instinctual legibility, and the possibility of *unconscious intentionality*, with all of its Freudian implications vis-à-vis archaic drives, and with all that it portends for what Achille Mbembe (2021) calls the "new liberal eugenics" of genomic manipulation (p. 13).

following Simondon, call 'individuation', partially frees us from the constraints of the genetic and socioethnic layers which in some sense always precede our arrival into society; just as we cannot choose the "exterior milieu" (climate, geography, vegetation) that we are born into, we cannot choose the world-historical moment, corporeal basis, or "interior milieu" ("social memory, the shared past, that which is called 'culture'") of our life (Stiegler, 1998, p. 57).

However, the 'socioethnic' programming, unlike the genetic, can be broken and manipulated, up to a point—Shakespeare will have greater success at this than you or I. The difference between the symbolic and socioethnic layers is that the symbolic allows for greater individuation, because it "concretizes its new possibilities at the individual level, reinserting them, when they are totally realized, into the socioethnic level" thus constituting a feedback loop, operating *at* a technical speed, but *on* the (s)pace and span of human life, through which anterior-historic interior milieus are reshaped for future generations through our repetitive engagement with and deliberate deviation from their elements (Stiegler, 1998, p. 172). These deviations of "individual intelligence" each constitute an "idiomatic differentiation" that achieves social-historical internalization only through technical externalization (Stiegler, 1998, p. 160). We can think here of all the great poets of antiquity whose works, unpreserved, are lost to time and memory since they could not rely on externalizations of their time-memory-vision in technics).

A straightforward example of the feedback loop in action is the written memoir. Chateaubriand's magniloquent *Memoirs from Beyond the Grave: 1768-1800* (2018 [1849]) reinscribe a highly personalized—and no doubt exaggerated—account of pre- and post-revolutionary France into the socioethnic reservoir of French-language literature through their intermingling of what, again quoting Arno Schmidt, we might call "[…] the existence=positing

(sic) force of names, numbers, dates, borders, tables, maps" with elegiac monarchism (Schmidt, 1997 [1954], p. 39). A hundred and seventy years or so since its original publication, the personal vision of Chateaubriand's memoirs continue to exert an influence over the interior milieus of not just the inhabitants of St. Malo, whose ancestors knew him personally, and for whom he will forever be celebrated as a local hero, but also the wider generic *reserve* in which a certain aesthetic and micro-historical memory is held fast, in the mnemotechnical acts of physical reproduction and digital preservation for fifth, sixth, seventh, nth generations of future readers who can ignore, read, forget, revisit, and remember its words—and have his words *remembered for them*. The question of the existence of such an imagined future readership is one I have taken up elsewhere and so will not indulge in here, though it ties neatly into Stiegler's discussion of anticipation, which we will get to in a moment.

A Sketch of the Mnemopolitics of Stiegler as They Relate to Language

We can already see however the clear distinction between corporate lingopower, as an extractive procedure culminating in networks of cognitive rentiership that aid entropic capitalization, on the one hand, and literariness—consisting of what Blanchot calls the "power of thought", which exists in the dimension of possibility that "founds reality"—in the other (Blanchot, 1993, p. 35, 42). The power of thought, as opposed to lingopower, is a negentropic and epiphylogenetic process beginning with nongenetic memorization, wherefrom speech "[…] begins by responding; a response to what is not yet heard […]" in the mnemotechnical, socioethnic reserve (Blanchot, 1993, p. 48). Speech must respond to what, after listening, it does not hear, for if this were not the case all speech and all thought would remain trapped in a cycle of mirrored and empty repetition. Hope and possibility thus appear under the guise of difference.

It is also precisely in this anticipatory dimension of hope—which recalls the infinitude of Badiou's communist hypothesis, rather than the finitude of capitalist brutalism—that connects Blanchot's thought most profoundly to Stiegler's phenomenological hermeneutics of anticipation. Blanchot formulates his hope in the same manner as Heidegger's premonition on the essence of technology, which in a corruption of Hölderlin is given as the danger of the unimpeded unfolding of an episteme of ordering-enframing that, despite excising and driving out the very fact of revealing (poiesis) from its mode of revealing (enframing), nonetheless coincides with "the possible rise of saving power" in the potential to 'make poiesis technical', so to speak—that is, to reintegrate the fact of revelatory-unfolding, or the poiesis of ideas, into the technical order which claims to abstain from such sentimental puerility (Heidegger, 1993, p. 333, 337). Blanchot (1993) puts it as such: "I hope little when what I hope for is almost at hand. Hope bespeaks the possibility of what escapes the realm of the possible; at the limit, it is relation recaptured where relation is lost" (p. 41). The ideological verdict, by bourgeois capitalist society, that a communist future is impossible is therefore seemingly the very precondition for the reignition of communist hope. This Panglossian outlook is complicated by Stiegler's implicit taxonomy of human activity: hope resides solely in the libidinal sphere, whereas its necessary counterpart, the power of thought—and its openly (re-)organizing, flocculating principle—is routinely deflocculated, as we will see, when it is automatically poached for the generation of lingopower amid the global industrialization of language, leaving hope unmoored, confused, and adrift from any autopoietic principle that might self-organize, through the labour of a truth, around the consequences of an event that makes a cut in the real. This process and its consequences will be explored more deeply in later chapters after some empirical analysis.

In sum, what is significant about Stiegler's account, and what links it up to the Badiouian framework, is that he attempts to explicate the point of contact between what Evan Thompson, in his work on autonomy and emergence in autopoietic systems, gestures to as *top-down relational organization*—which for our purposes we can think of as sets of cognitive resources enabling the progressive installation, through successful flocculation, of egalitarian political goals, scientific stratifications, artistic visions, amorous commitments—and *bottom-up energetic or thermodynamic requirements*—which can be conceived of as libidinal drives, joyful affects, and conversely, revolutionary exhaustion, dismay, betrayal (Thompson, 2007, p. 44). Stiegler's project, as it approached its culmination in *The Age of Disruption: Technology and Madness in Computational Capitalism* (2019), explicitly addresses the conjoining of the libidinal and cognitive through an update of Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002). His work, which could very well be retitled 'Dialectic of Technical Spirit', shows how mnemotechnical humanity today oscillates between the demoralizing barbarity of automated reticular disruptions, and the emancipatory hopefulness of socially individuated protentions (Stiegler, 2019). The latter represents technical artifacts that are both inherited and transformed, both educational and aspirational, which structure the fields of desire that make libidinal-cognitive projects function across generations (Stiegler, 2019, p. 14). For now, it is sufficient to say that *the point of contact* between libidinal and organizational capacities is the house of technics; and language, as the organon of maieutic thinking and the technics of thought, is its pediment (Stiegler, 1998, p. 178).

Ultimately Stiegler is, in the Heideggerian tradition, a thinker of finitude—precisely the finitude of the dual limits of mortality, to which he credits the ancient Greeks with discovering; humanity exists in the thanatological gap between an inaccessible immortality (godlikeness) and

an inaccessible existential innocence, or ignorance of death (animality) (Stiegler, 1998, p. 186). Despite this, he shares with Badiou a Platonic affinity. Towards the end of volume one of *Technics and Time* (1998), he retells and reinterprets the Promethean myth with an added Epimethean commentary to assert that the theft of fire gifts a divine capacity to human beings for access to truth, and for pleonectic reskilling (p. 187-8). Enormous metaphysical disagreements notwithstanding, there is a tentative accord in this type of technologized Platonism and Badiou's insistence, particularly in *The Immanence of Truths* (2022), that works of truth—here understood as a "*finite, but dynamic"* fragment of a truth procedure—are capable of accessing infinity and installing its fragments in the real (p. 451). The suggestion I would like to make is that works of truth—completed or abandoned—rely on *technicity*, and the technics of language-thought in particular (as their material scaffolding in actually existing worlds), and that their capacity to install a fragment of infinity in a world hinges on a degree of post-evental flocculation affordable only in the presence of this technics, which is to say only in the domain of our humanness capable of immortality, of superseding animal existence both in Stiegler and Badiou's aforementioned senses.

The question almost demands to be asked: given the privileged position of meta-technics relative to works of truth, can the rupture of a new form of technics itself constitute an event?[17] The answer must, in keeping with Badiou's paradigm, be an unequivocal no. Mnemotechnics of language-thought are the cartilage that sustains the fidelities to truths and their evental occurrences, but revolutions in these techniques do not themselves condition truths. The invention of the printing press surely facilitated the flocculation of many works of truth over preceding centuries: the political pamphlets handed out during the Paris Commune of 1871 come

[17] In a private discussion during June 2023, Alberto Toscano jokingly asked me if a technological 'singularity' could constitute such a Badiouian event *par excellence*.

to mind (Longeard, 2005; Ferguson, 2014), as do the artistic works punctuating the literary milieu that preceded the commune, such as Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1831), Balzac's *Illusions perdues* (1837), Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857), or the publication, verification, and proliferation of Pasteur's (1910) mid-century discovery of the underlying causes of fermentation, or much further back, the birth of data-sharing among natural philosophers during the first scientific revolution, such as in the case of William Gilbert's formalization of magnetic potential (Eisenstein, 1980). As a technique unto itself there is nothing about the enframing of any given technology that makes it disposed to veridical revealing, but just as with language itself (the technics of thought), they are not entirely disposable should one attempt to actually carry out the labour of thought in a world and not in one's imagination. This exposes a small lacuna in Badiou's account of alethic works: without mnemotechnics there can be no truth events per se, for there would be no *persisting* memory or trace of the event beyond individual memory, no reintegration into the socioethnic reservoir.

Technics are necessary because works of truth require *the preservation of an idea*, without which the "local exception to the existential laws of the world" in an event would instantly dissipate and remain unlinked to further works (Badiou, 2022, p. 447-8). For proponents of egalitarian politics, there are few possibilities as utterly depressing as those where the value of a minimized inexistent is temporarily maximized—in a revolt against an oppressive force, say—*and leaves absolutely no trace*, or a trace so weak that its covering-over is virtually instantaneous, and its obscurity total (Badiou, 2022, p. 448).

Tenacity ensures the opposite: in art this would take the form of the artwork itself in conjunction with cataloguing in public museums, in the republishing of books, in the entire critical apparatus of the arts; in science, experiments in conjunction with notational systems and

the circulation of theoretical rejoinders so as to produce "stratified differences" with intelligible outputs (Brassier, 2010, p. 66); in love, the presence, however transient, of the lover, in conjunction with all those infinitely cherished memorabilia that testify to a devotion to the 'scene of the two' (Badiou and Truong, 2012, p. 38); in politics, the site of a rebellion, a riot, an uprising in conjunction with the reports, slogans, histories, and continually changing reorganizations that attempt to sustain and renew egalitarian ambitions.

Here we find another binding point with Stiegler, who articulates prostheticity as "the possibility of anticipation (of the possibility of possibility)", thus predicating the very openness or readiness for the newness of an event—so essential to Badiou's militant patience—on mnemotechnics (Stiegler, 1998, 183). Between these two concurrences—the role of language in the fastidious preservation of ideas, and mnemotechnics more broadly as the precondition for any anticipation based on indices of prior truths—we have a picture of how Badiou and Stiegler fit together.

Hamannian Refrain: Language as the Technics of Thought

When we say 'language is the technics of thought' we are stating that even though all modes of poetic expression require their associated technical milieus for articulation—which we take to be a fairly rudimentary given—*poetics are underdetermined by the technics that nevertheless enable their instantiation.* The structure of this relation is analogous to Donald Davidson's famous "anomalous monism" theory of mind (2006, p. 110): a set of interconnected technics ontologically underpin the history and development of any type of (oral, signed, hieroglyphed, alphabetized) poiesis, but this materiality does not *determine* or *restrict* with lawlike regularity or predictability the conceptual content of poietic expressions themselves. The

upshot of this nonreductive lingo-cognitive materialism[18] is that our ensuing conceptual liberty exists only for, of, and between minded beings. In this sense, language-in-the-generic functions (among other things) as a valve for the issuance of concepts the contents of which—though entirely reliant upon pharmacological supplements for their manifestation in the world—are not causally reducible to some precise calculation, arrangement, or Bayesian aggregation of the associated states and modes of said supplements[19]. Technical conduits, however, remain essential for the enactment, through social cooperation, of those ideas which seek to change the world they think. The discrepancy between lingopower and the power of thought reappears as the difference between deflocculation and flocculation, and as the division between waste-products and works, in the Badiouian sense, and finally, as the difference between fidelity to events, and the resignation of 'sunset' politics that causes Mario Tronti, in the midst of our counter-revolutionary interval, to claim "history is epochless. And in fact, nothing happens. There are no longer events. There is only news" (Badiou, 2022, p. 93-94; Tronti, 2023, para. ix). To understand how lingopower is so much more materially efficacious than the power of thought, we will first have to analyze the way language, once captured, is articulated, then understood as a technical object, and finally connected to economic pumps. To do this we will briefly look at some ideas from Philip Agre, Yuk Hui, and Christian Marazzi. Only after this can we speculate as to whether alternative technical arrangements might be worthwhile, what they might look like,

[18] Another way of putting this: language as meta-technic is irreducible to any one technics.
[19] The universal validity of all modes of expression, regardless of their technical supports, is taken to be an essential egalitarian principle of mindedness: the broken pencil that makes indentations on a sheet of paper, the impassioned oration aided by a cough lozenge, the inscriptions of an ancient scroll stuffed into a sarcophagus for millennia, a video recording of the patterned gesticulations of American Sign Language, and so on, are all equally capable of scratching the surface of the real.

and, importantly, how it is that corporations produce and maintain lingopower in the first place—which is the basis of the forthcoming case study.

Agre: The Prophet of Grey Metaphor

The emergence of what P. E. Agre (1994) calls "capture" systems, and their associated "grammars of action" (p. 745) within the now-regnant cybernetic order (Tiqqun, 2020) ruled by "platform capital" actors (Srnicek, 2017) all relies on a certain type of informational legibility. Agre is concerned with how machines package what they capture for eventual use, and how any capture at all is tied to this detection, reception, packaging, and potential use. This kind of legibility is not to be confused with interpretability, which we will get to later via the route paved by the venerable tradition of Sellarsian biosemantics. A material analysis of this kind of interpretability—which I suggest is the presuppositional philosophic paradigm of language data capture—reveals to us in stark terms the stakes of a question posed more than a decade ago by Catherine Malabou: "*What should we do so that consciousness of the brain does not purely and simply coincide with the spirit of capitalism?*" (2009, p. 12, italics original). But first, legibility.

In Agre's framework, any surreptitious surveillant apparatus partaking in "capture"—such as Google has been for the past 20 years—does so by encoding information about human behaviour following five principles: (i) human behaviour is 'assimilated' into the representational language of computer system through what are fundamentally "linguistic" metaphors for activity; (ii) this "parsing" of human activity intervenes and reorganizes it, both within the representational inner-world *and in the outer-world of the activity itself going forward*; (iii) this organization follows "structural metaphors" fitted to the institution carrying out the capture; (iv) decentralization, heterogeneity, and localization affix the parameters of every such capture process; (v) the formal, mathematical reconstruction of captured data is "not political but

philosophical" and "transcendent" (1994, p. 744). While the final point is worthy of scrutiny, the preceding four point us in the direction of his central thesis that "grammars of action" absorb human behaviour into machines after a protracted net-weaving involving ontological analysis, quasi-aesthetic articulation, imposition of compliant and "parseable" social regimes, instrumentation to facilitate the technical smoothness of the entire operation, and lastly their elaboration and "optimization" through archival feedbacking (Agre 1994, p. 745, 746-747). Grammars of action are, in a sense, a gross oversimplification of human behaviour designed to squeeze it into computers using "interpretation, strategy, and institutional dynamics" as its permanent wedges (Agre, 1994, p. 748). Nevertheless, its aspirations are the realization of a "perfect transparency of correspondence between digital representations and the now fully ordered affairs of embodied activity" (Agre, 1994, p. 752). The agential shock of such a perfect transparency—note the biopolitical *dispositif* implied in this arrangement, its resemblance to Deleuzean (1992) societies of control—is fully characterized in the following manner:

> "Capture […] permits efficiency and control to be treated separately, so that people who engage in heavily captured activity have a certain kind of freedom not enjoyed by people in Taylorized work. Inasmuch as capture is based on a linguistic metaphor, this freedom is precisely the type ascribed to language users by linguistic theories of grammar—for example in Chomsky's [1971] notion of 'free creation within a system of rule' [p. 51]. That is, just as the speakers of English can produce a potentially infinite variety of grammatical sentences from the finite means of English vocabulary and grammar, people engaged in captured activity can engage in an infinite variety of sequences of action, provided these sequences are composed of the unitary elements and means of combination prescribed by the grammar of action" (Agre, 1994, p. 752).

When such a surveillant-capture system "works", as Agre puts it, it is actually the sign of the working of a "larger sociopolitical structure, not just a technical system" (1994, p. 748). And—crucially for our inquiry—"if the capture process is guided by some notion of the 'discovery' of a preexisting grammar, then this notion and its functioning should be understood in political terms as an ideology" (1994, p. 748). Here we have, in a seemingly innocuous enumeration of the procedural prerequisites for *any possible* capture system, a definition of the technical *dispositif* as ideological apparatus. In an iron clad Althusserian (1971) sense, the 'discovery' of a grammar whose terms are invented in advance ensures harmony between an ideological myth (the 'nature' and 'reality' of what pours forth from a grammatization) and the wider relations of production that incubated this process. This harmony mirrors that between the obedience of an unthinking and unprincipled "worker-consumer" as they are interpolated by the undoubtable 'nature' of "the infinite, transcendent and complete law of unfettered capitalism" (Badiou, 2022, p. 80). Both are, in Badiou's update of his master Althusser, ways of sustaining the societal sieve or filter through which money, consumption, and employment dominate our material and cognitive existence. The filter, the apparatus, the grammatization: each self-validates exploitative behaviour through a positing of its unavoidable necessity and unassailable 'reality', rather than the truth that each arrangement is merely contingent upon regnant modes of production (Agre, 1994, p. 755).

For language-capture systems like Google in particular, the subordination of language-thought to the category of "information commodities", and through this the proliferation of commodities in a process I call the generation of 'lingopower', is one such example (Agre, 1994, p. 755). Importantly, our behaviour as thoughtful, language-producing creatures is increasingly reoriented around the technical generation of lingpower for companies like Google, who in turn

become ever-larger holders and wielders of lingopower as a form of grammatization: Google makes the world legible for commodity-sellers by making everything in the world connected to sellable commodities (a point we will revisit in our empirical analysis). Equally important is that the reliance of all capture models on "linguistic metaphors" rather than the "visual metaphors" of surveillance models means that their very legibility is *doubled* in language-capture, which must be understood as dependent on the 'reading' of discrete-yet-consistent coded information flows enacting a *grammar of grammar*, or a language predigested as linguistic in an utterly alien language (Agre, 1994, p. 756). This means, in short, that language capture, such as Google's, is a *sui generis* form of capture: it compounds the a-priori "metaphor of human activity as a kind of language" with language itself (Agre, 1994, p. 749). It is super-translation.

This pre-arrangement of language that renders it "ontologically" visible and discernible to computers, and results in the articulation of articulation, raises questions about the existence of technical objects, and the ontic status of captured material before it is transferred and packeted away (Agre, 1994, p. 749).

Hui: Digital Ontology and Cosmotechnics

In his tome *On the Existence of Digital Objects* (2016), Yuk Hui advances Simondon's thesis that 'networks' act as "the limit of technical progress" because they subsume all other technical activities, and finally, in an Ellulian (1964) nightmare, become humanly intractable and incorrigible—they act on us more than we seem to act on them (Hui, 2016, p. 27). Hui discards, however, Ellul's latent eschatology. For Hui, true technical networks, and the digital cultures that bred them, are so porous and multi-levelled—more voluminous and thinly divisible than Bratton's (2015) famous "stack" suggests—that one is immediately faced with the Cartesian problem of how to ground inquiry into their operation. For Hui, the answer is a turn to

Bachelard's "phenomenotechnics", which freely admits that analysis at any order of magnitude neglects a host of variables at other magnitudes, or is concealing in order to be revealing (Hui, 2016, p. 30). This admission prompts the question: "what can we neglect?" (Hui, 2016, p. 30). To be clear about neglect, one must follow Simondon by declaring in advance—as a practice of methodological honesty—which "orders of magnitude" will be selected and held fast (Hui, 2016, p. 30).

The layer cake of industrial products—comprising an external manifestation, then a meso-zone of "semitechnic and semilinguistic" qualities, and finally an inner "purely technical" zone—is predicated on the fact that this taxonomic breakdown itself relies upon "instruments" that can conjoin, so as to render legible, different orders of magnitude; here we can think back to Agre's instrument of capture, which in an archival sweep conjoins external behaviour with symbolic translation through a grammar of action (Agre, 1994; Hui, 2016, p. 30). This "conjoining" of differing orders of magnitudes, or layers, so as to access or discern information, is actually a "restructuralization" that Simondon refers to as a "transduction" (Hui, 2016, p. 31). But we are getting ahead of ourselves, for in Agre's example, the human being is already assigned a role as a component within a technical system. This is also the case in our own inquiry, and must be pressed upon sooner or later, as Google's industrialization of human language primarily functions as a *transduction of language data*. In Marxist terminology this could be styled as the real subsumption of language-thought. This process 'resolves' a philosophically productive tension between two different orders of magnitude, that of the individual digital writer, and that of the circulation of capital across the "Corporate Platform Complex", in order to establish a new plane of consistency upon which corporate actors can

experiment with and refine existing methods for subordinating public and private thinking to the marketplace, and in the end make thought itself fungible (Terranova, 2022, p. 7).

The entire technical process undergirding this is fairly complex, and its roots are examined carefully by Hui. Starting from the idea that the "objectification of data" and the "dataification of objects" occur simultaneously along the spectrum "from code to phenomenon", Hui decides to distinguish between Ontology (in Heidegger's sense, as metaphysical ground) and ontologies (in an informatic sense, as forms) such that human beings, as foreseen by Agre, have a doorway to enter into the scene and thereby be counted as part of the technical system (2016, p. 32, 34). This inheritance from Stiegler keeps the human central to Hui's project, which in some sense can be defined as a reconciliation of global cybernetic metastasis with a sociocultural or philosophical inquiry adequate to not only grasp but once again navigate and control its existence.

The ambition to navigate industrial-technical existence relies on two concepts pertaining to digital objects: individualization, and individuation. Individualization is reminiscent of Agre's grammars of action but taken solely from the point of view of digital objects themselves, within their technical system, extending between the microphysics of silicon to the logical syntax of code. Its three sub-parts are: first, "the synthesis of data through the metadata scheme" (a grammatization that Hui compares to Kantian apprehension); second, the constraints that allow digital objects to "regulate their identity within the digital milieu" (analogous to the social laws of kinship); and finally, the third and subsequent stage of individualization is engagement in a "digital milieu" which the object, as conversant in a shared "logical infrastructure", is now capable of doing (Hui, 2016, p. 57). These cumbersome breakdowns and systematizations can be summarized in Liebnizian terms as the birth of a monad: only afer a digital object exists as a

singular entity, and in a singular way, can affect and duplicate and share with the other nodes in its milieu.

The *individuation* of digital objects on the other hand refers to a constantly renegotiated set of relations between a given digital object and other "objects, systems, and users within their associated milieux" including those pertaining to "emotions, atmospheres, collectivities, memories" and more (Hui, 2016, p. 57). A dynamism is possible because of how technical objects differentiate themselves through individuation after entering into the world through initial individualization. It has also led, however, to the partial transformation of human beings—in a long process of deskilling down to only the most superficial level of basic operation—into "digital objects themselves" (p. 57). The resulting human dilemma, which is perhaps more troubling than basic ejection from digital milieus entirely, is for Marx-via-Simondon the problem of alienation, which Stiegler takes up elsewhere as that of "proletarianization" (Hui, 2016, p. 57; Stiegler, 2017).

Nevertheless, the digital object has a "life cycle" in a triangle of processes: (i) metadata schematization, or the creation of ontologies; (ii) the "implementation of these schemes into databases and pieces of software, which creates a milieu" for them; (iii) the emergent technological system articulated in manifold ways by all of the machines and humans that integrate with this digital object either immediately or from a distance (Hui, 2016, p. 75).

We can think, for example, of a computer's CPU reacting to its motherboard registering that a power supply has been plugged into an appropriately sized electrical wall socket, or, better yet, a nuclear power plant flooding electricity through a power station and into a regional grid, where it eventually reaches a local green transformer box and sucks itself into my smartphone, which launches various web protocols including one that allows me to search up what those

green buzzing boxes so prominent along suburban sidewalks are called again, a piece of information which I type into my electronic keyboard, which speaks to this word processor, and therefore founds a local milieu that is recursively dependent, in innumerable ways, on enormous technical systems *inaccessible to immediate perception*. This paradoxically banal yet somewhat extraordinary example demonstrates how the three steps in Hui's 'life cycle' of digital objects progressively build on each other.

When applied to the question of digital language, the existence of such vast, iterative, and obdurate technical systems forces us to consider political economy and technodiversity, two issues brought up in the context of Stiegler and Derrida—specifically the latter's famous article "Plato's Pharmacy" (1998)—in Hui's paper "Writing and Cosmotechnics" (2020). It is here, under the "domination of digital writing", that Hui contemplates whether there are technical tendencies (lawlike universalities) underwriting the supplemental nature of digital writing (the kinds of web protocols it demands, the affordances it removes and the ones it adds and so forth). Given the still slowly increasing global hegemony of digital writing, which is largely a side effect of increasingly global computation and internet access[20], the question must be asked whether digital writing, as a possible medium of "synchronization" of all writing into a consistent technical-computational plane, is "universal writing" (Hui, 2020, p. 22).

Drawing on the distinction between phonological and pictographic writing, Hui problematizes the "universal writing" hypothesis by suggesting that it in fact represents a "limited heterogeneity within a highly homogenized system (in the same way that multi-culturalism has been contained within a secular and modernized society" (Hui, 2020, p. 25). As

[20] Roughly 65% of the world's population was using the internet as of late 2023, which is around 5.3 billion people, a number that keeps rising year over year (Kepios, 2023).

already implied in our earlier genealogy of the concept of cosmotechnics and its Nietzschean and Heideggerian inheritance, universality extends far beyond what Hui considers, quite correctly, to be a false technical universal. These limitations are connected to Hui's view of writing as a technology that suffers three reductions: first, the embedding of "existential relations, meaning the relation between the human and its external world"; second, that the "habitude of writing" realizes the singularity of minded "enunciation and exteriorization"; and finally that "it is not possible to identify and compare phonetic writing and non-phonetic writings in a narrow sense, namely the exteriorization of sound and practice of traces" (Hui, 2020, p. 27, 28, 29). The Benjaminian question that Hui fails to ask is whether Stiegler's diagnosis of the 'synchronization' effect of digital milieus on writing is correct not only because of technical-temporal facticity, but because of the possibility of a "virtual translation" latent in every text due to its very digitality (Benjamin, 1997, p. 165). Thus, when Hui calls for a "multiplicity of technologies", or a Dionysian "cosmotechnics", beyond its supposedly Eurocentric epistemic ken, he is abolishing in advance the egalitarian principle of language-in-the-generic which resides in the very bosom of translatability, and the very cupola of universally accessible thinking. His motivation for absolutizing perspectivism is, maybe not coincidentally, also Nietzschean: it is, of all things, in the name of overcoming a destructive nihilism that Hui (2020) seeks "strategies to liberate us from this apocalyptic end of technological singularity and reopen the question of the future" (p. 30). Hui's advocacy for an *a-priori* technodiversity (discrete writing traditions being the technics in question) recalls the Latourian (2000) 'parliament' of objects, or better yet the Nietzschean "*Olympus of appearance*" (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 282; italics original). The desire is to inscribe an ontological precedence and metaphysical force to the socio-ethnic traditions of writing systems as always-already uniquely supplemental—phonetically,

pictorially, and so on—in their differential processes of Heidegerrian poiesis or revelation, and thus discover a retreat away from capitalist synchrony. This is an ideological manoeuvre that gets at the heart of many enduring debates in communication studies. Forgetting for a moment, to paraphrase Badiou, the beneficent reality of pluri-linguistic cosmopolitanism, the commitment Hui is making is one of linguistic anti-universalism, as we explored in our earlier discussion (Badiou, 2003, p. 11; Nietzsche, 1977, p. 458; Vattimo, 2012, p. 88). The technodiversity of written technics, which Stiegler, in his criticism of Derrida, posited as fundamentally conditioned by technical tendencies from the outside (synchronization) is overturned in favour of a fundamentally unconditioned interior tendency that *distances* all language from all other language *cosmologically*. This untenable particularism is a disaster for the thinking of universal global emancipation (to say nothing of truth procedures), which, if any heed is paid to the correlation of language and thought, is necessarily forfeited as a collective horizon of human action because their avant-gardism would entail the subordination of one cosmology to another. The essence of our counterargument, to extend what was written in the previous chapter, is that the meta-technic language-thought has always been synchronized—recall Hamann's "reason is language"—even in tertiary retentions like writing, but that the epiphylogenetic exteriorization specific to global capital is a *rotten universal* precisely *because* it does exactly what Hui desires: it preserves established differences, exaggerates them in the name of profit, and uses them to refuse the postulate of human equality rather than subtract them in the disciplined creation of a supplementary multiple (Hamann, 2007, p. xiv; Badiou, 2003, p. 58). Our stance remains that the defensive preservation of linguistic differentiation under capitalism does not threaten lingopower, or even ensure the sustainability of technodiversity, to the same degree as a global communist resynchronization that would rupture the existing social reproduction of all language

by unfettering its transmission from the monetary purposes typified by Google. The question of how to dismantle and repair the synchronization of digital writing in the name of voided universals will arise shortly, but for now we will hold fast to this earlier criticism of Hui's politics of writing while at the same time accepting Hui's discourse on the 'life cycle' (individualization, individuation) of digital objects as vital and necessary for grasping the enormity of Marazzi's updated critique of political economy, which ties together Agre and Hui.

Marazzi: Post-Fordism, Economic Connectivity, and Lag Time

The enormous digital systems presented in Hui's analysis—ontologies for digital objects, their shared or translatable software milieus, and the vast industrial-scale systems that integrate them with other machines as well as humans beings—outline a massive chain of potential informatic articulation and transfer. Economically, this chain allows, in post-Fordist, computational, global-capitalist regimes, for "*effective* sales [to] directly 'command' orders and, therefore, production" (Marazzi, 2011, p. 22). Bracketing for a moment the conceptual baggage of cybernetics and feedback loops, we must appreciate how this quality of post-industrial contiguity is what allows communication to become integral to production—communication which down the line enables what Marazzi calls "cognitive laborers", a classification originating in the modern workplace that quickly seeped outside of it (2011, p. 94). In this way, both instrumental (teleologically overdetermined) and communicative (etiologically underdetermined) action have become part of the post-Fordist workforce; but this causes friction because—and this is vital—instrumental action is calculating and direct, but communicative action is equivocal, multidirectional, peripatetic (Marazzi, 2011, p. 42-43). This leads, for Marazzi, to a potential short-circuiting in production, and in the valuation of commodities in particular. We will entertain this specific post-*Operaismo* wager at another juncture. For now, let us finish with a

full appreciation of the continuously shrinking temporal lag that computational capitalism, through such connectivity and contiguity, introduces.

In their anticipation of "Indexical AI", Weatherby and Justie (2022) rightly remark that sufficiently automated economic systems that incorporate cognitive labour can produce not just a productive-temporal contiguity, but a *significatory-conceptual* contiguity, such that "the gap between their signification and ours closes", resulting in a collapse of "the space between infrastructure and representation, the small window of free air between immiseration and humiliation" (p. 383). The sequence of steps here—post-Fordist production that relies on communicational regimes, the birth of cognitive labour, the automation or infrastructural immanentization of the pathways of cognitive labour—leads directly to a hypothetical final stage that Dyer-Witheford et al. (2019) refer to as the automation of a "means of cognition" totally independent from human labour and yet parasitically born, originally, from within it (p. 31). In such a picture, the total dispossession that Mbembe (2017) describes as "the becoming black of the world" would be completed (p. 6).

Our intervention, which asserts that the technical *dispositif* named lingopower is what enables this particular sequence to play itself out, must address, finally, that peculiar linguistic zone where the cognitive and libidinal unite, and where lingopower—and its yet to be named opposite, that agent of flocculation—are generated. The Stieglerian 'technics of thought' has already been diagrammatically proffered in the form of a dispassionate cognitive-linguistic dialectic. That is, an argument was made for this constantly refreshing tension between language, thought, and world that can be understood through Fodor's account of compositionality, Grassi's account of indication, and Hamann's insistence of the insurmountable grounding of the space of reasons within the social and therefore collective impurities of language itself, all together

prompting, under the Hegelian leanings of Hyppolite, the ugly hyphenate 'language-thought'. Its contortion into lingopower—a deflocculating force among masses—has been theoretically sketched, but what remains to be explored is how its *opposite* could even begin to fasten together, in that hybrid moment, the libidinal and the cognitive, which can seem perpetually distant. The French poststructuralist strain—notably absent from this thesis thus far—finally makes a limited appearance to help us posit the qualities of this counterforce against the muted hum of lingopower.

Kristeva and Blanchot: To Flocculate, Now and Again…

If Blanchot's work in *The Infinite Conversation* (1993) explores "the passion of the outside" (p. 46), it would be fair to say that Kristeva's work in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1985) explores the 'passion of the inside'. In the former case, we are confronted with an absolutized ontological gap in the form of "impossibility" as "the form of the relation with the immediate"[21]—that is, the tragic inaccessibility of an immediate real to linguistic activity—a setback which stultifies the violent power of speech as it seeks to overcome the withdrawal of the world, name it, and nail it down (Blanchot, 1993, p. 38). Here language—we can even say, invoking Badiou, 'pre-evental language'—exhibits an inchoate power, distinct from corporate lingopower, that must satisfy itself with "naming the possible, responding to the impossible" in a kind of work that we could call, first, ideological preparation (naming and affirming "the very *existence* of the communist hypothesis", for example), and, second, a post-evental 'responding' to "a real point that we can hold on to, come what may; an 'impossible' point that cannot be inscribed in the law of the situation" but nevertheless compels organizational consequences

[21] Blanchot's (1993) formulation is quite succinct: "the immediate is a presence to which one cannot be present, but from which one cannot separate" (p. 45).

(Badiou, 2018b, p. 5; Blanchot, 1993, p. 48). The 'impossible' point in question can be the internationalization of communal energy resources, or the nurturing of art which shatters our post-figural impasse, or the resolution, once and for all, of the electroweak hierarchy problem (Weisskopf, 1939; Craig, 2022), or a reignition of the category 'love' following its juridical deracination and cultural de-symbolization during the epoch of *les belles-lettres*, which gave rise to an aggressive, pornographic, bourgeois cathexis over hereditary loyalty and financial inheritance.

This unexpected lightness at the end of perhaps Blanchot's most famous essay, "The Great Refusal" (1993, p. 35), generates a game between naming the possible and responding to the impossible that situates the outward-bound relation between subjects and their worlds, but does so without regard for the inward-bound relations, which are arguably far more complex. Kristeva offers this 'passion of the inside' in her Lacanian notion of "the chora" which is a *pre-linguistic* "modality of signifiance (sic) in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the distinction between real and symbolic" (1985, p. 26). We might even add that in addition to being prelinguistic the chora is 'archaic' in the Freudian sense; that is, the chora is formed by the cluster of drives that historically precede the linguistic moment of the human species. This 'semiotic' is intertwined with (and perhaps even biologically gives rise to) the Lacanian 'symbolic', but—vitally—any given signifying process ("narrative, metalanguage, theory, poetry") forever makes use of *both* modalities, just in different measure (Kristeva, 1985, p. 24). The chora's stases and impulses, meters and rhythms, benumbing and affective flows are the womblike chaos around which, through the lawlike sieve of the symbolic, "signification constructs itself" (Coward & Ellis, 1977, p. 148).

These two linguistic passions—of the inside and outside—demarcate the outward reach and internal reconfiguration of what we will return to later as "the desire of thought" (Blanchot, 1993, p. 12). For now, we can dichotomize lingpower (a tool for unleashing thoughtless drives) and what I propose we call "parlepsis", a portmanteau of 'parlance' and 'prolepsis'. Parlepsis designates the alterity of a thinking that *anticipates* in the sense of Stiegler's Dasein—a Being who occupies a promethean state of always-caught-ahead-of-itself-ness, an "essential advance", a self-objecting, self-conscious forethought (1998, p. 16). This proleptic quality of liberated language-thought manifests itself in the attempt to seize (λαμβάνειν) what does not yet exist, to embrace by extrapolation, in advance, too-early, with a thinking (ἔννοιᾰ) entirely enabled by the antic idioms of ordinary parlance, and encased in the grapholectic prayer that all exosomatization warrants, that all tertiary retention inspires (Stiegler, 1998, p. 135; Stiegler, 2019, p. 17; Woodhouse, 1910, p. 750, 868). At its best, parlepsis designates the self-overcoming "thought of thought" that Hyppolite (1997) so cherished, which interiorizes the sensible as memory (or primary-, secondary-, and tertiary-retention) and *negates it* in order to exteriorize it as language (p. 27). This appropriative capacity is what allows the cognitive digestion of mnemotechnical retentions, and that downstream parleptic moment in which "language precedes the thought of which it is nevertheless the expression" (p. 31). The oracular openness of parlepsis can thus be understood as a specifically linguistic subspecies of what Stiegler in volume 1 of *Symbolic Misery* (2016) calls "protentions"—anticipatory attention that gazes out at a horizon shaped by accumulated retentions (p. 65). The autonomy of parlepsis—a minimal threshold of cognitive locomotion—is a necessary precondition for the orientation of human action around truth events. It sustains the possibility of cognitive flocculation through slogans, plans, accounts, studies, exchanges, and the invention of new ideas. Forces of lingopower, meanwhile, sustain the

disorientation of unceasing deflocculation through an automated destruction of the formation of tertiary retentions (which parlepsis requires to avoid the Sisyphean task of always having to 'start from scratch'), all in the name of stimulating the accumulation of capital. The details of this process await us.

Preliminary Materials for a Theory of Cognitive Rentiership

Lingopower can only exist because alphabetized, syllabic, ideogrammatic, and logogrammatic language are, since the dawn of writing, always-already technologically captured in some codified, modified, and inherited form. This permanent liaison between languages and technologies of ordering (in a Heideggerian sense) strangely places software-powered analysis of language data on the same spectrum of technical-historical transformation as the earliest hieroglyphic messaging (Powell, 2018). That the conditions for the possibility of thinking might find themselves tethered to the capitalistic tendencies that underwrite our current technical assemblages should instill in us a healthy fear. One glaring concern is that of cognitive rentiership. The basic idea is this: monopolistic firms like Google capture our language *en masse*, then presume—in line with much analytic philosophy of mind[22]—that this language corresponds to people's thoughts, beliefs, and 'desires', and, finally, subordinate the 'insights' of this language data to the proliferation of commodity forms. This outlines a system of assetization, or the transformation of digital language, and cognitive processes travelling through them, into "something that can be owned or controlled, traded, and capitalized as a revenue stream" along a future-earnings trajectory (Birch & Muniesa, 2020, p. 2). To understand how this process behaves as a pernicious (and historically unprecedented) supplement to already existing

[22] A bias against continental traditions that is particularly revelatory and will be the topic of later theoretical investigation on the corporate epistemologies of language capture.

ideological apparatuses, we must consider the validity of the claim that the previously established entanglement of language and thought extends to include beliefs and desires. In a humourless way this also raises the question of corporate clairvoyance, erroneous reading, and indecipherability. The mass financial exploitation of the act of thinking itself (including, notably, antihegemonic thought) as it is assetized and subsumed under a set of extractive "economic rents" will be the focus of the subsequent case study (Birch & Muniesa, 2020, p. 6).

Chapter Four: Methods and Methodologies

"Technological arrogance is proving the necessity of epistemological humility" (Dara, 1995, p. 283).

"The function of research is not necessarily to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it" (Stake, 1995, p. 43).

Methodological Framework of Analysis

Everyone is born into the middle of a maelstrom and it is their unspoken duty to spend most of their life trying and failing to figure out what that whirlwind might look like from the inside-out, an experience Joyce captures quite while, as a restlessness of the mind, in the 'beach scene' episode near the beginning of his *Ulysses* (2007 [1922]). An important lesson from that chapter—one that will inform the spirit of this inquiry—is that what Dara calls "epistemological humility" in the face our epoch's "technological arrogance" is not in any way incompatible with the desire to change our world (Dara, 1995, p. 283). If anything, it is the desire to know and say more than what our acknowledged limitations licence us to know and say that motivates and even *requires* changing the organization of life so that those limits may be overcome. This reading reveals something like the dialectic of humility and confidence, a mutual interpenetration formed precisely on the negation that emerges when our uncertainty of what lies beyond our knowledge runs up against the uncertainty of that uncertainty. It is by way of this convoluted passage that we have the gall to adopt, as the methodology of the forthcoming study, a squarely "transformative" frame. Transformative not because it subscribes to any particular doctrine of social or material justice (though nebulae of influence may be discerned in the preceding literature review), but because our work here "holds that research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political change agenda to confront social oppression" at the level of *the conditions of human cognition* in particular, and at the level of material need in general, and that

addressing either of these issues (which are in many ways the same issue) necessitates a transformation of, at the very least, the way we produce consciousness in technologically-mediated ways (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018, p. 47). While some of the research may appear as if simply attempting to hold "liberal" ideology to its own ostensible commitments—that is, fostering "[an] ideal society […] based on freely given consent (after discussion) by grown-ups who have the dignity which comes from being autonomous deciders, masters of their own fate" my ambition is to stretch a good deal beyond these appeals to what we might call the satisfactions (perhaps even self-satisfactions) of individual liberty, and point instead to how a new communist horizon is the only alternative to social and economic oppression at both the humble scale of quotidian thought, which one would presume to be the last bastion of liberal piety, and the grander scale of mass political activity itself, which desperately seeks valid expression in capitalist spheres beyond voting booths and consumer habits, and in communist spheres beyond the "party-state-revolution triptych" (Guess, 2022, p. 25; Lazarus, 2007, p. 266).

In true Badiouian fashion, it will retroactively have been necessary to liberate the conditions of human cognition from its technocapitalist stranglehold in order to hand over the production of all that makes life endurable and worthwhile to common ownership, and this common ownership will entail the perpetual emancipation of the conditions of human cognition, or a technocommunist nurturing of the great untapped human potential largely wasted, under our current order, on either the pursuit of capital for its own sake or the exhaustion of one's time and energy in exchange for subsistence at a general rate of misery that capitalist oligarchs and the nation-states economically beholden to them deem acceptable (Badiou, 2022).

Scope and Object of Study

Our analysis of the still rudimentary, but increasingly sophisticated, disenfranchisement of the conditions and products of human cognition as they have taken place over the last twenty years will focus primarily on the cusp of the present moment, meaning roughly the past decade (2015-2025), and detailed descriptions and qualitative analysis of an assortment of documents pertaining to this time period. The curiosities under examination—including patents, data protocols, white papers, and legal documents—will all obey the fundamental criterion of pertaining directly to the corporate entity most easily identifiable with the commodification of human language and thought: Alphabet (formerly Google, which is now its subsidiary—although the two will be used interchangeably). Special attention will be paid to the progression from things like sentiment analysis (Google Cloud 2022a) to machine learning (Google Cloud 2022b), and to the ways that the elaboration of keyword and query surveillance, information brokerage, and behavioural prediction are being integrated into ongoing projects involving large language models (Google, "Introducing Gemini", 2023).

The goal is to plot a rough trajectory from robust language data analysis of yesteryear to private-experiments-on-the-public using LLMs today and plans for the integration of so-called "AI" into this process. This will allow us to explain how a capitalist firm extracts cognitive rents, in which direction this practice is headed, and what sort of diagnosis befits its oppressive effects so that their malign effects may be used, in keeping with the transformative framework of this study, to subvert the entire process. In order to tie together this bundle of documents into one overarching roadmap of where Alphabet/Google have been, and where the cognitive rentiership industry is headed more broadly, a particular method is needed: the allegorical case study.

ChatGPT, Pseudo-Novelty, and Cognitive Labour

Before outlining the tools, it may be worth addressing the elephant in the thesis defence room: ChatGPT. OpenAI's recent large-language-model tool, which broke headlines (CITE) the world over on its public release, is not included in the LLM portion of this study for a number of reasons. Largely, the decision was made to exclude it because of a wager that the total interlocking network of practices in major capitalist firms that constitutes cognitive rentiership today is not itself reducible to this one novel artefact, which could perhaps otherwise have been construed as its technological culmination. And subsequently that cognitive rentiership exists as a kind of secondary effect of decades of unidirectional market activity within big capitalist tech firms like Google/Alphabet and cannot be separated from the segment of the global economy that Google/Alphabet both invented in their modern character, as vertically integrated conglomerates (Srinivasan, 2020), and still dominate at that infrastructural level today ("The Drum", 2023). That is, cognitive rentiership is part of a longitudinal process within corporate development characteristic of the "real subsumption" of cognitive labour, a process under which—as Marx emphasizes to the point of italicization in the Appendix to Capital—nothing changes technologically in a production process per se, but only in the arrangement of said process such that an intensification and maximization of socially unnecessary time spent (cognitively) labouring occurs (Marx, 1990, p. 1026, 1034-1035). This is a long way of saying that the formal subsumption of cognitive labour was practised in myriad and circuitous ways long before Google/Alphabet or their LLM 'Gemini' existed. But the real subsumption of this process, "irrespective of the state of its technological development", has led to a total capitalist capture of cognitive activity itself, featuring its "complete (and constantly repeated) revolution […] in the mode of production, in the productivity of the workers and in the relations between workers [read: thinkers] and capitalists", of which LLMs are but the newest minimum-capital-

growth transformation (Marx, 1990, p. 1035). This production for production's sake, as Marx refers to it, becomes under the real subsumption of cognitive labour the production of thoughts for the sake of marketing and commodity exchange, which retroactively crystalizes technological appendages, such as LLMs, as "indispensable" due to their access to greater margins of profitability (Marx, 1990, p. 1037).

Methods and Tools

The primary method employed in the investigative portion of this thesis is peculiar in two ways. First, there is the extrapolative method itself, seldom used (as far as this researcher can tell) of the 'allegorical' case study (Bailey, 2022; Stake, 1995), which treats the case study at hand as both definitive of, in this case, some particular operations of Google, and also *emblematic* of global trends in corporate capitalism and cognitive rentiership more broadly. The second peculiarity arises from how this method interfaces with the 'object of study', if we can use this clunky pre-Kantian terminology. The 'object' under investigation is both an-objective, in some sense, for much of it does not even exist yet (patents will be presented as an ultra-dystopian form of corporo-science-fiction literature, for example), and phenomenologically inaccessible, as it were. By this I mean to say that the protocols and data transfers under examination take place at such a remove from the phenomenological space of the internet user, and yet buttress the very illusion of infinite proximity that is the specialty and fetish of our technological epoch, that locating 'it' remains somewhat treacherous.

Rather than descend, in a repetition of Hui's (2016) work on digital objects, into the subdermal world of protocols and code, this inquiry will use the theories of Alfred Schütz, specifically his post-Weberian, post-Husserlian treatise *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (1967), to identify the presence and absence, appearance and disappearance, structure and

fluidity of a para-linguistic system that has utterly colonized what used to be called 'cyberspace', and in so doing implemented new frontiers of reification, ideological covering, and deflocculation, inhibiting the conditions necessary for the yielding of ideas that propose new orders, ideas that are able to adequately think their time.

The instrumental, qualitative nature of what, in an adoption of media scholar James Hay's terminology, we will refer to as an 'allegorical' case study (Bailey, 2022) still necessitates the hallmarks of a standard case study, including what Stake (1995) calls "progressive focusing", a practice whereby the 'case' at hand, for us, eventually narrows from a nebulous longitudinal survey of Google's patents (which are in the public domain), and cover a wide, imaginative variety of enhancements and alterations to their existing language extraction strategy, before shrinking down to focus on their upcoming, still somewhat secretive project called the Google Privacy Sandbox API (for which ongoing documentation is accessible through Google corporate blog posts and tech news reportage). This second process has the end goal of streamlining anonymized digital behaviour tracking from the *third-person cookies* of yesteryear to *first-person cohort membership* of tomorrow—a move that relies on a switch from probabilistic analysis to factual identification, and, so they have claimed, will be fully implemented at some point in 2024 (Amadeo, 2022a, 2022b; Google, "The Privacy Sandbox: Technology for a More Private Web", 2022). The primary interest here is how this API allows the funneling of linguistic capital to become maximally efficient in process (via artificial intelligence initiatives) and rich outcome (via sentiment analysis and behaviour prediction). Finally, there is the recent move towards large-language-models (LLMs) which will be analyzed in the context, as of July 2024, of Google's shift away from their "Bard" chatbot to what they call "the Gemini family of generative AI models", which are LLM-powered applications "[…] capable of processing information from

multiple modalities, including images, videos, and text" (Google Cloud, 2024). This move has been noted by tech journalists as a significant threat to OpenAI's ChatGPT, as Google's "vast array of proprietary training data […] taken across services, including Google Search, YouTube, Google Books, and Google Scholar" may provide it with what, in this context, I identify as a wellspring of free cognitive labour in the form of epiphylogenetic marks.

The case study's progressive focusing will in a sense travel backwards, then, from future to present (from patents, to promised novelty in data parsing methods, to live and running LLM practices). This three-step focusing will reveal a richer image of, in its barest sense, what our language is being made to do, and what one of the history's largest and richest corporate firms is choosing to do with it. This investigation will prove allegorical because, through the framing of the preceding theoretical chapters, it attempts to speak about Google's commodification of language as a parable revealing broader trends in the materiality of language under cybernetic capitalism. It does so on the grounds that Google may be appropriately taken as symbolic of a global transformation in the relationship between language and capital, and in turn the conditions of the possibility of thought itself.

Unlike the case study examples proffered in Stake's (1995) book, our case study obviously does not involve the observation of living persons or their data, but rather the 'behaviour', if we can anthropomorphize it as such, of an information technology corporation. Correspondingly, the observation will not be direct or 'experiential', but historical and documented, and the move from patents to sandboxed data protocols to our final focus on LLMs will provide an "aggregation of instances until something can be said about them as a class" (Stake, 1995, p. 74). The aggregation will form a 'case' possessing two tiers: a hypothesized system of cognitive rentiership, and its complementary technological assemblage. The latter,

which is itself the object of study (the former being but a projection that arises from its operation) belongs far outside the phenomenological realm of direct or even indirect observation, and so belongs to the *impersonal* fixtures of what Schütz calls the imaginary space of our "contemporaries", or that which is beyond the reach of "mutually *interlocked*" face-to-face rapport (Schütz, 1967, p, 179-180). Rappelling away from the dyad of the facial encounter in numbered steps, Schütz arrives as the following frigid altitudes which for all their inaccessibility are nevertheless undeniably omnipresent in our social world:

> "(6) collective entities which are by their very nature anonymous and of which I could never in principle have direct experience, such as 'state' and 'nation'; then (7) objective configurations of meaning which have been instituted in the world of my contemporaries and which live a kind of anonymous life of their own, such as the interstate commerce clause and the rules of French grammar; and finally (8) artifacts of any kind which bear witness to the subjective meaning-context of some unknown person" (Shutz, 1967, p. 180-181).

It is clear that the documents comprising the case study corpus—and the interpretation of said documents, as evidence for the existence of cognitive rentiership—belongs at once to a collective entity (Google) of which one cannot, de facto, have a direct 'experience', and belongs as well to configurations of technocapitalist meaning that "live a kind of anonymous life of their own" in both the automated, computational processing of language-thought, market valuation, etcetera, and finally generate artifacts for unknown witnesses in the Google corporate milieu who seemingly use the powers of the aforementioned layers to sell panoply services to eager customers in the arena of mass marketing (Schütz, 1967, p. 180-181). Shoshana Zuboff, in her famous tome, uses the concept of a digital "moat" to designate the use of "secrecy,

indecipherability, and expertise" that protect what she calls, in the chapter "The Moat Around the Castle", the "commodification of behavior under surveillance capitalism"—an image rich with Kafkian ambiguities (Zuboff, 2019, p. 133). In some sense we intend to use forensic analysis to peer behind this digital moat without ever actually stepping foot beyond its imposing edifice. Part of the goal is to understand how the "qualities" of Google's globally regnant communication technologies "[…] also scaffold knowledge and culture by making certain messages, which appear more compatible with those qualities, seem more plausible or resonant than others" as a means of constraining human cognition along capitalist lines, a tendency not too dissimilar from—though much more macroscopic, structural, and formalized—than Wendy Chun's notion of "homophily" (Chun, 2019; Evans, 2014, p. 142).

Data Processing

The actual process of data collection and analysis will obey a set of parameters to prevent it from becoming unruly. These will consist in "building a case" around a set of time constraints (the ten years 2015-2025), enumerating the number of elements that qualify for each case, and focusing on five exemplars as indicative of the case as a whole. For patents, an overview of Google's licensing behaviour will be followed by the careful gathering of all patents pertaining to language capture and processing (widely construed) which are then sorted for relevance to the topic at hand and analyzed both individually and as a whole. This will be followed by a total overview of all documents (likewise enumerated) relating to Google's privacy sandbox technology, followed by their analysis at granular and macroscopic levels. And lastly a total analysis of corporate documentation pertaining to really existing LLMs by Google/Alphabet. The cluster of analyses will paint a focused portrait, a "close-up" if you will, of the avowed activity that Google/Alphabet partakes in this domain, as well as their future intentions vis à vis language

capture. No specific form of discourse analysis applies, as the building of the case from a tower of possible documents is quite plainly journalistic at heart, and amount to little more than merely reporting, and then theoretically interpreting, the empirical facts of Google/Alphabet's process as they themselves lay it out for the public, often in painstaking, detailed, and mundane prose all across their websites and sub-domains. A finer level of language parsing, while amusingly imitative of Google/Alphabet's own activity, would, I believe, reveal nothing substantial about the matters that concern us here.

Some of the "foreshadowing questions" so vital to the launching of any case study are already clear (Stake, 1995, p. 9). They can be irrigated in a convenient list:

i. What is the relationship between digital reticular retentions and protentions, as Stiegler names them, and the singularity of an event, as Badiou names it, as they coincide in our current moment? That is to say, is the site of struggle for the political events-to-come and their truth procedures actually located in, or intimately entangled with, the current capitalist synchronization of the means of cognition with capitalist computation?

ii. If this entanglement indeed exists, what are the prospects regarding either its incubation of, or its prohibition of, the emergence of what we have called a new communism, given that capitalist oligarchs dictate the terms of their entanglement?

iii. Since knowledge is "the power to produce bifurcations that do not destroy access to those previous bifurcations that are the collective secondary retentions whose accumulation forms knowledge", and, simultaneously, only the power of social individuation or fidelity-to-truth via "the incalculable" can break free of the "disruptive chaos" of capitalism (that is, can bifurcate away from the ideology of

inevitable calamity and catastrophe), then what kind of politics can emerge that do not merely privilege the technical over the political (as in both cyberneticism and luddism) nor ignore the massive change in the conditions of the computational world in which the appearance of events now coincides? (Stiegler, 2019, p. 42, 44, 46).

iv. Subsequently we must ask, following Badiou (2023), that if "[…] the wellspring of politics is not right away antagonistic confrontation, but the continuous investigation, in situ, of the ideas, slogans and initiatives capable of bringing to life locally the existence of two roads […]"—a bifurcation—"[…] one of which is the conservation of what exists, the other its complete transformation according to egalitarian principles" and the name of this bifurcation is "mass work", then what is the current fate of this mass protentional working? Another way of putting this is: how does a communism become thinkable again in post-industrial societies? To answer this, we need to know exactly what kind of world-historical morass we find ourselves in—and what strategy we might adopt to pull ourselves out of it—if it is indeed the case, as this study will attempt to confirm, that the bulk of global protentional working—indeed the bulk of gargantuan mass protentional thought—serves the private interests of capitalist barons and their elite shareholders?

v. Lastly, and in a much more mundane register, this case study should help us figure out what degree of connection exists between the patents, data tracking protocols, and LLM practises on the horizon for Google.

It is clear that many more questions will arise over the course of the case study itself, and will be summarily answered in the conclusion chapter, if not in passing during the study proper. But these five will help guide our step from patents to data sandboxes to LLMs, and the picture

that will emerge of what is, up to the time of my writing, the most elaborate and lucrative system of cognitive rentiership in human history.

Mind the Gap: A Political-Economic Lacuna

It is worth noting at this juncture that the degree of separation between the preceding theoretical chapters and the following empirical chapter. The former deal heavily in the relationship between politics and language, and language and technics, respectively, while the chapter to follow deals almost exclusively with the political economy of language data as localized in Google primary business venture. The ideal way to join these—the measuring of the ripples of a truth procedure's digital protentions through Google's informational infrastructure and the way this movement is captured by the advertising industry and thus ideologically diffused—remains frustratingly blocked off. On the one hand there is a historical barrier: which political truth procedures to follow in this age, to paraphrase Breton (1994, p. 89), of sparks without powder kegs? Secondly, there is the opacity of the inner workings of Google's vast labyrinth of linguistic capital, the fine-grain details of which are industry secrets inaccessible to the real-time tracking of a curious academic.

In light of these two stoppages, which form a sort of political-economic gap between the thesis up until now and the case study that follows, we are forced to seek recourse in syllogism. The theoretical chapters argued that any true emancipatory politics uses the information-seeking curiosity of discursive reason to regulate their internal criteria of goal-oriented behaviour, and that today this use of language includes a whole host of technologies that both enable and surveil digital writing. The subsequent allegorical case study seeks to validate the claim that the ultimate conditioning factor of this host of technologies in our century, for which Google is the historical emblem and paragon, is the prerogative to transform data about information-seeking, curiosity-

pursuing language into profit. The historical track record of this process, its operational contours in the present, and the future-oriented structure of language-data valorization is not hidden away (neither its efficacy nor its connection to the thoughts and desires of living human beings) as these are in fact its biggest selling points as a subsidiary of Alphabet.

Accordingly, the syllogism offered at this point of the thesis is as follows: the processes that seek to regenerate the horizon of emancipatory politics today will include routine investigation into worldly affairs in the form of curiosity expressed by digital writing; that digital writing is captured and surveilled on a mass scale by a behemoth of monopoly capital in order to reify economic oppression (Fung, 2024); therefore the attempted rejuvenation of emancipatory politics today either forfeits bottom-up composition from masses engaged in capitalist-instrumentalized internet searching or consents to this capture at the cost of further reifying economic oppression through digital synchronization. These are what in medieval philosophy would be referred to as 'repugnant' conclusions. Nevertheless, they map out a real technopolitical bind between the obliteration of language into a digital resource influencing economies of advertising at scale, and the necessity of digital writing in the groundswell of flocculation that will reckon with our present conjuncture. The space between these two contradictory vectors of autonomy and oppression, and the power differential that they reproduce, opens the space of ideology. It is not coincidental, perhaps, that this conflict between cognitive emergence and economic capture mirrors the gap between superstructure and base in classical Marxism.

By mapping out the details of Google's past, present, and future as an agent of linguistic capital, it is hoped that we can glimpse the cracks and fissures of its plans for linguistic capital as it heads into its third decade of global dominance. These may be the places where the destruction

of its architecture can give way to the positive feedback loops of a political truth procedure, the reference points and predicates of which are, in this reactionary interregnum, still undecided.

Chapter Five: An Allegorical Case Study of Google's Industrialization of Language

"Why are we endowed with somewhat more reason than animals?" (Schmidt, 1997 [1954], p. 23).

"The autonomy of reason is disappearing [...]" (Adorno, 2000, p. 45).

The question 'what does Google want with my language?' has no straightforward answer, because it exposes a puzzling rift between capitalist ideology (advocating the private ownership of the means of production, the inheritance of property and accumulated wealth, the zero-sum competition for the world's finite resources, general economic disequilibrium, the exploitation of waged labour, class oppression, and so on and so on) and the world itself as, we could put it, "the sum total of all objects of experience" (Kant, 1996, p. 10). The rift between these two is precisely that between capital and being, between the saturation of the world by specific relations of production and what Vološinov calls the "sociological structure" of the utterance (1986, p. 98).

In pragmatic terms, the ostensible reasons why Google wants to collect my and your language are proffered freely by their corporate media apparatus in a decades-spanning and highly disorganized collection of documents. As Prior (2011) points out, documents manufacture facts and therefore act as "agents" in the sense that after their production, and before their consumption or manipulation, they extend and preserve the referentiality of certain statements, imbuing them, usually through the fabrication of justifications, with an ontological facticity (p. 346). Documents—patents, press releases, developer memos—make the world as much as the inventions, product launches, and developer tools they engender. This is how we will pronounce the dual character of the variety of documents (patent filings, web pages, public announcements, developer notes) here under study: they promise the ability to meet corporate needs and testify to

the invention of all-new capacities while also, inadvertently of course, revealing to critical eyes a codification of corporate desire expressed through the actual and future-intended development of their methods of extractive data-capture.

What is most significant about the following scan of the patents, policies, and cutting edge AI-tools used in Google's language-thought extraction (which can be abstracted as a general model of cognitive rentiership at an industrial scale) is the discursive vacuum it creates around the relation of language to commodities, of common notions of privacy, and especially of 'intelligence'. Not only is this vacuum indicative of the rift between the inaccessible infinity of capital and the communal actuality of symbolic life, but it also creates a difficult problem of what I want to call 'factitious productivity' (Badiou, 2022, p. 89). Factitious productivity is similar to the definition of "gimmick" offered by Ngai (2020) as "overrated devices that strike us as working too little (labor-saving tricks) but also as working too hard (strained efforts to get our attention)", with strong overlap on the aesthetic dimension where the requirements of public relations mean that "techniques applied to resolve a conflict between form and content become unduly conspicuous" (p. 1, 112).

The case studies below show in three distinct blocks how Google positions itself in a discursive space where signification is drained of meaning and yet where their gimmicks remain immensely effective (in the sense that they are successful at valorizing language data as capital). The next step is to show how the gap or disjuncture between these two planes—the discursive and the mutely political-economic—are sutured together through the fact that Google's political economy is comprised of the discursive *tel quel*.

Building Our Case

As the previous chapter indicated, the progressive focusing of our analysis will flow from patents to new anti-cookie data parsing methods to current LLM practices in an attempt to detect a pattern that appears in aggregate across the interlocking system of Google's capitalist enterprise over the last five years (2020-2025). This tripartite case building will flesh out the empirical basis of the technological assemblage that exists to facilitate cognitive rentiership, and which in its moving contradiction alienates—perhaps irremediably—the technical means of mass human cognition from human thinkers. This matters of course because our alienation from our technical means of cognition will only exacerbate our alienation from our ability to alter history. It is therefore the 'slogan' of this chapter, and perhaps of this thesis as a whole, that the privatization of thought is the privation of thought.

To understand what the disalienation of the technical means of cognition would entail, we must first grasp that "[r]ent is the main capturing tool of both surplus value and the de-socialization/privatization of what is common" (Fumagalli, 2011, p. 9). This claim, coming from the Italian post-*Operaismo* school, not only juxtaposes the common to the private in an orthodox Marxist sense, but, borrowing freely from Marx's *Grundrisse* (1973), reveals the broader economic context of our forthcoming examination of Google patents, privacy programs, and industrialized language surveillance. This context includes the fact that "intellectual property rights keep the costs of commodities artificially high that have reproduction costs of close to zero" (Fumagalli, 2011, pp. 9-10). There is something of a transference from this logic of patents to the technical infrastructure of cognition in the twenty-first century, furnished as it is by capitalist firms such as Google. Cognitive rentiership parasitizes and valorizes, for a reproduction cost that is close to zero—especially relative to the revenue extracted from artificially high pricing (Hwang, 2020)—something that is indeed common to us all: language.

The baskets that our three cases in this case study will fall into can be seen as outlining the structures of what Rikap (2021) calls "monopoly capitalism". In her text *Capitalism, Power and Innovation: Intellectual Monopoly Capitalism Uncovered* (2021), Rikap focuses on the "capitalist planning of production and innovation" that takes place outside the regular confines of the market as we are able to access it:

> "We define planning as the capacity of certain firms to organize long-term capital accumulation beyond their legally owned capital. Intellectual monopolies plan the production and innovation processes of subordinated firms and other organizations (such as universities and public research organizations) by directly controlling management's critical parameters. They also define R&D agendas, clauses of exclusivity, commercial credit conditions, quality standards and other regulatory matters" (Rikap, 2021, p. 11)

Rikap goes on to describe a kind of "predation" that occurs by stealing what "actors participating in [corporations'] innovation networks" produce, and increasingly in a way that is "data driven" (p. 11). Our radiation-imagery of Google's business model via its public documentation shows that this is precisely the logic guiding their monopolistic practices, with the notable difference that the 'object' of 'research and development' that they pillage is in some sense the technical supports of the social field itself. Indeed, Google maintains "a vicious circle where they keep the exclusive access to new sources of centralized data that are processed and analysed — at least in part — with knowledge that was produced as a commons" and with the end goal of privately monetizing this knowledge (Rikap, 2021, p. 11). It is appropriate to discuss this in terms of what Rikap calls a "global value chain" (GVC) wherein corporate profits are derived from "[…] intellectual rents extracted from their global innovation networks" (Rikap, 2021, p. 14). The purpose of this chapter will be to demonstrate that it is neither absurd nor

inaccurate to claim that Google and its ilk "[…] sabotage society by privately monetizing intangible goods" and that "[the] more their rents grow, the more the rest of the world will be deprived of access to knowledge and of a greater portion of the total value produced" by such social knowledge (Rikap, 2021, pp. 14-15).

The preparation of the Lacanian symbolic (Fink, 2017) as a new region for capital accumulation is permitted precisely because biocognitive forms of labour are valorizable as mere ghastly extensions of an entire system of commodification that precedes them. Language was not commodified overnight. As far as new developments of capitalism go, however, this latest proves rather tricky to conceptualize for a number of reasons, some of which are helped by the empirical analysis below. The difficulty lies in the social nature of language and its relation to ideology. As Vološinov (1986) explains:

> "Countless ideological threads running through all areas of social intercourse register effects in the world. It stands to reason, then, that the word is the most sensitive *index of social changes*, and what is more, of changes still in the process of growth, still without definitive shape and not as yet accommodated into already regularized and fully defined ideological systems" (p. 19).

The growth, potentiality, and shapelessness of unregularized and undefined cognition that 'the word' indexes complicates the relation of ideology to the productive-economic 'real' that operates behind the back of human consciousness. The economic integration of language-thought into the productive apparatus supplements a pre-existing second-order relation to the conditions of existence (one's relation to the means of production, as owner or as worker) that classically defined ideology (Althusser, 1971). The following sketches an emergent and materially real (which is to say economically productive) second-order relation that through entirely novel

methods (and after two decades, increasingly refined ones too) directly binds our spontaneous ideological relation to the capitalist organization of production (through representations, symbols, language etc) to these forces of production themselves. The material fact of our cognition—its transmissibility being the only proof of its existence (Davidson, 2008)—is swept into the production process, including with it the cognition *of* that very material existence of the second-order relation itself. In a sense, the elaboration of language surveillance for profit opens the possibility of the indefinite autoimmunization of capital to communist criticisms of capitalist ideology insofar as it valorizes the very thinking entailed in those criticisms; off-stage, the revenge of Marx against Hegel continues noisily.

This perfect clasp, when offloaded to so-called 'AI' (which is neither intelligent nor artificial[23] but can automate the covering-over process) obviously undermines the sharpening of consciousnesses that liberalism once pretended, in its hymns to individual freedom, was so vitally important. With either regressive liberalism or the fortunes of socialism in mind, this attack on the material conditions of our means of cognition presents us with a rather time-sensitive challenge: how are we to ensure that it is possible to imagine and think our relationship to our own material existence amid such a technological situation? Or will capitalism dig its own grave, and in the total instrumentalization of the substance of symbolic interpellation tarnish even its generation of supple and spontaneous ideological forms, inadvertently destroying the essential nature of the very thing (language) that has hitherto (by indexing the social) been used to accommodate the deterioration of material conditions? Is cognitive rentiership, in other words, a self-destructive supra-ideological apparatus? Some of these questions we will save for the

[23] Landgrebe and Smith (2025) have argued that software emulation of our neurocognitive systems, which are the only types of artificial general intelligence that we know of, is impossible because one cannot create predictive mathematical models for complex systems.

concluding chapter, the rest will be broached, after a preamble on patents as means of production, during three sections: (1) A Brief Survey of Google Patents Pertaining to Cognitive Rentiership; (2) Third Party Cookies Hit the Beach: The Death of Privacy Sandboxes; (3) Google Gemini and LLMs.

Patents and Legal Ideology

Edelman's magisterial *Ownership of the Image: Elements for a Marxist Theory of Law* (1979) begins its attack on juridical ideology—of which the temporary monopolies granted by legal patents are an outgrowth—by questioning an old republican presupposition that has remained untouched in the long history of liberalism, and is perhaps best expressed in Benjamin Constant's assertion that "the enjoyment of property" is not only a bulwark against statist tyranny, and not only the very "precondition for the improvement of all the arts and sciences", but most of all a guarantor of biopolitical emancipation (1988, p. 261, 263). As Constant claims: "Contempt for the property of men is soon followed by contempt for their security and their lives" (1988, p. 264). Feminist and Marxist criticism notwithstanding (though both are perfectly justifiable in face of such a proclamation), it is worth noticing, like Edelman, the deep ideological effect at work. For early thinkers of liberalism, life itself, and the guarantee of its continuance, hinges on the maintenance of property relations. It is no coincidence then that life in a society—here meaning legal personhood—has since the abolition of slavery been defined by this same property relation, and, as Edelman (1979) brilliantly uncovers, has interpellated human beings (always-already) into legal-subjecthood on the basis of self-ownership (p. 29). What links Constant's adamant biopolitical anxiety anent private property to the general regime of human rights is that "[t]he freedom to acquire is the juridical consequence of the free ownership of oneself" (Edelman, 1979, p. 29).

Therefore, when Constant, in his famous lecture "The Liberty of The Ancients Compared With That of The Moderns" says "Every time collective power wishes to meddle with private speculations, it harasses the speculators. Every time governments pretend to do our own business, they do it more incompetently and expensively than we would", or when he boldly asserts before the audience at the Athénée Royal that "Individual independence is the first need of the moderns: consequently one must never require from them any sacrifices to establish political liberty", he not only peddles individualist mythologies but also articulates the crucial logical antagonism of a legal ideology that ties all liberty to ownership, though he knows not the source of this association (1988, p. 315).

The "juridical source of the sacred and the eternal" that underpins the "juridical production of the real" and thus the identification of liberty with ownership, and their ecstatic union in authorship, is none other than the tautology that, through the exertion of labour power (which we all individually 'own'), "property has demonstrated property" (Edelman, 1979, p. 38, 41). This dubious formula is further complicated—and made discursively unquestionable—by the fact that "the law presents the amazing 'paradox' of sanctioning its own ideology by force" (Edelman, 1979, p. 22).

Why does it matter that juridical ideology is tautological? We must now consider the case of technological patents, what they claim and by what authority, and moreover how this process is indissociable from the alienation of human cognition, how it in fact is not an ancillary buttress to that barbarizing tendency, but a constitutive element. This involution is the result of the patents in question being at once privatized and appropriated products of human labour in form, and in their content elaborating new methods for the formal and real subsumption of symbolic (cognitive-linguistic) labour. Here we face a crossroads: to what extent are my thoughts the

products of 'my' mind to begin with, and to what extent and on what basis do I claim ownership over their existence and the process of their emission, so as to then claim wrongdoing at the exploitation of this process? Edelman broaches this problematic cleverly when contemplating photography: "In order 'intellectually' to appropriate what belongs to everyone, I must not reproduce it, for then I shall do no more than expose what belongs to everyone, but I must produce it" (Edelman, 1979, p. 43). The same is true of language under capitalism, which is except in rare cases held in common, and to be appropriated must pretend to be 'produced' anew as data rather than simply reproduced. It is therefore necessary, without straying too far from our path, to revisit the question of the production of language-thought, this time considered in the domain of formal and real subsumption. We must scrutinize the ideology of productivity itself as a framework for understanding what it is that language does, and how it is that a world is being fashioned wherein "the subject can have self-affirmation only through the mediation of a technique which permits his investing himself in the real and his making it his private domain", or in other words a world in which the possession and ownership of the artifacts of technologically-mediated language delimits both subjecthood and cognitive labour-power as expressions of the privatization of language-thought (Edelman, 1979, p. 51).

Althusser and Cognitive Modes of Production

When disaggregating modes of production into their constituent parts, as Althusser does in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* (2014), we arrive at three basic components: a 'natural' object of labour, an instrument or tool of production, and the "agents of production", better known as those who possess labour-power, the capacity to use the aforementioned tool on the aforementioned object (2014, p. 25). However, Althusser goes to great lengths to explain to us that, this crude Stalinist formula or 'sum' is, as Hegel warned of all such lists, "just a sum"

(Althusser, 2014, p. 26). To extricate ourselves from this brutish summation, we need to discern their "specific unity" or conjunction which "for each mode of production, organizes its productive forces in specific forms" (Althusser, 2014, p. 26). For Althusser, the relations of production grant the organizational principle that determines when and how and why productive forces become operational, and this relation is determinant in the "base" of a classical Marxist base/superstructure dyad (2014, p. 21). In capitalism, these relations of production exist between "agents of production", or workers, and "personages *who are not agents of production*" yet who intervene and supervise production, also known as owners (p. 27, italics original). That division itself is nothing revelatory, but for us, it is the transference of these relations into the domain of human-computer interaction in order to extract a surplus quotient of cognitive-symbolic labour that remains of interest.

We are immediately thrown into a traditionally Marxist problem of political economy, because cognition as language, language-thought, *langage-au-generique*, is universally human, and therefore belongs *a-priori* to everyone. And, likewise, there exists intellectual property law. And from the latter there springs a system of patents authorized to not only sanction the tautological ideology of individual self-ownership, but to licence the protection of means of parasitically harvesting the work of thought in a way that any legal positivist would acknowledge as perfectly in accord with capitalist norms—norms which they may nevertheless still be unable to identify as economically coalescing behind the backs of constitutional framers and subsequent amenders, so firm is our world's prevailing belief in the everlasting bedrock of private property's subjective autodemonstration.

As Edelman (1979) points out, it is in cinema that we discover how producers—the financiers of motion pictures—become the owners of creative productions that they themselves

do not create, and how the idea that "the true creative subject is capital" enters the fray (p. 57). Edelman goes on: "Capital becomes the very person it interpellates. Capital assumes the mask of the subject, it is animated, it speaks and it signs contracts. Capital cannot do without its beloved subject in law, since the subject in law is its subject" (1979, p. 57). This personification of capital—not a foolish Marxist hallucination, but a capitalist juridical fantasy—allows us to grasp finally how the originary relations of production, which as Althusser reminds us are not reducible either to entirely "technicist-economistic" or "legalistic" interpretations but always to their *unity* as "the bourgeois ideology of the capitalist class struggle", always find their newest elaboration in legal-technical-economic knots that 'develop' relations of production within the pen of the "economistic-technicist-legal-humanist-bourgeois ideology of work" (Althusser, 2014, p. 46). As yet very little in human existence has proven totally immune from this capitalist overcoding, hence the socialist ambition of finding a way to abolish or revert such overcoding entirely, rather than partaking in pacifying, piecemeal reforms to either its legalistic or technicist-economistic components.

Cognitive rentiership allows us to look at corporate language-data processing as so many instances of capital itself speaking: in patents capital speaks doubly, both for itself and for the patenting process. When the process speaks, and capital attains simulacral self-consciousness, there ceases to be a difference for it between the inside and the outside of the process of valorization. In other words, there is no way to back-out of the process of valorization. This is why, when we ask what it would mean to call patents themselves a 'mode of production', we quickly realize that what the patents enable matters as much as the system of patenting itself particularly where the ownership of the fruits of cognitive labour are concerned. The two go hand in hand such that in the absence of an ur-patent, a patent of all patents, and in the flux of

technical-economic construction, one can only sigh and consent that the master trope of capitalism is and remains metonymy, which is to say forced substitution, or theft. Here we can pause for breath before we launch into our first case study.

Patents as a Mode of Production

Let us recall the Fumagalli (2011) quote from earlier, namely that "Rent is the main capturing tool of both surplus value and the de-socialization/privatization of what is common" (p. 9). Putting aside the enormous debates surrounding precisely this claim, and the theoretical commitments that we may or may not want to honour at this time, we can admit that rent is at the very least a particularly enduring form of surplus-value capture and de-socialization, which is to say is it one of the most enduring forms of actually existing anti-communism.

In the domain of patents and intellectual property law its effects are particularly pernicious as, to remind ourselves again, "intellectual property rights keep the costs of commodities artificially high that have reproduction costs of close to zero" (Fumagalli, 2011, pp. 9-10). The patent system emerges then as a method for big tech giants to continually invent and enable legally sanctioned forms of rent-seeking. At the same time, the patent system (as compared to the data-tracking and LLM systems we will analyze later) is the most vulnerable area of a company like Google's capitalist ecosystem. This is because, prior to the experimental implementation of what a patent describes, all that is at stake is a highly intertextual game of adjudging novelty and hypothetical worth, and therefore, as Foscarini (2019) points out in her literary analysis of patents, "the patent genre system appears […] to be eminently rhetorical" (p. 51). Their rhetoric is nevertheless an essential component of this ecosystem because of the temporary monopoly they grant on extremely profitable forms of value extraction.

I. A Brief Survey of Google Patents Pertaining to Cognitive Rentiership

One of the most notable patents assigned to Google in 2008, granted in 2013, and with an adjusted expiration date of Jan 6, 2030, bears the title "Using previous user search query to target advertisements" (Datar and Bayardo, 2013). The summary of the patent's main function reads as follows:

> "In order to better target advertisements that are relevant to the meaning of a search query, it is proposed to use the previous query, in addition to the current query, to target ads, as many search queries are preceded by other queries that may be relevant to the purpose of the current query" (Datar and Bayardo, 2013).

Mobilizing the accumulated history of each user's search queries to match them to advertisements and extending this recursive process indefinitely into the past (and future) has long been recognized as the foundation of Google's rise as a capitalist firm in the technology sector. As Google's "How our business works" page testifies: "While we sell things like Pixel phones, apps on the Play Store, YouTube subscriptions, and tools for businesses, we make the vast majority of our money from advertising" (Google, 2025a). It also gives us a classic example of how patents anticipate and petrify novel extensions of existing extractive processes in advance—in order to fight against tendentially falling rates of profit—by legally enshrining one's right to ownership over the data associated with the language-thought that passes through a digital systems' infrastructure. Patents—in their strange and at times "worthless" variety—interest us as ideological documents that consecrate under relations of class division and social warfare what Althusser refers to as the complex "unity" of factors: an "object of labour", some "instruments of production", and "agents of production" (Althusser, 2014, p. 25; Moore, 2005).

The ideological element of these patents thus emerges quite plainly from their pre-selected ends. These technologies are developed for one ultimate purpose, and for one ultimate aim: the continued extraction of capital. This means that no patent related to language data collection and parsing, even if not explicitly designed for ad delivery, falls outside the scope of that enterprise and the relations of production we are calling cognitive rentiership. That said, in many of the recent examples selected below, the connection to exploitation, to 'selling off' language-thought, is hardly implicit. Let us take a brief tour now through five examples, all from within the last couple of years (2023-2025), all with Google as their assignee or legal owner.

Exhibit 1: "System And Method For Restricting Traffic Based On Brands Specified In A Campaign"

This patent, filed in February of 2024 with Google LLC as its applicant, and internationally credited to three inventors across California and Bangalore, has a peculiar yet typical function that like so many of Google's investments in intellectual property focuses on the refinement of the advert-delivery system subvening their entire enterprise. The process here has five steps: "digital content providers" submit a brand campaign dossier specifying the desired parameters of ad delivery inclusion or exclusion for one or more concurrent ad campaigns (Kamarajugadda et al., 2024); a "publisher"—appearing increasingly on any screen or object connected to the internet (Sadowski, 2020)—launches a request for ad display based on specific search queries to derive a portion of ad revenue; a brand is matched to the publisher based on search-query associations; a single campaign from said brand is selected according to thematic proximity to query; web traffic for said queries is directed to at least this one matched campaign and the digital content provider hosting their advertising, thus interconnecting user, brand, and publisher through one feedbacking system entirely hosted by Google. From a business

perspective, this allows brands to curate and filter the kinds of searches they appear in as well as the downstream ad placements from said searches, with exclusion rules allowing for a high degree of self-censorship to avoid association with undesirable terms (and sometimes to avoid confusion with similarly named brands in different industries—the test case in the patent filing includes an example of disambiguating a plumbing service from a footwear company that share similar search terms).

This patent's novelty is primarily reorganizational: the proposed innovation is to make the site of language processing, as indicated in Kamarajugadda et al.'s (2024) diagram in figure 7 of the filing, the intermediary between brand campaign creation, digital content requests, and the matching of them both with each other, where language processing is defined as everything from correcting spelling errors to identifying synonyms or keywords (Kamarajugadda et al.'s, 2024, p. 4, para. [0046]) This de facto automates the matching process of search query terms with "associated products and services" (Kamarajugadda et al., 2024, p. 1). The ranking of the accuracy of this matching process is also suggested, as is the maintaining of its correspondence with a brand library detailing active products and services, and the "selection [of] a selected campaign of one or more candidate campaigns" in order to then provide to some web or app publisher "a sponsored digital content item" associated with said "selected campaign" as it is ignited into action by a search query (Kamarajugadda et al., 2024, p. 2, para. [0008]).

There are two things about this patent process that we should keep in mind going forward: first, the tendency towards the automation of decision making (in this case the manual labelling of key terms is displaced by a self-refining, automated identification system based entirely around *the historical relation between language and commodities*; and second, consequent of the first, the fact that search queries and keywords are the entire anchor of this

mode of production. What does this mode of production 'make'? It makes consumer-blocs out of populations of internet users who interact with a search engine and offers access to these blocs in continually updating and conveniently datafied form for a fee. How does it make these blocs? As this patent has nicely revealed to us, it is by uniting the productive forces of ordinary people who furnish Google with their curiosity in the form of language by searching for something with their laptops, smartphones, or any other computerized object, and the capitalist relations of production under which there is a need for such a thing as the advertising industry. This meta-service of unifying productive forces with specific relations of production, of integrating them into a restless circuit of valorization, happens for a price, which is the source of Google's immense profit margins, as their packaging of data ultimately matters much less than the socius they isolate, identify, and sell to bidders. This determinant factor is also what makes Google a corporate rentier.

Exhibit 2: "Automatic Association Of Products And Services To Be Advertised With Queries Upon Which To Advertise Them, Without Manual Selection Of Query Terms"

This patent, assigned to Google in 2022, is a spiritual precursor to the first patent we looked at, and deals with the same epistemological conundrum: how to match search queries to ads, and index this matching to sell audiences to ad campaigns, and implicitly—though the 'why' of this ordeal is purposefully, ideologically, omitted—to grease the wheels of consumer culture so that things made by humans (largely in the global periphery) made be sold for a profit by the expropriation of surplus value. In this patent we see Google's role as matchmaker flourish into the integration of existing labour channels with the burgeoning commodification of human curiosity itself.

The bold promise of this patent, similarly to the prior one, is to keyword-match queries to commodities without the advertiser going through the cumbersome task of thinking up these connections themselves, and to automate this pairing. The suggestion in paragraph 8 that "A trained machine learning model may generate the ad server generated keywords" (Sheth et al., 2024, p.1, para. [0008]) only scratches the surface of what Marazzi (2011) identifies as the classic move of post-Fordist regimes, namely the commanding of production by effective sales (Marazzi, 2011, p. 22). Here the unsanctioned sale of symbolic activity (anyone's use of Google search), in exchange for retrieving website referrals, commands automated ad allocation and the downstream purchase of ad delivery such that the retrieval of information costs the user an ungarnished wage in a symbolic-cognitive marketplace. This "absence of economic compensation for communicative-relational activities" facilitates the productivity of internet advertising tout court (Marazzi, 2011, p. 55). It also offers a glimpse at how the integration of users into cycles of commodity fetishism occurs at an increasingly molecular level: we must start asking ourselves what it means for every search query, every human utterance recorded by the most popular search engine in the world (as of February 2025 Google has a 94.8% market share of organic search engine traffic) to be automatically matched to an advertised commodity. (Khromova & Kotsiubynska, 2025). Are we aware of just what kind of fantastical degree of reification this represents? Let us move on to our third exhibit.

Exhibit 3: "Processing natural language using machine learning to determine slot values based on slot descriptors"

Now that we have analyzed two more or less standard language-commodity pipeline patents from recent years, which, as already established, largely seek to refine, extend, or automate existing rent-seeking and value-extraction processes, it behooves us to broaden our

scope slightly to include patents pertaining the language processing in general, which as of 2023 has increasingly meant the fusion of natural language processing with machine learning, and neural network models specifically. The patent under view here is designed, as the background description explains, for the context of an "automated assistant" (also known as a "personal assistant" or "mobile assistant") that "may be interacted with by a user via a variety of client devices, such as smart phones, tablet computers, wearable devices, automobile systems, standalone personal assistant devices, and so forth" (Bapna and Heck, 2023, p. 12, para. 1). The complex of filters, feed, tokening, and training diagrammed in this patent—the main principles of which are enumerated in Amaratunga's *Understanding Large Language Models: Learning Their Underlying Concepts and Technologies* (2023)—amount in this instance to the assigning of "slot value(s)" for this neural network tissue to anchor "agent command[s]" aimed at automated assistants tasked with triangulating these with third party agents; the example proffered is of booking a reservation at a café for a specific time such that the café and user both receive automated confirmation (Bapna and Heck, 2023, p. 9, fig. 7; p. 12, para. 3). The self-refining and gain-of-flexibility of this natural language tokening process, the 'slotting' it is premised on, all strives (as their café example indicates) after a union of "human-to-automated assistant dialog" and commerce (Bapna and Heck, 2023, p. 15). All manner of efficiency and redundancy is suggested across the patent's fourteen total claims, largely hinging on accurate tokening and responsiveness, but the invention itself remains eminently compatible with Google's overall mission of using language processing to solder into place a profitable language-commodity circuit in which all speech becomes hypothetically profitable and is exchanged daily as a rental fee for convenient internet browsing. The enclosure of the commons that this entails, and the power and leverage it affords to companies like Google, has been analyzed recently in

Pasquinelli's *Eye of the Master* (2023). Before delving into his argument there, let us look at a couple more patents recently assigned to Google so as to round off our understanding of the firm's vision for its possible technofutures.

Exhibit 4: Integrating User Declarations in Ads Personalization

One of Google's most interesting recent acquisitions tries to explode ad personalization profiles for Google users by merging declared and *inferred* consumption preferences (Erbiceanu-Tener et al., 2025, fig. 8). The resulting "merged preference profile" tries to solve a 'problem' that the inventors fail to realize is unsolvable without killing the social existence that it depends upon. This is because "being provided with advertisements that do not necessarily align with" the preferences of users is the necessary precursor to the capture of new advertising markets; without this the advertising industry cannot grow (Erbiceanu-Tener et al., 2025, p. 13, para. [0001]). Indeed, if declared and inferred preferences were identical, or, to put it another way, all advertisements were guaranteed to align with user preferences, a fatal stasis would overtake the advertising industry, which requires the simultaneous discovery and generation of new market segments, new personas, new audiences. This method and movement of de- and re-territorializing a consumer-bloc is exemplified in Coulter's (2014) analysis of Playboy magazine's 'suave' man-as-consumer in postwar America, a persona and marketing segment that was simultaneously discovered and invented.

Contiguity between advertiser and consumer is not really the goal. This is not only because the spontaneity of human beings is irreducible—so far—to what the invisible hand of the market can grasp at any moment, but also because such an 'alignment' would mean the functional end of preferences *tout court*, and the final victory of advertising as propaganda: a competition over the direct instruction of desire in the name of profit, and the tumbling rates of

profit to follow. What a patent like this is really after is a tether, a way to reliably chase after social errancy and deviation. Putting aside the issue of whether or not consumptive desire can even be 'declared' in a meaningful way, and whether or not it can be 'inferred' by automated corporate systems (as if they were Bernaysian psychoanalytic machines), we still have to face up to the pragmatic force of what Google means when they say 'inferred' preferences, and why they would be interested in this type of patent—what kind of *fantasy* (to borrow a term that my colleague Alessandro Delfanti and I have been using lately) it promises. In their patent filing, Erbiceanu-Tener et al. (2025) mention that inference is based on "a user's interaction with content", an amorphous phrase, typical of these documents, that means everything from search queries, to clicks, to "hovering" a cursor over specific content, to the actual viewing of ads in video and gif format (p. 17, paras. [0047-0053]). Conflicting preferences will be resolved using recency of declaration or inference, as a way of hierarchizing these inputs based on temporal weight, or a closest correspondence to the present state of mind of each of the millions unwittingly engaging with Google's advertisement architecture—and barring this, the combination of data points to infer a context in which preference-priority can be ascertained is also possible (Erbiceanu-Tener et al., 2025, p. 17, paras. [0047-0053, 0060]). Whatever your true desire as a consumer, rest assured there is a way to make it legible to the digital advertising machine.

Exhibit 5: Retrieval Token Generation From Queries Using Language Model

We arrive at last at the latest kind of innovation that seeks to surpass the basic automation of preexisting language query processes by introducing a new qualitative step, as made possible by large language models (LLMs) (Gergov et al., 2024). As the abstract from Gergov et al. (2024) explains, this patent's purpose is to train LLMs to "predict generalizations from public queries"

and then use such generalizations to "generate retrieval tokens for annotating the public queries". On it surface, this appears as nothing more than an efficiency tool for Google's search query system that can map and organize tokens (in this case search terms and phrases) with documents (in this case ad copy, broadly construed) and tighten the relationship they have to the "serving" of "digital content" (Gergov et al., 2024, p. 1, para. [0002]). However, training an LLM on public queries to generate retrieval tokens that are specifically used to "return public queries at run time" rather than in a detached predictive manner means that not only will 'hallucinations' likely not be reduced, but the "existing corpus of public queries and associated retrieval tokens" becomes recursively integrated into the sharpening of Google's "service apparatus" which, as we have already established ad nauseam, is ultimately anchored to nothing besides "an advertising service"—there is no functional reason for their business to exist, no reason to pursue LLM technologies, without this (Gregov et al., 2024, p. 4, paras. [0023-0025, 0088]). Putting aside for the time being the details of how 'generalization' works in the context of n-grams, it is enough to show how this process—more hypothetical in 2024 than it is in 2025 at the time of this writing—amounts to a total deracination of language from the human context it originates from (Gregov et al., 2024, p. 26). This will be a recurring theme in the analyses to follow: the myriad ways to deracinate language into something machine-readable, to de-language language.

Conclusion of First Case Study

From the thousands of potentially relevant patents to select from, we have here isolated five recent filings that give us the full range of an ongoing, ever-shifting process of valorization, something of a model for how language and capital interact: First, a capitalist firm must establish a historical relation between advertisements and language (which is, in truth, somewhat inchoate in the concept of advertising itself) and elaborate this over time until the patterning of this

specific enclosure of language reveals, through continuously valorized components, a de facto subsumption under the circuitry of capital. Next comes the automation of this relation to accelerate its speed of valorization and with it grow the rate of profit. After this comes an expansion of the range and responsiveness of this automation using machine learning; not only are broader internal limits established for what constitutes valorization and what can be valorized, but the rapidity of the relay between the selling of the surplus-value of cognitive labour and the delivery of commodities increases. Lastly comes the reintegration of this entire expanded field—of the new automation, the new range and responsiveness, the broader limits of valorization, the high-frequency relay between thought and consumption—back into advertising portfolios as a new standard by which it becomes impossible to imagine breaking the financial tether between language, curiosity, desire, and consumption that exists on a person by person basis among entire populations. After this, 'lastly', comes our present juncture, and some room for speculation: the question of the "absolute alienation" (Brown, 2023) of human beings from their own cognitive labour presents itself in the form of the total deracination of the elemental form of public thought (language), and in this violent expropriation, the diminishment of language's demiurgic impulse, and thus an unfixable deformation of the relation between language-thought and world, such that the Habermasian (1985) postulate of communicative action crumbles under the weight of his own trepidation in the face of capital's havoc.

We also discover here an interesting Althusserian point highlighted by Edelman (1979): as a mode of production, these patents we have analyzed limn the extension of a process that ultimately *pretends to produce* (in the amassing of data-about-language or language-data) what is actually *the reproduction* of what belongs to everyone (language as the reservoir of social thought), and is hence stolen on the basis of selling human curiosity (the desire of thought), as

filtered into market segments, for an enormous profit with the promise of a behavioural outcome (increased consumption). This entire sequence of events propagates and reifies the very habits that make Google's business model so sought-after in the first place. This makes it an entirely self-legitimating ideological apparatus, as its material-economic effects justify its material-economic effects. It is a closed loop, and in this sense perfectly mirrors both the comical absurdity and apparent ideological invulnerability of capitalism: Google's commodification of language-thought presupposes itself.

We will now turn to the second of the three links in our attempted x-ray image of Google's operations, this time turning to so-called privacy sandboxes.

II. Third Party Cookies Hit the Beach: The Death of Privacy Sandboxes

An article from April of 2025—the time of this writing—announces that "Google no longer plans to deprecate cookies through its Privacy Sandbox" (Roth, 2025). This comes as something as a shock to those who had anticipated the long-awaited evolution in web activity and tracking technology that Google had promised and happens on the heels of a historic antitrust case in which the US Department of Justice somewhat successfully accused Google of running a monopoly in ad tech, ad exchange, and ad publication (Roth and Felner, 2025). On the one hand, this new is, as James Rosewell (the founder of The Movement for an Open Web) indicates, an admission of defeat for some of Google's monopolistic ambitions, which would have been clinched with the launch of their 'privacy sandbox', as the elimination of cookies in their native Chrome browser would have demolished the hegemony of cookie-tracking in the ad industry (Claburn, 2025; Roth, 2025). On the other hand, as a closer look at what the sandbox reveals, the very basis of the entire cognitive rentiership industry receives superficial vindication from this 'anti-monopoly' move that requires preserving the worst forms of data extraction in the

history of the internet. Moreover, it is not entirely clear that the privacy sandbox is completely gone: the enormous difficulty of retooling their business model around a superficially more 'private' and 'depersonalized' web tracking system led to its postponement several times after 2022, and now (midway through 2025), even after its putative abandonment in the face of legal pressure, Google insists on investor calls that an "updated roadmap for these technologies, including our future areas of investment" will be presented within months of their springtime announcement, meaning the technological pivot remains—even in its abeyance—relevant to financial speculation and investment, as well as providing a glimpse into the desire behind this path not taken (Joseph and Shields, 2025). As their epic legal battle with the US Justice Department enters its many protracted resolutions and recommencements, third-party cookies look like they are here to stay, even if Google's monopoly appears poised to take a big hit from another de facto American monopoly entity creating their own search engine, namely Apple (Godoy, 2025; Soni & Godoy, 2025).

In order to assess the significance of these matters it is first necessary to ask what exactly the privacy sandbox proposed (and still hesitantly proposes), and how it differs from the cookie system so familiar to us after decades of use. To find out, we can look directly at Google's own press releases.

Privacy Sandbox Up Close

The 'about' page on Google landing site for the privacy sandbox explains that their goal is "to create technologies that both protect people's privacy online and give companies and developers tools to build thriving digital businesses" by reducing "cross-site and cross-app tracking while helping to keep online content and services free for all" (Google, Privacy Sandbox—"Protect user privacy online", 2025). This already requires a good deal of ideological

unpacking, but we can burrow in on some more details first. The rank hypocrisy of statements such as "People should be able to enjoy their browsing and app experience without worrying about what personal information is collected, and by whom" being placed next to assertions that "publishers and developers need privacy-preserving alternatives for their key business needs, including serving relevant content and ads" is compounded by a commitment to false innovation: the pretension that "new internet privacy standards" will emerge from finding ways to wash cognitive rentiership of its Orwellian overtones in the public and political forum so that it can continue unhindered by the hurdles of a critical popular press and broadly negative PR (Google, "Privacy Sandbox: Technology for a More Private Web", 2025). If it is not already clear by now, I would like to suggest that 'Privacy Sandbox' is something of a misnomer, and its paeans to 'privacy', famous watchword of liberal democracies and their fantasies of the citizen who is an isolated autonomous decider, is a method of avoiding the real economic issue at stake in these systems (Geuss, 2022).

The bottom line is that personal information—minimally as a form of thought contained in language—must be collected for Google's ad services to continue at scale. The only thing that can change about this is public relations and branding. The "two core aims" of browsing without third party cookies, and a 'reduction' in "cross-site and cross-app tracking while helping to keep online content and services free for all" are contradictory to the point of unprofitability unless the reduction in tracking is superficial or the infrastructure of cookies and the targeting they specify is replaced by a valorization process that is more or less homomorphic with the one currently underpinning the ad tech industry (Google, "What is the Privacy Sandbox?", 2025).

The "proposals" for this homomorphic rebranding lives through a lifecycle of "discussion, testing, and scaled adoption", and currently fall under five main categories:

"Strengthen cross-site privacy boundaries", "Show relevant content and ads", "Measure digital ads", "Prevent covert tracking", and "Fight spam and fraud on the web" (Google, "What is the Privacy Sandbox?", 2025).

Cross-Site Privacy Boundaries

In the first category, there are projects like "CHIPS", which aims to "partition" cookies so that cross-site tracking is replaced by same or similar-context tracking that remains isolated to each site (and are only grouped on Google's end as belonging to the same 'cookie jar') (Google, "Cookies Having Independent Partitioned State (CHIPS)", 2025). It is clear to see how a weakening of third-party cross-site tracking, and a strengthening of siloed context memory of various browsing instances strengthens Google's position as ad arbiter while weakening that of individual online retailers. This theme is carried over to "Fenced Frames" which provides another example of prohibiting cross-party tracking from learning the original browsing context (a news article for example) in which one clicked on a specific shoe advertisement, but crucially still identifies your basic demographic information (as surmised and distributed for a fee by Google's Ads program) with interest in said commodity (Google, "Fenced frames overview", 2025). The "Shared Storage" API meanwhile allows non-individualized cross-site tracking, a classic 'privacy' gesture from big corporate firms because it gives the illusion of alleviating personal spying while actually smoothing out the process of ad targeting because, as I already analyzed in my master's thesis (Fazio, 2020), advertising agencies are more interested in *types* of people than individual people themselves. This rhetorical misdirection allows Google to still promise "valuable insights about users" while also claiming to protect user privacy (Google, "Shared Storage overview", 2025). One must continue to stubbornly ask here the naïve question of how it is possible for economically valuable insights to be accessible for extraction,

processing and sale if users are being somehow protected from, ostensibly, a system that instrumentally tracks their cognitive behaviour in order to valorize it under the premise of having gleaned marketable insights from it.

Ad and Content Relevancy

That dreaded euphemism of computational capitalism, 'relevancy', returns with a vengeance in Topics API, which removes "fingerprinting" and cross-site re-identification by artificially throttling the amount of 'topical' information a third party can learn about users from frequent site visits and thereby forcing them to rely less heavily on "information about user interests they have not observed firsthand" (Google, "Overview of Topics API", 2025). This is then followed by a rather absurd paragraph with vague allusions to privacy:

> "The user's information about exactly what sites or apps user accesses does not leave the device, and privacy is protected. This model is in contrast to the current commonly-used model of having a user's cross-site or cross-app data being sent and processed off the device, on ad tech servers. Certain types of processing will continue to remain on ad tech servers, such as using the signals provided by the Topics API in personalization and optimization models for ad selection" (Google, "Overview of Topics API", 2025).

Putting aside the empty ridiculous declaration that "privacy is protected"—a reassurance offered without defining or explaining what 'privacy' means in this or any related context—this API proposal goes on to promise a normalization of local data storage for ad topics as well as the maintenance of a loophole to this entire protocol for the lynchpins of ad tech: personalization and optimization of ad delivery. Without this loophole, these policies would not only undermine the

Google Ad Manager ad server's current functionality for conveying audience segmentation, but introduce a level of insupportable latency, as some critics have pointed out:

> "Traditionally, cloud infrastructure and sprawling server farms handle the immense bandwidth needed to process billions of ad impressions in milliseconds, notifying countless servers and vendors. With the Sandbox, much of that work gets offloaded to individual devices—a shift that risks creating major bottlenecks at scale" (Joseph and Shields, 2025).

Here we get a stronger sense of why Google postponed (and will likely radically alter) the full launch of the privacy sandbox initiative.

Prevent Covert Tracking

The "client hints" system, which aims to shrink 'client' access to the full swath of user data unless "servers actively declare an explicit need for specific pieces of data", is a proposition that seems not only dubious in principle (who decides what is essential or inessential by default? By what criteria?) but also onerous in practice, with a whole new layer of actual and potential semi-automatic and semi-hermeneutic interactions placed over pre-existing information protocols (Google, "What is User-Agent reduction?", 2025). Their anti-bounce tracking protocol is meanwhile quite straightforward and attempts to halt malicious intermediary cookie-detection that occurs mainly through clickthrough walls on websites that are designed to circumvent "anti-tracking browser settings" (Google, "Bounce tracking mitigations", 2025). The question of course is why this last protocol, one of the simplest out of all those mentioned in the Privacy Sandbox dossiers, has not been the default for years already, as it is in the Brave browser for example (Brave, 2023).

Measuring Digital Ads

Finally, we arrive at the nuts and bolts of how this whole operation would prevent Google's business model from functioning. The two new 'privacy conscious' forms of measurement proposed by the Sandbox are Attribution Reporting and Private Aggregation (Google, "What is the Privacy Sandbox?", 2025). The former involves greatly enhancing the detail of advertisement reports, meaning the journey from "ad events" like clicks and views to their cost in terms of ad-bid winning relative to ad campaign budget and finally their religiously termed 'conversion' of a user into a customer as indicated by them performing a desired action after clicking or viewing an ad (Google, "Overview of Attribution Reporting API", 2025). The 'trick' here is again aggregate reporting: "noise is added to most data points reported in the event, so that no single individual's data is discoverable in a summary report", but in such a way that quantitative records and aggregate-qualitative thematic trends are undisturbed (Google, "Attribution Reporting: generating summary reports | Privacy Sandbox", 2025). Some of these trends include things like "unique reach" statistics, which, even under all the aforementioned anonymizing precautions still guarantees that ad tech companies can "record the first time a user saw your ad, embedded video, or publication, and prevent duplicative counting of that same user on different sites" (Google, "Unique reach measurement", 2025). The measuring of use demographics is of course integral to the "private aggregation" and storage of cross-site ad encounters, as is "K+ frequency" which recursively calculates and then measures the "effective frequency", or the "minimum number of views before a user will recognize or recall certain content (often in the context of advertisement views)" (Google, "Measure K+ frequency reach | Privacy Sandbox", 2025; Google, "Overview of Private Aggregation", 2025). This crude utilitarian flavour of the effective frequency measurement unravels much of the façade erected

by the foregoing of this document, and brings us to my ultimate point of analysis: Google's Privacy Sandbox, with all of its various sub-projects and components, is little more than a chronically oxymoronic attempt to regulate the free-for-all of third-party cross-site tracking in a way that saves computational capitalism from its own worsening reputation as parasitical, invasive, and, according to prominent left-liberal scholarship, a threat to democratic freedoms (Zuboff, 2019). I have tried to demonstrate via this post-mortem of the aborted Privacy Sandbox that it is Google's core business model, not the nuances of how they go about operating and enacting said business model, that is antithetical to whatever we might want to call human privacy, and more importantly antithetical to the protection of hundreds of millions of people from the exploitation of their distributed cognition.

After having examined Google's patent fantasies for future varieties of language extraction, and the corporate-conscience-as-PR-exercise that publicly fizzled out this year, we will now finally be moving on to the third and final portion of our analysis, the generative-text or large-language-model revolution. This technological novelty is both a core component of the anticipated future of Google's cognitive rentiership (as we saw glimpses of in the patent section), and a colossal threat to the simple continuation of individualized language privacy efforts and language capture in general: the former is rendered quaint, the latter accelerated to an unprecedented degree and given entirely new and frightening dimensionality.

III. Google Gemini and LLMs

As I write this, we are still living through what one tech reporter calls "the race for an AI agent", a race that in North America has for a few years been a battle between two American LLMs: OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Gemini (Gonzalez, 2023). This is happening with the backdrop of Google's now-default AI search feature siphoning traffic away from websites that

would normally receive referrals from Google users while greatly increasing its own flow of visitors, a move that some call "a change in the world order" (Bellan, 2025; Goode, 2024). Prognosticating on the market 'disruptions' this will precipitate, or on the longevity and varied uptake of these LLMs as their standoff in the capitalist arena unfolds is however irrelevant to our present analysis. Instead, we will look at what exactly Google's so-called 'AI' search already does now amid its massive popular uptake (Kurian, 2024) and connect it to the modelled arms and legs we already assembled into a headless body in the preceding patent and privacy sandbox analysis.

The lens for our analysis for what Silicon Valley marketing executives increasingly want us to call 'AI' will be largely taken from Pasquinelli's recent text *The Eye of the Master* (2023). In this book, he makes the overarching claim that 'intelligence' is far broader than what can be captured in a large-language-model and is firmly rooted in the *logos* of human labour (p. 2, 3). This leads to the thesis that "*labour is the first algorithm*", and hence any 'intelligent' machines that have emerged or will emerge will do so solely by imitating "the outline of the collective division of labour" (p. 16). The consequences of this Marxist view of intelligence will auto-radicalize as we get ever closer to the labour of the human mind in its work of *curiositas*, a "desire to know or learn" or "inquisitiveness" that comes from a careful interest in the strange or unknown aspects of existence, of social and material life (Harper, 2025).

There are a few other crucial insights from Pasquinelli's survey of Hegel, Babbage, Marx, von Neumann, Hayek, and Rosenblatt that we must reiterate here. The first is the idea that, in addition to labour being structurally algorithmic, the history of technological breakthroughs, as Marx maintains in the *Grundrisse*, is always preceded by novel divisions of labour, the steam engine included (Pasquinelli, 2024, pp. 105-106). The second is that these mechanizations and

consolidations happen for a reason: to achieve an increase in productivity, and in turn an increase in profitability. The third is that the threat posed to the circulation of capital by the increasingly lopsided ratio of fixed to variable capital (more labour being taken on by machines than workers), and thus the risk of overproduction as well as the historical tendency of the rate of profit to fall—which, following Brenner (2020), this thesis does endorse as a real phenomenon—is mitigated precisely by the redesigning of new divisions of labour that modulate a "relative surplus value" that forestalls economic crises in privately owned production centres (Pasquinelli, 2024, p. 118). The fourth and final insight—really the haymaker of Pasquinelli's text—is the idea that because all attempts to cybernetically mimic the functionality of human minds originate in a Babbagian desire to monitor the apparatuses of production, and thus the self-organizational sociality of labouring minds, the 'connectionist' theory of cognition undergirding so-called 'AI' (in the form of neural networked LLMs, for example), amounts to a surveillance apparatus for automating the very thing that leads to the redesign of labour-division, so as to ensure an equilibrium of relative surplus value: the abstraction and alienation of knowledge (Pasquinelli, 2024, p. 185, 191). This is an automation of the process of automation itself, but within a limited sphere and under a strict set of assumptions about how the world works and what technologies can do (Pasquinelli, 2024, p. 246). The goal of corporate 'AI' research is laid bare in a way that is immeasurably helpful for our own analysis: it represents the statistical automation of the process of labour division via surveillance, measurement, and correlation. Any actually-existing AI based on the political economy of "mercantile connectionism" and its view of the human mind could be renamed The Great Divider, a machine whose sole purpose is to discover new ways to segment and categorize the links in a given value chain (Pasquinelli, 2024, p. 185). For

us, that value chain concerns the unbroken chain of writing from the first clumsy etchings of early humans to the trillions of manic keystrokes now hammered around the world every day.

Gemini AI

In March of 2023, in response to OpenAI's ChatGPT and "amid a digital ad slowdown and investor anxiety", Google recalled its founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin out of retirement and with their oversight released its own 'AI' large-language-model named 'Bard' (Alba & Love, 2023, para. 4; Grant, 2023). Soon afterwards, Bard received a makeover, and Google re-announced their newest 'AI' software "Gemini" (a rebranded version of Bard with stronger capacities), which their current CEO and Co-Founder then called part of a broader mission to "accelerate human progress", and later a "transition" that "will be the most profound in our lifetimes, far bigger than the shift to mobile or to the web before it" (Pichai and Hassabis, 2023). We might ask the simple question: progress towards what?

According to their most recent press releases, including a blog post from the summer this is being written, Google has equipped Gemini with "a completely redesigned interface with a new way to address complex, multi-part questions and follow-ups" (Marini, 2025). The author goes on to encourage users: "Ask anything on your mind, and AI Mode delivers a clear, AI-powered response, with key details and handy links for diving deeper", and the corresponding primrose promise—typical of Google's messaging for the last two decades—that this is 'diving deeper' and enhancing the reach of access to human knowledge is "the reason we started investing in AI decades ago—and how we can deliver its benefits at the scale of human curiosity" (Marini, 2025). We would do well to hold on to this peculiar phrase, "the scale of human curiosity", for it contains the essence of what is at stake in this exploration.

In the same document, this Google employee goes on to boast about Gemini's most recent rollout: "The UXR team provided key insights into the use cases to prioritize for these users. Their research revealed, for example, that people are increasingly turning to AI for exploratory advice, 'how-to' guides and even local shopping assistance" (Marini, 2025). And finally, the most chilling detail, the result of a years-long social experiment performed on a more or less docile, economically captured, public audience:

> "The new experience is resonating with users. 'They appreciate us not just finding information, but actively helping them organize and understand it in a highly consumable way, with help from our most intelligent AI models,' Soufi says" (Marini, 2025).

From Google's own record, then, two things are at stake—human curiosity and complex questioning—and two initial trends have emerged—a desire for "highly consumable" machine-generated explanations and shopping assistance. Google could not be happier with this outcome. Before jumping to quickly to conclusions however, let us glance at how AI-overviews actually works, according to Google.

AI Overviews: From Extraction to Ideological Apparatus

In an article titled "Generative AI in Search: Let Google do the searching for you" (Reid, 2024), Google's VP and "Head of Search" Elizabeth Reid announces AI Overview to the world by first claiming that Google has "[…] built a knowledge base of billions of facts about people, places and things — all so you can get information you can trust in the blink of an eye". We know that this immense, encoded knowledge base "grounds" these facts about people, places, and things not only from older publicly available digitized records, but also from "real-time information" about "recent events and topics" based on "real-world information" (Google,

"Grounding with Google Search", 2025). The mixture of encyclopedic, up-to-the moment indexing of the discernible 'facts' of human reality as they play out in current events, and the alienation of all of this information into a system designed to sell ads (albeit under the guise of convenient information dissemination) is already quite loaded, and that is before its newest 'innovation': "Now, with generative AI, Search can do more than you ever imagined. So you can ask whatever's on your mind or whatever you need to get done — from researching to planning to brainstorming — and Google will take care of the legwork" (Reid, 2024). Not only does Google promise to have all the latest information about the world at its disposal, but it additionally offers to 'do the legwork' for users interacting with AI Overview. What do they mean by legwork? Evidently everything from "researching to planning to brainstorming" (Reid, 2024). Why would we want to alienate ourselves from the tasks of research, planning, and brainstorming? Google's VP of search has an answer for that too:

> "Sometimes you want a quick answer, but you don't have time to piece together all the information you need. Search will do the work for you with AI Overviews. People have already used AI Overviews billions of times through our experiment in Search Labs. They like that they can get both a quick overview of a topic and links to learn more. We've found that with AI Overviews, people use Search more, and are more satisfied with their results" (Reid, 2024).

In other words, speed. Piecing together information takes time, so why not let a machine "do the work for you", especially if Google's studies show that you will be "more satisfied with their results"? More than just marketing rhetoric, this reveals the obvious upshot to AI-systems that makes humanists (for lack of a better name) so anxious: the desire to stop thinking. The endgame of internet search services as a for-profit model seems to reveal itself in a single

moment as the end of thought itself, as the replacement of thought with stochastic regurgitation appended to the pragmatic means-ends decision-making of consumer-workers. It is easy to see, following Pasquinelli's logic, how the regimentation of cognitive rentiership as a new division of labour that results in the real-time alienation of curiosity and knowledge would then arrive at the mechanization of curiosity and knowledge through systems of recommendation and a recombinatorial pseudodiversity of existing thought. Cognitive rentiership, or the rentiership of language-thought as a new division of labour inaugurated at the dawn of the internet age, has, after the introduction of AI (the automation of the very process of labour-division as such) and more specifically machine-generated text in the form of LLMs, begotten *the automation of the automation of automation*; or the automation of the automation of new divisions of labour. Infinite regress during this process is impossible so long as human beings continue to live, as human beings are the only substrate that can guarantee the existence of the process as such, which relies on harnessing and harvesting human sociality. What we have here, as a limit case of the semi-autonomy of AI, is the problem of *Lebenszusammenhang*, or the totality of the public sphere, that Negt and Kluge previously articulated in their *Public Sphere and Experience* (1993, p. 6). However, in an unforeseen development, it is the alienation of the unity of our lifeworlds (people, places, things) that is itself automated, that is itself performed. This is a difficult thought to grasp. Profitability is indeed still the driving factor of this newest mechanization: "As always, ads will continue to appear in dedicated slots throughout the page, with clear labeling to distinguish between organic and sponsored results" (Reid, 2024). But the change from formal to real subsumption has occurred, and perhaps even beyond real subsumption towards hyper-real subsumption. If the extraction of cognitive rents is already an absorption of labour (the labor of thought as an expression of human curiosity and/or desire) into a system of capital accumulation,

and if the ongoing ossification of that labour is required for Google's Gemini AI-search to operate in the up-to-date manner promised to users, then what is occurring is not only the automation of rentiership-via-cognitive alienation (which would be a straightforward stripping away and valorizing of surplus value) but the automation of the cognition of the social conditions of labour recomposition as such. The endpoint of capitalist connectionism, then, according to the origins and historical lineage spelled out by Pasquinelli (2024), seems to be the automation of statistical surveillance, measurement, and correlation of social connection itself. Because social connection is the locus of human cognition, this would entail a capture of the most anterior of all relations of production: the capacity to choose and justify either new relations of production (new divisions of labour for example), or new arrangements of productive forces altogether (their emancipation for the public good). The reason why 'AI Overviews' are part of a capitalio-authoritarian technological apparatus that will, if left unchecked, usurp our capitalo-parliamentarian institutions as they currently stand, is of course that they are privately owned. The private ownership of the selection and justification of new labour relations and new arrangements of productive forces is only possible when the power to detect, en masse, in real-time, the linguistic-cognitive concerns of a lifeworld is concentrated in the hands of actors who economically valorize this knowledge. That this economic valorization of the alienation of our social lifeworlds happens behind the backs of our discursive spaces (that it nevertheless parasitizes) removes any possibility of democratically addressing them within those same spaces and thus impedes rational bifurcation away from a global capitalist system with increasing strength. This is also why discursive decay is a predictable outcome of the ascendency of AI-Overviews. Only a crisis internal to capitalism or (and possibly in conjunction with) the relaunching of communization around an evental rupture would be able to challenge what is

quickly becoming the most profound wellspring of ideological reification ever built, one that seriously throws into question the very foundations of political modernity (Pippin, 1999).

Language and Complexity

This last sentiment is worth taking seriously. As Reid's (2024) statement on behalf of Google goes on to say:

> "Soon, you'll be able to adjust your AI Overview with options to simplify the language or break it down in more detail. This can be particularly useful if you're new to a topic, or if you're trying to simplify something to satisfy your kid's curiosity"

This final infantilization of the people who engage with Google's services is also something of a culmination of its business model to date, and a crucial opening to the fascistic undertow of this technology. As Klemperer forcefully declares in *The Language of the Third Reich* (2013), the victory of simplicity is the victory of Joseph Goebbels: "Hitler's Mein Kampf preaches not only that the masses are stupid, but also that they need to be kept that way and intimidated into not thinking" (p. 185). The paradox of stupidity as a structural effect that destroys the structures that produce it is explored in Ronell's (2002) book *Stupidity*, where she describes it as something "inexhaustible" that "fatigues knowledge" and "wears down history" (p. 3). We can see then how Google's vast system works as a kind of engine for the undialectical essence of stupidity that offloads curiosity in exchange for a "satiety", a "certitude" that "rhymes internally" (Ronell, 2002, p. 44). If it is true, additionally, that there can be no true politics in the absence of a novel and rigorous idea, then it is no surprise that Google, which benefits enormously from the economic status quo, treats human language for the purpose of propagating one very specific nonthought: consume.

Without drifting into hyperbole, it is worth considering also the relationship between intimidation, coercion, and temptation at play in Google's infrastructure. Seen in a historical light, the onslaught of AI-overview summaries now populating our world—and which will doubtless proliferate even more madly in the years to come if early trends are any indication—are attempts to influence people into a certain timidity in the face of complex questions, if not to foster an outright fear of that vast unknown which escapes the comfort zone of LLM pseudo-expertise. Google's VP of Search is well aware of this when they further state:

> "With our custom Gemini model's multi-step reasoning capabilities, AI Overviews will help with increasingly complex questions. Rather than breaking your question into multiple searches, you can ask your most complex questions, with all the nuances and caveats you have in mind, all in one go" (Reid, 2024).

On the surface, it is obvious that they are making what appears to be a benign bid to improve the customer experience of Google users in some way (and humanity in general in an even vaguer way, as their corporate memos from earlier indicate). But as it pertains to the valorization accomplished by way of the automation of the alienation of the linguistic antennae of our social lifeworlds, these systems do little more than inculcate a new dynamic of cognitive passivity. Worst of all, it garbs itself in the clothing of enlightenment—an enhanced enlightenment even. It remains to be seen if it is possible for consumerism—here the consumption of an exploitative knowledge economy—could be more confused for intellectualism, or sophistry more confused for education. The perverse injunction 'Do Not Think For Yourself' is simply wrapped in different colours: "Let Google do the searching for you" (Reid, 2024). This mantra perfectly aligns with what Badiou calls the spirit of late capitalism, namely the imperative to 'Live without Ideas' (2007, p. 117).

Google As Extractive Cognitive Infrastructure

A quick rundown of the preceding chapters lands us in an interesting position. Thoughts escape our heads via language; we routinely say more than we know; cybernetic capitalism has industrialized this cognitive profusion by absorbing it into systems that make up the infrastructure of our everyday life; this absorption alienates us from the labour of language-thought and extracts enormous relative surplus value[24] from it; and finally, the body of capital (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009), in our epoch, uses this extraction to disable thoughts that it cannot subsume, and enable thoughts that aid its accumulation and growth (by suggesting consumption through the purchase of commodities, i.e. through advertising). The question of agency over the direction of human affairs rears its head here with added venom in the following form: under what conditions can the collective freedom of thinking persist, and under what conditions is it suppressed? As Kant reminds us, "[…] freedom in thinking signifies the subjection of reason to no laws except *those which it gives itself*" (1996, p. 16). What will happen after ten, twenty, or thirty years of subjecting our reason to the nondialectical impulse-response laws of generative-AI, which in turn uses the mass of our orientation-seeking inquiries to refine a network of commodity expansion, consumption habits, and lastly to reify the very automation of the alienation of our social lifeworlds? In what sense can we still say reason is 'free' when its faculty of orientation is offloaded to systems whose extraction of relative surplus-value serves the

[24] We should note here that the relative surplus value extracted by monopoly capital is also a form of differential rent, in the sense Marx uses the term in *Capital: Volume III* (1993, p. 59, 61, 781). The key point here is that the quantity of cognitive rent extracted depends on how much and how meaningfully one relies on Google's infrastructure for information retrieval of any kind, but that cognitive rents will continue to be extracted from users regardless of the intensity of their language-data productivity as long as they use Google's infrastructure (even passively) to enrich its data centres, and as long as there is continued demand for such data. There is, as Varoufakis (2024, p. 87) has pointed out, a degree to which our role in this accumulation as part-time 'employees' of companies like Google is elective, which presents us with a high-tech version of Étienne de La Boétie's old conundrum of voluntary servitude (2012 [1577]).

invention of new forms of surplus-value extraction? It is almost quaint to pause here to ask whether these corporate large-language-models can 'orient' themselves in thinking, because whether we like it or not, Google is already using them to orient us in thinking.

This turns us to the crux of our contemporary situation: the abandonment of comprehensive privacy overhauls, the patenting of technology to automate the association of queries with advertisements (thus opening up the possibility of queries commanding production, of symbolic forfeiture as the ground of surplus consumption), and the dawn of Google's Gemini AI as an ideological amanuensis all together signal that Google (as internally heterogenous as its investment portfolio and tech endeavours may be) remains primarily an advertising coordinator that traffics in linguistic capital. Indeed, beyond its status as the world's most popular and lucrative information retrieval service, it is undeniable that Google is nothing else if not the global hegemon of linguistic capital. And this is where two worlds clash: political truth procedures in the Badiouian sense cannot retain their immanent rationality without the internal dynamics of discursive reason against which (and through which) they measure their own egalitarian experiments. But this means that the tendential condition of political truth procedures (here read as nonprogrammatic communist movements)—their very engine of initial and enduring self-intelligibility, which has been referred to in this thesis as linguistic flocculation—cannot help but be absorbed through routinized contact, however ambient and fleeting, with one of its ideological adversaries, namely Google. The *a priori* capture of the linguistic resources of emancipatory cognition *en masse* through a privatized technical system necessitates reorientation against said technical system lest its primary overdetermination (the reorientation of human thought towards commodities) interrupt the becoming-intelligible of postcapitalist rebellion. Here we should note a careful distinction: the possibility of thinking human freedom beyond

capitalist superstition does not solely rely on overcoming reification, as, following Davidson (2006), mental events have an ultimately anomalous relation to physical or material events. It is because of this fact, *pace* Marx, that the idea of communism is thinkable at all. But the endurance and regularization of the anomaly of postcapitalist thought, as a consistency or fidelity that installs itself in historical actuality, is today impossible without dismantling the mechanism of hyper-reification that Google cannot, under current historical conditions, avoid being.

Conclusion: Language Without Landlords—On American Surveillance Theology and the Crises of Lingocapitalism

"[…] time is the only capital of people who must depend on their intellect" (Balzac, 2020, p. 83).

"As it determines this moment in time, the mind necessarily withers away and, stretched to the limit, desires this withering" (Bataille, 1994, p. 48).

"And as it has been proved, that nothing in the state or acts of the will of man is contingent; but that on the contrary, every event of this kind is necessary […] and so, that God gives virtue, holiness and conversion to sinners, by an influence which determines the effect, in such a manner, that the effect will infallibly follow by a moral necessity; which is what Calvinists mean by efficacious and irresistible grace" (Edwards, 1957 [1831], p. 433-434).

"The Company has longstanding ties with U.S. intelligence agencies, which raises concerns about Alphabet's role in surveillance on US citizens" (Alphabet, "Notice of 2025 Annual Meeting of Stockholders and Proxy Statement", 2025, p. 85).

The primary research contribution of the prior chapter may be summarized as providing a snapshot of Google's 'political unconscious' (Jameson, 2015). However, the method of an allegorical case study requires, as part of its fulfilment, a fleshing out of this deeper, dynamic, historical meaning upon which Google's eminently profitable failure at social representation operates. Discerning the narratological allegory that constitutes Google's political unconscious necessitates bringing to bear a mixture of abductive inference and historically contextual speculation to the evidence gathered in the preceding examination. This will be brought to bear, specifically, on how Google's political economy expresses its own projection from the immediate past to the indefinite future across its patents, whitepapers, corporate memos and so forth. In this spirit, this chapter will begin by pointing out a correspondence between colonial-theological and neo-Kantian accounts of human behaviour and cognition that are unique to the United States of America and wager that Google's political unconscious—here characterized as an American Surveillance Theology—falls along analogous lines. This will shift into a reconsideration of the category of 'cognitive rentiership' in a Lukácsian sense and a summary of the key findings and implications of this thesis.

In her 2005 article "The Father, the Son, and the Daughter: Sellars, Brandom, and Millikan", analytic philosopher of language Ruth Millikan situates her own work in a tradition of American neo-Kantian thought that centres around the idea that "there are no representations without function or 'attitude'" (p. 59). By this Millikan means that there is quite literally a "survival value" to conventional linguistic forms, because the 'natural selection' of these forms, whether they occur at the genetic level, the behavioural-conditional trial-and-error level, or the level of "social transmission" (which a Foucauldian could style as disciplinary) only succeeds if the selection adequately conforms to a "natural purpose" (Millikan, 2005, p. 66, 70). Millikan's bio-linguistic argument then, in contrast to Fodor's (2008) equally Darwinistic language-of-thought proposition that we discussed in an earlier chapter, is stoutly inferentialist rather than representationalist. In the sentence "The selection of language forms takes place on the social level. Language survives when it serves cooperative functions often enough, functions that reward at once both speakers and hearers […]" she is not only claiming that it takes two to tango, but that all conventional speech tends toward the building of projects (Millikan, 2005, p. 66). Representations themselves, then, whether in gesture, symbolic encoding, or abstracted as socially decoded data mediates between how we perceive "some part of the world" and our ideas of what to do about that perception (Millikan, 2005, p. 67). Millikan generalizes this into an omnipresent model of cognition where representations (such as languages) even in the simplest animal behaviours act as icons between perception and action that she calls "pushmi-pullyus" (Millikan, 2005, p. 67).

It is the claim of this chapter that Millikan's position regarding the content of human consciousness is also the position taken up by capitalist surveillance apparatuses like that operated by what in the wildfire-ridden summer of 2025 is the second wealthiest company in the

entire world (falling just behind the oil barons of Saudi Aramco), namely Alphabet (Google) (Marketcap, 2025). Subsidiary to this claim is the assertion that this view of human minds is not rooted in the philosophical grandfathers of American pragmatism (Dewey and so on), but rather an American Protestant theological tradition that stretches far past them. Finally, this chapter forces upon us the puzzling dilemma: Google's theological catallaxy of language-thought, which it expertly uses to extract enormous value from the labour of language-thought, is nonetheless false in its philosophical underpinnings; how is it possible for such an incorrect view of human cognition to be mobilized so effectively? Such a problem compels us to address one of Millikan's later ruminations on 'natural signs', specifically the notion that knowledge can function without understanding, and how capital's regime of knowledge predation in the form of language capture is cut off from, and cannot reconstruct, the realm of understanding (Millikan, 2012, p. 502; Rikap, 2021).

The purpose of this chapter, in coming to grips with this structural mobilization of knowledge-without-understanding, is to highlight logical similarities between the cognitive reification enacted by Google and the Calvinist concept of predestination so as to reveal how the former's system of language-thought catallaxy is, despite its contradictions, ideologically effective and socially compelling, as well as to shed light on the contours of its ontological presuppositions, and the way these inform the type of world companies like Google are trying to make.

Capital and Garrulity

The lingocapitalist drive to capitalize on permutations of what it sees as the social fabric of 'pushme-pullyus' is evidenced clearly enough in the prestige Google has accumulated as a universal information generator for advertising economies. It is also clear from our survey of

their patents, their abandoned privacy initiatives, and their AI large-language-model obsession that a core component of their "corporate platform complex" ideology is to act as if human speech always intends, *a-priori*, towards aim-uninhibited consumption (Terranova, 2022, p. 11). That is to say, their first and unconscious ideological manoeuvre is already a reification of our historically specific state of affairs, and plays out according to a subtle concatenation: the sum total of what there is in the world is currently shaped by capital; our perceptions of the world are thus perceptions of a strictly capitalist lifeworld; our pushme-pullyus or representations thus function as navigational instruments for the lifeworld (genetically, behaviourally, and socially) that we are given; any representations that do not abet survival in this lifeworld fail the selection process; it is therefore both 'natural' (in a right-Darwinist sense) as well as inflexibly 'rational' to enjoin any and all cognition to its complementary commodity-consumption, a union that can only be achieved through the privatization of the means of social cognition, kindly performed by a corporate benefactor, who resolves the unbearable tension between cognitive representations and the world whose pressures those representations seek to mediate and endure. This unnecessary denial of freedom from necessity, and of the re-imposition of survival over flourishing, is of course an old bourgeois trope refuted ad nauseum by Marx across his oeuvre. But in the current technological configuration of cognitive rentiership, it provokes an interesting thought experiment.

Imagine a world, for instance, where no corporations know anything about the activity of individuals and must operate solely on the basis of belief. Since Google's surveillance apparatus operates through the empirical observation of utterances, let us take Stalnaker's (2006) handy definition that belief, for their purposes, is equivalent to epistemically possible knowledge (which conveys a slightly greater accuracy than Wittgenstein's claim—indirectly inherited by

Millikan—that belief is merely dispositional and attitudinal) (Shaw, 2022). Imagine, further, that all previously acquired knowledge (de facto epistemically possible) about search-engine users has been blocked from access via legal prohibitions, robust international policies and so on, and cannot be pieced together 'on the other end' through elaborate pattern recognition mechanisms. In such a situation, how would a company like Google prevent the 'information economy', on which its valorization depends, from collapsing?

The first step it would have to take, in such a 'blank slate' scenario, would obviously be to covertly (and illegally) resume the surveillance of language on the basis of three beliefs: (i) that language speaks to the world as it is, which is to say the world of capital; (ii) that capital can answer the call of language through the presentation of a series of new commodities; (iii) that the successful practice of this call and response is a sign that the linkage of capital to language, and the subordination of thought to the elaboration of commodity forms, is in fact legitimate. If it were illegitimate, it simply would not be possible to market commodities successfully 'from scratch', as it were, in the manner described in this thought experiment. Of course, far from being outlandish, what we have just described occurs every second of every day. The deluge of Google searches—16.4 Billion searches per day, 189,815 searches per second—feeds a constantly renewing process of valorization in which a call is matched with a commodity-response, and with it the material relegitimization of the privatized bond between language and capital (Cardillo, 2025). This is all to say that lingocapitalism fabricates the very thing that it requires to be epistemically possible: actionable knowledge of peoples' thoughts and curiosities about the world. But does Google really have this knowledge? Is such a knowledge really so epistemically possible as to warrant Stalnaker's criterion of belief?

The answer is that, while it can be made to appear that this is the case, just as it can be made to appear that there is a natural affinity between the circulation of language and the circulation of capital itself, there is in language the absolute void of *langage-au-générique* that does not correspond to survivability in capitalist lifeworlds—it both predates them, and will postdate them. The immense technical infrastructure of lingocapitalism, so committed as it is to its operations, cannot acknowledge this however, as it is unable to parse language as anything other than a function of subjective integration into the vast interior of capital. Whether in obeisance to brute survivability or divine providence, as in Millikan's social-Darwinism or Edwardian Calvinism respectively, the structure is the same: language is little more the expression of necessity. This leads us to the theological apparatus of "finitude as destiny", as outlined by Badiou, that turns the infinite potential of *langage-au-générique* into a waste product, a deflocculated inoculation against the possibility of the good (Badiou, 2022, p. 76). It is this same theological apparatus that, if anything, will be lingocapitalism's undoing.

Cognitive Rentiership and Calvinist Predestination

Among the most significant religious debates in colonial America was the one fought between Calvinist preacher Jonathan Edwards and the Arminians on the question of predestination, a debate which spiralled out of the antagonism established two hundred years prior between the followers of Arminius, whose doctrine "attracted both the men who desired peace among Christians in England and those with yearnings toward the Church of England", and the main current of "rigid Calvinism", and which saw significant international cross-

contamination towards the end of the enlightenment between the Dutch Arminians and the Cambridge Platonists (Colie, 1957, pp. 22-23). One of the greatest inflections of this lengthy debate occurs in Jonathan Edwards' prolix masterpiece, *Inquiry into the modern prevailing notions respecting that freedom of will which is supposed to be essential to moral agency, virtue and vice, reward and punishment, praise and blame* (1831), where he forwards the position that:

> "[…] the liberty of moral agents does not consist in self-determining power; and that there is no need of any such liberty, in order to the nature of virtue; nor does it at all hinder, but that the state or act of the will may be the virtue of the subject, though it be not from self-determination, but the determination of an extrinsic cause; even so as to cause the event to be morally necessary to the subject of it" (Edwards, 1957, p. 433).

Edwards' rejuvenation of Calvinism's total rebuke of subjective self-determination is a rejection of the foundational principle of modernity itself: autonomy (Beiser, 2009). But it is not an absolute rejection; Edwards makes sure to preserve the illusion of human will—in fact goes to great lengths to justify its ostensibly fraudulent reality—as subordinate to an unknowable teleology. As Murphy (1959) says of Edwardian Calvinism:

> "It is essential to his doctrine both that a man should have a moral will (how else could he blame him?) and that he should be morally incapable of any other use of it than that to which, by causes beyond his will or choice, it has been 'previously' determined" (p. 188).

To have a will that involuntarily bends towards sin or virtue in accordance with the antecedent motive of God is structurally homologous, I would like to argue, to having a language that involuntarily bends towards the purchase or neglect of commodities in accordance with the antecedent motives of the invisible hand of the market: you can say and think what you want, but

you cannot choose to want what you want, and what you want are commodities. Google's lingocapitalism relies on precisely this model of consumerism as divinely preordained, where the 'elect' are segmented into appropriate market factions, and Google's 'bottom-up' market research summons prophetic insight via a language that is itself evidence of the complete 'depravity of the will' in the face of capitalist prerogatives. And just like in Edwardian Calvinism, where "an act of volition or choice cannot choose to come into existence" but requires a "previous cause", so too under lingocapitalism a speech act or choice of words cannot choose to come into existence, but rather (and one can reap immense profits by assuming this to be the case) one's curiosity is determined in advance by the unique demands of a capitalist lifeworld (Murphy, 1959, p. 187).

As Murphy (1959) goes on to point out, this Edwardian determinism bears an internal fallacy in that it retroactively justifies all behaviour on the basis of "prior appetites and drives" without which there would never be the will towards such behaviour in the first place, and in so doing offers the familiar bromide of circular-reasoning, namely: 'everything is what it is', and not only or merely because it indeed is the case now, but because, in fact, it had to will itself to be exactly as you find it currently construed (p. 201). This dim cul-de-sac shows, to some extent, why it is not enough to merely re-appropriate Google's surveillance apparatus for the purposes of socially beneficial self-analysis, as authors like Terranova (2022), in their "Red Stack Attack" article, suggest. Such a co-option, even aimed towards egalitarian ends, risks a type of neo-Stalinist fatalism that Greene (2023) has criticized for being revived as a "fated outcome as if preordained by some god of history" (pp. 281-282). We must break apart and then break away from technical systems that were built under the sign of inevitability, which is to say finitude and fate, and consider what sort of technology would instead *make an infinite use of human curiosity* to affirm the complete unboundedness of the will.

The Antinomies of Cognitive Reification and the Crises of Preordained Language-Thought

The freedom of thought in our current moment rests on a number of unresolved (and perhaps unresolvable) antinomies that are on display in Google's system of cognitive rentiership. Primary among these is the fact that the growth of economies of language-capture requires new types of possible knowledge, new inferences, and new types of belief to spring up so that it can continue to valorize them. Of course, this brings with it the possibility of a crisis of overproduction that takes the form of auto-cannibalization; hastening the tendency to financially tether thoughts with commodities begets a system in which, due to increased efficiency, *thoughts of commodities* become commodities for sale on the lingocapitalist marketplace, and ads summarily lose their value: there is no point advertising to people who self-advertise, and worse yet, there is nothing new to learn from them if their consciousness becomes totally integrated into the ad tech circuitry. Similarly, if companies like Google are not able to induce continually finer-grain behavioural patterns from residues of language-thought, their business model will grind to a halt; but the more successful their insights are to advertisers, the more artificially-occurring "homophily" one can expect to find in the internet socius, thereby obviating the emergence of novel patterns through too-well-honed repetition (Chun, 2020). In a paradoxical sense, baseline ineffectiveness is the only effective means of sustaining parasitical economic regimes such as cognitive rentiership. However, as with most theories of capitalist crisis, simply waiting for these dynamics to destabilize neither guarantees the disappearance of the rentiership relations in question, nor that something better will replace them. A turn towards the classical Lukácsian problem of reification elucidates some of the difficult swerves that lie ahead of us in rising to the task of exposing cognitive rentiership as effective despite being built on

philosophically dubious foundations, on the one hand, and using the gap between its effectiveness and its dubiety to, if possible, destroy the ad tech industry through either mass democratic revolt or reformist lawfare before its effectiveness erodes precisely the cognitive conditions under which either of those goals would be popularly desired or attainable.

Deflocculation as Cognitive Fragmentation

As Lukács points out early on in the "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" section of *History and Class Consciousness* (1971), it was the brilliant insight of Marx and Engels that capitalism is nomological: all capitalist subjects, whether of the ruling class or the working class, have an "unconsciousness" of their involvement in a social system that they are unable to observe in its totality, and instead interpret as a series of coercive natural laws that they must obey to survive or flourish in their lifetime (p. 133). Efforts to render the desire of thought profitable must partly (or even largely) include by necessity the churning-over, indexing, and sale of precisely this non-totalized, fragmentary cognition of involvement in social systems. In many ways, the banalities of individual 'perspectives' are itself the commodity at stake in cognitive retiership. This has the consequence, however, that the capitalist reification of cognitive activity—of the residues of the language-though nexus—becomes primarily a reification of the desire to see one's desire represented by the market. That is, to have the market pat one on the head and offer a reward (in exchange for money) for having exhibited and donated the desire-of-thought, or curiosity, including, due to its increasing success, the desire-of-thought to find itself represented in the economic circuits of capital. The strangulation of this apparatus is difficult to appreciate, for it entails the constraint at the level of the conditions of the freedom of thought itself (and therefore the thought of freedom and emancipation along with it) according to the terms of the worker-consumer ideology. Language capture thus forces us to ask pressing

historical questions: under the dynamics of this regime of cognitive reification, are human beings able to conceptualize, still, the ways capital is territorializing their cognition? If so, how is it possible, how can this reserve be leveraged, and what does this say about our preliminary Marxist social-linguistic representational theory of mind that evades closure? If no, to what degree can cognitive rentiership achieve the blockading of answers to crucial questions (or of blocking the asking of the correct questions to begin with), to what extend does it benumb emancipatory will and stultify our ability to even grasp with any certainty the absolutes that every so often puncture the contradictions of our moment in history? To what extent, in other words, does cognitive rentiership gesture towards the limp defeat of modernity's dream of civilizational autonomy, of the realization of the postulated homology between individual and collective emancipation? (Garo, 2023, p. 105). The cybernetic loop of nomological capital that overpowers us under cognitive rentiership is what Lukács (1971) describes as a system of historical fragmentation under which "[…] nothing new can happen by definition and a system of such laws which is held to be perfect can indeed reduce the need to correct individual laws but cannot calculate what is novel" (p. 144). This banishment of novelty resurfaces in cultural desire, in a classical return of the repressed, as a profoundly modern hunger that the endless pseudo-novelty of the marketplace satiates. The key distinction between the two being, of course, that the tatterdemalion distractions of the digital realm remain fetishized objects, not the products of our own free creation. That the satisfactions of cognitive rentiership ultimately prove unsatisfying is but another example of history wrestling with itself. But what does this wrestling signify?

The irony of the incessant, widespread news coverage expressing displeasure over Google's AI hallucinations is that it points to a fundamental contradiction within the service

Google offers us: we want, due to the expectations of our reified social relations—expectations that Google itself reinforces—a search engine that is free from error, and in some sense trustworthy, and yet, as this thesis has argued, we should also demand a search engine that operates as a free public utility and that does not extract cognitive rents. These two desires seem opposed to one another; extracting rents seems to be a requirement for Google's reliability and ease of use, whereas unreliable and cumbersome search tools seem to be the cost of freedom from extractive circuitry. The point of analyzing this contradiction is, following the spirit of Lukács, to figure out how it points beyond its own impasse. And it points past itself, however obliquely, when we realize that the new unreliability of Google's LLM-powered, mechanistic, curiosity-eating system is a condition of possible knowledge, and that in addition to ridding ourselves of extractive domination over our collective language-thought, we have the opportunity of casting off the myth of infallible, mechanized, alienated inquiry, in which subjective dialectical mediation has been replaced (and this replacement guiltily desired) by an undialectical impulse-response in which echoes from a cave of forgotten ideas displace the movement of the thought-of-thought, and worse yet still manages to manifest a mechanical fallibility, only one that is far insulting to its breathing counterpart, which the latter nevertheless grows to accept.

Summary of Key Findings

We are now in a position, after the 'shot/reverse-shot' of the theoretical chapters and the case study and the montage effect of their juxtaposition, to summarize the answers we have subsequently developed to the questions posed at the end of the methods chapter. These will be presented following the same original numbering.

(i) The capitalist synchronization of digital reticular protentions threatens to destroy the coherence of the encyclopedia-of-the-situation which has the task of creating the foil of knowledge through which truth procedures puncture a hole. Without this, it remains unclear how procedures become recognizable as such to anonymous avant-garde collectives in post-industrial lifeworlds. Simultaneously, synchronization entraps the eruption of the imminent discursive rationality of said groups (who belong to no fixed predicates) by being contiguous with the daily navigation of internet users, any of whom could belong to the presentation of a generic multiplicity. This entanglement does not proscribe the idea of communism per se, but, as is clear in the current and speculative integration of AI into Google search services, this entanglement actively seeks reification 'higher up the chain' of social causality. The attempted 'real subsumption' of symbolic production coupled with the imperative to not only live without ideas (as a consumer-worker) but to abandon the activity of primary thinking itself, as if it were beneath human dignity, forces any mass politics in post-industrial societies that is worthy of egalitarian ideas to include in its initial vectors of struggle a technopolitical break.

(ii) This lifeworld entanglement, and the mandate for technopolitical decisiveness, means that reticular protentions, as capital accumulates them in the feed-forward effect of reticular synchronization, are an unavoidable landmark in the terrain of political struggle. The answer broached in this thesis is that Luddism is too short-sighted: instead, it is reasonable to insist both on a communist resynchronization, and the deliberate desynchronization away from capital that that goal inevitably requires. Whether this initiatory desynchronization occurs via the bombardment of data centres in Belgium, Taiwan, or Chile, or financial starvation via government decree, or the occupation of the Googleplex hub in California (or any of its offices in New York City, Seattle, Austin, Chicago) by revolutionary actors with lists of demands is

difficult to ascertain in advance. The arrival however of this kind of resistance in territories like the United States is foreseeable, especially on protracted timescales.

(iii) Red cyberneticism, like neo-Luddism, is a subordination of the political to the technological, which restricts the autonomy of politics and also neglects, in its dream of a system of ends, the bond established in earlier chapters between language in the generic and the incalculable. On this point, Badiou answers Stiegler via Hamann: language as thought, when it passes into writing as techno-logos, preserves genuine bifurcations (or the incalculable) as tertiary retentions from which secondary retentions can emerge and primary retentions can be lived, thereby opening up, through the recursion of this process, the duration of this incalculable bifurcations in a persistent protentional structure that demands fidelity. In other words, the exosomatization of the discursive reason immanent to truth procedures propels a negative, self-adjusting feedback loop that if it is not containable by capitalist reification *can* flourish outside of it, but only—and this is the difficult part—if it includes in its flourishing the destitution of the system of protentional capture that it narrowly avoided. The key here is for the spark of a genuine communist idea (as that which cannot be properly synchronized, cannot even be acknowledged to exist according to the logic of capital) to include in the criteria of its installation the ruin of the technical means of cognitive reification. If the form of this politics is feedbacking (if the form of Badiouian fidelity as such appears recursive) it is not due to a deference towards cybernetics or a computational imaginary, but to the paradigm of the inhuman in which practice precedes essence: this praxeological paradigm is not algorithmic as the conditions of its recursion are aleatoric rather than combinatorial, and the purpose of its movement is emergent rather than closed. This model of praxis is also where the difference between the Italian post-workerist tradition is strongest: the purpose of this Badiouian-Stieglerian politics is not the

recapture and redistribution of the economic potential stolen during the exploitation of cognitive labour and rentiership, but the exposure and decimation of the ideological function of this process as part of a wider and broader upheaval against the epochal obscenity of capitalism.

(iv) The 'mass work' or continuous investigation that discovers the two roads—one conservative, the other transformational—from which bifurcation must then be decided upon is, as it turns out, a matter of both experimentation and theoretical discovery. In this sense, this very thesis, albeit in an esoteric and negligible way, contributes to the latter activity by arguing that there is a roadblock preventing the refoundation of the principle antagonism along which to bifurcate (viz., the antagonism between capitalist oppression and communist liberation), and that this roadblock is the world-historical reification machine that absorbs global protentional working. One 'solution' to this impasse, to be undertaken alongside the work of aggressive desynchronization and in preparation for a resynchronization that acknowledges the anti-capitalist truth that there is only one world for all of us, is to instigate the creation of an international reservoir of postcapitalist retentions. Acting as a postcapitalist encyclopedia, this scission would rewrite, in an ongoing way, the ossification of the communist incalculability of the past (a library of failures and partial successes) in such a way as to erect a foil for the present that exceeds the shattered mirror offered by loci of information retrieval such as Google. This is perhaps the most immediate way to implement a sheltered flocculation that, if nothing else, allows the lie of capitalist finitude to be judged en masse. There is no obligation for this living archive to be digital (its digitality may in fact be premature) though the speed of digital writing, recording, and transfer may prove advantageous.

(v) Finally, there is the confirmation, through the case study, of a uniform concern (although expressed in depoliticized jargon) for the expansion of cognitive rentiership found in

Google's patent filings, data tracking protocols, and LLM integration into search as it has progressed over the last half decade. As was stated earlier, this is not particularly surprising, as it makes good sense as a capitalist firm—and this is the real point—to maximize the vertical integration of your seemingly endless primary resource (volunteered digital writing) in a way that fights flagging rates of profit by chasing a rising inorganic composition of capital. It also makes perfect sense to do this without paying any heed to the political effects of reification as Google (or Alphabet) benefits exclusively from the continuation of capitalism, from perpetuating, as it is uniquely well-poised to do, the ideological wages of imperialistic consumerism. In a bizarre act of retrojection, it is as though Google has found a way, through the alignment of its patents, abandoned cookie-alternative, and rapid LLM-ification of search, to synchronize its own corporate protentions. This was explained above as a series of contradictions pointing to impending crises, but at a deeper level signifies something about the irrational automaticity of gigantic firms. Even the regular abstraction of language from billions of minds affords Google no greater capacity to navigate the ultracomplexity of capitalist totality. We once again confront the strange notion that lingopower, for all its rentier profits and ideological effects, is unable to inhabit the standpoint of language in the generic and the communist totality that it portends. The conceptual powerlessness of lingopower in the face of historical actuality suggests, rather appealingly, that it cannot anticipate its own demise.

Language Without Landlords: The Inhuman Hermeneutic

The fiction of Thomas Pynchon and Evan Dara, particularly *The Crying of Lot 49* (2012 [1965]) and *The Lost Scrapbook* (1998), give us glimpses of what a kind of universalized counterforce to capitalist lingopower might look like, albeit in somewhat outdated fashion (bordering on quaint Luddism) relying as they do on targeted blitzkriegs of letter writing, in

Dara's work, and an underground, anarchic postal system for surreptitious exchange in Pynchon. What both novels vaguely gesture towards however, and what this thesis struggles to prefigure, is a form of digital language that grants the greatest possible access to high density informational exchange while also providing the greatest possible shield from the advertising industry, being as it is the engine driving the commodification of thought and sophistication of cognitive rentiership. This 'search engine', if it would even be appropriate to still name it as such, would not resemble Google or DuckDuckGo or any of the other search engine clones in any way, because its foundational principle would be a total reorientation of the relationship between language and the world, such that the purpose of mediating curiosity is depth and richness of connection and engagement—in other words, to transform curiosity into a style of authorship, by default. This would entail an explicitly political reconfiguration search engines, in which exploration existed totally independently of either the marketplace or the state, and contained an entirely novel dimension, a dimension of digital poiesis, that, as is so often the case, we have to invent in order to envisage. This curiosity-poiesis portal would, in some sense, resemble Badiou's "encyclopaedia of the situation" replete with its deductive discernibles that blockade the indiscernible (Badiou, 2013b, p. 345). Here we might offer the idea though that, even though encyclopaedias are not sufficient for political truth procedures, they are nevertheless necessary in order to be broken. In this paradoxical manner, we may note that in the absence of a non-fragmented encyclopaedia of the situation, there is no exceptional indiscernible term to identify, and a total saturation of exchangeable names prevails, producing a kind of frantic (one could even say neurotic) series of contradictory reorientations. In contrast, this new technical configuration would harbour the untranscendability, inexistent-indexicality, cognitive indecomposibility, libidinal reflux, and interpretability of *langage-au-générique* such that, as in

centuries past, we would again refuse to see and do otherwise than what we ourselves see, and what we ourselves decide we must do, as subjects striving to immanently install in reality the generic multiplicity of a better world that has passed through our consciousness like the apparition of a second sun, and that leaves in its shadows an empirical trace of real situational truth. Finally, it would do us well to remember that since, under the current technical system, cognitive rentiership is based on the extraction of rents for "immaterial" or "insensible" labour (Lazzarato, 1996; Brown, 2014), we are not dealing with the owners of infrastructure and land holdings so much as lords over the fruits of cognition. Therefore, the slogans at our disposal ought to reflect this acute dimension: 'Abolish Mindlords!' is one rather ungainly battle cry for the project of an inhuman hermeneutic.

As was discussed in earlier chapters, Badiou's conception of truth procedures, which entails the gamble of creating what will have been retroactively necessary in order to maximize the existence of an inexistent possibility in a given political juncture, and Stiegler's call for negentropic bifurcation away from the pseudo-universal misery of capitalist synchronization, both entail the revelation of a new sociotechnical universality, one that may lead to the overcoming of the social fragmentation that currently prohibits the execution of mass political truth procedures in post-industrial societies. Of course, this new sociotechnical universality already needs to exist, in some sense, in order to achieve its own goals. Rather than treat this logic of presupposition as an impasse, we need instead to simply anticipate the possibility that the next globally significant political truth procedure might include the construction of a technology of social unification. The overcoming of the present order's merciless deflocculation will only come about, it seems, through the building of a technical system of flocculation that counters it, and the first of such systems will precisely be the system created during the process

of trying to arrive at one. If one had to anticipate its key components or features, they would be first and foremost the liberty of language, here understood as neither the 'right' nor the 'permission' to harass and aggrieve, but rather as the removal of the economic constraints that, in neolithic deference to the profit motive, preclude the infinitization of human curiosity, which in earlier chapters was spoken of as the 'parleptic' drive universal to all human beings. We have not yet seen the tyrannical heights of extractive lingopower, which at its logical extreme—a mode of total extraction—might resemble cascades of financial transactions triggered by increasingly uncommunicative signals and be accompanied by the total heat death of political imagination as endless repetitions of historical finitude. Nor, however, have we seen real technologies of parlepsis, a force which, as the very crucible of the infinite in social existence, disregards the false limits used to justify domination.

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