



The Public Intellectual is Dead, Long Live the Public Intellectual! The Postdigital Rebirth of Public Pedagogy

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Abstract

The figure of the public intellectual and the act of public pedagogy are fairly central to varieties of critical pedagogy. Public intellectuals have historically been those who speak truth to power and challenge dominant ways of thinking, and critical pedagogy argues that academics have to take up this call, leaving the ivory towers and entering the public sphere. Critical pedagogues are not alone in their concern about the retreat of intellectuals or academics from public life, yet to what extent are these notions of the public intellectual tied to a pre-digital age, and how might the digital age undermine these notions? In this paper, we argue that the digital has facilitated the death of the traditional public intellectual as the means of intellectual production have been dispersed throughout society. Turning to Paolo Virno's writing on potential and history, we examine the pedagogy of the public intellectual and present a new configuration of learning and studying that emphasizes the infinite potentiality of history and the present. Whereas most scholarship defines learning as the actualization of potential, we show that potential is never fully actualized. Such a configuration introduces the need to historically saturate political acts with meaning, which we argue is the new task of public intellectuals in the postdigital age. In order to do this, however, academics who wish to contribute to social movements must embed themselves and operate within social movements, joining the leadership of organic intellectuals and professional revolutionaries, and even viewing their own critical work not as the production of new knowledge but rather the amplification of existing knowledges generated through these struggles, shifting the educational register from epistemology to ontology, and the educational mode of operation from teaching to collective studying.

Keywords: *public intellectual, social movements, postdigital, critical pedagogy, time, actual, potential, déjà vu*

Introduction

Scholarship on, and enactments of, public pedagogy increasingly take up space in academic literature and related conversations. Academic workers in various fields—including beyond the humanities—want to make their work accessible and relatable to the public in different ways. This is likely egged on by recent attacks on higher education, which are often justified by presenting the university as bastions of elitist and detached liberals with little to nothing to offer society.

Another impetus, especially for those of us on the Left side of academia, is a desire to make our work speak to—and, in rare cases, with—social movements. Alternatively, in what we could call public pedagogy as pathology, by engaging in public pedagogy we can imagine ourselves as activists and organizers by the mere act of, say, publishing a blog post.

As an unwieldy and often under- and un-theorized term, public pedagogy doesn't adhere to one kind or set of acts or research. In their study of public pedagogy scholarship, Jennifer Sandlin, Michael P. O'Malley, and Jake Burdick (2011) found five kinds of orientations: "(a) citizenship within and beyond schools, (b) popular culture and everyday life, (c) informal institutions and public spaces, (d) dominant cultural discourses, and (e) public intellectualism and social activism" (p. 340). They locate the origins of the proliferation of dominant uses of public pedagogy in the work of Henry Giroux. Inspired by Edward Said's living scholarship that betrayed any borders between the academy and the public, "Giroux draws on cultural studies literature that focuses on popular culture as a site of socialization and an arena in which hegemony is reproduced as well as challenged" (Sandlin, O'Malley, & Burdick, p. 344).

Key here is that popular culture (including what are known as everyday life and the public sphere) is an absolutely crucial arena where critical teachers, students, and activists must intervene to disrupt the reproduction of inequality, oppression, and domination. As Giroux (2018) puts it in a recent book, pedagogy in general "is always implicated in power relations because it narrates particular versions and visions of agency, civic life, community, the future, and how we might construct representations of ourselves, others, and our physical and social environment" (p. 85). Such a pedagogy, of course, must not be limited to the school, and so we "must be attentive to how pedagogical practices work in a variety of sites to produce particular structures in which identity, place, worth, and above all value are organized in the service of the practice of freedom and justice" (Giroux, 2018, p. 85). A mobilizing figure in this project is the public intellectual, who brings light on and clarity to underlying problems and realities. Simply and popularly put, the public intellectual speaks truth to power. Noam Chomsky is a prime example for Giroux (2014), as he "trades in ideas that defy scholastic disciplines and intellectual boundaries" at the same time as he "makes clear that it is crucial to hold ideas accountable for the practices they legitimate and produce, while at the same time refusing to limit critical ideas to simply modes of critique." In other words, Chomsky works at the level of ideas to not only critique what exists but also to call for alternatives, or at least to signal where they might be found. The public pedagogy of the public intellectual is a form of teaching and instruction that is positioned away from the private and toward the public. The public intellectual is an individual who initiates or supports transformative processes, facilitating the realization of agency in the process. They do so not by organizing but by thinking, not by protesting but by writing, speaking, and teaching.

This leads us to some of the problematics of public pedagogy scholarship that Jennifer Sandlin, Jake Burdick, and Emma Rich (2017) explore in their helpful article on public pedagogy research and practice. Specifically, they interrogate the power relations inherent in both individual and collective forms of public intellectualism, how the public pedagogue and the public relate, and the ethical issues involved in locating "activist work under the umbrella of 'pedagogy'" (p. 824). Against the individualized public intellectual that Giroux calls on (the one who uses research and accessible writings like blog posts to expose and demystify inequalities), feminist and communal approaches to public intellectualism look to how the means and ends of public intellectualism can line up by seeing communities and collectives as public intellectuals in their own right. No longer the recipients of the enlightened progressive academic, the public is comprised of activists and

others who do their own teaching, exposing, and demystifying. Taken as a whole, these formulations “illustrate a vision of public intellectualism that, while potentially centering on a particular figurehead, does not locate its educational investments within an individual’s intellectual capital” (Sandlin, Burdick, & Rich, 2017, p. 826).

Sandlin, Burdick, and Rich (2017) go next to Biesta’s educational philosophy to pick at the relationship between pedagogy and the public(s). Drawing on Hannah Arendt, Biesta (2006) prefers to talk about publicness rather than the public. The latter signifies a fixed or static product while the former signals a kind of being-together, one that enables beings to act (to begin and to take up others’ beginnings). If we take publicness as our aim, then public pedagogy doesn’t *produce* a public nor does it speak *to* an already-existing public. Thus, Biesta calls for a pedagogy that works *toward* publicness, one that provides opportunities for people to truly act and be together. Finally, they pose the “problem of pedagogy,” or the problem that public pedagogy scholarship takes forms of activism and other public interventions as pedagogical rather than as political. Here they draw on Biesta’s critique of learning regimes, which individualizes education and politics. They argue that under this conceptualization “learning is always future-oriented, as learners are urged to *become* something, and to embrace an ideal of being or doing *something better* in the future” (Sandlin, Burdick, & Rich, p. 830-831). Even more fundamentally, they point out that “what we *know* as education is informed by existing, school-related cultural artifacts, practices, and beliefs, all of which are ultimately arbitrary yet operate to limit our capacity to see or even imagine new possibilities that lie beyond those institutional scripts” (p. 832). We can see the limitations of this within the article itself, as the only educational modes of operation mentioned are learning and teaching, which are themselves untheorized. The dominant framing of learning and teaching rests on a certain educational logic, or scale, running from potential to actual. The learner has the potential to actualize certain knowledges, skills, habits, politics, and so forth, and the teacher is the one who helps the student actualize these through whatever methods, from transmission to dialogue. Thus, we are left with an understanding that public pedagogy starts with a potential pedagogy that is actualized through its engagement with the public realm (whatever the coordinates of that realm may be).

In what follows, we explore the current status of the public intellectual in the postdigital age. In particular, we focus on the *pedagogy* of the postdigital public intellectual. The paper follows several steps, beginning with pedagogy. We first examine the philosophical relationship between the potential and the actual that is found in educational scholarship on studying and learning. Building on the insights of Paolo Virno’s (2015) reworking of this philosophical relationship, we present a new conception studying and learning that emphasizes the irreducible resistance of potential. We turn next to the postdigital, articulating the potentials and problematics it introduces and demonstrating how its logic corresponds to the pedagogical landscape we extract from Virno. In order to ask if and how we can reformat the public intellectual in this new arena, we appraise the responses of three public intellectuals whose careers have straddled the postdigital divide. Having laid our conceptual groundwork, we move to synthesize and propose a kind of collective digital studying in which the public intellectual moves from critique to organization, which necessitates a subordination to existing social and political struggles.

The Actual is Always Potential

Educational philosophers have turned in recent years to the educational logic of studying as an alternative and potentially oppositional logic to the logic of learning, which currently dominates the educational landscape. The most influential philosopher here is arguably Tyson Lewis, who has taken Giorgio Agamben's work to develop a rich theory of study as a form of inoperative education. Lewis (2017) turns to a distinction Agamben finds in Aristotle's writing on potentiality. Agamben (1999) finds two kinds of potential in Aristotle: generic and effective. Agamben writes the distinction as follows:

The child, Aristotle says, is potential in the sense that he must suffer an alteration (a becoming other) through learning. Whoever already possesses knowledge, by contrast, is not obliged to suffer an alteration; he is instead potential... thanks to a *hexis*, a 'having,' on the basis of which he can also *not* bring his knowledge into actuality... Thus the architect is potential insofar as he has the potential to not-build, the poet the potential to not-write poems. (p. 179)

Learning is organized around generic potential, wherein one transitions from "I can" to "I am." Here, the ends (what one can do) organizes and drives potential. This is the logic of learning described above, in which the student is defined as having the potential to achieve predetermined ways of being in the world and so must use their potential to actualize those things. Potential is *only* in the service of actualization. If a student doesn't actualize their potential, they are merely wasting it. If a teacher doesn't help the student actualize their potential, they are ineffective. It is imperative to note that when the demand of actualization reigns, potential is held captive to *what is*, because the only reason we know what the actualization of potential looks like is if that potential already exists in the world. For example, actual citizens determine our conception of what the potential citizen looks like. Studying, by contrast, embodies effective potential, or potentiality *as such*. Divorced from the command to actualize potential, the studier drifts endlessly (so long as they remain a studier, that is) between conception and action. This is an important notion because it frees the student and the world up to new unforeseen and unforeseeable pleasures, uses, forms of life, ways of knowing, and social relations (see Ford, 2016; Lewis, 2017; Zhao, 2018).

Paolo Virno (2015) gives us a different conception of potential, one that we believe has more postdigital promise than Agamben's version. Virno doesn't go to the divergence between generic and effective potential—a divergence that rests on an earlier disjuncture between act and potential—and instead, through an analysis of the *déjà vu* phenomenon, theorizes potential and act as *co-constituting agentic twins*. *Déjà vu*, it must be remembered, is an *imagined* repetition. In other words, it isn't when an event that has actually transpired before occurs again at a different, later time. Neither is it when an event *similar* to what is transpiring in the present happened at another point in the past. Instead of a concrete repetition, *déjà vu* is a chimeric repetition. It's always an uncanny phenomenon because we are *almost* certain it happened, but we are *almost* certain it didn't happen. As an event, *déjà vu* is something that both might and might not have happened.

Déjà vu isn't a problem with memory, because it is not that our memories are defective or confused. It is, however a problem proper to memory. Virno shows that *déjà vu* reveals the problematic of our thinking of the operation of memory and, more specifically, the problematic of the

domain that we assign to memory: the past. “Rather than limit itself to preserving traces of times past,” Virno (2015) remarks,

memory also applies itself to actuality, to the evanescent “now.” The instantaneous present takes the form of memory, and is re-evoked even as it is taking place... Inasmuch as it is an object of memory, the “now” is camouflaged as the already-been, and is thus duplicated in an imaginary “back then,” a fictitious “other-then.” (p. 7)

Held in the grip of our present memory, we are never able to fully or decisively suss out the now and the illusory back-then. They rather appear as heterogeneous events blocked together, disrupting any regime of certainty.

Déjà vu is predominantly framed as an act of misattribution and false recognition, as a blunder or mistake, and hence as something to be overcome or brushed aside if we want to keep our sanity (or go on learning). Déjà vu as false recognition corresponds with an epistemology of history as a series of acts that exhaust themselves. This epistemology figures that history remains in the past and, to the extent that it carries over into the now and the future, it is as a limit or a basis of what can happen (we could think of some more vulgar versions of historical-materialism here). History is an act that happens, and there’s no more to it. It’s over. This is Agamben’s logic of generic potential, in which potentiality is no more, and all we have is a past actualized actuality, its occurrence and its record of existence. Virno contends, on the other hand, that such an understanding fixes history into a static accomplished end. As such, we need an alternative epistemology of history, one that will help us grasp déjà vu differently, and in this way provides the frame to rethink the relationship between history, time, potential, and the actual. As we show later, the logic of the postdigital era corresponds with—if not rests on—this rethinking.

First, riffing on a passing and one-off remark in Henri Bergson’s essay on false recognition, Virno builds an argument that perception and memory have methodological differences. Perception, on the one hand, pins the present down as a concrete and concluded act “resolved in unambiguous given facts” (p. 14). Memory, on the other hand, confines the present “within the terms of mere potential,” which crucially means that memory always holds onto the present’s *virtual* character” (p. 14). In other words, our bodies divide experience into two. First, our senses stabilize the experience into an ordered set of characteristics (who did what, what happened, how the happening felt on what date); second, our memory destabilizes the experience into the realm of potential. Déjà vu is when both methodologies are blocked together, when the act and the virtual twist together, or, more strictly speaking, when the *specific* act and its potential, and the *specific* potential and its act twist together.

Potential is never the exhaustion of the act, never a passage from “I can” to “I am” or from “I will” to “I did,” wherein one no longer can and instead is. As he formulates it,

far from being liquidated or debased, potential reaches its very acme precisely when it persists as potential alongside the corresponding act. The difference in its nature precludes any assimilation, instead implying its independence: the possible is not cancelled out by the real, as if it were a temporary interlude, but rather represents another way of being, substantial in itself.” (Virno, 2015, p. 18)

Actualization never exhausts potential, and the phenomenon of déjà vu bears witness to the infinite surplus of each moment, act, and experience that lives on in our excessive memory in the present.

Memory has less to do with the past, then, and more to do with potential. One metaphor for and enactment of this division takes place when writing, reading, or speaking, and a word or phrase is encased in inverted commas, or scare quotes. In such a case, a recognized word is doubled, “is *used* but also *mentioned*; perceived in its actuality, and together with this remembered as something virtual” (Virno, 2015, p. 24). The actual word is communicated as is its surplus potential, and neither the actualization or the potential of the word are eliminated (see Ford, 2019).

Potential and act form the parameters of becoming as they refer to what can be and what is or has been. Thus, they seem to refer to an earlier and a later, where “potential is what which is not *yet* actual (but can become so) whereas the actual is that which is *no longer* potential (but once was). This pair expresses the articulation of earlier and later, the preceding and the subsequent, the past and present” (Virno, 2015, p. 63). Acts occur in time. Actualizations always happen at, during, or over certain definite moments. More specifically, they take place in *present time*. Potential, on the other hand, doesn’t remain *in* time, although it is thoroughly temporal. Actualization marks temporal progression whereas potential, as a steadfast not-now, envelopes the totality of time. The totality of time is therefore not a procession of accomplished acts but a derangement or disordering of what could have been and what yet could be. Memory retains both the actual and potential, the moment *in* time and time *in toto*.

Although Virno isn’t responding to Agamben, because theories of studying rely so heavily on his philosophy, it’s worth dwelling a bit on the explicit divergence. Agamben’s understanding of potentiality links potential and actualization, but Virno’s understanding institutes a solid gap between the two. Virno (2015) characteristically turns to the faculty of language to make his case here:

A faculty cannot be broken down into fractions: the capacity-to-think is not subdivided into portions, and there is no percentage of the capacity-to-speak. The single act of thinking or speech, however indistinct, always has to do with the *entire* corresponding potential. When I ask a passer-by for information, I am mobilising the faculty for language as a whole, not some narrow portion of it. Potential is indeterminate, generic, formless, and thus radically different from a potential act, because it is a *whole without parts*. (p. 84-85)

The act doesn’t bring potentiality into a moment in time, which would exhaustively realize potential. Potential as the perpetual *could be* and *is not* can never be realized, and therefore isn’t divisible. Rather, potential permanently predates and exceeds the act—whether that act took place years ago, is taking place, or will take place in the future—precisely because it is the temporal backdrop or stage of chronology. This allows for a new conception of studying. Studying here isn’t effective potential or a state of inoperativity as it is for Lewis. Because Virno cleaves potential from the actual he paradoxically provides us with a theory of studying that always co-exists with learning. This appears similar to Weili Zhao’s (2018) Daoist approach to studying, which figures studying and learning in a yin-yang movement, wherein both pedagogical modes turn over on each other, are mutually sustaining and informing. We argue, however, that the potential of study is always operative independent of the actualizations of learning.

Moreover, Virno helps us add this temporal dimension, which is necessary for the political work of public pedagogy. When potential is separated from the potential act, history remains double: there is the history of the act and the history of potential, the former having taken place in time and the latter enveloping time and enduring throughout; the infinite possibility of the alternate could-have-been. The past dominates the plane of time for both of these reasons, as accumulated

acts and unrealizable potential. Because potential haunts any act the historical moment is *unsaturated*. The *historical act* takes place within the gap between potential and act. The moment can only be saturated from outside, is filled in through the construction of the past and the future. Because historical acts are saturated externally, they depend on the agents and forces determining historical moments, not during their actualization but in their infinite potentiality. The act is a fact that takes place, and what makes the act historical is the context with which it is imbued. Thus, what makes an act historical is its relationship to a potentiality that is infinite, for there is no limit to the contexts in which we can place facts. History is birthed precisely through this infinite heterogeneity, which is only possible because the act is *not* the exhaustion of potential. The process of saturation is a necessarily collective one, particularly in the postdigital era, to which we turn next. The postdigital rapidly increases the points of saturation through the proliferation of networked technologies, which tends to individualize us (we each have to produce our own “hot take”—and fast!).

The Public Intellectual is Dead

Computers, smartphones, and all other digital devices, are based on electronic circuits which can exist in one of the two states: on/off or zero/one. These two states, combined with three mathematical operations—addition, subtraction, and negation—can describe and perform any logical operation. In the digital world, therefore, potential and act are inseparable partners. A logical unit (bit) in the state of zero, has the potential to turn to the state of one. The act of changing state does not exhaust the potential—now, at the state of one, the same bit has exactly the same potential to turn to the state of zero. This potentiality is constructed by the past (the previous states), the present (the current states), and the future (the possible next states). For as long as our bit is powered by the necessary material conditions like electricity (that some theorists of immaterial production often forget) this potentiality is also infinite. This reminder of the relationships between potential and actual at the very basis of digital technologies shows that fundamental functioning principles for digital technologies are no different from the rest of the natural and social world. However, there is a long way from isolated bits and bytes to a functioning digital device, and there is an even longer way from a functioning digital device to the complexity of relationships between philosophy, technology, and society. During the past few decades, Western societies have passed through the bedding stages of early computer development and social diffusion of computers; we then ran through subsequent stages of computerization; and we quickly left behind concepts such as e-learning and digital education. The digital or electric no longer requires the “e” prefix as it quietly resides in our cars, refrigerators, watches, and bodies. Therefore, Tim Fawns (2019) concludes:

All teaching should take account of digital and non-digital, material and social. Ideas like “digital education” are useful insofar as they encourage people to look closer at what is happening, but become problematic when used to close down ideas or attribute instrumental or essential properties to technology. (p. 142)

The digital has become invisible, and yet its ways of functioning deeply influence our lives. In this uncanny space, powered by digital logics deep under the hood, technical relations between potential and act are inseparable from human and social relations. Slowly but surely, we have arrived in the age of the postdigital (Jandrić et al., 2018).

In the postdigital age, (digital) logic is surprisingly less “logical” than it appears. And this is a lovely example of Virno’s analysis of scare quotes, where neither the actualization or the potential of our subject—logic—are eliminated. The referent is totally suspended, it’s both actualized and totally in potential in that we’ve referenced it in such a way as to throw it into question. From newspaper articles to sophisticated algorithm studies, authors report erratic, non-logical, and sometimes downright crazy behavior of ‘logical’ computers (Peters & Besley, 2019). Furthermore, the ‘logical’ aspect of the postdigital age is just a tip of a much deeper iceberg. Currently, we are at the brink of the phase of “biologization of digital reason,” which “is a distinct phenomenon that is at an early emergent form that springs from the application of digital reason to biology and the biologization of digital processes” (Peters & Besley, 2018). In this spirit, Williamson (2019) describes “a new postdigital science of education that merges brain biology, advanced data, software and algorithms with commercial and political imperatives” (p. 82). Arguably, computers are still based on microchips, which are nothing more than huge conglomerates of electronic circuits described in the beginning of this section. Yet, when it comes to combinations of possible actions performed by microchips, and topped up by their combinations with the biological and the social world, we arrive at a messy and unpredictable postdigital reality rich with potentiality. This potentiality cannot be determined analytically, because trying to describe the postdigital reality by looking into an electronic circuit is like trying to describe the warming of Earth’s seas by looking at a kitchen pot. The micro level is useful, because it helps us understand the physical world around us. Yet, in every imaginable sense, the micro and the macro level are still too far away to explain each other. In the postdigital world, therefore, the ubiquitous presence of digital logic does not change relationships between the actual and the potential described in the previous section. In spite of putting our calculations to digital circuits, we have not surpassed the importance of deep human emotions such as *déjà vu*. In this way, the postdigital is the circuit of infinite potentiality *par excellence*.

However, the postdigital world does place our emotions, communications, and politics into new contexts; more generally, it offers very different ways of human participation in the world. This article is written by two co-authors, who are dear friends, and yet who have met only a couple of times IRL (in real life). Our professional and personal relationship has developed almost exclusively online, and yet our IRL and online encounters blend together almost seamlessly. At any moment, we can log into a social network of our preference and sign thousands of different petitions, but our signatures usually produce very little effect or no effect at all. Social uprisings, such as the proverbial Arab Spring, are now organized on phones. While digital technologies can support and bolster social struggles, this is not always the case. There are even times when people organize political events on a social media site and then don’t even bother showing up. Broadly speaking, all these developments belong to a wide definition of popular culture, which has indeed remained the main arena of social development and struggle in the postdigital age. However, the arena of popular culture has irreversibly changed. The so-called information revolution, or what we prefer to more broadly describe as the arrival of the postdigital age, has been one of the fastest technological and social changes in the history of humankind—it happened, more or less, within a single human lifetime. Further, the postdigital age rests on the educational formation of a disjunctive synthesis between the potential and actual. At this point, we can perhaps understand most simply what this educational formation means for us today. Consider the retweet. With each retweet, we add our own take to an actualized tweet. The new retweet is actualized yet still remains completely in potential, for we can take up the tweet again, deploy it in different ways and directions.

Before we reevaluate the public intellectual in this version of life, it might be useful to look into ways in which actual public intellectuals, who lived through these turbulent times, have responded to the postdigital challenge. As part of a book project, between 2012 and 2017 Petar Jandrić conducted interviews with 16 public intellectuals and asked them various questions about the position of public intellectuals and educators in the age of the postdigital network (Jandrić, 2017). We call on these now to get a first approximation of the reformatted public intellectual in the postdigital age.

We start with Henry Giroux as an entry point, for he is not only one of the founding theorists of contemporary critical pedagogy in the U.S., but also, as noted above, a prolific contributor around the research theme of public pedagogy and the public intellectual. A lot of Giroux's work has focused on the social role of teachers (e.g., Giroux, 2012). Since *Teachers as Intellectuals* (1988), however, digital technologies have transformed our social landscapes so radically that the original formulations can't remain intact. Giroux's response has taken place over a few decades, although he locates the origins in the 1990s and the explosion of the Internet and its reconfiguration of knowledge production and dissemination, which "placed all kinds of new responsibilities on the intellectuals" (Jandrić, 2017, p. 146). These responsibilities included how to not only study public problems but also how to publicize the work so it can have some kind of impact. He can't think the educator outside of the compulsion to address key social problems. Yet there is a new urgency for public intellectuals "to master digital technologies." This is urgent because of the drive "to eliminate the public intellectuals and to replace them with anti-public intellectuals" (Jandrić, 2017, p. 147). Here we can sense that Giroux has certain figures in mind—the public intellectuals. But there is another, more fundamental question perhaps: how to give intellectuals the space necessary to produce their work? And to legitimate their work? By situating their work as public pedagogy, this space and legitimation is created, and he "think[s] that information technology is absolutely essential in doing that" (p. 147).

The Internet represents an alternate public sphere, or in any case a technology that fundamentally reorders our notion of the public. Giroux locates an "enormous" potential for democracy in the Internet as it pertains to the production and circulation of alternative knowledges. He claims that "ten or fifteen years ago, many people on the left could not get published in liberal journals or with established academic publishers. All the major public and alternative spheres, rooted in print culture, refused to publish us" (Jandrić, 2017, p. 142). This has changed, and he cites *Truthdig*, *Truthout*, and *CounterPunch* as websites that publish critical and left-wing work, thereby creating "a space for a generation of theorists and public intellectuals who were once considered quite dangerous in the past, and whose work you could not find so easily" (p. 142). Giroux's own work entails facilitating the entrance of new theorists into the alternative public sphere of the Internet. Giroux's notion of the public intellectual is fairly traditional, but the postdigital context has opened up more spaces for them to breathe, exist, and find allies. In other words, the postdigital opens up the possible avenues for the teaching and learning relationship to occur.

We turn next to Fred Turner, who is amongst the most prominent of today's historians of information and communication technologies. Turner believes that "we still live with the *myths* that intellectuals are only those people who write books and say things; that they are deeply involved with culture and literature, rather than say, business and technology; that they are perforce critical" (as cited in Jandrić, 2017, p. 71). He describes such a myth as a "tremendously blinkered view," contrasting it with his own notion that "a new kind of intellectual has arisen alongside the integration of computer networks into our lives" (Jandrić, 2017, p. 71). This figure of the public intellectual writes books still, yes, but as they do so they more fundamentally build *networks*. In

other words, the role of the public intellectual isn't to speak or delegate to the masses, but rather to construct the very relations that make political action possible. As an example, Turner gives us Stewart Brand, whom he calls "a kind of latter-day P.T. Barnum, a circus master" (as cited in Jandrić, 2017, p. 71). What's notable about Brand as a postdigital public intellectual is that he doesn't begin or enter into the building of a network from the position of an expert. Instead,

when he brings networks together they start to do things and develop new languages for their joint projects. Brand himself becomes the person who can use that language and export it. He comes to stand for the circus, just as Barnum once did. (Jandrić, 2017, p. 71)

He terms them *network intellectuals*, who "are simultaneously masters of ideas and masters of social worlds" (Jandrić, 2017, p. 71), insisting that it is this latter aspect that propels the former.

From Turner we get the key idea that the postdigital public intellectual exists in, and produces, networks. The educational inflection can change here as each actualization in the network remains in potential in that it can always be recontextualized or reconfigured. The postdigital public intellectual is inextricably embedded in the social worlds—and we could very well add, social movements—that these networks produce, and that in turn produce ideas. Here we see that today's public isn't a singular figure embodied in an individual human being. They are rather a *node* through which the network expands and extends, a transmitter that propels the formulation, circulation, and development of ideas.

Paul Levinson is a prominent science fiction writer and academic, who extensively worked with prominent media theorist Marshall McLuhan. Yet, with over 500 public appearances on radio and television in various countries, he's also a kind of public intellectual. For Levinson, the network age forms a multitude of openings for one to engage with, and being a public intellectual means seizing all of these opportunities. "I have never turned down an interview request," he says, "and I never will" (as cited in Jandrić, 2017, p. 297). These apertures permeate our everyday lives, and Levinson urges us to *act* on our ideas, express them and put them out into the public. "But if I get a political idea, I immediately write about it. If you have an idea, go for it. Tweet it. Say something about it on Facebook. Write about it" (as cited in Jandrić, 2017, p. 26). The point is to flood the networks with information, perspectives, data. Don't worry if your ideas are rejected or ridiculed, because this just locks information up in the individual. The public intellectual becomes a collective being subjected to greater logics and forces, as it is no longer the academic who judges ideas but rather the movements themselves who take and leave what they need.

Andrew Feenberg, amongst the most influential philosophers of technologies who worked quite extensively with Herbert Marcuse and participated in the May 1968 uprising in Paris, shares Levinson's general idea. But he doesn't think the Left has adequately seized the possibility of the Internet. With the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s waning due to repression and economic restructuring, the Internet was born into "a largely depoliticized public sphere" (Jandrić, 2017, p. 26). While it certainly "provided new possibilities for political communication...the organizational capacity and will of the American Left was broken by then. It has not revived, witness the void left by the Occupy Movement" (author, year, p.#). What's interesting, then, is how Feenberg seems to identify the rebirth of public pedagogy and the public intellectual as latent and merely potential. He adds a crucial element in our own reconfiguration, however, by locating the problem within the *political organizations and forms* and their relationship to the Internet.

The Public Intellectual is Dead—Long Live the Public Intellectual!

Now that we have given a brief snapshot of the significant transformations public pedagogy and public intellectuals have had to undergo, adapt, regroup, or respond to, we want to articulate our own proposal. We do this by building on some of the insights generated above through these different authors, who respond to different questions and in radically different contexts. As a first, simplistic formulation, we will say that the postdigital age has killed the traditional public intellectual by replacing old relations of communication with something new.

In 1979, pop band The Buggles produced a famous song *Video Killed the Radio Star*. During the times of sharp rise in the popularity of music video, the song mourns over a “better past” when people listened to music exclusively on radio. The act of killing, of course, is a mere symbol—40 years after, radio is still alive and well. Instead, the song reflects on the fact that the arrival of (music) video has increased the relative importance of moving images in relation to music, and the act of killing symbolizes a rite of passage from one technology to another. Here, we clearly see Heidegger’s (1977) famous adage in action: “the essence of technology is by no means anything technological” (p. 4). Video and radio are not just technologies. They frame the ways we produce, circulate, and consume media and information, frames how we understand and act with the world around us, and much more—they are frames of two different feelings (in this case, of consuming music), and more generally, of two different *Zeitgeists*. Yet, neither technology killed the other; they continue to co-exist, remaining in potential.

The wheel of history never stops, and it is hardly a surprise that the 1979 song *Video Killed the Radio Star* by The Buggles was parodied in 2010 in The Limousines’ *Internet Killed the Video Star*. Three decades later, we can draw identical conclusions from the new version of the song – we are again talking about the new medium, the new world, the new *Zeitgeist*. And this new world, which we call postdigital, kills the old public intellectual and gives birth to a new public intellectual. The postdigital public intellectual arises from her predecessors’ ashes, and she requires nursing, upbringing, education, and formation. The postdigital public intellectual needs to use postdigital media and respond to the postdigital *Zeitgeist*. For instance, McLuhan famously claimed that radio put Adolf Hitler into power (McLuhan, 1964, p. 261); these days, many claim that “Donald Trump’s ‘celebrity-style’ tweets helped him win the U.S. presidential election” (Bulman, 2016). Obviously, the role of public intellectuals in Trump’s time cannot be modelled over the role of public intellectuals in Hitler’s time, and the threat of public intellectuals and academics ‘disappearing’ from traditional public life, which has become a commonplace base of today’s critiques (e.g. Fuller, 2005; Giroux, 2015), is somewhat misleading. The real question that we are exploring in this article is: where did public intellectuals go and what should they do next? The postdigital age brings about a wealth of postdigital potentialities. Thus, we should not mourn the deceased traditional public intellectual, but rejoice at the birth of the postdigital public intellectual. The public intellectual is dead; long live the public intellectual!

The postdigital public intellectual resides in an uncanny social and media space which has recently received a lot of attention under the label of post-truth. The concept, dubbed as Word of the Year 2016 by Oxford Dictionaries, means: “Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). In this place, we do not want to delve extensively into the question of post-truth, a topic we both explored in other works (Ford, 2018; Jandrić, 2018; Dean, Medak, & Jandrić, 2019). Instead, let us take a look into consequences of post-truth media environment for public intellectuals. The popular adage, “my ignorance is just as good as your

knowledge,” fits the bill for important post-truth dilemmas such as the safety and stakes of vaccination, attitudes to global warming, and similar public issues. In the social world, however, we are not dealing with true/false categories—instead, we *produce* these categories. For example, a protest takes place. Was it a success or not? That will hinge on who successfully saturates the act. In the post-truth world, the act of saturation does not merely happen at the stage of public pedagogy—instead, it is a direct (social and political) struggle over people’s emotions, over the meanings asserted and circulating in the event and the context in which the event takes place.

In other words, history is always *unsaturated* and remains in infinite potentiality. Therefore, the postdigital public intellectual should be concerned both with fighting the struggle over the content of events (filling in events with meaning) and with organizing enough force to assert that content. In this way, action and potential are wedded together, and the problematic (at least partially) transforms from one of intellectualism to one of organizing. In a sentence, the postdigital public intellectual devises new ways to struggle over saturating historical acts, and such an intellectual does so by emerging from *within* the networks of resistance, producing new nodes in the network, and organizing the network into an actual fighting force. Yet this requires two displacements. The first displacement is from the academy to the networked struggles of our day, as one can’t effectively intervene on this terrain from a separate place. The second displacement is away from the one to the whole, as the only way to effectively intervene is as a *collective*. Individuals stand no chance in the struggle over saturation in the postdigital age.

We can turn to the 2014 Ferguson Rebellion for an example of the new form of the public intellectual. In an article on *Liberation School* released just after the Missouri Governor declared a national emergency, Gloria La Riva and Eugene Puryear (2014) struggle to frame the emerging struggle by saturating the previous actions with new meaning. Significantly, La Riva and Puryear have diverse experiences in Black and Latin American liberation struggles (among many others) are both leading members of the Party for Socialism and Liberation. The Party serves as a network that collates and aggregates these experiences to bring them to bear on new struggles of saturation. In their article, they assess the various forces, including the cops, the protest leaders working with the cops, and the diverse masses engaged in street fighting. They describe a deal between the first two actors: “The state recognizes one section of organizers as the leadership of the movement in exchange for these organizers working to minimize those expressions of anger that are outside of their pre-approved actions” (La Riva and Puryear, 2014). They re-narrate the struggle, saturating it with a new historical analysis, in order to shift the forces in favor of those fighting in the streets. “Those who have drawn the movement into a partnership with the police to coordinate ‘peaceful’ responses and set red-lines for permissible action,” they write, “are helping the system retain complete control.” “Leadership with a revolutionary outlook must state first and foremost that the people of Ferguson, and similar communities nationwide have every right to rebel against police terror and the economic terror of poverty and marginalization” (La Riva and Puryear, 2014). Here we see an intervention written from within and directed to the networked struggles fighting not only in Ferguson, but across the nation.

Thus, those of us who hope to be(come) postdigital public intellectuals must grapple not only with theory of social change (which is complex enough in its own right) but also with its practice. There is nothing new in this call: from Gramsci’s organic intellectuals, we know that theory is useless without practice and vice versa, from Lenin’s (terribly misunderstood) professional revolutionary, we know that there can be no revolutionary theory without revolutionary practice. However, while predigital public intellectuals could still get away with a strong focus on theory and open neglect of practice and could privilege the pedagogical modes of teaching and

learning, disseminating their findings and dictates to others via broadcast media, today's postdigital public intellectuals just cannot afford that luxury. In the age of the post-truth, engagement in theory *is* practice, saturating correct interpretations of historical acts is a duty, and the road to truth is a battlefield. We have to engage in collective acts of studying. In the postdigital world, dynamics between the actual and the potential have been irreversibly altered—and many of us would argue, for the worse. However, our analysis shows that the digital logic which runs our devices does not change complex dynamics between the actual and the potential, and that the postdigital society is heavily detached from technologies running under its hood. “The postdigital is both a rupture in our existing theories and their continuation” (Jandrić et al., 2018, p. 895). Video did not kill the radio star, but the new way of consuming music (enabled by video) has transformed the old way of consuming music (enabled by radio). The Internet did not kill the public intellectual, but the new ways of producing and consuming media (enabled by the Internet) have transformed the old ways of being a public intellectual (enabled by pre-digital media). In this dialectic technology is important, but so are the ways we develop and use technology. The postdigital public intellectual understands this postdigital dialectic and seeks postdigital solutions.

Our argument indicates that these solutions are less about intellectual exercises and more about social and political struggle. In the age of post-truth, it is simply not enough to produce new knowledge. It is (at least) equally important to struggle for recognition of existing knowledge, and that pushes the postdigital public intellectual towards social movements. Acting within social movements, we need to recognize the importance of digital technologies in the broadest sense. Instead of merely looking at technological affordances, or seeking easy theoretical exits through subscribing to one or another philosophical determinism, we need to understand the complexity and nuance of the postdigital reality. We need to learn how to produce digital media, develop alternative public spheres, and create spaces where people can be truly equal in inequality. We need to look beyond microchips and into the biological challenge, or what Michael Peters and Tina Besley (2019) call bio-informational capitalism. We need to build networks. While we acknowledge that a certain balance between theory and action has always been a part of the public intellectuals' life, it is fair to say that traditional public intellectuals have predominantly been beings of critique. The postdigital public intellectual is predominantly a being of organization. This helps explain the resurgence of interest in historical and contemporary revolutionary organizations, from the Black Panther Party (and its members like Assata Shakur and Huey P. Newton) to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (and its leaders like Leila Khaled). Networked technologies bring the affects of this kind of organizing closer. When we participate in acts of saturation—when we contribute to trending hashtags, appropriate memes, signal boost tweets and articles—we join in a collectivity-in-constitution that struggles over political meaning.

The communication networks in which we are constituted and through which we organize disperse the entry points for the production and dissemination of information, theories, and analysis. Yet this isn't a democratization, for those with capital are able to finance troll farms, purchase advertised posts, and so on. The act of saturating history and the present—the act of filling an event with signification—thus depends crucially on coordinated organizations. The infinite heterogeneity that constitutes an act's endless potentiality—the potentiality in which collective studying takes place—is educationally desirable but politically problematic. We need not choose between potentiality and actuality, which is fortunate given that there are so many highly funded and coordinated efforts—many of them centralized through state apparatuses—to soak the present with meaning and move on. The fact of the matter is that the present moment isn't lacking the latest theory or the most updated philosophical toolkit, and the sooner we recognize this the sooner we

can dispense with our predigital notions of public pedagogy. Networks have replaced the detached academic, who if they are to join in the new pedagogy of the public intellectual will do so not as an academic but as a node in an ever-expanding network. It is with this message, that we welcome the birth of the postdigital public intellectual into our world who, it should be clear by now, is always already a *collective* assemblage whose educational logics run along the lines of collective postdigital study, and not traditional teaching and learning.

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