Two Spectres: Communism and Abstraction
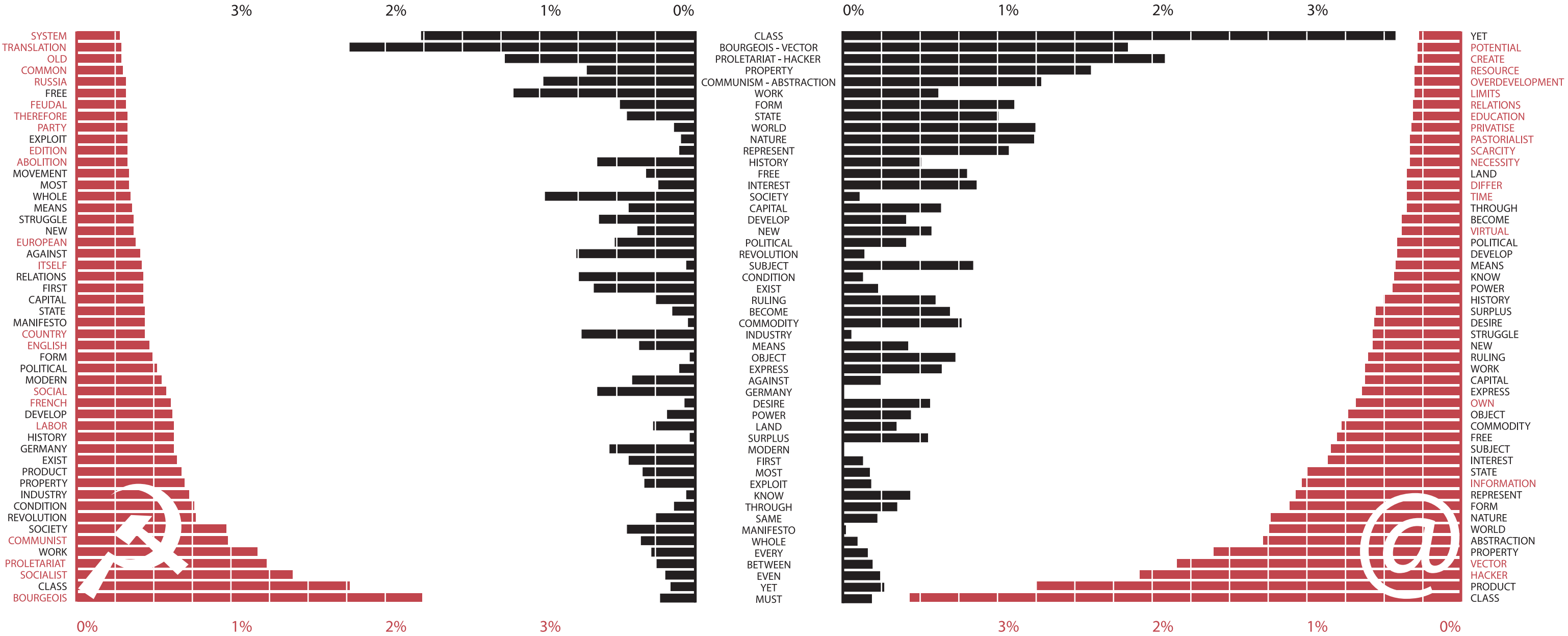
Word-Frequency Analysis of *A Hacker Manifesto* and the *Communist Manifesto*

Left (red) histogram — top to bottom: SYSTEM, TRANSLATION, OLD, COMMON, RUSSIA, FREE, FEUDAL, THEREFORE, PARTY, EXPLOIT, EDITION, ABOLITION, MOVEMENT, MOST, WHOLE, MEANS, STRUGGLE, NEW, EUROPEAN, AGAINST, ITSELF, RELATIONS, FIRST, CAPITAL, STATE, MANIFESTO, COUNTRY, ENGLISH, FORM, POLITICAL, MODERN, SOCIAL, FRENCH, DEVELOP, LABOR, HISTORY, GERMANY, EXIST, PRODUCT, PROPERTY, INDUSTRY, CONDITION, REVOLUTION, SOCIETY, COMMUNIST, WORK, PROLETARIAT, SOCIALIST, CLASS, BOURGEOIS

Center (black) histogram — top to bottom: CLASS, BOURGEOIS - VECTOR, PROLETARIAT - HACKER, PROPERTY, COMMUNISM - ABSTRACTION, WORK, FORM, STATE, WORLD, NATURE, REPRESENT, HISTORY, FREE, INTEREST, SOCIETY, CAPITAL, DEVELOP, NEW, POLITICAL, REVOLUTION, SUBJECT, CONDITION, EXIST, RULING, BECOME, COMMODITY, INDUSTRY, MEANS, OBJECT, EXPRESS, AGAINST, GERMANY, DESIRE, POWER, LAND, SURPLUS, MODERN, FIRST, MOST, EXPLOIT, KNOW, THROUGH, SAME, MANIFESTO, WHOLE, EVERY, BETWEEN, EVEN, YET, MUST

Right (red) histogram — top to bottom: YET, POTENTIAL, CREATE, RESOURCE, OVERDEVELOPMENT, LIMITS, RELATIONS, EDUCATION, PRIVATISE, PASTORIALIST, SCARCITY, NECESSITY, LAND, DIFFER, TIME, THROUGH, BECOME, VIRTUAL, POLITICAL, DEVELOP, MEANS, KNOW, POWER, HISTORY, SURPLUS, DESIRE, STRUGGLE, NEW, RULING, WORK, CAPITAL, EXPRESS, OWN, OBJECT, COMMODITY, FREE, SUBJECT, INTEREST, STATE, INFORMATION, REPRESENT, FORM, NATURE, WORLD, ABSTRACTION, PROPERTY, VECTOR, HACKER, PRODUCT, CLASS

Two Manifestos

Reading *A Hacker Manifesto* can be dizzying, particularly for the reader that lacks a background in Marx. In order to try to get a bit of a handle on the text, to slough off the wordplay and labyrinthine circumlocution, I did what any red-blooded American would: applied gratuitous amounts of brute force. Both *AHM* and the *Communist Manifesto* underwent the Burroughsian cut-up Cuisinart of mechanical literary analysis: word frequency analysis. By removing syntactic structure, the raw material—and hopefully, the nature—of a text is revealed.

A basic frequency-count is a crude measure: it's not context-specific, and thus over-counts words with multiple meanings (or even shades of meaning). The frequency-count doesn't account for synonyms or multiple phrasings of similar concepts, (to say nothing of multiple meanings and ambiguities layered in the texts). Fuck it. If the president doesn't have to "do" nuance, neither do I. There's a certain aesthetic charm in performing surgery with a hatchet; the patient may not agree, but the surgeon's guaranteed a lusty good time and some pretty, rewarding spatter.

The bluntness and crude nature of the technique may not be ideal for an analytical tool, but a patina of obfuscation is a hack that works as an artistic lever, ideal for an elicitive work such as this one.

Most analytic graphics tell a story. This analytic graphic is instead a medium for conversation; rather than describing, it asks questions. This is a quantitative map of a network, an anti-structuralist accounting of the most atomic elements of a text. It is meant to be a deuterological object, a visualization aid, a representation that rewards the viewer who stands in front of it, picks it apart, and works it out for themself, making their own connections.

Methodology

AHM and the *Communist Manifesto* were analyzed using simple word frequency analysis. The 100 most common English words ("*The*", "*of*", "*and*", "*to*", etc.) were excised. Multiple forms of a word have been summed and listed under the root word before the final count (e.g., "*vector*", "*vectors*", "*vectoral*", "*vectorally*", etc, are all included in the count for "*vector*"). Because the lengths of the two manifestos significantly differ (*AHM* is over two and a half times as long as the *Communist Manifesto*), all comparisons were quantified in percentages relative to each whole work.

Common words were determined by summing the percentages of occurrences in both books. This process includes both words which are high-frequency in both texts, as well as words which may occur very frequently in one and barely at all in the other. Here we see the evolution of a trope through time (e.g. "*subject*", "*object*", or "*representation*"), or the atrophication thereof (e.g. "*Germany*", "*society*", or "*condition*"). Which opens a greater question: is tendency to change terms a result of a correction in argument, or fashion in argumentation?

Graphic Constructions

The black histogram (center) compares the 50 most common words which appear in both Manifestos. Certain equivalencies have been rendered in a few cases because of specific dialectical relationships: "Bourgeois" and "Vector" are cast together, as are "Proletariat" and "Hacker". The two Spectres—Communism and Abstraction —are similarly paired.

The red (outer set) of histograms relate the most common words in each Manifesto, independent of each other. Here is an unadorned picture of the priorities of each text. Words which are both common and of high frequency are colored black in the outer histograms. Take care to note that this is not necessarily a symmetrical property; a word may be frequent enough to register as "common", but only appear one "high-frequency" list—or neither.