

Epidemic Subjects—Radical Ontology

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Francesca Coin

Tearing the Neoliberal Subject

Just let yourselves be overthrown!
Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

A few months after the occupation of Gezi Park, Stephen Snyder wrote an article for *Roar Magazine*, in which he described the Turkish protests as a process of transvaluation.¹ Snyder argued that it was a process of transvaluation that had lit up Istanbul, a weaving of dancing and art-making, aesthetic intensities and creative performances. In this weaving, singularity had stripped off its old skin of abstract labor and had spilled over into the streets to celebrate new values. The same scene, after all, is shaking up public spaces the world over, where subjectivity is tearing labor off its back together with its morality, with its interpretations of true and false, right and wrong, good or bad behavior, with a reality that is “false, cruel, contradictory, seductive, without meaning,”² as Nietzsche describes it in *The Will to Power*. This process of transvaluation dissolves the old neoliberal era and affirms “an *ascending* evolution of life [...] well-being, power, beauty, self-approval”³ in a social condition that interrupts the eternal return of the same, that continuous process which since primitive accumulation repeats itself every day by weaving a close tie between morality, capitalist production, and state in order to leave it all behind. In this context that strange encounter through which the individual whose own “capacity for labour, his own person” and “the owner of money meet in the market, and deal with each other as on the basis of equal rights, with this difference alone, that one is buyer, the other seller; both, therefore, equal in the eyes of the law” becomes exotic.⁴ The

1 Stephen Snyder, “Gezi Park and the Transformative Power of Art,” *Roar Magazine* (January 8, 2014), available at: <http://roarmag.org/2014/01/nietzsche-gezi-power-art/>.

2 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York, N.Y.: Vintage, 1968), chap. 853, p. 451.

3 Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, trans. H. L. Mencken (New York, N.Y.: Knopf, 1924), chap. XXIV.

4 Karl Marx, *Capital Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1992), p. 119.

encounter between the owner of money and the owner of labor is suspended here, belittled by the arrogant indifference of one of the two sides. There is a double process in this overflow. To cease being acted upon and acting as abstract labor, the forces reacting against this exchange must reject not only the exchange itself and its value, not only pull out of infinite negotiations on *fair* times and working schedules. This is not merely a case of rejecting the conditions of exchange or of rebelling against the supremacy of the strong over the weak and of the master over the slave. It is rather a question of subverting the values of that exchange.

Something similar happened with the Occupy movement, where the process was easier to observe. The students and precarious workers who attempted to liberate Wall Street were part of the diffused intellectuality born in the last forty years, subject to increasing unemployment and rising levels of debt. For the last twenty years, the US administration has made access to credit subject to continuous mechanisms of evaluation. The transformation of welfare into debt-fare, the dependence on credit to access reproduction, knowledge, housing, or health has imposed on subjects a process of constant evaluation. Through evaluation, capital measures, counts, compares, and classifies every subject in order to reward or punish, separating in this way the deserving from the guilty, the useful individuals from the useless, the best from the rest. In this context merit defines the capacity to constitute oneself on the basis of predetermined expectations, thus demonstrating one's propensity to transform leisure time into working time in order to win in the race to the bottom. In 2011 this process broke down. It was no longer a case of producing the maximum quantity of work at the minimum possible cost. The slogan *lost my job, found an occupation* summed up the happy abandonment of the work ethic and the rejection of the sale of bodies and labor in favor of a communal production of new knowledge and new values.

From this point of view, Marx's *Fragment on Machines* also speaks of a process of transvaluation. A process of transvaluation is what we glimpse when "production based on exchange value breaks down, and the direct, material production process is stripped of the form of penury and antithesis."⁵ Then, Marx writes, wealth no longer coincides with the accumulation of money but with the possibility of having time at one's disposal. Work ethic is replaced by the free development of individualities, and hence "not the reduction of necessary labour time so as to posit surplus labour, but rather the general reduction of the

⁵ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin 1973), p. 705–706.

necessary labour of society to a minimum, which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them.”⁶

This chapter offers a moral reading of Marx, or a materialist reading of Nietzsche. In other words, it looks at the crisis of the law of value through values. Deleuze writes that values look like, or are disguised as, principles: “evaluation presupposes values on the basis of which phenomena are appraised. But, on the other hand and more profoundly, it is values which presuppose evaluations, ‘perspectives of appraisal,’ from which their own value is derived.”⁷ If values are disguised as principles, Nietzsche tells us that at the origin of values there is always a hierarchy. At the origin of an evaluation there is always a hierarchy of forces. It is not coincidental, according to Deleuze, that values and evaluation pertain to genealogy. From this point of view, merit—the aspiration to distinction, to cite Nietzsche, the general order of superior moral values through which capital promises to compensate the evaluation of time as utility—always refers to a dialectical order within which capital posits itself as the perspective of appraisal on which the value of all values depends. Throughout the first stage of industrial capitalism the existence of an interpreting subject was hidden in the production of profit: particularly in the West, education and salary were presented as a means of exchange for subsumption, a process that continuously forced the relations of capital and labor to mediation. According to Nietzsche, the willpower expressed by the reacting forces in adapting themselves to a more powerful will is sublime, almost as if the new willpower that appropriates them had in itself the possibility of their reactivation. It may be sublime, but it is still an abortion of the willpower in favor of what is called *responsibility*. In the neoliberal age, this means of exchange no longer exists. Capital has reduced to zero the portion of value exchanged for labor and, as David Harvey puts it, has stopped paying the costs of social reproduction.⁸ In this context, the question we may ask is what makes possible and what blocks a process of transvaluation?

6 Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 637.

7 Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 1.

8 Compare David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

The Origin of Values

We need to go back to the origin, that is, to the moment when we can observe “the entry of forces [...], the leap from the wings to center stage, each in its youthful strength.”⁹ By way of the metaphor of the world as a stage, Sandro Mezzadra notes a possible affinity between the Marxian concept of origin (*Ursprung*) and that which Nietzsche defines as emergence (*Entstehung*). We need to return to the origin because that is where we encounter “the protagonists of the drama that forms the historical plot of the capitalist mode of production,”¹⁰ as Mezzadra calls them: active and reactive forces, dominant and dominated, a hierarchy of forces that transforms a long series of processes of oppression in a hierarchy. The origin is always a hierarchy of forces, a process of oppression from which the difference between the forces derives. But as Deleuze wrote, “the origin is the difference in the origin, difference in the origin is *hierarchy*,”¹¹ the differential relationship from which the value of values is born, that is, the idea of true and false, right and wrong, behind which the stronger will of an interpreting subject is concealed. Following a Marx uncharacteristically dressed up in the garb of a genealogist, we find ourselves back in that timeless zone where the birth of hierarchical relations reveals the origin of all values.

In some ways, Deleuze’s reading of Nietzsche allows us to meet another Marx. In the famous chapter 24 of the first book of *Capital*, Marx argues that the primitive accumulation of capital is first and foremost a history of expropriation: It is violence that separates the producer from the means of production. But the history of expropriation that produces dominant and dominated forces, active and reactive forces, owners of capital and the destitute homeless or vagrants, can be traced back to a moral distinction. The dominant forces claim that the hierarchy is the effect of merit and guilt, the way in which God uses money to express a moral judgement on everyone’s conduct. In this sense, Deleuze’s reading of Nietzsche allows us to re-read capital accumulation in a moral sense, the same process Marx undertakes when he identifies the original sin of political economy in the division between

9 Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Random House, 1984), p. 84.

10 Sandro Mezzadra, “Attualità della preistoria: per una rilettura del Capitolo 24 del *Capitale*,” *UniNomade* 2.0, 16/01/2011, available at <http://www.uninomade.org/per-una-rilettura-del-capitolo-24-del-capitale/> (accessed 07/09/2015)—trans. Francesca Coin.

11 Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, p. 8.

dominant and dominated forces: "this primitive accumulation plays in Political Economy about the same part as original sin in theology,"¹² Marx writes. There is no violence, but rather two qualitatively different forces, "one, the diligent, intelligent, and, above all, frugal elite; the other, lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living. [...] And from this original sin dates the poverty of the great majority that, despite all its labour, has up to now nothing to sell but itself, and the wealth of the few that increases constantly although they have long ceased to work."¹³

The origin focuses on a perspective of appraisal where hierarchy becomes a consequence of conduct. The force that imposes obedience "affirms its difference and makes its difference an object of enjoyment,"¹⁴ while the force that is compelled to obey represents something bad, something that must be "rectified, restrained, limited and even denied and suppressed."¹⁵ In this sense, the will to power that establishes itself in the hierarchy as the genealogy of strength and of powers, the qualitative element that determines the difference between forces, also establishes the perspective from which phenomena are valued. The dominant force embodies victory, merit, and excellence, while the dominated forces stand for sin, bad conduct, and guilt in a dialectical relationship that shapes history through the voice of the dominant powers and identifies those powers with the embodiment of progress itself: the avant-garde tasked with separating prehistory from history, antiquity from the future and "a history whose perspective on all that precedes it implies the end of time."¹⁶

It would be revealing to look at the daily repetition of the process of accumulation from a moral viewpoint starting from the dawn of capitalism, in other words to see in what ways the violence of oppression inscribes itself on the body to define not just the origin of private property but rather the origin of good and evil, of good and bad conduct. Frantz Fanon reflects in depth on the undecidability of truth and falsehood in the colonies, where "the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure. The cause," he writes, "is effect: you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich."¹⁷ Colonial power weaves a tight bond with morality, thus subverting the mental coordi-

12 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, chap. 26, p. 507.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 507.

14 Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, p. 56.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

16 Foucault, "Nietzsche," in *The Foucault Reader*, p. 87.

17 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2004), p. xx.

nates of the indigenous population. It celebrates the oppressing powers in immutable intellectual monuments, while the native “can only recognize with the occupant that ‘God is not on his side.’”¹⁸ Behind beliefs and emotions, behind ways of being, saying, feeling, thinking, behind the lifestyles produced by their origins, there is always a hierarchy: “modes of existence of those who judge and evaluate, serving as principles for the values on the basis of which they judge.”¹⁹ The questions we must ask, then, is, what is the origin of values and which subject is concealed behind the perspective from which we establish the value of all things?

The Law of Value

Nietzsche and Marx were writing a few years apart, in Germany. At the time, “modern industry itself was only just emerging from the age of childhood,”²⁰ and from three different corners of Europe, Jevons, Menger, and Walras were each in their way laying the foundations of economics as an autonomous science, ready to free itself from the apposition of the *political*—what is usually described as the Jevonsian revolution of value.²¹ From that moment, economic analysis no longer defined production as a spontaneous innovation of social processes, but rather as the function of an utilitarian objective, thus opening up economic discourse to mathematical formalization and to individualism as its methodological foundation. This paved the way for interpreting the birth of political economy as the establishment of a new perspective of appraisal. It marked a historical turning point: Value is no longer intrinsic to goods but is expressed as a fraction of a unit of measurement that is universally applicable.

In the 24 January 1873 postscript to the second edition of *Capital*, Marx himself gives us arguments for interpreting political economy as the result of the establishment of a new way of assigning value.

18 Frantz Fanon, “Racism and Culture,” in: *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York, N.Y.: Grove, 1994), p. 38.

19 Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, p. 1.

20 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, Torr ed., p. xxiii.

21 As Ranchetti and Lunghini argue, the revolution of value “rejects the idea that the value of goods would depend on their intrinsic properties. Such value would on the contrary depend on the capacity of individual subjects to appraise whether commercial goods might be able to fulfill their needs.” Giorgio Lunghini and Fabio Ranchetti, “Teorie del valore,” in *Enciclopedia della Scienze Sociali Treccani* (1998), available at http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/teorie-del-valore_%28Enciclopedia_delle_scienze_sociali%29/ (accessed 07/09/2015).

Economy is not a science, Marx argues. It can only be a science to the extent that it reflects the values of a specific interpreting subject:

In so far as Political Economy remains within that horizon, in so far, i.e., as the capitalist regime is looked upon as the absolutely final form of social production, instead of as a passing historical phase of its evolution, Political Economy can remain a science only so long as the class struggle is latent or manifests itself only in isolated and sporadic phenomena.²²

In fact, what we call science describes the process through which one particular interpretation asserts itself as a universal way of assigning value. Science is a *symptomatology* and a *semiology*, as Nietzsche might have put it. It describes a process of capture, appropriation and management of a portion of reality. We are therefore talking not of science but of a process of oppression within which the more powerful forces appropriate the name and function of the other forces. In this instance, too, it is hard not to hear Nietzsche in Marx's words: We are not talking about science but about a general tendency towards indifference, the ultimate aim of which is "to make up for inequalities,"²³ to deny differences and to transform life into matter that can be measured and quantified.

In this context the very concept of abstract labor comes to describe a symptomatology. It is a mere discourse in signs, as Nietzsche puts it in "Twilight of the Idols:" "an interpretation of certain phenomena—more precisely, a misinterpretation."²⁴ It is not just the concept of value, then, that needs to be put under scrutiny, but the very meaning of things, the goal they make their own but which they appropriate from the power that captures them. In lieu of life, then, we find abstract labor whose mathematical representation becomes an anthropological constant that reduces life to something to be measured and quantified.²⁵

From this point of view, the industrial era looks like an exotic anthropological achievement. The concept of value and that of abstract labor

22 Marx, *Capital*, p. 11.

23 Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, p. 45.

24 Friedrich W. Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols," in: Walter Kaufman, ed., *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York, N.Y.: Viking, 1976), chap. "The 'Improvers' of Humanity," p. 501.

25 "The 'arithmetical presentation' assumes abstract labor: that is, it assumes that labor power as an anthropological constant. Human beings are already exchangeable as different deposits of labor power and thus capitalism is always possible." Jason Raed, "Primitive Accumulation: The Aleatory Foundation of Capitalism," *Rethinking Marxism* 14.2 (Summer 2002), p. 44.

hide a society that is wrenched from the commons and in which the rhythm of monetization increases together with the impossibility of direct access to reproduction. In the first phase of industrial capitalism, “the notion of abstract labor becomes a near natural category, a mere mental abstraction, free from all those characteristics—from mercantile alienation to labor expropriation—that make it a specific category of capitalism.”²⁶ In the introduction to his 1857 *Grundrisse*, Marx describes abstract labor as the starting point of modern political economy and of the very facticity of the producing subject. The question that has long haunted Nietzsche is, why would the subject abdicate its own will to power and form itself on the basis of the will to power of others? Why does a force accept to be appropriated anew for new goals, kidnapped again, and adapted to new finalities?—How does it happen? Nietzsche asks. “Which one makes it happen’?, you should ask,” he retorts. For Nietzsche, the pronoun “which (one)” points to the forces that have taken hold of the meaning of all things: Who is hiding there?²⁷ In the transformation from what a force “already is” to what it “is not yet,”²⁸ to cite Pierre Macherey, from *Arbeitskraft* to *Arbeitsvermögen*, from the actual body to the virtual one, as Legrand puts it, another will to power emerges, a will that is more powerful and capable of measuring the other’s action in terms of the benefit it can extract from it, a third passive agent that calculates the value of each object in terms of the utility it can bring to itself.

Nietzsche carefully examines this process of appropriation through which the reactive force abdicates its own will to power and forms itself on the basis of extrinsic values. He does not accept this adaptation. He is disgusted by the adaptive will of the reactive forces, he is repelled by it: “Fie on the thought that merely by means of higher wages the essential part of their misery, i.e. their impersonal enslavement, might be removed!” he writes. “Fie, that we should allow ourselves to be convinced that [...] the disgrace of slavery could be changed into a

26 C. Vercellone, “La legge del valore nel passaggio dal capitalismo industriale al nuovo capitalismo,” *Uninomade*, available at <http://www.uninomade.org/vercellone-legge-valore> (accessed 7 December 2013)—trans. Francesca Coin.

27 Nietzsche *Posthumous Fragments*. Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, p. 77; see also translator’s note 3*, p. 207.

28 Stéphane Legrand, *Les normes chez Foucault* (Paris: PUF, 2007), cited in Pierre Macherey, “The Productive Subject,” trans. Tijana Okić, Patrick King, and Cory Knudson, in: *Viewpoint Magazine*, no. 5 Social Reproduction (October 2015), available at <https://viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/the-productive-subject/>.

virtue!"²⁹ To conclude: "Ah, man returns eternally! The small man returns eternally! [...] Ah, Disgust! Disgust! Disgust!"³⁰

Nietzsche traced the abortion of the will to power in everything he examined, from salaried occupation to education, the main target of his critique.³¹ The problem for Nietzsche was the slave's desire to become *current*, to circulate, to become a currency. Following Deleuze, one could say the problem is that the slave conceives of power only as "the object of a recognition, the content of a representation, the stake in a competition,"³² and makes power the result of a struggle the reward of which is the mere allocation of already established values. We are still within a dialectical relationship. To Nietzsche, the slave's shame consists in subordinating nobility to utility, in putting prudence, the calculating intellect, in the place of courage or vital force. Only a slave would replace the reality of his relationships with a perspective that expresses all those relationships in terms of *measure*.³³ Only a slave sells his own will to power for a means of exchange, for money. Only a slave thinks in terms of utility.

"The *aim* now is to preclude pessimistically, once and for all, the prospect of a final discharge," Nietzsche exhorts, "the *aim* now is to make the glance recoil disconsolately from an iron impossibility; the *aim* now is to turn back the concepts 'guilt' and duty [...] against the debtor first of all."³⁴ For Nietzsche, the slave is precisely he who has for too long looked upon his own natural instincts with *an evil eye*, until those instincts "have finally become inseparable from his 'bad conscience,'" from all "the *unnatural* inclinations [...] to that which runs counter to sense, instinct, nature, animal, in short all ideals hitherto which are one and all hostile to life and ideals that slander the world."³⁵ The slave makes the perspective of the dominant forces his own: He takes on his guilt, his responsibility, the sacredness of duty, and becomes an animal "with the right to make promises," one that is

29 Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *The Dawn of Day*, trans. John McFarland Kennedy (New York, N.Y.: Macmillan, 1911), p. 182.

30 Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common (2010), p. 173.

31 Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, trans. John McFarland Kennedy (London: Foulis, 1909), p. 36

32 Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, p. 10.

33 Compare *ibid.*, p. 118.

34 Friedrich W. Nietzsche, "On the Genealogy of Morals," in: Walter Kaufman, ed., *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, (New York, N.Y.: Random House, 1989), second essay, section 21, p. 91.

35 *Ibid.*, second essay, section 24, p. 95.

"calculable, regular, necessary,"³⁶ equal among equals, conforming to the rules and thus predictable.

Nietzsche always saw utilitarianism lurking behind morality. The issue is that the notion of utility refers to a subject capable of interpreting the actions of others as something to be evaluated in terms of the benefit it can draw from them. The framing of utility in Nietzsche's philosophy demonstrates a kind of capture, a more powerful will that separates a force from what is in its power and gives it a name, a use, an aim, a goal. Deleuze points out that morality conceals within itself the utilitarian point of view, such that the qualities morality ascribes—good and bad, good and evil—hide a subject who claims an interest in actions that s/he does not undertake.³⁷ In this sense, utilitarianism always presupposes a different point of view, a subject that quantifies the actions of others from the point of view of the utility that can be drawn from them.

But looking beneath the surface, Nietzsche reveals an ambivalent attitude towards the abortion of willpower. Deleuze writes that "[t]here is something admirable in the becoming-reactive of forces, admirable and dangerous,"³⁸ since from a certain point of view in this exchange the reactive forces show what amounts to a will to power. As Deleuze puts it, "reactive force is 1) utilitarian force of adaptation and partial limitation; [...] 3) force separated from what it can do, which denies or turns against itself."³⁹ "But, in another way, it reveals to me a new capacity, it endows me with a new will that I can make my own, going to the limit of a strange power."⁴⁰ This is where Deleuze describes Nietzsche's attitude towards the adaptive process of the reactive forces as ambivalent. The will to power they express in adapting is sublime for Deleuze, almost as if the new power this process gives them was the precondition for a new mode of becoming active, making it possible to cross a new threshold. Power here is not conceived as an object of recognition but gives access to a bigger capability. In this sense, aiming for excellence constitutes the essence of the slave's desire. It refers to that order of superior values to which the reactive force aspires so as to conceal its own wretchedness. Aiming to excel, Nietzsche writes, means desiring to see "our neighbour suffer from us, either internally or externally." It means aspiring to "a long series of stages in this secretly-desired will to subdue," that "marriage of pretences, sophis-

36 *Ibid.*, 2.1

37 Compare Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, p. 118.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

tication and sickly idealism which is not coincidentally an excellent history of culture."⁴¹ Thus, "pain would be given to others in order that pain might be given to one's self, so that in this way one could triumph over one's self and one's pity to enjoy the extreme voluptuousness of power." Nietzsche almost apologizes for his excitement, for the orgasmic seduction of the will to power, but his research was such that he could not restrain himself, his yearning for that place where the slave finally triumphs "in the vast domain of psychical debaucheries to which one may be led by the desire for power."⁴²

Answering the question of what can be found behind the becoming-reactive of the forces appears now much simpler. Behind it we find a world divided between high and low, heaven and hell, good and evil, a world defined by the allegedly superior moral values typical of modern dialectical thought and of Christian ideology, the very world that Georges Bataille mocked when he celebrated his big toe, or the other monuments of the oppressing forces. In this world, those forces embody victory, merit, virtue, excellence, while the oppressed ones are left with sin and guilt for what must be rectified, tamed, repressed. Although such a dialectical relationship might seem pathetic to us, in reality it has long been described not just as a social relation but as a precise direction for human evolution. Without revisiting the debate about the Marxian concept of modernity, it bears mentioning that capital has always used dialectics not just to repress but also to embody the promise of progress, of emancipation, of liberation or of ultimate power. "Capital not only presents itself as measure and as system, it presents itself as *progress*. This definition," Negri argues, "is essential to its internal and external legitimation. [...] Progress is the eternal return lit-up by a flash of a *now-time* (*Jetzt-Zeit*). Administration is illuminated by charisma. The city of the devil is illuminated by grace."⁴³

In a sense, we can start thinking about the concept of measure from here. Marx describes the measure of value as the result of an antagonistic relation: the process through which the capitalist, as he puts it, "tries to make the working day as long as possible," while the seller of labor "wishes to reduce the working day to one of definite normal duration."⁴⁴ To the subject who sells his labor, the aim is to free up time for "[t]he free development of individualities, and hence [...] the general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum,

41 Nietzsche, *The Dawn of Day*, p. 99.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 101.

43 Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (London: Continuum, 2003), p. 108.

44 Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, part 3, ch. 10, p. 164.

which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them."⁴⁵ For the owner of money, the aim is to capture life for new objectives, to manipulate it anew and use it as a resource to be extracted, but which is inadequate to enjoy the very prosperity it has produced. The measure of value, in other words, must be placed within a context propped up by values, the values defined by the dominant forces. We are faced, then, with a war between antagonistic perspectives of appraisal, each of which proposes a reading of reality that is the opposite of the other's, like an upside-down image.

The Crisis of the Law of Value

As we have seen, throughout the era of industrial capitalism the positive will of the productive forces is directed towards and incorporated into the will of capital through the production of surplus value, which then functions as a means of exchange for the process of subsumption. In this context, liberal democracy and representative governments, particularly in the West, have had a redistributive task, as social struggles and class conflicts reminded them. In practice the negotiation between diverging conflicts of interests was mainly made possible by the disproportions present in the system. The opportunity to extract surplus value rests on disproportion, in particular on the disproportion between surplus labor and necessary labor; surplus value in its turn makes it possible to achieve a temporary agreement between conflicting interests. At the end of the Fordist era the huge increase in the technical and organic composition of capital reduces profits even if the exploitation of labor intensifies, according to Marx. What is slowly revealed is capital as capital, a subject that reaches its full development when it subsumes into itself the conditions of social reproduction. Marx argues that during the crises, capital becomes visible: it is no longer directly involved in the process of production, but it appears "as money existing (relatively) outside of it"⁴⁶ The productive forces too are no longer directly involved in that process: free labor,

⁴⁵ Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 706.

⁴⁶ "In a general crisis of overproduction the contradiction is not between the different kinds of productive capital, but between industrial and loanable capital—between capital as directly involved in the production process and capital as money existing (relatively) outside of it." Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin 1973), p. 413.

precarious circumstances and unemployment coexist in a relatively autonomous way outside of it.

We are faced with an inversion, or perhaps a separation:

Beyond a certain point, the development of the powers of production becomes a barrier for capital; hence the capital relation a barrier for the development of the productive powers of labor. [...] This is in every respect the most important law of modern political economy, and the most essential for understanding the most difficult relations. It is the most important law from the historical standpoint. It is a law which, despite its simplicity, has never before been grasped and, even less, consciously articulated.⁴⁷

Beyond a certain point the process of negotiation of value that had defined the industrial era breaks down. Like an upside-down image, the devaluation of labor is reflected in the sparkle of private wealth, while the huge development of the productive forces is reflected in using life itself as a resource to be exploited. What Carlo Vercellone analyzes as the divorce between the logic of value and that of wealth is realized in the formation of two fully developed subjectivities that square up to each other as antagonistic perspectives lying at the margins of the productive process.⁴⁸ On the one hand, there is capital in its molar form as the universal creditor and the central management of liquidity. On the other, there is a diffused intellectuality that demands not just the sharing of wealth but an ethical and political rupture with that dialectical world divided between dominant forces and dominated ones, a world against which the movements of the Sixties and Seventies had already fought.

In this context we observe a shift from Marx to Nietzsche, a ninety-degree turn in which conflict is no longer based on the appropriation of value but rather on the assertion of different values. The puzzle for capital is how to reproduce life as a resource to be exploited in spite of the end of scarcity; how to transform leisure time into working time in spite of the fact that productive (not reproductive) labor has become overall superfluous; how to prevent the productive forces from using knowledge to constructive ends. For the productive forces the problem is different. Now that salary is no longer the means of exchange for subsumption; now that the grounds for mediation between capital and

⁴⁷ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 748–749.

⁴⁸ Compare Carlo Vercellone, “La legge del valore nel passaggio dal capitalismo industriale al nuovo capitalismo,” available at <http://www.uninomade.org/vercellone-legge-valore> (accessed 7 December 2013).

labor disappear, we must return to the initial question: What makes a process of transvaluation possible, and what prevents it?

Evaluation/Transvaluation

To speak of evaluation or transvaluation we must start from this element: the relative autonomy of money from the productive process. To say that money circulates in a relatively autonomous way from the productive process means recognizing that money functions as the reserve of value and the currency of exchange. This role sends us back to the end of Bretton Woods as a symptom, of the crisis of labor time as a measure of value.⁴⁹ Unhooked from goods, money is revealed as the perspective of appraisal of an economic hierarchy at the top of which sit the few financial operators who control global financial flows. As the essence of capital, money takes us to the top of a hierarchy that is situated at the heart of financial markets. It is situated relatively autonomously outside the productive process, as Lazzarato has argued, and functions as a universal creditor or central government of liquidity.⁵⁰ Evaluation here means the process through which capital classifies, orders, and compares investment opportunities at the same time as money becomes materialized. The same principle applies to the financing of the public sector, where credit becomes legitimated only insofar as it makes possible an increase in value and return on investments. In the shift from disproportion to crisis, then, neoliberalism becomes the paradigm for restricting access to credit only to those subjects and structures that would be capable of increasing the value of capital's investments. In this context, money becomes the lever through which capital produces the subject and forces it to respond to the needs of the market. This transformation has been particularly intense in institutions of knowledge, as to produce the subject as an assemblage of competencies to satisfy the demands of the market despite the fact that this demand has been increasingly feeble. Here, evaluation fulfills the information function of money: It communicates the value of each sub-

49 On this subject, see also Andrea Fumagalli with Stefano Lucarelli and Luca P. Merlino, "Lezioni di teoria della moneta," available at http://economia.unipv.it/pagp/pagine_personali/afuma/didattica/Materiale%20sul%20sito%20del%20corso/Parte%20a%20-%20Teorie%20della%20moneta.pdf

50 This article benefited a great deal from two books by Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Semiotext(e), 2012) and *Governing by debt* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Semiotext(e), 2015).

ject. Capital ascribes to each subject a numerical value—a rating—on the basis of its place in a list—a ranking—that indicates its ability to excel in a competition of all against all. After demolishing salary as the result of national pay bargaining, the reward system celebrates the winners of this race in which excellence is capital's reward for self-exploitation.

Deleuze writes of *salary according to merit*, a concept which today we might paraphrase as *credit according to merit* as the concept that best encapsulates the difference between the two societies, the disciplinary society and the society of control.⁵¹ Here, merit defines the positive judgement by which capital rewards the subject's ability to constitute itself on the basis of capital's own demands. In general, the concept of merit has been conceived to restore faith in the market at the same time as the fall in profits of the industrial era undermined it. Its task is to be a motivational coach for productivity and for work ethics precisely at the time when working becomes superfluous. But far from bringing a benefit to the producing subject, the concept of merit in effect frustrates it, bringing the subject back into a dialectical position. The elusive essence of the concept of merit disappears whenever a subject is focalized behind it. Once again, we must ask not what but who lies behind the concept of merit, not *what ever*, but *who ever*: What forces have taken ownership of the meaning of this word? Who is hiding within it? Merit is not the weapon for defeating the privilege of the ruling powers. It is the weapon by which the ruling powers absorb the will of others into theirs, thus ensuring that the transformation of disproportion into crisis does not undermine the notion of hierarchy as the natural form of social structure. In this sense merit is the quintessence of hierarchy—it does not free us from it, but reasserts it.

Marx's text "Comments on James Mill" becomes useful here. Marx argues that credit disguises itself as high appreciation for the subject but rewards the individual who "is turned into *money*." The transubstantiation of flesh into money, the process through which, according to Marx, credit disguises itself as a reward process within which "money is *incorporated* in him"⁵² seduces the subject to abort his own willpower and transform himself into the object of capital's desire. It is no longer an abortion in favor of a progressive rationality: it is a mere

51 Compare Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (Winter 1992), p. 3–7.

52 Karl Marx, "Comments on James Mill, *Éléments d'économie politique*," in *Collected Works*, vol. 3, trans. Clemens Dutt, p. 215 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1987), p. 215.

capture, a process whereby the subject must produce himself as an object of accumulation

Nietzsche had already observed that the relation of dependence between creditor and debtor allowed the former to inflict on the latter “every kind of indignity and torture [...] for example, cut from it as much as seemed commensurate with the size of the debt—and everywhere and from early times one had exact evaluations, *legal* evaluations, of the individual limbs and parts of the body from this point of view [...]”⁵³ The way in which the creditor imposes brutal parameters of evaluation in their tiniest details has not changed until today. What has changed is that there is only one creditor from whose judgement everybody’s access to reproduction depends. In an era when productive labor becomes superfluous, the secret for accessing reproduction is to demonstrate its necessity. As if to paraphrase Joan Robinson’s provocative 1962 quip that “under capitalism the only thing that is worse than being exploited by capital is not being exploited by capital,”⁵⁴ capital transforms access to exploitation into a privilege. In this context, capital

diminishes labour time in the necessary form so as to increase it in the superfluous form; hence posits the superfluous in growing measure as a condition—question of life or death—for the necessary. On the one side, then, it calls to life all the powers of science and of nature, as of social combination and of social intercourse, in order to make the creation of wealth independent (relatively) of the labour time employed on it. On the other side, it wants to use labour time as the measuring rod for the giant social forces thereby created, and to confine them within the limits required to maintain the already created value as value.⁵⁵

Here, the expropriated can only find redemption in the continuous repayment of an unsustainable debt. As Deleuze and Guattari said, “a time will come when the creditor has not yet lent while the debtor never quits repaying, for repaying is a duty but lending is an option.”⁵⁶

53 Nietzsche, “Genealogy,” 2.5.

54 Joan Robinson, *Economic Philosophy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p. 46.

55 Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 706.

56 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 197–98.

Soul-Sourcing

An alien landing on Earth would probably laugh in horror at the way in which some life accepts to compete to the bottom in order to be appreciated by the same subject that has expropriated it. What would jar the eyes of our alien is what is often overlooked by those who study evaluation: the indissoluble relationship between value understood as surplus value expropriated from the producing subject throughout the centuries and evaluation understood as the moral judgment of the expropriating subject towards those who have produced it. In recent years, merit has been interpreted primarily through the Foucauldian category of governmentality, which emphasized the subject's disposition towards fashioning itself as a productive subject. These analyses have opened up an important debate. It seems to me, however, that these analyses sometimes not only risk forgetting the structural causes for the context of crisis in which we are living, but also do not manage to account for the connections between value and evaluation. This means that the key points of the problem are not identified, and neither are the points of rupture, which at times culminates in analyses that have a somewhat conservative aftertaste.

In this context, Lazzarato's critique of the concept of governmentality must be taken seriously. We are no longer in the danger zone where interpretation pushes beyond a point of no return and disappears together with the interpreting subject. Neither is power invisible and omnipresent. Crisis makes capital visible, as Marx argued, even brazen. The discourse of capital, its voice, its attempt to conceal the exploitation by the creditor in the body of the debtor, does not authorize us to forget that capital is a subject. From this point of view, we should take into account the tendency towards *de-governmentalization* practiced by the State and the *de-nationalization* of government. We should recognize behind this tendency a subject capable of directing the conduct of others by using money as a means of blackmail. In other words, we cannot speak of the neoliberal subject without speaking about money, or we will confuse causes with consequences and find capitalism there, in the body, where it does not belong.

I want to step back from Foucauldian interpretations that speak of self-government without coercion. Competition is much more than internalized rationality. It is coercion, blackmail, a matter of life and death. Once more, Nietzsche is useful: The aspiration to excellence is not separable from the ruling hierarchy. The subject who aspires to excel makes others suffer what they would otherwise make him suffer. In other words, the aspiration to excel seems the only way out of a blackmail situation between suffering violence and inflicting it.

It exists exclusively in a dialectical society founded on a Hobbesian rationality of the *mors tua, vita mea* kind. From this point of view, the problem of subjectivity is rather complex. The neoliberal era inscribes the body within a battlefield where antagonistic interpretations are at odds with each other; and the bigger the promise of appreciation, the more intense self-exploitation becomes. As Mark Fisher beautifully argued, the neoliberal era rests on what David Smail called *magical voluntarism*: the belief that it is within every individual's power to make themselves into whatever they want to be. "Magical voluntarism is both an effect and a cause of the currently historically low level of class consciousness. It is the flipside of depression—whose underlying conviction is that we are all uniquely responsible for our own misery and therefore deserve it."⁵⁷ Coerced to excel and forced to compete, desire is constantly derailed. Marazzi has neatly defined the process through which capital seems to be able to feed itself on the very flesh of the subject as a form of *crowdsourcing*.⁵⁸ His *crowdsourcing* presupposes it seems a kind of *soul-sourcing*, the ability of capital to capture desire and use it to suck its subject back into slavery, an excitement that keeps on sliding towards the quicksand of debt, a process that reveals merit ever more openly as a mystification, a con-trick, a lie.

The Tear

If my argument holds up, then the question is, where does the tear occur? This attempt at a theoretical reframing was meant to arrive precisely here: at the tear. Silvia Federici has often argued that the restructuring of the global economy in the last thirty years has been a response to the establishment of the movements that shook the hierarchies in the Sixties and Seventies. For women, exploitation was then hidden in their bodies. But just as the feminist movement has tried to liberate the body from an interpretation that turned exploitation into the essence of feminine affect, just as the anti-colonial movements have rejected race as the expression of a sort of predisposition towards slavery, the concept of merit locates the responsibility for exploitation in the body and attributes to it the cause of one's own subsumption. To bring capital as a subject back into the analysis serves to free the sub-

57 Mark Fisher, "Good for Nothing," online: <https://theoccupiedtimes.org/?p=12841> (available 29 June 2016).

58 Compare Christian Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, trans. Kristina Lebedeva and Jason Fancis McGimsey (Los Angeles, Calif.: Semiotext(e), 2011), p. 65.

ject from the responsibility that capital would like to hide in the individual. In this sense, to stop the analysis at the reactionary notion of self-fashioning would mean aborting it. On the contrary, the point is to understand where such hiding takes place and where it is ruptured.

Foucault argued that “there is no explanation for the man who revolts. His action is necessarily a tearing that breaks the thread of history and its long chains of reasons so that a man can genuinely give preference to the risk of death over the certitude of having to obey.”⁵⁹ In “Is It Useless to Revolt?” Foucault looked for the point of rupture. There comes a moment, Albert Camus wrote, when

[a] slave who has taken orders all his life suddenly decides that he cannot obey some new command. What does he mean by saying “no”? He means, for example, that “this has been going on too long,” “up to this point yes, beyond it no,” “you are going too far,” or, again, “there is a limit beyond which you shall not go.”⁶⁰

The slave, according to Camus, affirms the existence of a borderline. Camus’s borderline is Foucault’s tear: It is the point where the body breaks into the language of capital to speak out the truth. In that instant the body interrupts history and its long chains of reasoning: “But with loss of patience—with impatience—a reaction begins which can extend to everything that he previously accepted, and which is almost always retroactive. The very moment the slave refuses to obey the humiliating orders of his master, he simultaneously rejects the condition of slavery.”⁶¹ Here the exchange with the possessor of money is interrupted. The whole point is not to demonstrate that we are worthy of credit; we have already worked enough. It is the creditors’ turn to demonstrate their legitimacy.

Translated by Elena Gualtieri

59 Michel Foucault, “Is It Useless to Revolt?,” trans. James Bernauer, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 8, no. 1 (Spring 1981), p. 1.

60 Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York, N.Y.: Vintage, 1991).

61 *Ibid.*, p. 11.