

A trans woman isn't a cis woman; what has been deserted is the ground of cisness. Communization immediately deserts the ground of the commodity-form, but it also introduces the abyssal immediacy of communism into the world of the commodity.



VANDALIZING THE SUBJECT

Notes

- 1 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin, 1973, 170.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 664.
- 3 Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Hogarth Press, 1955, 28.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 38.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 53.
- 6 Karl Marx, *Results of the Direct Production Process*, MECW 34, Lawrence & Wishart, 1994, 492.
- 7 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 663.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 26.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 257.
- 10 Karl Marx, *Capital I*, Progress Publishers, 1965, 421.
- 11 *Grundrisse*, 232.
- 12 Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Progress Publishers, 1955, 12.
- 13 Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, University of Minnesota Press, 1993, 79.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 80.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 82.
- 16 Gilles Deleuze, "Pure Immanence: A Life," *Theory, Culture & Society* 14, no. 2, 1997, 4.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 18 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Minnesota University Press, 1987, 499.

an immanence that isn't immanent *to* something. Whereas gender *transcends* a body, and DNA is *immanent to* a body, pure immanence is neither transcended nor immanent *to*. In the case of a body, there is only one thing that is neither *outside of it*, nor simply *in it*, but rather, its absolute immanence. The absolute immanence of a body is the singular power which is *in* that body. A power which comprises the full processes of that body, and which would be everywhere equally, in each part of it. Just as DNA *is not* a cellular membrane, it cannot be the *pure immanence* of a body; the pure immanence of a body is that which is everywhere at once in it, equally—a *life*.

Not “Life.” Such a concept, which we could call *vulgar vitalism*, would transcend each singular body. *A life*, however, does not transcend the body, and is fully expressed in every part of it. Cellular membranes are not “less alive” than the nucleus which contains a cell’s DNA. In this case, Deleuze says, we can speak of a *plane of immanence*. *A life* is not immanent to Life, but only to itself. When immanence isn’t transcended by anything nor immanent to anything, then it is *a life*, “sheer power, utter beatitude.”¹⁶

“The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens.”¹⁷ Such a life is *singular* and *universal* rather than *individual* and *common*. The smiles of babies, Deleuze explains, are *singularities* proper to each baby, but they are neither subjective nor personal.

This is not a *vulgar vitalism* in which an abstract category such as “Life” would be posited. Already in his 1961 “Lucretius and Naturalism,” Deleuze denied any oneness to “nature.” In “nature,” he saw “a power on behalf of which things exist one by one without the possibility of being gathered together all at once,” always either *one thing* or *multiplicities of singularities*, but never The One or a totality. Deleuze’s vitalism is *inorganic*: “if everything is alive, it is not because everything is organic or organized, but, on the contrary, because the organism is a diversion of life.”¹⁸

Desubjectivation can *never* mean to give oneself to a higher power like “Life”—in fact, subjectivation already consists in *giving oneself to higher powers*. Desubjectivation is a gesture of empowerment—it returns the body to the body.

VANDALIZING THE SUBJECT

ULYSSE CARRIÈRE

First published March 2022

Ill Will Editions

Cover photograph by Maya Mercer

capital weighs like a nightmare on our every thought. Capital and its values are the last abstraction—what is the State, Human Rights, the Law, or Human Nature? Utter abstractions. And yet, all appear perfectly clear to everyone. Thinking in concrete terms is *alien* to the logic of capital.

Deleuze speaks in such simple and concrete terms that our thought, accustomed to the pallid, theological abstractions of capital, mistakes them for an esoteric language. *A pure flow of a-subjective consciousness* is simply a bodily and mental state of presence and involvement without self-consciousness: a disposition to affect and be affected by the world, *without thinking about it*. “A pure, immediate consciousness without subject or object.” This is the modality of art, riots, friendship, sport, and love—it is the radical opposite of alienated labor, self-consciousness, subjectivity and identity.

Like Plato’s Forms or the Christian God, identity is always transcendent. Each given identity is performed by throngs of individuals trying to model themselves on it. We can say that something *transcends* an object if it is *outside of that object* and *greater than it*. If one’s subjectivity depends on the identity of *cis man* for example, that identity transcends one’s subjectivity. Subjectivity, as it always self-consciously performs identity, is *always being transcended*—it is always obeying some higher power.

A common misunderstanding of Deleuze’s concept of *immanence* is to assume that he means the simple opposite of *transcendence*. One’s genetic code, for example, is immanent to one’s body insofar as it exists in one’s cells and not anywhere else. Nor could it exist outside of one’s body. But there are multiplicities of other things that are *not* one’s genetic code in a body. Although it cannot exist without a body and a body cannot exist without it, DNA isn’t *absolutely immanent* to a body. Cells are what one’s DNA *is in*; they do not transcend DNA, as they are its expression. And so, DNA is immanent *to* the cell. This would be a simple inversion of transcendence; what is transcendent is what is *outside* something, and thus, what is immanent is what something is *in*. But Deleuze’s concern is not with simple immanence, but rather, with *pure* or absolute immanence.

Deleuze offered a lapidary formula in one of his seminars: *absolute immanence is the simple notion that there is no higher power, that it’s just us and the earth*. And so, if DNA isn’t transcended by the body, but is rather immanent *to it*, it is not, for all that, *pure immanence*. Pure immanence is

a common ground: the Spectacle.

We can say, then, that to vandalize subjectivity is both a gesture of introducing the *abyss* into the ground, and of deserting that same ground. The abyss: trans and non-binary singularities immediately display the inexistence of such universals as “man” and “woman.” A trans woman isn’t a cis woman; what has been deserted is the ground of cisness. Communization immediately deserts the ground of the commodity-form, but it also introduces the *abyssal immediacy of communism* into the world of the commodity. Looting, as Debord knew, “instantly undermines the commodity as such, and it also exposes what the commodity ultimately implies: the army.” And sooner or later the tanks will always come.

Why did the tanks come to Tiananmen? The community there had no demands, and thus, no identity. They *refused communication*. If the armored divisions of the National Guard fell upon Minneapolis in 2020, it was because of looting, the immediate abolition of the commodity-form. To loot means to fill a commodity with something it cannot communicate as a commodity: *being free*. All that a commodity can communicate is exchange-value. It’s thus the entire religious system of the commodity-form that looting collapses.

Looting—immediate communization—shares no common ground with the world of the commodity. And yet, it expresses something abyssal *within* that world: the possibility that everything could be free. It is precisely owing to the danger represented by this sudden opening of an outside that the State sends in the National Guard. One doesn’t send the army to shut down the DSA, and that’s all anyone needs to know about it. It is not a threat to capital.

The gesture that vandalizes subjectivity necessarily strikes at commodity-fetishism too, and vice versa. To make oneself incommunicable—to become as one becomes—is an act of desertion that also limits the extension of the desert into our lives.

In “Immanence: A Life...,” a text written shortly before his death, Deleuze spoke of just this, *a life* beyond subjectivity. By describing this life as “pre-reflexive,” he aimed to highlight the same relation between gestures and affects that we have described above. *A life*, he writes, is “a pure flow of a-subjective consciousness.” If these terms seem abstract, it’s only because

If we still ask ourselves the question of the subject, we do so primarily out of historical concern—or perhaps out of habit, in the same way we say “the sun rises” when we all know it’s the earth that moves around the sun. But we ask it, once again, until we no longer have to.

The theory of the subject can only be a theory of *subjectivation*, i.e., a theory of how subjects are *produced*. Today, we set out from the certainty that capital and its state stopped producing subjects long ago, that the liquidation of the subject is a given. What remains, as an atavism, is *subjectivity*.

Already in his 1979 seminars Gilles Deleuze asserted that capitalism only produced subjects so long as the ratio of variable capital (wages) to fixed capital (machines) tended towards the former. In other words, as long as there were factories and a clear-cut industrial proletariat, along with a clear-cut bourgeoisie, the result would be a *subjectivation*: a certain baseline commonality of experience in space and time, inscribed as distinct subjectivities, such as the *worker* and the *capitalist*. Our era, he argued, no longer functions like this: through automation, the fixed capital of machines had eclipsed the variable capital of wages. The circulation process of capital therefore no longer produced a social subjectivation but rather a *machinic enslavement*.

On this matter, Deleuze was more optimistic than Marx. The subject, Marx insisted in the *Grundrisse*, is liquidated by capital from the outset. Between humans who participate in the process of capital, “it is impossible,” Marx wrote, “to find any trace of distinction, not to speak of contradiction; not even a difference.”¹ Even if this is only true of humans *as* exchangers—but are there other humans under capitalism?—Marx goes even further, concluding that capital proceeds *from itself* as the active subject, the subject of the process, independent of its relation to labor.² The sole subject of the circulation process of capital, he argues, is capital.

What this means, for us, is quite simple: it’s only *prior to the emergence of capital* that one could find subjects. With capital, we don’t have subjects—only subjectivities. The *Bloom*, as *Tiqqun* called the latter, is presupposed by capital from day one. And if we continue to believe that such subjectivities proceed from substantial subjects, this is only due to the essentially fetishistic nature of capital. This is a classic operation. The mass expropriations of land that dissolved Europe’s traditional communities weren’t followed solely by the creation of an urban proletariat, since the founding gesture of capitalism was *also* the birth of a new model pseudo-community: the nation.

Consider the example of medieval France, which never had a clear cultural center. Dozens of languages were spoken throughout its territory, and still are. But after the Thirty Years War, against the decentralized particularism of the nobility and the universal aspirations of the Papal States, another power emerged: the Absolute Monarchy, which heralded the alliance between the centralized state and the emerging bourgeoisie. The very notion of *France* emerged as an alliance of the bourgeoisie with the state, against religion and the nobility—what Marx called “the progressive drive of capitalism.” But this idea of France wasn’t simply predicated on Louis XIV, XV and XVI attempting to fight the Papal States and crushing the nobility—it was at the same time the destruction of community.

As the process of capital dissolved local communities, the pseudo-community of the nation developed. When the monarchy had completed its task, the bourgeois cut the king’s head off and moved on. Today, it’s only to the extent that people *lack* community that they call themselves “French.” Our friends in Auvergne, who speak Occitan, or Auvergnat if you prefer, certainly don’t call themselves “French.” They don’t call them-

dise. But this also means that the Spectacle, as the alienation of human communicativity, can only communicate alienation.

To destitute the Spectacle, one has only to fill communication with the difference it cannot contain. And there is only one thing the unlimited communicativity of the Spectacle cannot possibly contain: *the incommunicable*. What is incommunicable is also inexperience, whether because an event’s intensity is imperceptible to subjectivity, or because it exceeds its bounds. When this occurs, there is an event of desubjectivation, which either exceeds or escapes subjectivity.

For example, what makes one trans or non-binary? One wasn’t “born like this,” and there’s no *trans* or *non-binary* gene. It’s something imperceptible and incommunicable. Hence, desubjectivation. The only danger is to get caught back into an identity, into a predetermined field of experience and its associated subjectivity. The task of *desubjectivation* ceaselessly points us back to the vandalizing of subjectivity.

Trans and non-binary gestures have already vandalized gender. As a friend says, “there’s no such thing as binary trans.” The *transition* collapses the idea of two distinct identities into a single plane. Reactionaries don’t hate trans people because they’re trans: they hate them because they’re *not binary*. If transness simply reproduced the cishet sexual binary, it would pose no problems to reactionaries, since there would be no difference between transness and cisnormativity. But it’s precisely because transness is necessarily non-binary that it poses problems to reactionaries. Thus, the *becoming* proper to transness is a direct attack on the identities “man” and “woman.”

If trans and non-binary singularities vandalize gender, it’s because gender is essentially binary, and that these singularities create, within gender, a becoming that gender cannot express. They fill gender with something it cannot account for, something it does not have the power to communicate.

Hence, to vandalize subjectivity can mean two things: to either refuse communication, or to become incommunicable. To fill flows of communication with the incommunicable means that one will be understood by those who share incommunicable affinities, while actively introducing incoherence into the Spectacle. To refuse communication entails a refusal of

of productive activity, but also and principally toward the alienation of language itself.”¹³ This is the aim of a critique of subjectivity and identity fetishism. The conditions of possibility of identity fetishism are twofold: an *authentic experience* mediated by capital on one hand, and *alienated language* on the other, constructed discursively as a shared experience.

All that can be *subjectively* experienced is then always already determined by identity. If nothing unspeakable can be experienced, this is because, the field of the experiencible for any given identity is predetermined by discourse. And so, everything that happens within the field of subjectivity is *relatable*. The epoch of the relatable is also, as Marx would say, the epoch of the complete domination of a mediation that has made itself necessary.

At the same time, the “nihilistic position” to which capital reduces the individual is a position of absolute separation from community and valuing: separated from the time or ability to cook, capital mediates between the individual and take-out. The same is true of community: the extension of the relatable is proportionate to that of alienation. *Seinfeld* nailed it: to make life relatable is to make life bearable. Lived experience is about living the life of anybody. It’s because everyone relates to Rupi Kaur that she should be shot.

In fact, if Agamben can describe Debord’s Spectacle as both “accomplished nihilism” and “language itself,” this is because language long ago passed over into the nihilism of capital. The Spectacle, “a social relation mediated by images,” is nothing other than the *alienated communicativity of human beings*.¹⁴ The individual’s misery does not lie in its incommunicability, but rather, in its unlimited communicability. Everything that one can experience through identity will be experienced as immediately communicable. The most private and intimate foundations of individual personhood are also the most public and common. Subjectivity is like pornography: nothing is left to the imagination.

Yet as Agamben also insists, it is here, in the final alienation of language, that humans could for the first time experience language as such, “a devastating experience of language that all over the planet unhinges and empties traditions and beliefs, ideologies and religions, identities and communities.”¹⁵ All such consistencies are liquidated into the Spectacle, where they are then self-consciously performed as existential merchan-

selves anything: they are there. But the less community one has, the more one tends to embrace a pseudo-community, a nation.

The complete liquidation of the subject is followed by a boundless proliferation of subjectivity.

Freud, realizing in 1895 that “hysteria” was a *mixed* neurosis, and that the relations between the intensities of hysterical representations were unexplainable through psychological conditions, had already acknowledged a certain death of the subject. Merely to speak, in his second topology, of an ego, an id, and a superego, was to accept as a given the *fragmentation* of a unified subject. The subject was no longer the totalizing “ego” of Descartes. Already fissured by Pascal’s leveling Jansenism, this subject was assumed by Freud as fractured, fragmented. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud speaks of consciousness “as a function of a particular system,” one separate from the “perceptual system,”³ whereas instincts are “an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things.” Instincts are all *reactionary*, since they strive for the original state of all living matter: the inorganic. “The aim of all life is death,” he concludes, with a penchant for theater.⁴ And yet, in order to avoid “Jung’s monism,” Freud positions the life instincts against this aim, with the organism as an equilibrium between the two.⁵ The key takeaway here resides in Freud’s avowal that his patients do not present him with a unified Cartesian subject—perhaps it is out of some honesty regarding his *clinical* situation that Freud refuses to reduce psychology to a single libidinal drive.

At the same time, Freud constantly triangulates the subject back into a unified Oedipal structure. And does not the very *need* to do so betray the historical collapse of the Cartesian subject? Freud proclaims the Oedipal structure as an *ancestral truth* of current human subjects; meanwhile, the “hysterics” he treated no longer exist today, a fact that is certainly not due to any alleged progress in diagnostic and psychiatric science (Freud’s diagnosis of hysteria was as rigorous as any in his time). If hysteria has disappeared, this is not on account of a more “scientific” psychiatry, but rather because hysteria only afflicted the *bourgeois* subject, which by Freud’s time was already a dying breed.

The subject is like God, dragging on a slow death.

The invocation of God is never innocent; in fact, the subject occupies

the same place, in liberalism, that God once did in the monarchies of divine right. The subject (the voter) is the source of *transcendent legitimacy*, and like God, He cannot be held responsible for anything that happens under his rule. The subject's irresponsibility is total, but so too is his guilt. To feel guilty and yet not *responsible*...could there be a more distinctively liberal disposition?

When we claim that "the subject performs gender," a question remains: *what* is it that carries out such a performance? There is an entire system of identities performed by the subject at any given moment, but what is it that performs this system? If one were to peel away the subject's identities one by one, what would we be left with? Precisely *nothing*.

Stirner was right, stupidly right. But this nothing isn't exactly nothing: it is a mediation. It mediates between *identity* and *acts*. Its acts are actualizations of identity. Let's take a white homosexual man from Brooklyn, for example. Like any subject, he performs his identities in accordance with the affects he receives from them. He performs manhood, homosexuality, wokeness, whiteness, urbanity, hipsterism, etc. Based on these identities, affects communicate themselves to him as orders: "this is how you should act." The act follows. And it's all an act.

Such identities extend to all domains of existence. Nothing is left to chance. On one side, there is identity; on the other, its performance. In the middle lies the subject.

It is by now apparent what the subject really does: it *watches over itself*. The subject forms an apparatus of self-policing. There is an entire state with its prisons and police forces in the mind of every subject. It is a curious fact that self-consciousness should be the definitive mark of a subject who is never really there, too busy watching over itself.

Never living, the subject watches itself live. Subjectivity therefore names a certain absence from the world. It is, further, an anxiety within this absence. The identities that the subject must perform must be fundamentally perfect. In this, they are a bit like Plato's Forms: from them, the subject receives orders that are then performed as acts. Yet no matter how close we come, this act can never live up to the original identity demanding performance. The fact that the subject is always slightly off the mark explains its anxiety in the face of a perfection demanded but never fully

Whereas commodity fetishism refers to situations in which social relations are relations between objects, *identity fetishism* names a system in which relations between commodities form the basis of a relation between humans—i.e., in which habits of clothing, eating, traveling, and entertainment come to *constitute* human subjects. And so, the full realization of higher-stage capitalism necessarily took the form of the *hipster*, the non-subject whose subjectivity is entirely composed of authentic, anti-capitalist consumer habits.

But subjectivity, just like any other moment in the circulation process of capital, *is* capital. "Lived experience" is lived capital. Though commodities are often assumed to be artificial, capital *must* nonetheless flow, it must become *genuine*. And so, surplus-authenticity becomes the decisive form of valorization in contemporary capitalism. It is surplus-authenticity that imbues commodified identities and existential merchandise with the terrible power they hold. Surplus-authenticity is the "effect of reality" that has become reality itself.

Within the logic of subjectivity, all of my experiences are consumed *as* experiences, as existential merchandise under the fundamental mode of absence: I watch myself consuming my own experience. I consume existential merchandise, and the more I consume, the more I produce, and the more I become a piece of existential merchandise myself. Consuming authentic experience through an identity, I eventually assimilate myself to this identity, this system of *reified relations between commodities*.

In capitalism, only ownership is individual. Consumption, like production, is inherently social. The consumption of existential merchandise through identity is a *socialized process*. As such, identity is constructed discursively as a shared pseudo-belonging, a commonality of experience. However, since identity requires a common language, the discursive construction of identity requires the liquidation of language itself into capital. A common experience of consumption can only be communicated by a common language of consumption. Shared alienation is never enough—a shared language is still needed to communicate it. And it so happens that we find, here, a happy meeting. *The global alienation of language realizes itself as a global language of alienation*.

"A fuller Marxian analysis," as Agamben insisted, "should deal with the fact that capitalism was directed not only toward the expropriation

gency to *nihilism*, it remains the case that *value* is still being created here. Unlike the pre-capitalist human inscribed within a social order granting their existence its value, the individual of capitalism is a *consumer* of a value produced by capital and consumed during free time. Yoga, homosexuality, religion, motherhood, electoral politics, all exist as moments within the circulation process of capital. In their free time, individuals consume the *surplus-authenticity* of capital as existential merchandise. To the radical devaluing of their existence, human beings respond with the panicked consumption of capitalist value as existential content. A pianist, as Marx flatly states, “stimulates production, partly by giving a more decisive, lively tone to our individuality.”¹¹ There is no limit to what can be alienated.

Thus did higher-stage capitalism undertake the final alienation of existential value into capital:

This is the time when the very things which till then had been communicated, but never exchanged; given, but never sold; acquired, but never bought—virtue, love, conviction, knowledge, conscience, etc.—when everything, in short, passed into commerce. It is the time when everything, moral or physical, having become a marketable value, is brought to the market to be assessed at its truest value.¹²

What higher-stage capitalism dissolved into capital is precisely everything *not* capitalistic; it should therefore come as little surprise that one of the finest commodities of our time is *anti-capitalism*. Here, surplus-authenticity itself serves as the very norm of capitalist exchange. The *excess* of authenticity found in the global Brooklyn coffee shop, hipsterism and sexual identities, is the terminal merchandise of capitalism. Ontology and language both passed into capital rather early on. Already in 1964, Adorno remarked that Heidegger’s language was strictly indiscernible from Coca-Cola commercials. Our era bears witness to the liquidation of authentic experience as the ground of subjectivity into capital.

The authentic experiences individuals consume in their free time form the means by which they construct their personhood and identity. The identities associated with gender, sexuality, parenthood, or adolescence are *market audiences*, reified consumer habits each with their own arsenal of accessory commodities.

accomplished. The first anxiety is one of degree: not being manly, not being gay, not being communist enough. But then there comes a second, deeper terror: the terror of being nothing. *Absence* and *anxiety*: these two concerns underline the subject’s every thought, word, and act.

Anxiety and absence; guilt and irresponsibility. Are we not here in the presence of the Last Man?

As Nietzsche knew well, one can only be a Last Man in thinking they’re not. Or better, the Last Man is the one who is not a subject, but believes otherwise.

The subject’s Outside won’t be found in any authentic identity, nor in any true self. Subjectivity is not the same as identity. Rather, it is the self-conscious performance of identity. By “subjectivity” we must understand a certain relation between act and affect: an affect is received internally, and is then followed by the performance of an act that then actualizes this identity externally. Subjectivity is this relation between act and affect. It responds to a sequential schema: *identity, affect, subject, act, identity...*

The program of gender abolitionists has always been to strike at the level of *identity*. This is misguided. What matters more is the relation between affect and act, between which the subject is constituted as a relation. Anyone who has engaged in any sport, riot, sex, dance, or music knows that there is another way to conceive existence. Playing soccer or making music with other people are activities that even preclude any notion of the subject. The affect must always arrive from the outside. Such affects cannot be processed by self-consciousness, but become gestures immediately, that is to say, without mediation. In this sense, sport and music are not self-conscious activities. In them there is no subject.

The Free Spirits, a spiritual movement rambling across Europe from the 13th to the 15th century, preached *kenosis*, or self-emptying. Insofar sin requires *choice*, and the latter requires will, the abolition of selfhood and free-will meant that they could no longer sin. “Nothing is a sin,” they claimed, “except what is thought to be a sin.” By this they did not mean that sin was relative, but rather, that it had to be *self-conscious*. One could not sin without a conscious *knowledge* of sin—such were Adam and Eve

before the apple.

For the Free Spirits, there was no Church, no sin, no property, only a community of friends. In 1295, Marguerite Porete proclaimed that Heaven and Hell, along with Virtue and Sin, were nothing. They were nothing to the annihilated soul. In her *Mirror of Simple Souls*, she wrote that, “I don’t pray, I don’t care about God, and I don’t do any work...because I annihilated my soul. [...] The annihilated soul cannot do anything good, nor anything evil.” For Porete, such a soul was beyond good and evil: “I receive all that comes to me without any prohibition.” Virtue, reason, morality, church, law, property: all were immediately abolished by the annihilated soul. “Our will must become the sea.”

If the relations affecting this *annihilated soul* produced love or joy, those relations were maintained, without this involving the least trace of self-consciousness. “True freedom,” she said, “never needs a *why*.” In a prophetically Nietzschean formulation, Marguerite Porete explained her life: “It is only life willing will.” For this, she was burned at the stake.

Freedom beyond voluntarism, an abyss of freedom, the infinite freedom of necessity: in this disposition, all that can happen happens, and in the purest innocence. This is a *strictly ethical* disposition, which recognizes nothing but the joy of power and the power of joy. The pure present and the purity of presence, on the peaks of (ir)responsibility. Intent, a Christian invention, is worthless here. Only gestures are acknowledged, because only gestures are power.

Such a doctrine is in no way abstract. Even Marguerite Porete’s mystical Christianity never managed to make it so: the reality for which she was burned was the immediate communism she and her friends were practicing. The practice of *kenosis* is the most concrete one imaginable. Wherever reality makes itself *felt*, we have allowed ourselves be affected by what comes from the outside—a refusal to mediate between affect and gesture.

What separates us from our power isn’t *subjectivity* so much as the fetishism attached to what subjectivity performs: identity and its fetishism. Since this fetishism is so often taken as a *given* of the human condition, it’s worth tracing its genealogy.

Capital, Marx explains, is the self-valuing process of value, a process that has achieved independence from human agency: humans, now born

as merely a moment in the reproduction process of capital, he describes as “living means of production.”⁶ As this *self-valuing process of value*, capital is the expropriation of the human ability to create, preserve, and increase value. Within the circulation process of capital, Marx writes, only one subject has agency: capital.⁷ It is capital that posits the objective conditions of existence of living labor, an existence separated into two extreme moments, production and consumption. However, for capital, consumption is posited as a moment in the production process. It is the presupposition of consumption that sustains the circulation of capital.

“Consumption creates the need for new production,” and “production creates consumption”—in other words, free time exists as a moment in the circulation process of capital, during which the producer *recreates* themselves as living means of production. “Production produces not only the object but also the manner of consumption, not only objectively but also subjectively: production creates the consumer.”⁸ Marx therefore speaks of the *immediate identity* of production and consumption: the producer, whose free time is spent as a consumer, is *produced* by their consumption as a moment of the production process. In this way, capital becomes the *mediation* between the extreme poles of its process. It is “the subject for whom the extremes are merely its moments,” and which annuls the autonomy of these extremes “in order to posit itself as that which alone is autonomous.”⁹

What has often gone unnoticed, as Vioulac recently signaled, is what Marx sees as the result of this process: “*es ist die beständige Tendenz des Kapitals, sie [die Arbeiter] auf diesen nihilistischen Standpunkt herabzudrücken*,” which was translated to English by Moore and Aveling as “The constant tendency of capital is to force the cost of labor back towards zero.”¹⁰ Perhaps because Engels participated in editing this edition, it seems the translation went unquestioned. But Marx is saying something else entirely: “It is the constant tendency of capital to reduce workers to this nihilistic position.” For Marx, capital has a constant tendency toward nihilism.

The nihilism to which capital reduces the worker is precisely what drives their consumption of *existential merchandise*.

If capital is the *self-valuing process of value* that expropriates the human capacity in order to create value, generating alongside itself a constant ten-