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The Spectral Form of Value

Ghost-Things and Relations of Forces

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As
Derrida was kind enough to tell us, Marx, in the first chapter of *Capital,* wrote a spectral theory of the commodity-form as social relation, according to which the social appears to man as phantasmatic, while it is actually a set of "material relations between persons and social relations between things."[1] Here we have an interesting form of a real insanity, which inhabits things without being at home in them. This insanity is not a natural character of these things. It appears at the moment of exchange and expresses the social character of labor. A social form is embodied in the commodity. This form expresses a relation of substitution, abstraction and reification. Marx calls this real abstraction – as actual as it is fantastic – a specter that must be driven out. In commodities you can touch what is otherwise untouchable: the mode of production of capitalism. Commodities are in this sense, sensuously supersensible things; they are social crystals. This is the secret of commodities, a secret that shows itself

by not showing, a mysterious mirror. People don't get the mysticism of the commodity, they think that it is quite normal that things have a value and are exchanged. Marx reveals this as a mystery. He is a decipherer who makes it clear that the phantasmatic will not vanish by interpreting it. It will not dissipate until we pass into another mode of production. It will not be until then – and this is a passage in *Capital*, beautiful in its clarity, while remaining mystical regarding the rationality of the revolution:

> "the whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds the products of labor as long as they take the form of commodities, vanishes therefore, so soon as we come to other forms of production."[2]

Marx holds this lesson on specters in the fourth section of the first chapter of *Capital*: 'The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret thereof'. Conjuring the magic of the commodity, Marx operates with a religious and fantastic vocabulary:

> "Here it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world."[3]

His pathos of truth is that of an exposing, an unveiling critic of religion. His problem is that his critique is still dominated by a religious spell (that he would like to get rid of) because he forgets to reflect upon whether the sharp distinction between a rationality of use and an irrationality of exchange is in itself spectral, mysterious and fantastic.

We are now at an intersection of theoretical and political questions. Derrida's book, *Specters of Marx*, culminates in

deconstructing the concept of a phantasmatic form of the commodity and Marx's strategy of driving out the specters, making them dissipate, vanishing into a communism of the pure use of things and planned work. This Marxist mythology of truth reverberates in the structuralist cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, in its anti-fetishism, in its will to show things behind the things, and its suspicion of the gaze and the image. With his first remarks on biopower in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault implicitly and radically differs from this idea of truth and of work.

To put it directly: 'doing' is not the essence of man. The body – as working, as fucking – could never be liberated; it is an effect of power, and communism should question how we can alter our bodies so that they are not time bombs of mobilized discipline, of the wish to work, the wish to confess, to be creative, to do something, to have sex. "When did you shoot your last movie?", "When did you go to the gym?", etc. This symptom is most evident in certain segments of urban youth under the age of forty-five. It signals a development in the mode of socialization, a simultaneity that is coming to a head: both the mobilization of forms of life and the attack on them, this ticking make-something-of-yourself, get out of normality (even the trashy promise of becoming a superstar), and at the same time, the expansion of mechanisms of exclusion and valorization: super-poverty, super-deportation, super-control. There is an increasing anxiety among urban youth, having to do with the need to have a deviant lifestyle, while still being successful. With this biopolitical imperative of our societies, both the norm and deviation have been occupied. In a certain sense this could be described as the successful failure of 1968 or perhaps as a sort of paradoxical "communism of capital," as Paolo Virno has put it.[4] In 1968, activists fought for a revolutionary change that does not stop in front of everyday life,

feelings, sexualities and living conditions. Step by step this minoritarian politics has become detached from the question of socialism. It has become a biopolitical building block of an expanded capitalist life. This is not to say that the greater variety of forms of life are just bullshit, or that things were better in the 1950s – quite the contrary. And, of course, this ideological amphetamine – less sleep, more Open Source – only suits the lives of certain people: the coke-sniffing creative bourgeoisie, or the hippie version: Green party voters who shop in health food stores and dress casually. And it has ultimately led to a growing number of advertising films in which one can observe fast-cut, blurry footage of people in track suits in their hip, disorderly, daily lives. Today advertisements no longer directly praise the commodity-object, but rather, they praise forms of life. And if there is something like a spectral commodity-life, we should not try to drive
out the specters in the belief that there is a previous pure life.

Form

Marx deciphers a social form in the commodity. The bourgeois political economy had already developed the theory of labor-value. In 1817 Ricardo wrote that,

> "the value of a commodity, or the quantity of any other commodity for which it will exchange, depends on the relative quantity of labor which is necessary for its production, and not on the greater or less compensation which is paid for that labor."[5]

That's not the news of Marx's critique of political economy; the news is that the commodity form is the form of a commodity

producing society itself. Let's reconstruct the scene: Marx starts from the elementary exchange of products: x amount of commodity A is exchanged for y of commodity B, for example 20 yards of linen are worth 1 coat. That is to say: the social form does not hide in the money-form, but in the elementary value-form in the exchange of one commodity for another. Here we have a double methodological hint: first, Marx recognizes an embryonic form that already incorporates its ultimate breakdown, a fictional germ,[6] and, secondly, this embryonic form expresses no substance and no essence, but a relation which, again, will be one of the starting points of the poststructuralist discussion.

According to Marx, the commodity-form is determined by substitution and a double abstraction (from use and from concrete labor). When linen is exchanged for coat, the coat acts as a mirror to the value of the linen. In a certain sense, according to Marx, its material purity vanishes together with its possibility of use. As soon as the commodity enters the market and transforms into the form of value, it becomes its own specter. As a good pupil of Hegel, Marx claims that use-value becomes the form of appearance of its opposite: value as such. As this unit of the contradiction of matter-object and value-form, the commodity could be called a sensuously supra-sensuous thing, "abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties,"[7] a bodiless body. This spectral incarnation only works because, in the exchange, labor is reduced to an abstract quantum. What counts is the average time that is necessary to produce a commodity. Marx is not just politically accusing capitalist society of ignoring the working conditions, poverty, and the 12-hour workday, but also, and more profoundly, of not regarding the mode of its expenditure. He constructs a theoretical method in which the commodities themselves incorporate a form which determines, moves, and limits

historical development. This is the social: the form of a movement of advancing contradictions, into which crisis and breakdown are already written.

Let's get that briefly and schematically: The fundamental principle of a capitalist society is reducing costs and increasing profit. This is only possible because of surplus value. People earn less than the value of the products that they are manufacturing. Lowering wages or prolonging working hours has absolute limits. But the development of big industries and the automatization of the factory opened up huge possibilities to relatively increase surplus. Less and less work time is needed to produce goods, but as we know, this time does not go into communist holidays of disposable time or a 3-hour workday, being used rather to reduce wage costs. This means that at the same time, according to Marx, each commodity has less value because less work is contained in it. From a certain moment on, the conditions of capitalist development become its own fetters. It then generally tends toward a drop in profit margins and then to over-production and crisis.

Marx is fitting a political collective-subject into that objective movement of capital in which the horizon of crisis is always present. The problem with this is that it presupposes the sublation (*Aufhebung*) of capitalism and the passage to another mode of production as something inherent to the very movement of capital itself; that is, it sees the abolition of capital as inevitable. The working class will realize the abolition of capitalism; it stands potentially at just that time-place in which the movement of contradictions leads to crisis. Like hare and hedgehog,[8] one moment the movement of capital is the hedgehog, the other it is the working class. The whole thing is a circular argument. Capitalism needs the working class: there must be people who have nothing other than their own labor to sell. Capitalism produces the

working class: poverty and class consciousness increase and, at last, capitalism will be abolished by the working class; it will be the last obstacle for its movement. Showdown of history. This finely balanced political-economic movement of Marxist theory has been sharply criticized. This criticism opened up a new way of thinking for the new left of the 1960s, new social movements, non-dogmatic Marxism and poststructuralist theory.

The multitude of social relations does not hide a contradiction in its heart that determines and figures its limits. The social is not the effect of a form that explains the social. Foucault and Deleuze break with this theoretical figure. End of dialectics. Period. History is not a movement of negation, negation of negation and sublation. Deleuze once said that "A social field does not contradict itself, but what is primary is that it flees."[9]

Relations of forces

One of the problems of Marxist theory is the vanishing of the social event. If the dynamics of capitalist development are determined by a form-law (*Formgesetz*), changes can be anticipated. They waver between modernization and revolution. According to Marx, the contradictory builds a higher unity: an individuality. With poststructuralism, the materialism of an antagonistic form is no longer the starting point, it is rather the materialism of an irreducible multitude of practices that have an effect on bodies, populations and forms of life. In that sense the historicity of one contradiction is replaced by the idea of a contingent historical event, and that event is a kind of improbable effect of strategies of power which constitute subjectivity along with many diverse moments of resistance. The forces that clash in a strategic conflict – and the social is a strategic conflict – influence each other, that

is, they neutralize, intensify or destroy each other, but they are not reigned or determined by a structuring form.[10]

Foucault's work is characterized by a kind of genuine struggle with Marx, which has been one of the principal sources of its productivity. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault poses the question of why power is so persistent, to which he will answer that the expansion of capitalism coexists with the mobilization of bodies in a way that is as productive as it is disciplining. Biopower means enabling and regulating life, which radically questions our political idea of autonomy. There is nothing that represents the determining kernel, foundation, or source of emancipation – not human practice or human activity, not the body, not the libido, not the truth, not life, love, laughter and struggle – nothing. While in the theory of Marx the relations of forces are internalized by a form, Foucault suggests an extreme exterior figure of power. It does not express itself through a form, being rather a force that stands in relation to, and has effects on, other forces. Using the term 'form', Foucault means the historical stratifications of knowledge and institutions. He speaks of power in an almost nominalist way; the term is very much emptied out. Power is just a diagrammatic fitting-in of different *dispositifs*. A *dispositif* connects the discursive with the non-discursive, the development of knowledge and the development of institutional strategies: science of law and prison, psychology and clinic, always "the sayable and the visible."[11] You can't reduce one to another or derive one from the other. In a way, power is just the name – this is what is meant by nominalism – of the mobility of the *dispositifs* on which it is based and which it stratifies. Power is nothing other than an actual cross-section of the mobility of social processes, like increasingly intensifying the strongest element of a social situation, reversing it or increasing both poles at the same time. From a law

of form determining and limiting the movement of advancing contradictions to a complex strategic situation of mobile *dispositifs* modifying each other and modified in turn by acts of disagreement, -revolt, and deviation that power tries to anticipate. From Marx to Foucault. The spectral figure of real-abstraction has vanished into the figure of the relation of a relation that is never fully present. This could be called the virtuality of the social, which would be its spectral aspect in a positive sense.

Foucault develops this position step by step. In *Discipline and Punish*, he represents the prison as sort of universal form of a *dispositif* in which the panoptic model of power expresses itself. Here we come across remaining pieces of an unexpressed teleology: If all of society has become a prison, the prison will open its doors, Foucault indicates at the end of *Discipline and Punish*. These are remaining pieces of an unexpressed law of form, therefore it is not "surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons."[12] In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault revises this position. The prison is not the big model anymore. The *dispositifs* do not express an internal determining form. Just as there is no homology between the micro- and the macro-level: the family is not an embryonic form of the state, while the state does not imitate the family. Instead, Foucault radicalizes the idea of differential relations of forces. The social articulates through bodily, economic, sexual and discursive lines. They do not maintain a dialectical relation – a mutual one, yes, a spiral one, yes, sometimes an antagonistic one, but never a dialectical one.

And now the next question: Do we recognize anything in these relations of forces? Foucault analyzes a differential field of relations by starting with the local unstable subjectifying strategies that effect bodies. He does that mostly by reading the prescriptive

discourses of a specific time, looking for the cross-sections of knowledge and power. The school, the prison and the state are already end-forms of infinite clashes. This is his Nietzschean side. Especially until the mid-1970s, Foucault sees the central mode of power not in law and consensus, but in war and struggle. Later on he concentrates on the question of how integrated strategies emerge out of this mobile field of the social, how more stable strategies of governing and regulating the population have been established, always focusing on their coexistence at a given moment.

Today workfare strategies making labor precarious and economizing health care coexist with a strong call for making provisions and having medical check-ups: stop smoking, keep fit. And not just on the level of the mass trim trail of the 1970s, but professionalized: Nordic walking, gyms and fitness centers for exquisite taste. It is possible to deduce one from the other. If health care is capitalized, it will be even more necessary to stimulate people to make their precautions, to prompt them to be responsible for themselves, to take care of their bodies, to become self-entrepreneurs of their health. That would determine the character of biopolitical measures by the regulation of capital. In this sense, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt identify the movement of capital with the development of biopower. Until capitalism begins to help itself to those forms of life that valorize emotions, creativity, and not just the six or eight hours a day of wage labor – they call that the real subsumption of society under capital – until then, they say, capital is biopolitical. Yes, so far as they would like to remark that the strategies of valorization and of biopower modify each other increasingly, in spiral forms. No, so far as they would like to suggest a single tendency in the social, namely, the mode of biopolitical production. Then, simultaneity is

deduced, the difference of strategies that calculate profits and of strategies that regulate bodies is deduced and again a teleology is induced. Let's face it: in contrast to the metaphorical qualities of the term 'society of control', we do not live today in the Sci-fi of computerized control. In our societies, high security prisons coexist with electronic collars for inmates of jails, post-trauma therapy with the internment of refugees, the increasing of supernational law standards alongside a politics of emergency. We are not racing into the horizon of a pure, fully deterritorialized capitalism. We are not rushing through the narrow channel of a one-way progress.

Ghost-Things

The spectacular element of Marx's comments on the character of the commodity lies in his strategy to shift the form of the social into the form of the commodity. There it emerges: a mysterious incorporation. The secret is not hidden behind the phenomena, it is *in* the phenomena. This shift begs the question of the state of the things. What's up with commodities? Marx autonomizes the commodity. It becomes a contradictory individuality, a para-subject, a thing that is illuminated by the social. Marx often speaks about the commodity as if it were a living thing, a twisted thing that has a commodity-soul: it dances, it stands on its head, as "soon as [a trivial table] steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent [...] and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than 'table-turning' ever was."[13] Marx says, if the commodity would speak, it would say..., if the commodity could walk it would..., etc. Resolutely and categorically ignoring what it has to do with constituting the body, with constituting sex, with the population, Marx lends the things a fetishistic force. Crystallizing the social, they incorporate exchange-value; they are just jellies of value, spectral objectivity. Marx wants

to get the phantasmatic out of them again. Therefore he operates with the idea of material, actual, present objectivity: that is, the simple trivial thing – a value in use. He permanently identifies reality with rationality, presence and use. Of course, this is crazy in itself. Even if it's pointing towards something important, something irreplaceable and valuable, still a jewel of social theory: capitalism is not a natural necessity.

Here Marx gives us a critical ontology of presence as actual reality, as purity of use and as objectivity. A chair is for sitting. It is what it is, identical with itself. This was in the beginning. It was intact. But there is nothing like the real reality of things and the simple rationality of use and production. This idealism of use and utility characterizes the romantic anti-capitalist mourning for things that have lost their original state. It still reverberates in the new social movements rejecting consumerism, in this disgust for all these false things, the abundance of things, trumpery and glitter of the commodity-world. And often enough, the body of the woman is chosen as a metaphor for this fetishism of things. That shows a huge and dark lack in Marxism concerning the constitution of the body, sexualities and affects. In romantic anti-capitalism, the woman must lend her body to the commodity, until she herself becomes, in a certain sense, a commodity. Eye shadow of blindness. Anti-fetishism wants to show something behind the deception of the commodity, something true, something simple concerning the woman, it is the female worker, the mother, menstruation, the not-made-up woman. Therefore the secret relationship of *ungeschminkt* and *wahr* in German (*ungeschminkte Wahrheit*), without makeup and true (the naked truth). The analysis starts to become interesting when the series of stratifications are reconstructed in which the female body of consumption has been constituted. How did that work? The sexualization and refinement

of femininity: How many practices of housekeeping, educating a girl, taking care of health and sexuality, how much the visual politics of advertisement and movies have become sedimented in the female body. Linda Singer writes, in her book *Erotic Welfare*, about the ensemble of bodily strategies, consumer practices and the effect of a commodity that is perceived as fetish.

Marx's strong rhetorics of the secret, which shows itself by not showing itself, strengthened the gesture of the critique of ideology in Marxism. In part, materialist aesthetic theory established that idea: to ban the fetish, to smash the mirror, to lift the veil, to unmask reality. This line of young-Hegelian critique of religion was inherited by the structuralist cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. Laura Mulvey writes, in her introduction to *Fetishism and Curiosity*, about this position in Marxist and feminist movies. She writes about the primacy of showing and, at the same time, the suspicion of the gaze in a world of blindness. The work, the daily routine at the factory, the social conditions should be dragged out, should step out of the shadow of the glitter of distraction around the commodities that have been worshipped by Hollywood and its studio interiors and middle-class stories. The feminist movie made an analogy between the commodity-fetishism and the beauty-fetishism of the female star. Here, again, there is a strong deciphering gesture and a will to show: images of vaginas, menstruation, close-ups of skin – what was considered as the abject inverse of normative beauty. The menstruating star. Why not? But it should not be linked with the truth of the non-artificial, the not-made-up, with dis-alienation. Slowly the vogue of romantic anti-capitalism and essentialist feminism has come to an end. The anti-fetishist impulse weakens. Camp has been actualized again: the gesture of dis-identification, repeating and displacing the sex-self-fame-money equation. The question is less whether – in the

representation and incorporation of beauty and sex, fashion and porn – a powerful form of sexist alienation and substitution is hidden and expressed, and more a question of how fetishistic practices are carried out, with which other practices they are linked, in what ways do they have effects on forms of life, what is their relation of forces? Not deciphering, but analyzing. When the Canadian queer porn filmmaker Bruce La Bruce left the film university of Toronto, he decided to de-program the entire Marxist-feminist discourse of movie theory, in the first place its anti-fetishism, carrying on with what Kenneth Anger and Jack Smith, Andy Warhol and John Waters had begun. A remark on one point concerning the social relation of forces in which the pro-fetishist and the pro-porn attitude emerge: a potential blockade and retortion it could meet would be the mainstream desire for trash and the anti-left *ressentiment* with which one line of love for artificiality, fashion, and glamour is connected.

At the end of the section entitled, 'The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret thereof', Marx presents a short version of communism as:

> "a community of free individuals, carrying on their work with the means of production in common, in which the labor power of all the different individuals is consciously applied as the combined labor power of the community."[14]

Producing what is needed and what is possible, the result is social. One portion serves as fresh means of production, the other portion is shared justly and consumed by the members of the community. Marx writes: "The social relations of the individual producers [...] are in this case perfectly simple and intelligible."[15] Doing, being active, emerges here as a natural character of human beings. Man is

active and practical. Against this idea, Foucault develops the concept of biopower. Activity is not the essence of human beings; the horizon of a community of free individuals carrying on their work in common is not a free horizon. The horizon of work is an effect of modern power. Marx thinks that overcoming capitalism means overcoming the spectral incarnation of the form of value. This is problematic on a theoretical level because truth is equated with utility and objectivity (*Gegenständlichkeit*), while it is problematic on a political level because it fails to question how it is that the constitution of an active, mobilized, working subjectivity coexists with capitalism.

For Marx, the commodity-form is phantasmatic because it is irrational. But knowledge and truth are not simply measures of the degree to which a form corresponds to an object. The object as matter is not separable from its frame as form, through which and in which the object is recognizable. Communism doesn't imply the separation of simple matter from its false capitalist form. The correspondence between truth and emancipation is cut. The idea of a non-correspondence between truth and objects does not imply that there is no truth, but rather, that truth has a normalizing rather than a rational character. Communism must question the state of the body and the form of life that demands that you make-something-of-yourself, that you be active, creative, have sex, and make sense. The most recent conception of a communism of autonomous activity can be found in the book *Empire*, which I mentioned above. The authors, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, claim that a proto-communist collective subjectivity has emerged due to the following changes: with the class struggles and confrontations of the 1960s and 1970s, the factory diffused into society and all of society became a factory; the feminist perspective of counting non-paid work as part of social productivity became

true historically on an expanded level; capital eats more and more through bodies, valorizes the knowledge of the working process, valorizes the ability to cooperate, the ability to self-organize, the affects, the subcultures, compelling subjects to become entrepreneurs of their own existence. Negri and Hardt suggest that the mode of being of subjects in late capitalism is so refined that it has become precious and autonomous. Capitalism is now only a passive machine of profit-robbery. Activity – that is the multitude. Potentially it knows how it wants to live, to work, to have relationships, etc. This forgets about the constitution of a postfordist form of life; it does not see that autonomy is always an effect of power. Ability in discipline. We find this idea of a happy communism of autonomy in the concept of Open Source programming as a proto-communist activity. Again, the situation of the body in front of the screen – its being-engendered, its non-social loneliness, its 24-hour-online-guard – is forgotten.

The promise of the commodity

Walter Benjamin is far away from the politics of truth and presence. He is turning back all the time; he speaks with the past. He was inspired by Marx's works and historical materialism for different reasons: Benjamin hated capitalism and Marx's theory promised to give his hatred materialist sharpness and clarity. Benjamin was a friend of Brecht and while he was working on *The Arcades Project*, both Adorno and Horkheimer advised him to read especially the first chapter of *Capital, Volume 1*, on commodities. Upon the announcement of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, Benjamin wrote, in shock, "the experience of our generation: that capitalism will not die a natural death."[16] Therefore, revolution is not a final goal of history, it is an interruption and a redemption of the past. As a political author, revolution is the locomotive of global

history for Marx, while with Benjamin revolution is a pulling of an emergency brake. It delivers us from the pain and defeat of the past, from catastrophe: the angel of history would like to wake the dead and join together what has been smashed to pieces.

Analyzing the fading fashions of the 19th century, Benjamin insists on the actuality of the past in the present – the presence of what is not present. He refers to Marx's chapter, 'The fetishism of the commodities and the secret thereof', shifting or displacing the question that is posed there. Detecting another (utopian) aspect of commodities – not just the crystallized form of private expended labor – Benjamin does not want to exorcize the spectral. He does not want to return to elementary use as he does not identify truth with rational production. No hunger, no poverty, communality of production forces, just distribution, etc. are preconditions for another society, which must be there, but as a revolutionary spiritualist, he is searching for the promise of what a life could be in the tiny things, the short seconds of bliss, the fragile beauty.

Marx was analyzing a crystallized form in an antagonistic movement. After doing so he does not really care about the experience of that thing, the commodity, to which he had given an autonomous existence as spectral. He does not speak much about the aesthetics, perception, or glam of the commodity. What's up with consumption? What kind of a practice is it? Benjamin speaks about the puppet-like entity and its enthronement. He recognizes in the commodity the sign of a standstill of what is happening. What a figure! In the *dernier cri* of yesterday, in the most recent crystal of commodity Benjamin finds the irredeemable of an epoch and its dark deception. Sex-appeal of the anorganic. According to his messianic understanding of revolution as something sudden – something that happens now, like a shot on the clock tower –

there trembles, in the commodities' glitter of distraction, a possibility of that which has not yet been actualized.

And now? What can we do with Benjamin's crazy mixture of messianism, romanticism and materialism? What is our 19th century? How could we describe the experience of the commodity? The methodological figure of a 'dialectics at a standstill' does not seem so appropriate. It is related too much to the Hegelian idea of a unity of contradictions. Like use-value and exchange-value, utopia and cynicism take their respective sides, facing each other in the commodity. In his book, *Stanzas*, Giorgio Agamben criticizes Marx's opposition between the enjoyment of use-value as something natural and the accumulation of exchange values as something aberrant. As Derrida in *Specters of Marx*, Agamben notices that

> "the whole [Marxian] critique of capitalism is conducted on behalf of the concreteness of the object of use against the abstraction of the exchange value [and that] Marx's critique is limited in that he does not know to separate himself from the utilitarian ideology, which decrees that the enjoyment of use-value is the original and natural relation of man to objects."[17]

Agamben looks for the possibility of a relation to things that goes beyond both the enjoyment of use and the accumulation of exchange value. He takes the artificiality of the commodity-thing, the will to fashion, the distinguished gesture of the dandy who is a connoisseur of the speciality of the commodity world, as starting point. He is looking for a way of redeeming things from the imperative of use – for the possibility of an impossible movement: the appropriation of unreality. But Agamben's text still remains deconstructive poetry. He remains far away from the everyday

experience of capitalism. Agamben, for example, takes Baudelaire as an early witness of struggling against triviality. The *flaneurs* who, around 1840, set the tempo by walking turtles through the arcades on glittering leashes held in their pink-gloved hands, testified to an early gesture of pop cultural peculiarity: the loneliness of sensation-seeking and the aristocratic distinction of the last dandies in contrast to the coming world of salaried employees.[18] Since then, the strategy of coolness and beautiful emptiness, open to impressions from commodified things, has been repeated a thousandfold and failed successfully – as real capitalist pop strategy it ran aground because of the pressure for subjectivization, outdoing oneself, anti-bourgeois excess, fucking as desire for transgression, the de-socialization of revolt, etc.

The poststructuralist term 'singularity' understands experience as an ensemble of pieces of things, parts of subjects, certain practices and certain situations. A singularity is more individual than a subject or an object. Hence Deleuze's quote of Lewis Carroll's paradox of "a grin without a cat,"[19] an intensity that does not refer to a subject or an object.

I would like to ask if the experience of the commodity is a real capitalist intensity of what Benjamin called now-time (*Jetztzeit*): the intensity of a promise of sudden change that until now just crystallizes itself in a newly bought thing. We should show this experience no disgust for alienation. If we take Benjamin without dialectics, without setting utopianism and cynicism opposite each other, we have to ask first for the relation into which the commodity-experience enters, that is to say, which non-actualized options does it have? That would again be the spectral aspect of social experience, and secondly, how could these intensities potentially escape the capitalist horizon?

And using Benjamin today: from which dream will we one day awake? Is it the past of Fordism? Which promise, which irredeemable expresses the mass goods that have been piled up in warehouses since the end of the Second World War? What does it mean that today the commodity-thing steps into the background? The experience of commodities becomes more and more immaterial and biopolitical. The image of the commodity altered: we now see clips out of casually professionalized life-forms, stills of casual bodies, flashlights on deviant forms of life. This has become the primary image of commodity: an affect, a lifestyle, sometimes a sub-cultural one. We can see it in advertisements all the time. What's up with the biopolitical commodity? Perhaps it incorporates the experience of how capitalist consumption occupies norm and deviation at the same time.

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[1] Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One* (1867), http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/index.htm.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] See Paolo Virno's 'Ten Theses on the Multitude and Post-Fordist Capitalism' at the end of his book, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (2002), Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004.

[5] David Ricardo, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817), London: John Murray, 1821. http://www.econlib.org/library/Ricardo/ricP.html.

[6] Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One*.

[7] Ibid.

[8] See The Brothers Grimm's Fairy Tale of *The Hare and the Hedgehog*, in which the hedgehog always wins the race; when he arrives at full speed at the lower end of the field, the hedgehog meets him with the cry, "I am here already." (http://fairytales4u.com/story2/hare.htm).

[9] Gilles Deleuze, 'Desire and Pleasure' (1994) in Arnold I. Davidson (Ed.), *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

[10] For this debate, see the exciting article by Étienne Balibar, 'Foucault and Marx, the Question of Nominalism' (1989), in Timothy J. Armstrong (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992.

[11] See Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (1986), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

[12] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1977.

[13] Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One*.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, with Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Sholem, Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Eds.), Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1972-1999, V, 819.

[17] Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, 48.

[18] Benjamin notes that "it was briefly fashionable to take turtles for a walk [...] The [dandy] liked to have the turtles set the pace for him. If he had his way, progress would be obliged to accommodate itself to this pace" in 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *Illuminations*, edited and introduced by Hannah Arendt, New York: Schocken, 1968, 197.

[19] See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, where he is referring to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: "'Well! I've often seen a cat without a grin', thought Alice; 'but a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in my life!'"