

Reification through Commodity Form or Technology? From Honneth back to Heidegger and Marx

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After briefly criticizing Honneth's recent reconceptualization of reification as (1) psychological and (2) noneconomic, I outline the problem of reification from the perspective of Marx, which prepares the confrontation that I present between Heidegger and Marx, for the real issue is whether reification is the result of technology (which I will call "causality form") or the result of the "commodity form." I claim, against Heidegger, that Marx's concept of the commodity form is not based on subjectivity and, in addition, that Heideggerian ontology is unable to explain the connection between "enframing" and the capitalist structures that Heidegger implies in his descriptions of modern phenomena. Accordingly, this essay tries to open a new path towards what has recently been called "Heideggerian Marxism."

Key Words: Marx, Heidegger, Reification, Technology, Commodity Form

The concept of reification has reemerged in recent debates in European social-political philosophy, which is the result, on the one hand, of the regained interest in Marx's philosophy (especially in Europe) and, on the other hand, of the work of Axel Honneth and Rahel Jaeggi, who recently presented a reinterpretation of the concept of reification and alienation on the basis of both Honneth's theory of recognition and social theories of authentic life.¹

1. It is interesting to note that Husserl was one of the first philosophers to use the word 'reification' (*Verdinglichung*). In his *Logos* article on philosophy as a rigorous science, he warns against naturalizing consciousness, which, according to him, leads to the reification of consciousness. This ontological confusion that Husserl is thinking of has not much to do with reification in Marx's sense, as the concept of reification in the tradition of Marx and critical theory is not used in the sense of "objectification." I am therefore also skeptical about Honneth's claim that Heidegger's reflection on reification in *Being and Time* can be used in this context, as Heidegger here—whether he read Lukács or not—follows the Husserlian problem in *Being and Time*. Marx, though, is concerned with a different sense of reification: namely, the increasing independence of social relations and the *appearance* of those social relations as something that they are not.

According to Honneth, reification is based on the forgetting of a primary relationship toward oneself, toward things, and toward other persons, which is not to be found in epistemological relations; rather, it is to be found in recognitive relations, which is to say that Honneth claims that all cognitive acts go back to intersubjective relations within which others are encountered in a *noncognitive* empathetic and emotional framework. This framework is, according to Honneth, primarily based on recognition, through which we are nonobjectively connected to other persons. Reification, then, is precisely the destruction of these primarily psychological, affirmative, and positive relations into “objective” and neutral relations. As a consequence, Honneth turns reification into a psychological concept that is only remotely connected to the social reality that is structured by economic forms and technological frameworks.

In contradistinction to Honneth, I believe that the concept of reification should not be turned into a psychological category, as this move, rather unfortunately, hides the real problem that Marx had in mind in the fetishism chapter, located in the first volume of *Das Kapital*, which is concerned with establishing reification as a category of the real. Not surprisingly, Honneth treats reification as a form of alienation. The difference, however, between alienation and reification is that alienation is a concept related to the laboring individual, whereas reification is used to characterize the *totality* of social relations.

Honneth’s turn toward a psychologistic and normative grounding of the concept makes it unfortunately impossible to find a materialist basis for reification, which is mostly visible in Honneth’s failure to give more space to economic explanations in his analysis of social pathologies within modernity.² In short, instead of deriving psychological pathologies from the commodity form, he proceeds the other way around and characterizes normative structures as absolute. For example, he argues in a Hegelian fashion that commodity exchange remains tied to a legal basis, and hence, ultimately, it returns to recognition (Honneth 2005, 94). In addition, he claims that Lukács presupposes a simplistic model of base-superstructure for his explanation of why capitalist exchange processes can infiltrate all other social systems (Honneth 1995, 97). As Honneth puts it, the traditional Marxist analysis of reification remains blind to what Honneth takes to be ideologically induced phenomena, such as racism and human trafficking (Honneth 1995, 98).³ As a consequence, Honneth operates with a rather traditionally defined concept of ideology as a form of misrecognition (Honneth 1995, 100).⁴

2. A similar point is made in Chari (2010), but the author does not develop an argument for how the economic perspective could be reintegrated into Honneth’s approach. Jaeggi (1999, 2005), similar to Honneth, characterizes reification as a form of “misrecognition” (*Verkennung*): i.e., as a subjective concept.

3. It is interesting to note that Honneth uses the word *Menschenhandel* (“human trade”; 1995, 98) for human trafficking, which already (as a word) points to an economic structure that Honneth denies since he claims that economic structures remain dependent upon recognitive (and therefore normative) relations.

4. Though Žižek is one of the few authors to reflect on a materialist conception of ideology, he comes very close to Honneth when he claims that “reification has a liberating effect, as it also de-fetishizes ‘relations between persons,’ allowing them to acquire ‘formal’ freedom and

I especially find the concept of ideology as misrecognition unconvincing, as Marx's thesis about the relationship between the commodity form and ideology is more complex, especially if one takes Marx's later work into account. According to this position, which is opposed to Honneth's weak ideology critique, the social relation towards things (Lukács) is *objectively* present. Finally, as Honneth is solely interested in turning reification into an intersubjective and normative concept, he only pays attention to the early Heidegger. In what follows, I will argue against this move by claiming that it makes much more sense to turn away from *Being and Time* and to shift attention to Heidegger's later philosophy on technology, as the concept of subjectivity no longer plays a major role in these writings. More specifically, my thesis is that Heidegger's concept of technology can help us to understand reification as an asubjective concept. In addition, the shift that I propose has the advantage of being a return to Marx, given that Marx, too, works with an asubjective concept of reification.

The consequence of this move is twofold, as it not only allows us to rethink "Heideggerian Marxism," but it also forces us to de-psychologize the concept of reification. Despite the reception of Heidegger in some strands of contemporary Marxism, shifting the focus back to Marx and Heidegger is still highly unusual, since most contemporary critical theorists and phenomenologists who work on these issues are hostile towards each other (for example, see the exchange between Thomson 2000 and Feenberg 2000). Against this mainstream of scholars, I will argue that we should pay more attention to the relationship between Heidegger's concept of technology and Marx's concept of the commodity form, as this permits us to claim that reification is an objective phenomenon.

In a recent contribution, Pawling (2010) has tried to open up new aspects of a Marxian-inspired reading of Heidegger. As Pawling points out, there are two lines of thought that make Heidegger's ontology attractive from a Marxist perspective: on the one hand, there is Marcuse's early enthusiastic reception of Heidegger's *Being and Time* as an existential framework for a Marxian revolutionary theory (Pawling 2010, 594); on the other hand, there is the "posthumanist" Althusserian reception of Heidegger (Pawling 2010, 597). What follows here, however, deviates from both perspectives, as it shifts the attention to as yet unexplored resources in Heidegger's later thought, especially his concept of technology. The concept of technology, in contrast to "Being" and "Dasein," seems to be more promising for a fresh perspective on Heideggerian Marxism, as this perspective deviates from both the German and the French Marxist reception of Heidegger's philosophy. Accordingly, this essay refrains from commenting upon the relation of Heidegger's philosophy to (the concept of) politics and to aesthetics (Pawling 2010, 598); for in my view we need first to clarify whether Heidegger's philosophy can be used for an analysis of capitalism. In contrast to Pawling, this essay offers a "third" way of reopening a

autonomy" (Žižek 2009, 142). On the one hand, this view is similar to Honneth's, since Honneth assumes that the legal structure is not simply the extension of the commodity form but is itself based on normative grounds that are independent of it. On the other hand, Žižek remains within Marx's framework, as Marx claimed that modern capitalism is a progression towards formal freedom (if, for example, compared with the ancient slave system).

“Heideggerian Marxism” via the connection of economy and technology and through the concept of reification.

Though some Heidegger scholars see that Heidegger’s concept of technology is somehow related to economic concepts, as introduced by Marx, and especially to commodification, they usually do not provide help in understanding how we get from Heidegger’s concepts of technology and enframing to Marx’s concept of commodity and its reception in critical theory.⁵ They mix up, in other words, two things: enframing and commodity form. Part of this confusion is rooted in the attempt to understand Heidegger’s critique of technology *immediately* as a critique and explanation of commodification. These scholars, however, forget that the concept of commodity is an *economic* concept that can only be understood on the basis of an economic theory and not on the basis of Heidegger’s concept of enframing. Heidegger himself claims that enframing is *beyond* the economic (Heidegger 1976–2012, 76:295).

For example, Andrew J. Mitchell has recently claimed, in a brief reconstruction of Heidegger’s notion of thinghood, that “the drive to have everything available for instant consumption equally renders the human a commodity” (Mitchell 2010, 34). It is certainly true that in the age of biotechnology the human becomes a universal object of demand and is turned into an object for consumption, but Heidegger’s concept of *availability* is not identical with being a commodity; for, as we must claim with Marx, a commodity can only exist through the universal inexistence of a value that makes products expressions of *prices*. Mitchell’s identification of technology with commodification is, accordingly, false.⁶ Even if we do not follow Marx’s concept of commodity, an *economic* framework is nevertheless necessary for Mitchell’s identification. Similarly, Albert Borgmann makes the same mistake in his *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, insofar as he *immediately* identifies technology and commodity without explaining how commodities are established and what they *are* (Borgmann 1984).

As far as I can see, there are only rare exceptions that reflect on the relationships between technology and commodification in the Heidegger school (Shalow 2000). Against this Heidegger scholarship and against Heidegger himself, I argue in this essay that although he gives us an excellent tool for analyzing reification from the point of technology (whereas the Marxist tradition has the tendency to reduce technology to an instrument),⁷ he does not succeed in understanding the role that capitalism plays in this picture.⁸ As a consequence, we need to disentangle two

5. A good example of the confusion is Zimmermann (1979, 105), as Zimmermann does not understand that, for Marx, reification is *not* caused by the division of labor. In contrast, Marx would claim that the division of labor is a *necessary* moment of the commodity form. For a better understanding of what Marx calls a “category,” see Reichelt (2002 and 2008, chap. 9).

6. Though I am unable to develop this further in the present paper, Albert Borgmann (1984) makes the same mistake in his *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* insofar as he identifies technology and commodity without really explaining how commodities are established and what they *are*.

7. The best example for this can be found in Buris (1988).

8. Heidegger’s failure is most likely rooted in his (sometimes truly hilarious) global political schemes. His comments on Marxism in his notes on readings of Jünger’s work exclusively cite

motives. On the one hand, we need to confront Heidegger's concept of technology ("causality form") with Marx's concept of commodity form—instead of confronting it with Marx's concept of technology. And on the other hand, we must see that we need to bridge the analysis of technology and the commodity form, given that the empirical capitalist phenomena that both Marx and Heidegger describe are identical.

In what follows I will therefore turn my attention to Marx and Heidegger in order to demonstrate that, instead of a psychological and normative concept of reification, we should understand reification from the perspective of Marx's materialism and Heidegger's ontology since this will allow us to see that reification is only the subjective side of an objective process and framework, which in turn permits us to acknowledge that this phenomenon is much better covered through the concepts of causality and commodity. What *seems* to be subjective (as in Honneth), accordingly, turns out in truth to be the opposite.

Marx on *Verdinglichung*

The source of the modern discussion surrounding reification is of course Marx's analysis of the commodity form and the fetishism chapter in the first volume of *Das Kapital*. As Marx underlines, despite the fact that this is often overlooked, the categorical forms of bourgeois economy are "objective forms of thought."

The categories of bourgeois economy consist of such like forms. They are objective forms of thought that express with social validity the conditions and relations of a definite, historically determined mode of production, viz., the production of commodities. The whole mysticism of the commodity world, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds ghostlike [*umnebelt*] the products of labour as long as they take the form of commodities, vanishes, therefore, as soon as we come to other forms of production. (Marx and Engels 1956–1990, 23:90; translation altered)⁹

What could be read as a simple relation between social reality and ideology is thus more complex when we take into account that Marx says *objective* forms of thought. For what he has in mind here, as Helmut Reichelt recently reminded us (Reichelt

sources that are not academic (for example, he reiterates Lenin's statement that communism is the combination of mobilization and electrification). It seems to me that Heidegger never conceived of Marxism as a viable philosophical source (though in his *Letter on Humanism* things seem to be different); rather, he takes it to be a *worldview*. Needless to say, in recent decades Marxist scholars have been concerned with separating themselves from a "worldview Marxism." This structure is still visible in the recent attempts of a group of scholars called Neue Marx Lektüre (Backhaus, Reichelt, Heinrich, and Elbe) who attempt to establish Marx as an economic thinker who should not be understood through the official "Marxist-Leninist" ideology or through "worldview" Marxism. For this, see Michael Heinrich's (2004) response to a critique from Haug.

9. English translation taken from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm#S4>

2002, 145), is not an intersubjectively established form of thinking as the result of the commodity form; rather, the forms of thought exist themselves objectively in the commodity form—i.e., on this level of Marx's argument, which is the level of exchange and money. As a result, we can no longer claim that ideology and knowledge is *simply* a mental category, as some scholars still claim (Grondin 1988, 89); instead, ideology is, as Žižek puts it, “the form of thought whose ontological status is not that of thought” (Žižek 1989, 13)—which takes us back to understanding categories as *objective* thought forms.

Money, for example, seen from this point of view, emerges as a category out of an objectively occurring abstraction and exchange, and, as a result, every entity can take on the money form. Once this takes place, the categories, such as value, money, interest, capital, etc., can develop *purely* in abstraction from the social process of production that underlies use values. There are three aspects that are important here: (1) the categories emerge from an act of abstraction in exchange (see Elbe 2010, especially 230–3), (2) this act is universal, and (3) the abstraction is itself *practical*—i.e., social—and this is precisely what Žižek (following Sohn-Rethel)¹⁰ has in mind. As a consequence, the fetishism is itself objective since, in capitalism, value (as a pure and universal abstraction) appears as a *natural* property of things, which leads to a “turnover” of all social relations. Social relations, in other words, become *themselves* more thinglike and are not simply (mis)conceived or (mis)perceived as thinglike (*versachlicht*):

In capital—profit, or still better capital—interest, land—rent, labour—wages, in this economic trinity represented as the connection between the component parts of value and wealth in general and its sources, we have the complete mystification of the capitalist mode of production, the conversion of social relations into things, the direct coalescence of the material production relations with their historical and social determination. It is an enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world, in which Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre do their ghost-walking as social characters and at the same time directly as mere things. (Marx and Engels 1956–1990, 25:838)¹¹

This “topsy-turvy world”¹² can be best described by the following eight aspects: (1) reification points to the fact that, in exchange societies ruled by private production,

10. For this, see Sohn-Rethel's (1971, 31) critique of Lukács's conception of reification as false consciousness.

11. English translation taken from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch48.htm>. Backhaus (2004, 82) interprets this turn as a switching of subjective and objective: the subject receives an objective character and the commodity receives a subjective character (in the sense of Hegel); money and capital, in other words, are the “subject” of the development.

12. For the purpose of this paper, I am unable to reconstruct the relationship of this term to Hegel's “*verkehrte Welt*” in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. For the general background of the world turned on its head through the separation of production and commodity, see Reichelt (2002, esp. 167).

all social relationships are mediated through what is exchanged—i.e., through commodities—which leads to thing-mediated relations (Elbe 2010, 231):

Only the conventions of our everyday life make it appear commonplace and ordinary that social relations of production should assume the shape of things, so that the relations into which people enter in the course of their work appear as the relation of things to one another and of things to people. This mystification is still a very simple one in the case of a commodity. Everybody understands more or less clearly that the relations of commodities as exchange-values are really the relations of people to the productive activities of one another. The semblance of simplicity disappears in more advanced relations of production. All the illusions of the Monetary System arise from the failure to perceive that money, though a physical object with distinct properties, represents a social relation of production. (Marx and Engels 1956–1990, 13:22)¹³

Continuing, (2) social power relations and dependencies become more objective, insofar as they turn into an object-like character (*Versachlichung*);¹⁴ (3) social relations become less traditional and more abstract (Markus 1986, 89); (4) decisions will be subordinated to the logic of capital, and political power becomes subjected to instrumental rationality; (5) individuals in a capitalist system start to relate to each other in an atomistic fashion, as the commodity form destroys the social character—i.e., the relational character of entities; (6) the nature-like appearance of commodity entities form as necessary, unchangeable, and independent forces in the lives of individuals, hiding the interests of capitalists, who desire to keep the “semblance” of the commodity alive (Marx and Engels 1956–1990, 25:839); (7) as Marx had already realized in 1845, social relations become formalized and appear upside down (for example, though we believe that we become free as workers, which is formally correct, in truth we are really much more dependent since our labor power is turned into a commodity); and (8) nature becomes a limitless object of exploitation.

I would like to mention a last point: As a consequence of Marx’s analysis, nature turns into something that is no longer *limited*, and it can now be expanded limitlessly, as the production process is no longer limited from the outside and reproduces itself in accordance with *internal* laws—i.e., the laws of capital. He writes:

13. English translation taken from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/ch01.htm>.

14. Marx writes: “The division between the personal and the class individual, the accidental nature of the conditions of life for the individual, appears only with the emergence of the class, which is itself a product of the bourgeoisie. This accidental character is only engendered and developed by competition and the struggle of individuals among themselves. Thus, in imagination [*Vorstellung*], individuals seem freer under the dominance of the bourgeoisie than before, because their conditions of life seem accidental; in reality, of course, they are less free, because they are more subjected to factual constraints [*sachliche Gewalt*]” (Marx and Engels 1956–1990, 3:76; English translation taken from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01d.htm>; translation altered).

Thus, just as production founded on capital creates universal industriousness on one side—i.e. surplus labour, value-creating labour—so does it create on the other side a system of general exploitation of the natural and human qualities, a system of general utility, utilizing science itself just as much as all the physical and mental qualities, while there appears nothing *higher in itself*, nothing legitimate for itself, outside this circle of social production and exchange. Thus capital creates the bourgeois society, and the universal appropriation of nature as well as of the social bond itself by the members of society. Hence, the great civilizing influence of capital; its production of a stage of society in comparison to which all earlier ones appear as mere *local developments* of humanity and as *nature-idolatry*. For the first time, nature becomes purely an object for humankind, purely a matter of utility; ceases to be recognized as a power for itself; and the theoretical discovery of its autonomous laws appears merely as a ruse so as to subjugate it under human needs, whether as an object of consumption or as a means of production. In accord with this tendency, capital drives beyond national barriers and prejudices as much as beyond nature worship, as well as all traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfactions of present needs, and reproductions of old ways of life. It is destructive towards all of this, and constantly revolutionizes it, tearing down all the barriers which hem in the development of the forces of production, the expansion of needs, the all-sided development of production, and the exploitation and exchange of natural and mental forces. (42:323)¹⁵

To repeat the point (as it is so often overlooked in the interpretation of the fetishism chapter): Marx's claim is that the "turned around world" has to do with how value is constituted through capital—namely, *not* through beliefs and attitudes. Beliefs are established *objectively*, behind the backs of the social agents, through the objective act of exchange.

As a consequence of the foregoing, Honneth's critique that there is an outside of economic relations and, accordingly, that not all social relationships are reified should be rejected, as Marx's claim is that the *form* of value as something universal leads to the *opening up* of all beings for taking on this form. For Marx, economy is not a partial system of the social reality; instead, it is the *synthesis* of the society as a whole. Consequently, the argument is not that in capitalism certain reifying ideologies are formed; rather, the argument is an ontological argument: the being of beings now appears in a new light—namely, in the light of the commodity form. Thus, nothing (no tradition, no entity, no relation) can be conceived *in principle* outside of this form; it is the true transcendental structure, but—and this is the philosophical problem—this structure is *real* and *existing*. In fact, we are currently in the process of observing the truly global expansion of this principle, not only in a spatial sense but also in an ontological sense: ideas, rights, planets, air, blood, organs, etc., are turning "upside down" by taking on the commodity form. The fact that people nowadays *can* buy *everything* from love to politicians is not derived from

15. English translation taken from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch08.htm>.

their lack of morality or from their misrecognition of social relations; rather, it is the necessary result of the commodity form itself, which makes everything *appear* as what it is not.

We should already be able to see at this point why Heidegger enters the discussion at all, for just as Marx is not interested in a psychological and, hence, subjectivist explanation of commodity fetishism and reification, Heidegger is not interested in turning technology into something that is based on subjectivity.¹⁶ The assumption that Marx's and Heidegger's philosophies are incompatible can already be rejected at this point, for Heidegger's claim that Marx's philosophy is based upon a metaphysics of subjectivity can be rejected (at least in regard to the commodity form).

Heidegger and Marx

I shall now turn to Heidegger, whose main discussion of Marx can be found in the "Letter on Humanism." As this passage has been discussed before, I only want to recall the main points: Heidegger points out that Marxist materialism should not be understood as the vulgar assertion that "everything is simply matter" (Heidegger 2008, 243) but as a metaphysical determination "according to which every being appears as the material for labor" (Heidegger 2008, 243), which is a materialism that in truth is a metaphysics of subjectivity.¹⁷ What Heidegger advances here is simple: he claims that a universal *availability* of beings is the result of the implicit production paradigm in Marx. Consequently, Heidegger goes on to claim that the essence of materialism "is concealed in the essence of technology" (Heidegger 2008, 243) since modern technology, for Heidegger, is contained in the essence of technology in general. Heidegger's claim, in other words, is that Marx's implicit metaphysics is itself an instance of modern enframing *because* it is based upon a subjectivist metaphysics. To repeat the main point, we see here that my foregoing discussion of Marx stands in stark contrast to Heidegger's interpretation, as exactly the opposite is the case for Marx: the *real* abstraction that occurs in the exchange process leads to the abstract category of value form, according to which the emergence of a universal and objective category determining the being of beings arises. Seen from this point of view, Marx operates on the same level as Heidegger. In addition, as scholars even today do not realize, for Marx the exchange of products is on a different level than the exchange of commodities, as the exchange of commodities is not identical with the exchange of products between two individuals (see Marx and Engels 1956–1990,

16. In addition, the importance of the term "form" here should not be underestimated, as Marx is in this regard a Hegelian and anti-Kantian thinker. For Marx, the form of entities is not something that human reason brings to them; rather, it is inherent in reality. Accordingly, Marx treats "form" as something that belongs to the being of beings; for this, see Sohn-Rethel (1971, 30).

17. It is interesting to note that Heidegger, without justifying it, switches from "Marx" (242) to "Marxist" (243) and "communism" (244) in his explanation, implying that Marx's doctrine can easily be translated into political doctrine (opposed to what he calls "Americanism"). Most likely this is the reason for Heidegger's neglect of the later writings on the essence of capitalism from a strictly economic standpoint.

23:126).¹⁸ The dialogue Heidegger calls for needs to be focused on this issue: whether Heidegger's assumption makes sense, that Marx's materialism is "concealed" in the essence of technology. The real question, then, is the following: is reification the result of technology or is it the result of really occurring abstraction and the commodity form?

Heidegger, the Causality Form, and Reification

Heidegger's view of the concept of labor is closely connected to Jünger's *Der Arbeiter*, within which Jünger outlines the transformation of modern human beings into "workers." The total mobilization of human beings through labor¹⁹ leads, according to Heidegger, to the domination of the earth (Heidegger 1976–2012, 90:108), transforms everything into energy to be exploited (90:107), and is rooted in manipulation (*jemanden bearbeiten*; 90:108). Laboring, according to Heidegger, is basically an exploitative relationship toward beings, especially since it establishes beings as something that in principle *can be labored* upon. This, in turn, presupposes that beings are accessible to the laboring subject. Heidegger's argument, consequently, is that labor as a universal (human) concept, as can be found in Marx until 1845, *presupposes* a framework that makes it possible for beings to appear to labor while being themselves "things" that can be manipulated. Labor, accordingly, is secondary. The manipulability, for Heidegger, comes from somewhere else, as it is *not* the *result* of the act of labor; rather, it is its *presupposition*. Here Heidegger follows a transcendental argument: the condition of the possibility of labor is the understanding of being as manipulability. In his notes about Jünger, Heidegger quotes Lenin's definition of communism as "Sovjet power + electrification" (90:230),²⁰ which he then interprets as the total mobilization of every being through technology. Seen from this angle, Heidegger argues that socialism has nothing to do with sociality and that it is rather the planetary unfolding of power, in which the proletariat is used as a means within a "planetary process of labor" (90:257), which is itself based on the total upsetting of beings as mere sources of energy and use.

Having said this, it is astonishing that Heidegger constantly focuses on two aspects: namely, on the modern tendency to use everything up, and on the total availability of everything for consumption. The Marxian terms to be used here would be *consumption* for the former and *commodity form* for the latter. Moreover, Heidegger

18. For this, see Backhaus (2004, 61). As Backhaus underlines, the concept of commodity according to Marx cannot be determined as a pre-monetary category. As a consequence, Marx's theory is the attempt to introduce an objective concept of value that cannot be reduced to a subjective category.

19. Heidegger notes affirmatively that, according to Jünger, the soldier is the best expression of the modern form of the laborer, for during World War I the soldier turned out to be pure material to be used up (1976–2012, 90:219). The "homelessness" that Heidegger mentions in the "Letter on Humanism" is addressed in the notes on Jünger through the statement "that humanity does not have its *Da*" (90:226), the lack of which leads to the modern *Raserei* of technology.

20. All quotations in English from Heidegger 1976–2012 are the present author's own translations.

speaks of the “using up of all materials [*Stoffe*], the resource [*Rohstoff*]²¹ human included, for the unconditional possibility of the production [*Herstellung*] of everything is determined in a concealed way by the complete emptiness in which beings, the materials of what is real, are suspended” (7:94).²²

It should be clear from this that Heidegger’s analysis is precisely the same as Marx’s; even though the explanation *seems* to be different, since Heidegger claims that the *root* should be seen in the lack of a foundation for beings in Being itself (66:16). So far so good, but I think that we need to see the differences, too. Though Heidegger does not use this term in his later writings, we can safely make the following claims: reification in Heidegger means (1) that beings are revealed in such a way that their own *revealed* character remains hidden and forgotten, (2) that beings are in danger of losing “world” in the age of modern technology (although not through all kinds of technology), and (3) that beings are revealed as *material cause* only, and as *mere* materiality (materiality here understood as “stuff”). The simple schema of stuff and matter gets a new sense here, as we are now living in an age in which beings *really* become just “stuff”—i.e., something that is available 24/7 for an infinite range of purposes and “forms” that remain *external* to “stuff.” In contrast to this move, Heidegger tries to show that things, as things, depend upon a *noncausal relationship between the four causes* and upon a *nonproductive relationship between the four dimensions* of the world. So perhaps we might say that for Heidegger the schematization of our experience has something to do with the understanding of being as causality (from which instrumentality is derived): “enframing challenges forth into the frenziedness of ordering that blocks every view into the propriete event of revealing and so radically endangers the relation to the essence of truth” (2008, 338).

As Heidegger argues in his technology essay, modern technology should be understood as (1) the loss of the unity between thing and world (“de-worlding”) and as (2) the reduction of “technics” to a single form of causality, namely, *causa materialis*. When Heidegger introduces the essence of modern technology in his technology essay, he claims that modern technology is still a form of revealing, but the revealing is now of a different character, which he calls *challenging* (*Herausfordern*). This transition is important, as it allows us to reject the claim that the difference between modern and nonmodern technology seems to be absolute in Heidegger. It is rather the opposite: there is no essential difference between modern and nonmodern technology. What changes, however, is the *instrumentality* itself, which as we need to recall is for Heidegger the relationship between the four causes. Consequently, modern technology is characterized by the opposite of or destruction of indebtedness (as the basic principle for how all aspects of a thing come together in the ancient concept of “technics”), the main consequence of which is that the *material* moment of beings becomes *separated* from the other three causes.

21. The German word *Rohstoff* goes back to “prime matter.”

22. The emptiness in this quote refers to the forgetting of being. It should be noted that Heidegger (1976–2012, 79:56) claims that the transformation of the human into raw material is especially visible in the concentration camps, which, of course, would require a discussion of its own.

Here, the cause-effect relation replaces causality as indebtedness and instrumentality. Accordingly, Heidegger's philosophy of technology is in truth a theory of causality or a theory of how causality becomes interchangeable with the being of beings. Causality, however, is not simply the relation between cause and effect; instead, it is the reduction of the world to one causal relationship, which no longer allows us to see how all dimensions of the meaningfulness of entities hang together. It is much easier to confront Heidegger and Marx (and, as a consequence, reification) from this point of view, as the causal definition of entities as entities leads to the process of de-worlding that Heidegger was concerned about.

"It seems," as Heidegger puts it, "as though causality is shrinking into a reporting" (2008, 328), which leads him to introduce the *standing-reserve* (*Bestand*). The German word *Bestand* means something that is "just there," positive, stripped from its context. As he underlines, the being of beings as standing-reserve no longer is encountered as a thing (*Gegenstand*); instead, it is encountered on the basis of its *orderability* (*Bestellbarkeit*) or, perhaps better, on the basis of *availability*. As he puts it in his lecture on Hölderlin's "The Ister":

It suffices here to point out in a cursory manner that in the unfolding of the modern world picture, that is, in terms of the mathematical and technical projection of inanimate nature, the aspect of "order" came to be essential with respect to whatever is actual. "Order" here means the calculable accountability of everything actual to everything else that is actual, of every relation between actual things to every other relation, of every relational relation to every other relational relation. Order here means calculable and ordered relationality. Whatever is subject to order must be posited in advance in such a way, and can be posited only in such a way, that it becomes accessible for such order and can be controlled by it. (1996, 40)

The German term that Heidegger uses in the Bremen lectures (which were the basis for the technology essay) is *Verwahrlosung*, which means "in a state of dilapidation" or being neglected (Harries 1994, 230), as well as (even more literally) "without being kept safe" (as "*verwahren*" means to "store away" and to "keep safe"; see also Heidegger 1976–2012, 79:47). The state of neglect is identical with *available material*, for if material is reduced to its mere availability, it is no longer taken *as material* (being one of the four Aristotelian causes that make up an entity). Heidegger's discussion of causality and technology is nicely formulated in his lecture courses on Hölderlin: "Kant was the first to bring this conception of causality, that is, of effecting, to a philosophical concept: 'to be caused *by* something' means: to succeed this 'something' in temporal succession in accordance with a definite rule. 'Ends' too are only a kind of cause, and purposiveness is a cause-effect relationship that must be capable of being subjected to functionalization" (Heidegger 1996, 41).

In addition, Heidegger refers to this context at the end of the technology essay when he discusses the concept of essence. Modern technology is a form of the being of beings that makes beings "essence-" and form-less. They no longer find their way into their primordial essences and instead they become *identical* and *uni-form* (*gleich-förmig*; Heidegger 1976–2012, 76:321). Put differently, everything has the

same essence and is therefore essentially the same. Uniformity means precisely that entities become *essentially* undistinguishable, which in turn implies that they do not have different essences and therefore that they lose their specificity. Again, every entity, according to the Marxist tradition, gets a uniform character precisely because—from the perspective of the value form—every being is exchangeable and is therefore no longer unique. Instead, every being takes on the *real* universal: namely, capital.

Example: Causality Form, Commodity Form, and Time

The example of time and space can nicely illustrate the issue in question, as it is astonishing that Heidegger never considers that modern linear conceptions of time and space could be implied in the commodity form. For example, in his lecture course on Hölderlin's "The Ister," Heidegger contrasts the poetic "time and space of the river" with what he takes to be "actuality" in the modern world. He declares the following:

We do not need to refer at great length to the achievements of the technological era or the world picture belonging to it in order to show that we "get the picture" about the "spatio-temporal world," and that, via our calculations and machinery, we have such convincing power over its "spaces" and "times" that the space of our planet is shrinking and the annual seasons and years of human life are being condensed into diminutive numerical values for the purposes of our calculative planning far in advance. (Heidegger 1996, 39)

Heidegger's comments are—given the time when they were written—truly prophetic, but one wonders why Heidegger is apparently convinced that the framework (in this lecture course, which is still conceived as a projection) goes back to a mathematical conception of nature as the real trigger of the revolution that occurred in the modern world. The destruction of pragmatic time and lived time (i.e., time as it is experienced as something that constitutes *specific* worlds to which entities belong and by which they become accessible) leads to a unification and abstraction of time itself and, as a consequence, upsets the relation between thing and world.

What Heidegger has in mind here could easily be translated into Marx's framework, with the advantage that we find in Marx at least the attempt to fully explain the necessary connection between the phenomena that Heidegger has in mind and its *form*, which leads to a more precise account of how reification can be spelled out in terms of time.

For example, the introduction of labor power as a commodity led to at least three effects (see Rosa 2005, 257–78): (1) labor time became determined by clock time, which led to the independence of labor time from seasonal time (weather, day/night, seasons, etc.) and in turn enabled time (*a*) to be measured quantitatively and (*b*) to be globally comparable, decontextualized, and unifiable; (2) labor time became separated from nonlabor time in connection with the spatial separation of workplace

and living place, which led to a “de-worlding” of the labor activity and the exclusion of personal relationships from labor relationships; and (3) labor time became separated from the object of labor, insofar as labor time is no longer dependent upon the time that an object intrinsically requires; rather, labor time is abstractly defined through “activity” or—to use Heidegger’s term—“energy,” as such.

These three aspects, though they require much more discussion, show how the commodity form and its inherent abstraction implies the upset of *potentially* all (even global) social relations. Whereas in Heidegger it remains unclear how we get from the *Gestell* to the phenomena described, in Marx this connection is clear: as soon as we agree to his thesis that the abstraction inherent in the commodity form is real and universal (see first section of this paper), it is clear that time itself *must* (potentially) become a resource to be calculated in abstract terms. The mathematical projection here is the *result* of the commodity form and not its *presupposition*.

Heidegger or Marx?

Seen from the perspective of Marx, *all* cultural phenomena that Heidegger describes or criticizes are economic phenomena, and I do not see how we could possibly neglect this fact. A theory from the Heideggerian perspective needs to explain how enframing necessarily leads to the economic phenomena described. As far as I can see, so far no Heidegger scholar has shown how we should conceive of this connection. Instead, it is much more common, as I mentioned in the introduction, to identify technology with the commodity form, which is (to repeat the point) false insofar as the commodity form *presupposes* and implies money and capital. Indeed, the latter concepts are not implied in Heidegger’s concept of technology. Accordingly, it seems much more promising to proceed the other way around—i.e., from Marx to Heidegger—as Marx’s commodity theory allows us to understand the revolution that occurs in relation to labor and, as a consequence, in relation to all productive forces. As we know, though Heidegger assumed (for a while) that there is a genuine break and shift in the fundamental ontological *setup* of modernity through modern science and its dependency on what I have called the “causality form,” he abandoned this position later in favor of a theory that assumes that the “break” occurred much earlier or even *within* the origin of Western metaphysics.

Seen from Heidegger’s perspective, the role of labor in Marx is crucial, and we are similarly unable to neglect the fact that Marx, though he developed objective concepts independent from anthropology, never gave up on reflecting upon the production paradigm and the central role that labor plays for the development of history and social reality. In addition, with a few exceptions he never gave up on the subordinated role of nature in relation to labor. As Alfred Schmidt (1977; a Marxist philosopher in the critical theory tradition) admitted, Heidegger’s critique should in fact lead Marxists to see the crucial role of the domination of nature in Marx’s theory. Though, as I pointed out above, Marx was well aware of the global exploitation of nature in capitalism and the implied ontological shift, he never gave

up on the basic claim that the relation of human beings and nature is based on *possession*. In the “Critique of the Gotha Program” he states:

Labor is *not the source* of all wealth. *Nature* is just as much the source of use values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists!) as labor, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labor power . . . And insofar as man from the beginning behaves toward nature, the primary source of all instruments and subjects of labor, as an owner, treats her as belonging to him, his labor becomes the source of use values, therefore also of wealth. (Marx and Engels 1956–1990, 19:13)²³

So, even if we argued that Marx assumed that, in a socialist world, wealth would not be defined through abstract value and that therefore our relation to nature would radically change, we need to see that nevertheless Marx remained committed to the idea that nature *as nature*, i.e., as the being of entities, is based on human possession. Consequently, we find here an implicit anthropological and, hence, subjective principle, which Heidegger would reject since it does not allow us to think being as something that is independent and above its relation to humans.

However we solve this problem, one thing is clear: both Heidegger and Marx would fundamentally disagree with the newer proponents of critical theory, such as Honneth and Habermas, since both claim that we need a principle or metaframework for understanding the being of beings as such. Accordingly, they do not follow the switch that occurred in recent social theory: namely, the rejection of the idea that society as a whole is something that is constituted by a universal structure, principle, or concept, such as money (Marx), technology (Heidegger), or exchange (Adorno). Accordingly, from the perspective of Marx, Heidegger, and Adorno, one must reject the thesis that the ontological or social whole can only be described through a plurality of systems, discourses, etc., the best examples of which are perhaps Habermas’s take on money as a “medium” in the second volume of his *Theory of Communicative Action* and Honneth’s claim that economy and normativity are *separate* spheres. Given what I have said in this essay, I believe that we should try to think again about this problem, as only this dividing line will lead to a substantial and systematic confrontation between Marxists, Heideggerians, and contemporary critical theorists.²⁴

23. English translation taken from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm>.

24. This would, of course, require a thorough discussion of Andrew Feenberg’s theory of technology. I am unable to address his theory in this essay, although one can observe the same trend in Feenberg’s theory, as he moved away from any substantial economic-philosophical considerations, accusing Heidegger of being an essentialist and of reifying technology (for example, Feenberg 2010, 25)—the claim of which, given what I have outlined in this essay, should be rejected. There is, as far as I can see, and especially in Germany, a new generation of social theorists who are in the process of returning to more substantial theories of capitalism (especially see Rosa [2005] and Dörre, Lessenich, and Rosa [2009]). Backhaus and Reichelt have also expressed their uneasiness with Habermas’s neglect of economic theory in his social theory; for this, see Reichelt (2008, chap. 15).

Conclusion

In this essay I argued that Honneth's conception of reification fails insofar as he underestimates the economic and technological fundamentals of the concept of reification. The latter fundamentals can be reconstructed through a "Heideggerian Marxism" that combines Heidegger's insights into technology with Marxian theory, even though, as I argued, Heidegger does not develop an appropriate understanding of the empirical capitalist phenomena that he has in mind. As I briefly sketched, Heidegger's misinterpretation of Marx's theory as a "metaphysics of subjectivity" does not allow him to see that the commodity form *contains* central aspects that he takes to be contained in technology. This reconstruction, accordingly, allows us to see that the real confrontation of Heidegger and Marx should be redefined in terms of causality and commodity form.²⁵ However, working out this confrontation in all of its aspects, especially in relation to the problem of how all natural relations are turned over in the technology and commodity form, remains the task of future reflections.

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25. This move also helps us to see more clearly the dividing line between Adorno and Heidegger, as Adorno (1993, 57, 77)—in contrast to his successors—never gave up on the exchange principle as a principle that determines the *whole* of all social relations. For this, also see Backhaus (2004, 83).

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