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act and in this sense “make history,” but they cannot bring about “true” history, as this takes place in a series of epochs and epochal breaks “behind their backs,” and not in the intentions and actions within those epochs. Looking from a socio-economic perspective onto epochal breaks, we need to acknowledge that the epochal break of capital accumulation and that which Marx terms valorization [*Verwertung*] introduced a completely new dynamic in modernity that can be derived neither from political processes nor from economic developments alone. It is undeniable that we must assume that at some point merchants ceased to use their money for hoarding, peasants were driven off their land and violently turned into industrial workers, technologies and the sciences developed, and labor and the earth were made productive under capital as the new social principle. Nevertheless, despite these historical facts, we remain unable to fully explain the *break* that occurred with the arrival of value as the new principle of human social organization. The reorganization of reality into a new configuration that we try to address by the term “epoch” is itself something that does not exist on the level of actions.

As Althusser puts it, though in a slightly different context, “there is, in the first instance, no history but the history of social formations.”⁷³ What Althusser has in mind is that the history of social formations should not be confused with history in a general sense. History in truth is the history of social formations, and these social formations can fundamentally change. Though numerous intentions and motives lead to factories, the steam engine, different infrastructure, and so on, “the capitalist epoch”⁷⁴ as such was not planned and foreseen in actions, intentions, and motives. A new mode of production as a new principle of social organization is not history; rather, it is that which makes history possible. It is its structure. So, although we can argue that the steam engine belongs to the capitalist epoch, we are unable to derive the capitalist epoch from the steam engine. The capitalist epoch is not an effect of a cause. Nor were there people who *wanted* to bring capitalism about, nor can we explain the new *total* configuration as an effect of a finite number of causes. The name that we give the event “capitalism” can only be applied retroactively, *after* the event. The social form that emerged and makes it possible for all developments to fall under one uniting principle cannot be derived from actions themselves. Capital, or, more precisely, the organizing principle of the value form as a new epoch, makes it possible for us to differentiate capitalism from pre-capitalist social organizations that have *occurred*, but which were not *made*. An epoch is a social configuration of history that can only be retroactively recognized once it has taken place. *Historically speaking, the value form as a new epochal principle is transcendental*, insofar as a social form, as Althusser puts it, “exists only in its existence, in the conditions of its existence.”⁷⁵ To remind us, “transcendental” in the Kantian sense refers neither to something transcendent nor to an independent essence. As

Chapter 6

Capital as Enframing On Marx and Heidegger

Christian Lotz

INTRODUCTION: CAPITAL AS EPOCH AND EVENT

“The distinction between the subject of history, who is supposed to be able to ‘make’ it, and his object, which is supposed to be ‘made’ by him, can now be brought to a point in the following way as well: Man does indeed make history, but he does not make epochs.”⁷¹ It is true, humans do make history—but can they also make that which makes this “making” possible? After repeated attempts to analyze and describe the break that led to modernity in the history of human ideas, Hans Blumenberg has formulated this question in the following way:

It is true that we must proceed from the assumption that man makes history—who else should make it for him?—but what can be experienced of history for us is not identical with what has been “made” to occur at any given time. For in relation to actions that could have “made history” whether of the discredited “great men” or, more recently, of the masses that are defined by their economic conditions—the element of interference always supervenes. . . . The principle that man makes history certainly does not mean that what is made depends solely on the intentions and the precepts as a result of and according to which it was produced.⁷²

What Blumenberg has in mind is that “history” cannot simply be formulated on the level of actions alone, and that regardless of their intentions and motives, a new epoch cannot be derived from them. In other words, men do

Marx has it in *Capital*, “capital . . . announces from the outset a new epoch in the process of social production.”⁷⁶ Capital, in other words, is an event and *therefore* history. This means that we are unable to predict with certainty any future changes in society. As the twentieth century has shown, all Marxist-Leninist attempts to administer the movement toward a communist society have failed. The future cannot be engineered. Accordingly, it can only take place the other way around (as Marx early on had already claimed): political and wider social changes can only take place once social relations are developed to a point where political change *becomes* possible. Though we can do many things, such as reorganize our workspaces, invent new organizations, remake our legal institutions, struggle on the streets, and so on, we cannot *make* a post-capitalist society. Until one day we wake up and have another name for what might have occurred, we can only wait for the event, which is to say, for history to happen. Of course, this position does not exclude that we should do *everything* to bring about the *conditions* for this event, but the point is that we will never know beforehand whether these conditions are *really* the proper conditions or whether they even lead into wrong directions. For example, for a long time many people in the former GDR thought that they were in the process of developing the socialist conditions for a communist society, but as we know, this project ended officially in 1989. Similarly, whether the dreams of current “techno-communists” who are building a peer-to-peer production network that can no longer be subsumed by capital come true, we will not know before the change actually takes place. Contrary to the determinism of certain Marxist traditions, we will only know this *retroactively*.

Based on these introductory remarks on capital as an event, in what follows I will try to demonstrate that, although Heidegger is certainly correct in claiming that the central metaphysical concept for Marx is the concept of life (and, hence, subjectivity), he does not see that for Marx the concepts of life and labor are framed by two elements that escape the subjective position—namely, the earth as the external condition for human activity,⁷⁷ and the value form (capital) as the external condition for how labor exists in our capitalist social organization. Put differently, he overlooks that Marx’s concept of capital is *epochal* in the sense introduced earlier. *Furthermore*, modern subjectivity, as Heidegger proclaims it for modern epistemology and idealist metaphysics, is, for Marx, a moment of the social reorganization that occurred with the subjection of labor and the laborer *to* the principle of valorization. Accordingly, the value form is the condition of the possibility for life and labor turning into central metaphysical concepts for our current epoch. Put differently, the fact that subjectivity is central for Marx depends upon a non-subjectivist transcendental social form, which, through the process of valorization, positions [*stellt*] and orders [*bestellt*] laborer and the

earth as beings to be *material* for capital (accumulation). Consequently, what Heidegger calls “positionality” [*Gestell*] is *in truth* capital. The truth of being is value. Rejecting Heidegger’s understanding of Marx and correcting his concept of positionality is made possible because recent Marx scholarship has moved away from the understanding of Marx that was prevalent in traditional and dogmatic forms of Marxism. It is now more common to understand Marx’s theory as a critique of labor instead of making it part of an essentialist anthropological theory.⁸

HEIDEGGER’S CHARGE THAT FOR MARX BEING IS PRODUCTION

In order to prepare a proper confrontation of Heidegger’s and Marx’s thought, we would do well to briefly review one of Heidegger’s main claims that he presents in the often-quoted *Letter on Humanism*. Heidegger writes the following about the dialogue of his own thinking with materialism:

The essence of materialism does not consist in the assertion that everything is simply matter but rather in a metaphysical determination according to which every being appears as the material of labor. The modern metaphysical essence of labor is anticipated in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the self-establishing process of unconditioned production, which is the objectification of the actual through man experienced as subjectivity.⁹

Heidegger’s claim that Marx remains within Hegel’s metaphysics—that is, the claim that the central modern metaphysical concept is subjectivity as that through which and as which being shows up—is extended in numerous passages via the concept of labor, which Heidegger understands as human self-production through which everything (i.e., history and nature) appears as the product of human labor and self-production. For example, Heidegger writes in a later comment on Marx:

For the word “labor” here does not mean mere activity and performance. The word speaks in the sense of Hegel’s concept of labor, which is thought as the basic trait of the dialectical process, by which the becoming of the actual unfolds and completes its actuality. That Marx, in opposition to Hegel, does not see the essence of actuality in absolute, self-conceiving spirit, but rather in the human producing itself and its means of living, this indeed brings Marx into the most extreme opposition to Hegel, but by this opposition Marx remains within Hegelian metaphysics.¹⁰

Though Heidegger is certainly right in claiming that in his early writings Marx seems to defend an anthropological concept of labor that can be applied to the entire human history, he does not see that already in *The German Ideology* labor does not *simply* appear as the process of human self-production and the subordination of nature and history to the “making” of humans. Rather, the anthropological process that Marx addresses in *The German Ideology* is only possible because of certain underlying historical and social forms through which humans and their social (re)production appear in different configurations. Laboring and producing “as such” remain empty abstractions, insofar as these are, concretely grasped, an “ensemble of relations.” As Marx puts it in the *Sixth Feuerbach Thesis*, “the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.”¹¹ Accordingly, the claim that laboring is identical with *making* is, at least in the way in which Heidegger uses this concept, misleading. This has led to the observation that runs from Althusser to Negri, which posits that Marx’s thought is based on Spinozist materialism rather than on Hegelian metaphysics of subjectivity. Moreover, Heidegger underplays Marx’s claim that production is not the baseline of all history, but is instead a process undertaken for the sake of satisfying *needs* as the primary acts of all human history (i.e., this does not mean that history is *only* the process of satisfying needs, as it is most visible in capitalism). As Marx writes in the *German Ideology*, “[t]he first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs.”¹² Accordingly, to repeat this point, the central aspect of production is not simply an act of creation, but both a response to and the *formation* of needs and wants within history. We should therefore be cautious about Heidegger’s assumption that Marx reduces being to production, since it is rather “need” that is the first anthropological concept for Marx, though it is certainly correct to say that needs cannot be thought of independently from the satisfaction (and, hence, reproduction) of needs, which relies on the type of social formation reached within the stages of history. Human beings, for Marx, are needy and hence “open” beings.

Moreover, Marx’s analysis of human labor in *The German Ideology* is developed and put on a much clearer footing in *Capital*, which is something that Heidegger never considers, most likely because he took *Capital* to be a work in economics. Marx argues here that labor turns into the center of all social organization *because* it becomes subjected to the commodity form and value. That is, only in societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails does labor and production *become* the central metaphysical concept. Labor as the way in which being shows up, in other words, is *epochal*, not only for Heidegger but also for Marx, and in this way labor is not an essential property. So, Heidegger’s claim (in the earlier quote from the *Letter on Humanism*) that the modern metaphysical essence should be seen in labor

and that Marx is the best representative for this view should be rejected, especially given that Marx’s position is a *critique* of labor as the center of the human universe. According to Marx, it is rather the value form—and not labor—that *upsets* all social relations and reorganizes *all* human activities as productive activities. In pre-capitalist times human beings, except slaves, expressed their humanity in a manifold of activities, all of which are *now* subjected to capital, which leads to them being simply defined as something to be valorized. The consequence of this seismic and epochal shift is that all human activities become reduced to labor and, in addition, that labor becomes abstract because under capitalist conditions *only* its universal exchangeability counts. When Heidegger argues that the new, modern, metaphysical framework (1) turns human beings into *subjects*, (2) defines reality as the objectivity of objects [*Gegenständlichkeit*], and (3) brings it about that “labor in an aggravated sense becomes essential,”¹³ he is arguing *precisely* what Marx argues in his later writings between the *Grundrisse* (1858) and the *Notes on Adolph Wagner* (1881).¹⁴ Accordingly, when Heidegger claims that labor in modernity (1) is based on subjectivity, (2) is centered on rational representation, (3) leads to being as effectiveness [*Wirksamkeit*], and (4) lets the earth and the human being appear as a “source of raw material” [*Rohstoffquelle*], one cannot help being reminded of Marx’s famous statement in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* that capital destroys both sources of wealth, the laborer and the earth.¹⁵ All of this can also be expressed in Heideggerian terms, which has been nicely done by Michael Eldred:

Beings are ordered into position, they are put into the order of the set-up and they are ordered just like items in a mail order catalogue. Setting-up and valorization are the respective essential actions of the respective essences, whereby action here cannot be thought in terms of human action, but as an historical destiny that prevails over and overwhelms everything by disclosing the totality of beings to human understanding within a specific epochal cast.¹⁶

Let me therefore analyze in more detail the shift that Marx presents in the central chapter 6 of *Capital*, which should then also clarify why I believe that Heidegger is not as far away in his technology essay than he himself seems to believe.

CAPITAL AS AN EPOCH

Heidegger’s position toward Marx has also been echoed by many non-Heideggerian interpreters of Marx who took Marx’s position in his early writings as the expression of a general anthropology that allows us to

interpret the world historical development as a quasi-naturalist process in which human communication, politics, and the arts are simply expressions of the metabolism between humans and nature and their need to reproduce themselves. For example, Arendt claimed that Marx's naturalist position leads to a reductive view regarding human freedom and political action, and Habermas argued that Marx's concept of labor leads to an instrumentalist reduction of human reason and the underestimation of communicative rationality. To repeat the point from the previous section, what both positions miss is that Marx does not present a theory for understanding the universal and general human condition; instead, Marx's theory tries to explain the conditions and the *kind* of relations of production under which certain labor relations become possible. For Marx, the bourgeois epoch differs from all forerunners because it disconnects the production and property relations from natural conditions. This does not mean that the metabolism between humans and nature gets cut. Rather it means that in all pre-capitalist social formations relations to nature are predominant whereas with the reign of capital, society as a whole stands opposed to nature (and is therefore hostile to it). With the arrival of modern bourgeois society, the relation between natural and historical is located *within* the historical process since the bourgeois promise consists in the emancipation from nature.¹⁷

This can also be grasped as a new historical time in which the configuration of history appears to be in a different *mode*. "Historical time is thus no longer the pure succession of changes or the universal relativism of the *hic et nunc*; it is the time of each mode of production, of the cycles of production and reproduction and so on."¹⁸ What Althusser has in mind is that the way in which the relations of production are organized within an epoch determines the way in which changes and developments occur. Under conditions of capital accumulation and under conditions of uneven development developments can become complex in terms of production, circulation, and consumption time. Nevertheless the way in which historical time unfolds is historically specific. In this vein, Marx argues in *Capital* that "definite historical conditions are involved in the existence of the product as a commodity."¹⁹ His philosophy thus does not allow us to come to any conclusions about labor and productivity that do not take into account the "definite historical conditions" under which these are possible. As he has it,

[o]ne thing, however, is clear: nature does not produce on the one hand owners of money or commodities, and on the other hand men possessing nothing but their own labor-power. This relation has no basis in natural history, nor does it have a social basis common to all periods of human history.²⁰

Marx argues that labor and productivity are abstractions that one can find in bourgeois philosophy, which he criticizes as ideological expressions of what is *really* going on under capitalist social organization. Accordingly, the view of Marx's theory as an anthropology based on labor misses the fundamental concept of social form under which such an anthropology becomes possible—namely, in its bourgeois-inverted way. Put differently, an anthropology that *abstractly* argues that labor and labor production are human properties is precisely the position that Marx criticizes, insofar as only in bourgeois ideology is labor taken to be an abstract, human, property. Every social form, then, depends upon its own conditions of existence that need to be in place in order for labor to express itself in certain ways. In modernity this event can be seen in the shift from concrete labor to abstract labor that is regarded and treated as universally exchangeable labor-power. Only under capitalist social conditions can labor-power as a *real* social factor appear. As Marx writes:

It is otherwise with capital. The historical conditions of its existence are by no means given with the mere circulation of money and commodities. It arises only when the owner of the means of production and subsistence finds the free worker available, on the market, as the seller of his own labor-power. And this one historical pre-condition comprises a world's history. Capital, therefore, announces from the outset a new epoch in the process of social production.²¹

What Marx has in mind here is that with the event of capital a *new* form of labor emerges that can no longer be defined by concrete time or the product of labor; instead, labor is now defined by *abstract* measurability through money, abstract time, and universal exchangeability. This, in turn, leads to two consequences: (1) everything can be exchanged by everything, and (2) *all* human activities become "labor," as they are now newly configured as labor-power, which is the abstract property of productivity. As Marx has it:

We mean by labor-power, or labor-capacity, the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities which he sets in motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind.²²

The switch from concrete labor activities that are defined by the product to the entire range of mental, emotional, and physical activities that are independent from the product means that the *entire* human being can now be subjected to its underlying social form and its underlying social principle. With the event of the value form not only can *all beings* be subjected to the valorization process, but *all human capacities* can equally be subjected to this process. We can observe today the endpoint of this development, insofar as all noetic and emotional capacities of human beings *and* of all nonhuman

living capacities (plants, genes, animals) have been made productive by being included in the process of valorization and capital accumulation.²³

However, we need to take into account another aspect, as the abstraction that occurs with the focus on labor-power as the principle of social organization is connected to the abstraction that occurs in the form that labor-power takes on under conditions of capital accumulation and commodification—namely, value, which, in turn, only exists in and as money. Social unity is established by abstract relations constituted in universal exchange in which everything (in principle) is exchangeable with everything. As Marx argues, this is only possible if the sociality takes on the value form—that is, if labor as the substance of social reality takes on an abstract form, which, on the one hand, is determined as abstract labor and, on the other hand, is determined as universal exchangeability. As abstract labor is taken to be the substance of social reality, legal and other social relations need to be taken as secondary over the commodity form. Right at the very beginning of *Capital* Marx promises to investigate the nature of commodities, by which he means the contradiction between the singular natural thing that is in use for consumption and the non-singular exchange value that establishes the intrinsic relationality of commodities. Since one commodity is worth x amount of another commodity, the exchange value is at first the *other* commodity (for example, x amount of linen is worth x amount of iron), which shows that exchange value is not a property of or in a commodity; rather, it is the *relationship* between commodities.²⁴ The *opposition* of the commodities is, however, only possible if the exchange value is itself made possible by a *universal* comparability, which, in this case, is the *exchangeability* of commodities. This is what Marx calls “value,” which many commentators miss. Consequently, value—especially in its social expression as money—is primarily a qualitative concept, which expresses the social homogeneity of all things. Put differently, the goal of *Capital* is to reconstruct the *specific form of sociality* under capitalism. Value, as Postone nicely puts it, “expresses the inner nexus of connections of the capitalist social formation.”²⁵ Consequently, it only *seems* to be the case that abstract labor indicates the expenditure of human labor energy, for Marx himself refers to abstract labor as the *common* “social substance” in the commodity form—i.e., the fact that “the” human becomes so important in bourgeois ideology is an *effect of the social form of labor (power)*. In the *Grundrisse* Marx puts it this way:

Because money is the general equivalent, the general power of purchasing, *everything* can be bought, *everything* may be transformed into money. But it can be transformed into money only by being alienated [*alieniert*], by its owner divesting himself of it. Everything is therefore alienable, or indifferent for the individual, external to him. . . . With that, the individual is posited, as such, as

lord of all things. There are no absolute values, since, for money, value as such is relative. There is nothing inalienable, since *everything* is alienable for money. There is no higher or holier, since *everything* is appropriable by money.²⁶

We can see here that for Marx the establishment of the human as the “lord of all things” (which, again, reminds us of Heidegger) is conceived of as the *effect* of the universal exchangeability of everything with everything, which is introduced as the value form in chapter 1 of *Capital*. On this point, Marx remains superior to Heidegger, insofar as Heidegger ends up with fairly empty claims about the shift toward our self-understanding as the master of beings. With Marx, though, we understand the social-historical dynamics included in the event of capital, which permits us to acknowledge the value form as the true modern metaphysical form. With Marx we can realize that nothing counts, unless it can be used as the material *for* capital accumulation. And since capital accumulation can only occur via money *as* capital, valorization sets in through both the subjection of labor to capital (the consequence of which is labor-power as abstract labor) and the subjection of the products of labor to capital (the consequence of which is the commodity form as the abstract form of sociality). Consequently, the value form is the way in which *everything* shows up *as* a thing under capitalism.²⁷

MARX AND HEIDEGGER ON TECHNOLOGY AND ENERGY PRODUCTION

Heidegger says the following about his own thinking on technology:

My thinking is not against “technology” (against the essential (dispensational) thoughtlessness), but rather against the superficiality and cluelessness in the ways that technology is regarded: (1) in terms of machines, apparatuses, and organization, (2) as a means, (3) as something neutrally present-at-hand.²⁸

Whomever Heidegger has in mind in this statement, it is immediately clear that, after everything I have argued so far, this point can certainly not be applied to Marx, despite that he has occasionally been interpreted as either a technological instrumentalist or a technological determinist. However, if we take into account that, for Marx, technology in connection with knowledge production (science) is a productive force and therefore a social relation, then these claims about him being a determinist or an instrumentalist can safely be rejected, insofar as these positions do not take into account that a dialectical thinking about technology in which culture, economy, and class relations are intertwined cannot be causally traced back to technological inventions.

As Marx explains in an important footnote in the first volume of *Capital*, “[t]echnology reveals the active relation of man to nature, the direct process of the production of his life, and thereby it also lays bare the process of the production of the social relations of his life, and of the mental conceptions that flow from those relations.”²⁹ It is quite remarkable that at this point in his thinking Marx does not use the word *verursachen* (causes) but instead speaks of *enthüllen* (revealing/disclosing). Put in Heideggerian terms, “causality as effecting”³⁰ differs from to-bring-something-into-the-open. Let us remember how Heidegger puts it: “technology reveals [*entbirgt*] the world, in which its results are fitted to.”³¹ For Marx, technology does not cause anything; rather, it discloses central relations within the social totality in a certain mode—namely, in the mode of *being available* (for valorization). Marx has often been read through some of his key formulations, such as that all history is the history of class struggle, or that being is prior to consciousness. These empty and abstract reductions are all misleading, though, as they do not appreciate that each phenomenon that Marx analyzes, including technology, can only be understood within the totality of social relations. Abstractions are just the beginning; the point is to reach the concrete. The phenomenon of technology discloses the entire range of social and ecological relations, which includes “technologies, the relation to nature, social relations, mode of material production, daily life, mental conceptions and institutional frameworks.”³² As Alfred Schmidt points out, we can see here how close Marx and Heidegger have come, insofar as “Marx understands ‘technics’ in the sense of an epochal world projection that includes economy and culture.”³³ In this way, technology is enframing.

One of the relations that are implied in the phenomenon of modern technology is *energy* (production), which in Heidegger’s model of the exploitation of the earth is central but, I submit, can be better explained with Marx. This is visible in the famous “machine fragment” in the *Grundrisse* in which Marx foresees the twentieth-century developments shift from industrial capitalism to knowledge-driven capitalism. In this cognitive capitalism, the “general intellect”³⁴ (i.e., a socially dispersed and networked form of knowledge) integrates individuals within a larger social network of productive relations. As Marx puts it, “social knowledge has become a direct force of production.”³⁵ Moreover, in the “machine fragment” Marx draws a subtle connection between capital as the *center* of all social relations and its material actualization and existence in *energy* (through the system of machinery), which gets equally centralized in modern capitalism. Fixed capital is the *real existence* of capital: “Machinery appears, then, as the *most adequate form of capital as such*.”³⁶ For Heidegger, energy production is centralized and universalized, too. As Heidegger argues, *energy production* and *power generation* no

longer use certain forces for human purposes, in a manner that, for example, a sailboat uses the wind for getting somewhere; instead, we now *produce* these very forces independently from the instrumentality in which natural forces are embedded within human instrumental goals (such as reaching the sea shore with a sailboat).³⁷ With energy production, as Mitchell has it, “the result is a homogeneity of force that renders it utterly replaceable, utterly exchangeable for entirely equal units of force.”³⁸ Heidegger likes to use the power plant as an example for this process. For example, he writes:

The hydroelectric plant is placed in the river. It imposes upon it for water pressure, which sets the turbines turning, the turning of which drives the machines, the gearing of which imposes upon the electrical current through which the long-distance power centers and their electrical grid are positioned for the conducting of electricity. The power station in the Rhine river, the dam, the turbines, the generators, the switchboards, the electrical grid—all this and more is there only insofar as it stands in place and at the ready, not in order to presence, but to be positioned, and indeed solely to impose upon others thereafter.³⁹

Of course, one could argue that the produced forces are still used for something else, such as, for example, powering traffic lights and regulating human traffic so that there are less car accidents on our streets. However, as such, the produced forces are produced in order to bring about effects that are totally independent from natural forces, such as the Rhine river. The power plant does not function like the sailboat because the relation between it as a means and the ends that it serves becomes externalized. This disconnection of production and instrumentality leads to a new, independent and universal system of connections, such as the electrical grid that is connected to *all* beings powered by the produced energy. Energy (and money) become dis-embedded. The energy thing produced is no longer a *particular*; rather, energy now sets up virtually everything. It is rather astonishing that Mitchell (and Heidegger) do not consider the deeper *social* understanding of the homogeneity and dis-embedding of energy from “localized” production to a global system that is literally everywhere. As we argued in the foregoing section, the homogeneity and universality of capital and valorization should be analyzed in connection with the introduction of abstract labor within the value form. Consequently, the importance and centrality of energy production is the third way in which modern abstractions function. Accordingly, the homogeneity that Heidegger explains metaphysically are the result of three modern social abstractions: value (money), labor-power, and energy.

In a similar fashion, Heidegger argues that the machine is no longer a particular thing, insofar as its essence is *machinery*. Yet again, we can easily see how we can better understand this with Marx, who argues in *Capital* that the

system of machinery was from the beginning implied in the machine, once the latter becomes subsumed to capital.⁴⁰ Not incidentally, the interpretation of nature in terms of a machine is an integral part of the early modern scientific worldview. In addition, seen from a Marxian point of view, the power plant is the best *material* existence of capital because the energy production now has become so abstract that it can be totally disconnected from businesses and industry. In other words, the energy production becomes *external* to those who use the energy,⁴¹ which, again, demonstrates the material actualization of capital as a self-referential process. As such, electricity production is closely related to the commodity and money form, insofar as the same real abstraction occurs with the *universal* exchangeability that subjects *all* beings to valorized money. As capital in the form of valorizing money circulates throughout the globe, so energy is the “flow” throughout everything that nowadays makes *all* social life possible. Let us just imagine that tomorrow the entire energy production on our globe comes to a halt!

In this development, nature appears, on the one hand, as something to be ordered for energy production (most visible in nuclear energy) and, on the other hand, as something to be ordered and positioned for growth. In both cases, energy and valorization, the being of beings shows up as something *limitless*, although it is clear after further reflection that the capacities of the earth are limited. For Heidegger, all of this can be summarized in the term “machination.” He writes:

Instead the name machination [*Machenschaft*] should immediately refer to making [*Machen*] (*poiesis, techné*), which we assuredly know as a human activity. This latter, however, is itself possible precisely only on the grounds of an interpretation of beings in which their makeability [*Machbarkeit*] comes to the fore, so much so that constancy and presence [*Beständigkeit und Anwesenheit*] become the specific determinations of beingness [*Seiendheit*].⁴²

“Makeability” means that nature is now showing up as something that can be produced. For example, our contemporary attempts to engineer plants, produce animal meat in the lab, or to remake the human genome presuppose that nature no longer shows itself to be something created by a divine being, insofar as it now shows up as something to be manipulated. We can get *into* the inner side of beings because we discover them to be functions brought about by natural laws. The question of how the tree *functions* in the ecological system systematically differs from the idea that the tree’s essence is related to God. The metaphysical understanding of “ground” has substantially shifted in modernity. As Marx argues in *Capital*, the overall switch to nature as something that functions, and therefore can be made productive, is first visible in capitalized agriculture, which, in turn, has an immediate effect for

the role of the earth, soil, and fertility within the process of valorization and capital accumulation.⁴³ Agriculture and agricultural chemistry turn the earth into something *available* for capital accumulation, by positioning [*stellen*] the earth toward capital. The inclusion of science into this process and the turn of knowledge into a productive force takes place in close connection with turning the earth into a large-scale gas station. As Marx puts it, the process of separating humans from and turning them against the earth “is completed in large-scale industry, which makes science a potentiality for production which is distinct from labor and presses it into the service of capital.”⁴⁴ Seen from a Marxian perspective, knowledge and science separate themselves from the labor process and become external to it, which, in turn leads to establishing the subject-object schema through which humans are now “positioned” toward everything else as an object for them.

CONCLUSION

For Marx nature is not, as in Hegel, a self-related process that can be grasped via a metaphysical logic; rather, as Schmidt underlines, nature is only something originally self-given, insofar as it is for us “given” in human activity.⁴⁵ Put differently, nature appears *as* independent *throughout* human activity, which, in turn, means that it is not as such produced by human activity. It is true that Marx’s famous analysis of sensible experience in the *German Ideology* shows that all objects of human social reproductive praxis ought to be understood through that which, in the *First Feuerbach Thesis*, is called “objective activity” [*objektive Gegenständlichkeit*]. However, the object appears here only insofar as it is related to human activities and labor, which *excludes* nature in its metaphysical sense. In addition, the early comments on the earth as the extension of the human body as well as the later comments in the *Gotha Program* on the earth as a *condition* of wealth production all point to the fact that Marx understood the earth and its materiality as the *preexisting condition* of human activity (i.e., *not* as the result of human productivity).⁴⁶ Moreover, the physical, moral, and cultural limits that capital tries to expand and destroy point to limits of growth set by something that cannot be included in an infinite process; it remains foreign to social totality. Given this, Heidegger’s assumption that being shows up in Marx’s metaphysical position *only* “as the material of labor” can safely be rejected, because, as I have tried to demonstrate, being shows up as a material for (abstract) labor *only under capitalist conditions*. Though it might be true that Marx still thinks within a Hegelian framework of thought, he certainly does not expand his philosophy *beyond* the social world, and, as such, Marx’s call for communism as the “resurrection of nature” is a call for *overcoming* a world determined by capital

that subjects beings to material for valorized labor. Capitalist social formation would become a thing of the past. As Marx puts it in 1859, “The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation”⁴⁷ (i.e., the prehistory of human society ends with the end of capitalism). A world no longer determined by the value form would be a world in which beings would be freed from their status as *pure material* for valorization. We can safely assume that we need to wait for such an epoch to come and that we will, despite all calls for revolutionary praxis and despite all hopeful attempts to change the current state of the globe, not be able to *make it*.

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NOTES

1. Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1983), 478.
2. Blumenberg, *Legitimacy*, 477 (translation altered).
3. Louis Althusser, *History and Imperialism*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Polity, 2020), 126.
4. Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Penguin, 1993), 274.
5. Althusser, *History and Imperialism*, 133.
6. Marx, *Early Writings*, 274.
7. The role of sensuousness and the externality of the body and the earth as given push Marx closer to Kant than to Hegel; for the Kant-Marx relationship, see

- also Lucio Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, trans. Lawrence Garner (London: Verso, 1979), 113–38.
8. This position can be associated with Moishe Postone's *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Postone's position was especially decisive for the Anglo-American reception of Marx in (anti-Habermasian versions) of contemporary critical theory. In addition, during the last three decades, the German and Italian "value form theory" has demonstrated that the so-called "labor theory of value" is a misunderstanding of Marx's later philosophy, insofar as it reduces it to a theory about goods, values, profit, and prices. However, Marx's theory in *Capital* is primarily an analysis of the social *form* under which all social and ecological relations are subsumed and become totalized.
9. Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David F. Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 243.
10. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 90; see also 132. For more background, see Lawrence Hemming, "Heidegger's Productive Dialogue with Marxism," *Philosophy Today* 58, no. 2 (2014): 179–95.
11. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1993), 1:423.
12. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), 48.
13. Martin Heidegger, *Leitgedanken zur Entstehung der Metaphysik, der neuzeitlichen Wissenschaft und der modernen Technik*, Gesamtausgabe, Band 76 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2009), 286.
14. Not incidentally, Marx refers to Descartes as standing in for an epistemology that implies the subjection of nature to humans (Marx, *Capital*, 522fn.).
15. In the words of Enrique Dussel, "Modernity has constituted nature as an 'exploitable' object, with increase in the rate of profit of capital as its goal. . . . Once the earth is seen constituted as an 'exploitable object' in favor of *quantum* (of capital) that can defeat all limits, all boundaries, there by manifesting the 'great civilizing influence of capital,' it now reaches its insurmountable limit, where itself is its own limit, the impassable barrier for ethical-human progress, and we have arrived at this moment." See Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, Liberation Theology*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), 68.
16. Michael Eldred, *Capital and Technology* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2015), 79.
17. For this, see Alfred Schmidt, "Zum Verhältnis von Geschichte und Natur im dialektischen Materialismus," in *Existentialismus und Marxismus: Eine Kontroverse zwischen Sartre, Garaudy, Hyppolite, Vigier und Orcel* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1965), 119, 123.
18. Althusser, *History and Imperialism*, 44.
19. Marx, *Capital*, 273.
20. Marx, *Capital*, 273.
21. Marx, *Capital*, 273.

22. Marx, *Capital*, 270.
23. For more on this, see Christian Lotz, *The Capitalist Schema: Time, Money, and the Culture of Abstraction* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014).
24. For more on this, see Christian Lotz, "Gegenständlichkeit: From Marx to Lukács and Back Again," in *Theory and Practice: Critical Theory and the Thought of Andrew Feenberg*, ed. Arnold Darrell and Andreas Michel (London: Palgrave, 2017), 71–89.
25. Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 134.
26. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1995), 839.
27. For more on this, see Lotz, *The Capitalist Schema*.
28. Andrew J. Mitchell, "The Question Concerning the Machine: Heidegger's Technology Notebooks in the 1940s–1950s," in *Heidegger on Technology*, ed. Aaron James Wendland, Christopher Merwin, and Christos Hadjiioannou (New York: Routledge, 2019), 130.
29. Marx, *Capital*, 493.
30. Heidegger, *Leitgedanken*, 328.
31. Heidegger, *Leitgedanken*, 297; see also 308.
32. David Harvey, *Marx, Capital, and the Madness of Economic Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 113.
33. Alfred Schmidt, *Marx als Philosoph: Studien in der Perspektivische Kritischer Theorie* (Springe: zu Klampen Verlag, 2018), 93.
34. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 706.
35. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 706.
36. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 694; for a detailed commentary, see Christian Lotz, *Christian Lotz zu Karl Marx: Das Maschinenfragment* (Hamburg: Laika Verlag, 2014).
37. The same process occurs in valorization. For more on causality and instrumentality, see Christian Lotz, "Reification through Commodity Form or Technology? From Honneth Back to Heidegger and Marx," *Rethinking Marxism* 25, no. 2 (2013): 184–200.
38. Mitchell, "The Question Concerning the Machine," 118.
39. Martin Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking*, trans. Andrew W. Mitchell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 27.
40. The following passage in Heidegger nicely demonstrates how his thinking about technology falls behind Marx's philosophy of technology, in so far as Heidegger does not consider society, the concept of which disappears behind the veil of metaphysics and empty chain of sentences, such as these: "The machine is just as little an object. It stands only insofar as it goes. It goes insofar as it runs. It runs in the drive of industry. The drive drives as the bustle of the requisitioning of the orderable. If the machine stands, then its standstill is a condition of the drive, of its cessation or disturbance. Machines are within a machinery. But this is no piling up of machines. The machinery runs from the plundering of the drive, as which positionality orders the standing reserve" (Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 33). Though Marx would agree with Heidegger that a machine is not a thing, he would argue that the

system of machinery can only properly be grasped if we take capital, value, and labor-power into account.

41. For this, see Hans-Dieter Bahr, "Die Klassenstruktur der Maschinerie: Anmerkungen zur Wertform," in *Technologie und Kapital*, ed. Richard Vahrenkamp (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), 51.

42. As quoted in Mitchell, "The Question Concerning the Machine," 121.

43. For this, see Kohei Saito, *Natur gegen Kapital: Marx' Ökologie in seiner unvollendeten Kritik des Kapitalismus* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2016).

44. Marx, *Capital*, 482. Heidegger also deals with this: method becomes technics and makes it possible that scientists are no longer related to the essential dimension of their ontological realm and their objects. The biologist no longer knows anything about living beings because the formalization of science is directly related to *research* and research results generated without essential knowledge (Heidegger, *Leitgedanken*, 160). Another example that Heidegger mentions is the art historian who no longer has any real experience of art and history. In contemporary terms, we could say that a researcher who uses x-ray technologies to determine the overpainted layers of a Renaissance painting no longer needs to *think* about art, painting, and history. The painting appears here as an object of research.

45. Schmidt, *Marx als Philosoph*, 152.

46. For the most updated overview of Marx's contribution to ecological thinking, see Saito, *Natur gegen Kapital*; see also Michael Zimmermann, "Marx and Heidegger on the Technological Domination of Nature," *Philosophy Today* 32, no. 2 (1979), 99–112.

47. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>.