

Phenomenology as Critique

Why Method Matters

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Building Blocks for a Phenomenological Appropriation of Marx

Christian Lotz

1. Introduction

The history of the relationship between Marxism and Phenomenology is complex. At least four immediate points of encounter can be identified: 1) almost all major French phenomenologists, not only Sartre and Merleau-Ponty but also figures such as Lefebvre, were close allies of Marxism at some point in their intellectual developments; 2) in the Frankfurt School tradition we find not only close encounters such as Marcuse's early essays and their attempt to bridge Heidegger with Marx but also appropriations of phenomenology in thinkers such as Lukacs and Adorno; 3) in the 1960s we are confronted with the revival of a Marxist phenomenology in Italy, particularly in the work pushed forward by Enzo Paci (e.g., Paci 1970); and finally, 4) we saw a general appropriation by phenomenological scholars of Marx and Marxism in Europe, represented by four volumes on these issues edited by Bernhard Waldenfels in the late 1970s (Waldenfels 1977–79). However, after these 20th century waves of scholarship had subsided, interest in forging a connection between Marxism and Phenomenology had largely disappeared, especially in Husserl scholarship. Two observations seem to be important here: first, whereas in the French tradition encounters between Marxism and Phenomenology seem to be more politically than philosophically motivated, in parts due to the intellectual engagement of French philosophers with the French Communist Party and their struggles of finding a proper response to the role of Soviet Union and Stalinism after WWII, in the German tradition phenomenological impulses were employed to develop new theories of society distinct from the most important movements of the beginning of the 20th century, such as Neo-Kantianism and Positivism. Second, in times during which Marxism was still a political worldview, it was difficult to free Marx's genuine philosophy and social theory from its entanglement in the larger Marxist movements, which, in turn, lead to a reductive reading of Marx. However, with the withering away of "real existing socialist" countries and Marxist worldviews, Marx was subjected again to a proper philosophical reading, which includes not only a theory of society

but also theories of ontology and epistemology. Unfortunately, in these encounters, the role of Marx's philosophy remains obfuscated because post-phenomenological philosophers, such as Deleuze and Althusser, turned to Marx as a figure that can be used for *anti-phenomenological* thinking.

Thankfully, this situation has changed significantly in recent years. Indeed, several scholars have demonstrated that it is time to bring phenomenology back into Marxism and scholarship on Marx: Richard Westermann has shown that Lukacs' early philosophy was developed in close encounter with Husserl and can be read as a "phenomenology of capitalism" (Westerman 2019). Ian Angus has argued for a close methodological re-reading of Husserl, Marcuse, and Marx (Angus 2016, 2017), and has recently published a monumental study on Phenomenology and Marxism, which includes a consideration of Husserl (Angus 2021). Andrew Feenberg has shown new ways to deal with Marcuse and his encounter with Husserl and Heidegger (Feenberg 2005, 2013). In what follows, I would like to contribute to these new trajectories by focusing on a few selected building blocks that will pave the way for a renewed, thorough, and sober phenomenological reading of Marx's philosophy (see also Lotz 2013, 2021). As this project is far too extensive for one chapter, I intend to show here that this can be done best through 1) moving Marx away from a Hegelian framework, 2) understanding the concept of critique as an attempt to de-naturalize social phenomena (see also Paci 1969) and as disclosure, and 3) showing that Marx's concept of philosophy, his method, as well as his understanding of technology, are forms of "disclosure." This, in turn, should point us away from a dialectical understanding of Marx and open up new venues for a phenomenologically inspired critique of political economy (see also Araujo 2017).

2. Moving Marx away from Hegelianism

Despite the obvious points, the most visible in 20th-century appropriations of Marx in Frankfurt School critical theory and Italian phenomenological Marxism include the attempt 1) to understand Marx's theory not as a narrow economic theory, but as a critical theory of society that includes epistemological and ontological questions, and 2) to understand his theory by focusing on the categorical framework of his theory, which requires us to reject approaching Marx from a Hegelian standpoint, despite that in many dogmatic readings of Marx Hegel is still the main reference point for coming to grips with Marx. I submit that an anti-Hegelian understanding of Marx is necessary for moving his thought back to a subjective-transcendental and less metaphysical framework, and ultimately, for pushing him into the phenomenological matrix of thought. As I will briefly outline here, there are central systematic aspects that speak against a Hegelian reading of Marx; most importantly, it is

Marx's methodological standpoint that itself speaks for a perspective of thought that can be characterized as "transcendental philosophy," broadly construed. I will point to two crucial aspects that do not allow us to read Marx from a Hegelian perspective, namely, first, the concept of finitude, and second, the role of concepts, before I outline the concept of critique in the next section of this chapter.

2.1. Infinity/finitude

Let me first remind us of a few obvious points that nevertheless tend to be overlooked in the Hegelian understanding of Marx, especially the Hegelian readings of *Capital*. According to Hegel, Kant's philosophy remains insufficient because its "standpoint" remains, in the end, only a standpoint of the human being, which Hegel interprets as being based on a limited concept of reason. According to Hegel, the consequence of this limited concept is that we cannot transcend finitude and close the gap between reason and reality, reason and society, reason and God, and reason and the moral good. As we know, the function of Hegel's *Science of Logic* is to overcome the gap between the finite and the infinite, and to demonstrate that reason is infinite via thinking itself through and in what it is not. For Hegel, pure thinking can be the other of itself. For Kantian thinking and its 19th- and 20th-century successors such a position is impossible to maintain, insofar as there is always something that remains *not* thinking, such as intuitions, sensations, the thing-in-itself, matter, and the other. In contrast, Hegel's project is supposed to show *in actu* that the gap that underlies all of the modern dualisms, namely the gap between reason and being, can be closed via reason and philosophical thought itself.

It is not a secret that even in his later writings Marx remains tied to what Hegel calls the "human standpoint" and the "standpoint of humanity," even if Marx's standpoint is mediated by the Young Hegelians, rather than by Kant himself. He explicitly criticizes Hegel for not accepting the difference between concept and content, which also means that Marx's thinking is accepted *only* as a human activity and therefore limited through its own emergence in human life. It cannot transcend its own material background via an absolute self-relatedness that includes the other of itself. The ontological principle of life, which replaces Kant's synthetic consciousness, is taken to be the principle of all human and social reality. This is visible not only in his earlier writings, such as the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844)* and *The German Ideology (1845)*, but also in *Capital*. For example, in Chapter 6 of *Capital* the principle of life is nicely visible in Marx's understanding of labor power:

The second essential condition to the owner of money finding labor-power in the market as a commodity is this—that the laborer instead

of being in the position to sell commodities in which his labor is incorporated, must be obliged to offer for sale as a commodity that very labor-power, which exists only in his *living self*.

(Marx 1993, 272)

Accordingly, in terms of the "living self," what gets subsumed under capital in modernity is consciousness insofar as it is related to itself but only inasmuch as it encounters itself through its *sensuousness* and *embodiment* (which is visible in Marx's treatment of space, body, and death in *Capital*). Leaving aside the wider context of Marx's theory for the purpose of this chapter, it is important to note that it is human life to which thinking and thought as *finite* activities can be applied. *Systematically*, this position is closer to Kant and phenomenology than to Hegel.

Accordingly, embodied activities are part of social and natural reality, and importantly, this also includes thinking and reason itself. Put differently, Marx reason remains explicitly human, which in turn means that it is *limited* and *finite*. In Hegel's terms, we could also add that Marx's thought remains as negative as Kant's is. Hegel charges Kant with the following:

the general idea to which he gave justification and credence is the *objectivity of reflective shine* and the *necessity of the contradiction* which belongs to the *nature* of thought determinations: of course, this he did above all with reference to the way in which these determinations are applied by reason to *the things in themselves*; nevertheless, what such determinations are in reason, and with reference to what is in itself, this is precisely their nature. This result, *grasped in its positive aspect*, is nothing else but the *inner negativity* of the determinations which is their self-moving soul, the principle of all natural and spiritual life. But if one stays fixed at the abstract negative aspect of dialectics, the result is only the commonplace that reason is incapable of knowing the infinite—a peculiar result indeed, for it says that, since the infinite is what is rational, reason is not capable of cognizing the rational.

(Hegel 2010, 35)

Leaving the finer details aside, Hegel argues here that a finite concept of reason that cannot grasp the thing-in-itself remains ultimately *irrational* since true reason (as Hegel believes) contains its own self-negation and the other of itself in itself: only this is for Hegel "rational" (*vernünftig*). However we position ourselves in this battle between Kant and Hegel; it is safe to argue that Marx rejects the speculative nature of reason. There are no indications that either the early philosophy, which is based on human life, or the later philosophy, which is based on capital, spells these principles out as principles of a (mysteriously) conceived identity

between thought and being. Moreover, Marx does not propose a *universal* logic that would be valid for all spheres of being such as nature, mind, and God, which is consistent, since his thinking is restricted to the sphere of (human) society. To be sure, his restriction is thoroughly post-Hegelian since it requires us to focus on *one* region or realm of being through which the others become accessible, namely, society.

I would also like to remind us here of Heidegger's reading of Kant, which argues that Kant's metaphysics is, in fact, determined by the concept of finitude, that is, that it is centered on the question of how intuition and understanding (*Verstand*) are interrelated. Marx's theory is ruled by the same systematic problem, namely, how theory and historical content and experience are interrelated to such an extent that one cannot exist without the other. For Hegel, reason can be self-related *without* being mediated by intuition; that is, something can be "known" by thinking about thinking alone. The latter position is impossible to defend within Kantian and phenomenological transcendental philosophy. This counts equally for Marx, insofar as his methodological position of how something can be "known" via his theory and thinking *must* be related to intuition and experience, even if we enlarge the latter concept to include the concept of history. Accordingly, to argue that Marx is a Hegelian, is leading into the wrong direction and fixes all debates about the status of Marx's theory for modern and contemporary philosophy to a historical confrontation that hides rather than reveals the true importance of Marx's thinking for phenomenological thought.

2.2. Concepts/intuitions

The problem of finitude and Hegel's critique of Kant as employing only a finite concept of reason that is not able to truly relate itself to itself is also visible in the treatment of concepts and intuitions, the issue of which sheds more light on Marx as a thinker who remains closer to transcendental philosophy than to Hegel. It is certainly true that the concept versus (sensual) intuition dualism is no longer a strictly epistemological problem in Marx; however, the problem is situated in the methodological problem of how to research and present the system of political economy coherently in regard to social-economic categories in relation to the real historical process. As Marx underlines in his late remarks on Wagner; he "does not begin with concepts" (Marx 1881), which seems to be surprising at first, since we might ask: is it not the case that Marx deals with the *concepts* of value, money, and capital in the first chapters of *Capital*? Importantly, what Marx rejects is not the role of concepts in his theory, but the conception of concepts as 1) being self-related, 2) independent from (sensual) intuitions, and 3) *internally* deducible. Instead, he argues, basic concepts can only be *genetically traced back* to intuitions via a systematic presentation of their order. This also explains why he calls his

basic concepts not "concepts," but *categories* (for more on categories, see Lotz (2020)). It would be "scholasticism," as Marx argues in his defense against Wagner, to derive use value and exchange value from the value concept instead of developing them analytically; what Marx means here is that the value form cannot be grasped via a *logical* process: "my *analytical* method . . . has nothing to do with the German professional method of deriving concepts from concepts" (Marx 1881). As a consequence, Marx argues that basic concepts (again, now conceived of as categories) that are employed in his theory of political economy need to be traced back and genetically developed via the *real historical developments and experiences*. Consequently, Marx transforms the concept/intuition dualism into the category/history dualism, which in turn makes clear why we cannot artificially disconnect the "systematic" development of the concepts presented in the first chapters of *Capital* from the later chapters on history. Both belong systematically together. This has two interesting consequences for further thinking about the role of concepts in Marx: 1) First, put in Kantian terms, we might say that *economic categories remain empty without historical content, and historical content remains blind without economic categories*. Again, one cannot be grasped without the other. Just as in Kant transcendental concepts cannot be thought of as being independent from experience, so also in Marx: the categories developed in *Capital* cannot be thought of as being independent from historical experience, even if the systematic presentation of the categories and their interrelatedness requires a separate discussion and presentation. 2) Second, Marx is here in striking proximity to Husserl's later philosophy, insofar as both the static and essential phenomena for Husserl need to be genetically analyzed, and their meaning horizon needs to be revealed and traced back to that from which they emerge. Of course, in Husserl, despite the *Crisis* problematic, this primarily refers to the relation between the pre-reflective affective world and judgments (such as in *Analyses concerning Passive Synthesis* and *Experience and Judgement*), but the point is the same insofar as in Marx the content of categories no longer refers to a *conceptual content*; rather, it refers back to a system of relations in *real* history.

Furthermore, we would do well to remind ourselves that Hegel criticizes Kant for arguing that the categories can only be developed in connection with the sensually given; that is, he argues that Kant remains within an empiricist psychology. In contrast, according to Hegel, we should ask for the truth contained in the categories (Hegel 2010, 525). It is clear that Marx (and later critical theory) cannot fall under such a Hegelian paradigm of "truth as actuality" for two main reasons. First, Marx's theory of political economy is not based on a historical universality, insofar as its object is historically limited to capitalist society. The categories must be won in and wrested from the historically *given*. Second, the absolute (self-related and logical) necessity that Hegel calls for in

the quote above does not exist for Marx given that his concepts are tied to historical developments and would lose their reference if capitalism would in fact be overcome. The theoretical genesis of the categories and their exposition demonstrates that the categories *cannot* be understood without their real historical relations.

Consequently, generating the necessity of the systematic relations in political economy cannot be absolute in the Hegelian sense since the object is itself historically limited. In opposition to this, Hegel argues that philosophy as pure thinking must demonstrate that it is in principle *not* finite, *not* limited, and therefore *truly* self-referential. Social categories can therefore not be concepts in the Hegelian sense. Furthermore, what is *contained* in categories can be spelled out and *revealed* in the historically given preconditions of capital, which, in Marx's theory, can neither posit itself nor develop autonomously but is brought about through real violence, expulsions, and turning formerly concrete labor processes into abstract labor. Accordingly, for Marx, proper method takes place on the level of the *presentation* of the categories, not on the level of the relations to which these categories refer. In Hegel, dialectics is purely expository, insofar as the presentation of the categories in his *Science of Logics* is at the same time the *real* unfolding of thought through itself. Put differently, there is no difference between presentation and research in Hegel. Against this, Marx holds the following:

Of course the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyze its different forms of development, to trace out their inner connection. Only after this work is done can the actual movement be adequately described. If this is done successfully, if the life of the subject-matter is ideally reflected as in a mirror, then it may appear as if we had before us a mere a priori construction.

(Marx 1993, 102)

Finally, we find this Marxian rejection of blurring the line between concepts and intuitions also in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*, which, in the English-speaking world, is usually taken as a document that demonstrates Marx's close connection with Hegelian dialectics. One of the central passages in the *Grundrisse* reads as follows:

The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation and conception. Along the first path the full conception was evaporated to yield an abstract determination; along the second, the abstract

determinations lead towards a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought.

(Marx 1995, 101)

Unfortunately, what gets lost in the English translation of this oft-cited passage is that Marx uses two eminent Kantian terms for explaining the core of his methodological reflections: the term used for "observation" in German is "Anschauung" (*intuition*), and the term used for "conception" in German is "Vorstellung" (*representation*). As becomes clear after reading the entire passage, Marx warns us to understand concepts in a speculative fashion as self-related and as being based on some internal developmental logic. As he further argues, categories in his theory depend upon the ordering of the historically won material; again, as given. *Darstellung* is so central for Marx since the way in which the material is presented to us is *not*, as in Hegel's *Science of Logics*, pre-given in the logic of the thought itself; there is no problem of how to present the categories in Hegel, since in Hegel's *Science of Logics* we think about thought *through itself*. Put differently, the ordering done in subjective thought is identical with the logical ordering contained in objective thought itself.

Finally, as was shown just earlier, determining a social formation in its inner logic and inner limits is identical with revealing it as a historically finite social formation. From this it follows immediately that the specific categories that belong to the object of critical analysis a) must be related to each other through their inner genesis and coherence and b) must be analyzed in their historical genesis by revealing or "unmasking" (Couzens-Hoy 2008, 282) their fields of emergence. This is nicely visible in a distinction that Marx makes at the beginning of the chapter on "primitive accumulation." There he draws a distinction between two concepts of origin and argues against political economists of his time that they identify origin (*Ursprung*) with past (*Vergangenheit*). Whereas bourgeois political economists determine the "origin" of economic development as something that remains *external* to the economic development itself, that is, as a thing of the past that is over and no longer is part of the development itself, Marx's own analysis reveals the origin of the economic development as a *moment* of this development. Strikingly, this reminds us of the phenomenological idea of demonstrating that a genesis of a phenomenon is implied *in* the phenomenon, as long as we operate with the concept of meaning.

In conclusion, we can see that Marx is closer to a subjective and phenomenological method than to any kind of speculative or dialectical method. Thus, it should be clear why it is not appropriate to (simply) approach Marx from a Hegelian perspective, since Hegel despised the critical standpoint, characterizing it as a limited standpoint and as a limited conception of reason and philosophy.

3. Critique

After having demonstrated in the foregoing section that we should read Marx more properly as a non-Hegelian thinker and as a philosopher who rejects the concepts of infinite reason, metaphysics, and even dialectics, it should now be easier to understand not only why Marx could be read as a phenomenologist, but also why his thinking can be read as a philosophy that is critical through disclosing what is contained in the given. German and Anglo-American Frankfurt School theorists since Habermas have repeatedly argued against older authors within the same tradition, maintaining that the concept of critique needs to be grounded by normative concepts, if it does not want to end up in self-defeating positions. In this vein, one cannot criticize reason without employing at least a minimally defined normative origin of rational judgments about reason. More recently, Rahel Jaeggi has spelled out the concept of critique in critical theory in regard to three aspects: a functional, an ethical, and a moral aspect of critique (Jaeggi 2016). The functionalist critique of capitalism argues that capitalism is dysfunctional, the moral critique argues that capitalism is based on exploitation, whereas the ethical critique of capitalism argues that capitalism leads to a meaningless life (ibid.). Though I find this differentiation very helpful, it shows how the critique of political economy and the Kantian sense of “critique” in critical theory remain systematically under-evaluated in contemporary critical theory (see also Nemeth 1976, 245). In any case, it falls short of a proper Marxian concept of critique, which I will briefly outline in the following.

The argument that critical theory is necessarily in need of normative foundations is short-sighted, as the proper concept of critique should be conceived of as the attempt to reveal the *inner limits* of its object through an analysis of what is essential to its object. As the object of social critique is society, a critical theory of society is or becomes critical whenever it reveals its object as *finite*. In a central passage on Hegel, Marx writes:

True criticism shows the inner genesis of the Holy Trinity in the brain of man. It describes its birth. Similarly, a truly philosophical criticism of the present constitution does not content itself with showing that it contains contradictions: it explains them, comprehends their genesis, their necessity. It grasps their particular significance. This act of comprehension does not however consist, as Hegel thinks, in discovering the determinations of the concepts of logic at every point; it consists in the discovery of the particular logic of the particular object.

(Marx 1992, 158)

Decisive in this quote are three aspects of Marx’s concept of critique, namely: 1) critique is a procedure that leads to a comprehension of its

object, 2) critique is essentially grasping a phenomenon in its *genesis*, and 3) critique comprehends the *inner* logic of its object, and *only* in this way, does it grasp its essence. We can easily see that critique is here introduced by Marx as an analytic activity that attempts to define its object through grasping the *inner limits* of its object by tracing its elements back to their origins. Genesis is here identical with *finite*, insofar as an object with its genesis can no longer be located in an abstract logical space that is characterized by an atemporal structure. Instead, a genetically determined object has a temporally limited horizon and therefore a finite (and historical) origin. Only an object that can be determined by its own inner logic can be *separated* from another object, as the difference between objects comes about through that, which “makes them up” as precisely this and not another object. A determination of an object in its being, accordingly, introduces a limit through which the particularity of the object is revealed. Marx’s connection of critique and analysis has a phenomenological character, insofar as he traces that which makes an object a particular object back to its inner categorical determinations. As we know, this idea is central for Kant’s *First Critique* within which Kant criticizes existing metaphysics not only by *limiting the scope of what could legitimately fall under metaphysics* but also by *limiting the scope and essence of reason and rationality itself*. Critique deals with *finite* in the Heideggerian sense.

Accordingly, it should become more transparent how Marx uses the concept of critique for the analysis of capitalism. The *Critique of Political Economy* is critical because the Marxian critique does not deal with *just any* social formation; instead, it has a *specific* object, namely, capitalist society (i.e., a social formation determined by valorized labor). A critique of capitalist society, consequently, tries to analyze this specific sociality as a specific *form*, and in so doing it tries to analyze capitalism in such a way that its *inner limits* become visible by revealing its essential categorical determinations. As we said earlier, determining a social formation in its inner logic and inner limits is identical with revealing it as a historically finite social formation. So, more specifically, *Critique of Political Economy* is critical because it reveals its object, capitalist society, as a *finite* form of sociality that, because it is finite, can also be overcome, can fall apart, or can be replaced by a different form of sociality. As Marx says in the quote above (and as a social phenomenologist), the essence of an object is *this* essence because it contains *its own* peculiar logic. All of this is nicely visible in a famous quote from a letter to Lassalle written in February 1858:

The work I am presently concerned with is a *Critique of Economic Categories* or, *if you like*, the system of the bourgeois economy critically presented. It is at once a presentation of the system and because of the presentation a critique of the system.

(Marx 1858)

4. Disclosure

Above, I have (hopefully) successfully indicated that Marx's thinking, if grasped philosophically, is closer to a subjective and transcendental way of thinking about (social) phenomena than to a Hegelian conceptual and epistemological framework of thinking. In what follows I will demonstrate that the genetic phenomenology that is implied in Marx's thought can also be detected in the way in which both philosophy and phenomena are taken to be based on disclosure rather than logical or causal interpretations.

4.1. What philosophy reveals

Let me remind us of the following: the function of the phenomenological *epoché* is to make visible a realm that is lost behind the veil of the natural attitude within which we are not aware of the proper intentional connections and associations of experience. This, once subjected to phenomenological reflection, emerges as a phenomenon *for* the analytical gaze of the phenomenologist. Perhaps surprisingly, we find the same problem in Marx's method in *Capital*, which is built around the problem that the fetishistic relations that the commodity form introduces in social reality makes social relations and associations contained in experience and everyday activities invisible. The intent of Marx's method is to make these relations visible again *in* the natural attitude via turning what appears in everyday experience as natural into phenomena, which can be traced back to their true field of origin. Accordingly, Marx's method can properly be understood as a *genetic phenomenology of society*.

This genetic reconstruction takes place on two levels: on the one hand, Marx argues in his early writings, especially in the famous letter exchange with Ruge in 1843, that the task of philosophy is to analyze "mystical consciousness obscure to itself." On the other hand, he argues in his mature writings, especially in *Capital* in 1867, that the task of a critique of political economy is to de-naturalize fetishistic social relations that appear to agents in capitalist society as natural relations. In both cases, it is the task of critical reflection to operate without logical or causal connections; instead, the entire endeavor is about *revealing* what remains hidden *in* the natural attitude, which, once subjected to the analytical gaze, are then analyzed as phenomena proper. Accordingly, *critique is here understood as disclosure*.

Let me briefly point to the Ruge letters before dealing with Marx's method in *Capital* in more detail. In a famous passage, Marx writes the following:

The reform of consciousness consists *entirely* in making the world aware of its own consciousness, in arousing it from its dream of itself, in *explaining* its own actions to it. Like Feuerbach's critique of

religion, our whole aim can only be to translate religious and political problems into their self-conscious human form. Our programme must be: the reform of consciousness not through dogmas but by analysing mystical consciousness obscure to itself, whether it appears in religious or political form. It will then become plain that the world has long since dreamed of some thing of which it needs only to become conscious for it to possess it in reality. It will then become plain that our task is not to draw a sharp mental line between past and future but to *complete* the thought of the past. Lastly, it will become plain that mankind will not begin any *new* work but will consciously bring about the completion of its old work.

(Marx 1992, 209)

The following aspects are important for the purpose of this chapter: 1) Marx does not argue that his method operates from the *outside* of society via an external observer who normatively criticizes society or the agents who operate in it. Rather, he argues that the task of *critical* philosophy is merely to analyze *properly* how things are; 2) consequently, he assumes that in social everyday life, society appears to its agents "upside down"; that is, as not how things truly are. One does not need to artificially construct associations to immediately notice how close Marx's thought appears to the thought of Husserl, given that in Husserl we see the attempt in his *Crisis* to criticize the formalized concept of reality that the modern natural sciences introduce by showing how it is alienated from the practical rationality that we find in the life-world (see also Paci 1968, 14–18), which includes ethics (Husserl 1970, 131). As Husserl attempts to phenomenologically "heal" the disconnect from the life-world that the modern mathematization of nature introduced, thereby reconciling the modern world with itself, so does Marx attempt to reconcile the social world by bridging the disconnect of society and its agents through the imaginations and distortions introduced by metaphysics and religion (see also Shmueli 1973). As Marcuse has it,

Husserl proposes to break the mystification inherent in modern science by a phenomenological analysis which is in a literal sense a therapeutic method. Therapeutic in the sense that it is to get behind the mystifying concepts and methods of science and to uncover the constitutive *lebensweltliche* a priori under which all scientific a priori stands.

(Marcuse 1965, 287)

In both cases, the critical task is achieved by way of a thorough analysis of how things are rather than how things – seen from an external position – ought to be. Again, critique is here understood differently than critical theorists, such as Jaeggi, assume.

The problem of visibility, invisibility, and the disconnect *within* modernity is not only hinted at in Marx's early writings; for one could argue that it is *the* problem of *Capital*, insofar as it not only explicitly determines the entire fetishism problem, but also re-appears on every methodological level of Marx's mature theory. For example, think of the problem of commodity circulation and market relations. Marx's entire theory deals with the problem that all social relations, that is, relations contained in production, consumption, and distribution, disappear at the surface of commodity circulation. Put in modern terms, at the surface of the market exchanges and the processes of selling and buying, the *entire* content of political economy and the central functioning of capital and surplus value disappear and are no longer visible. It is as if the true content of the act of buying and surplus value disappears in the natural attitude that buyers and sellers move in during their everyday transactions. It should come as no surprise, then, that the problem of how to reveal these true relations that remain veiled behind the natural attitude can be traced throughout all levels of Marx's *Capital*. For example, in the fetishism chapter Marx states the following:

We have already seen, from the most elementary expression of value, x commodity A = y commodity B, that the object in which the magnitude of the value of another object is represented, appears to have the equivalent form independently of this relation, as a social property given to it by nature. We followed up this false appearance to its final establishment, which is complete as soon as the universal equivalent form becomes identified with the bodily form of a particular commodity, and thus crystallized into the money-form. What appears to happen is not that gold becomes money, in consequence of all other commodities expressing their values in it, but, on the contrary, that all other commodities universally express their values in gold, because it is money. The intermediate steps of the process vanish in the result and leave no trace behind. . . . Hence the magic of money. (Marx 1993, 187)

What Marx points out here is the process through which the value-form, as he discusses it in the first chapter of *Capital*, becomes invisible in the result of its constitution, that is, in the real existing form of value, which is money. However, the steps that lead to money as the universal mediator of social reality *vanish* in their result. As Marx puts it in the above quote, *the intermediate steps of the process vanish in the result and leave no trace behind*. When we find commodities on the market, they *already* come with a price tag, and the fact that commodities are constituted by their *specific social form* disappears behind their appearance. Put differently, money is "magic," insofar as in its thing-like form its true relations disappear. Turning money into a *phenomenon* is therefore the goal of

Marx's reflections. Similarly, Marx argues that this natural-fetishistic veil occurs at every level of money and capital. For example, at the surface of commodity circulation and everyday market relations, such as buying and selling as well as supply and demand, equal individuals seem to encounter each other as formally free individuals. In fact, market relations are only apparently made of individual transactions between individuals that are socially constituted through their exchange relations. In truth, however, these individuals are constituted by the relations that are *hidden* in the market relations. As a consequence, Marx's methodological reflections need to cut through the fetishism of the natural attitude and reveal the latter as the surface of lost "traces." The core of Marx's method, hence, is truly phenomenological, insofar as it *reveals* via a genetic reconstruction the social relations that turn up as natural in everyday life. It is important to note that this genetic reconstruction does not proceed through the concept of causality, since Marx does not argue that the underlying relations *cause* surface effects; rather, he argues that the naturalized market *contains* social relations that can be disclosed through properly turning everything that seems to be natural into something social. As he underlines right at the beginning of *Capital*, the value form contains *no* natural elements, even if to agents in capitalism as well as to bourgeois economists and philosophers it appears as natural. Marx's critique of political economy, accordingly, de-naturalizes society and properly traces it back to social elements. Again, critique appears here as disclosure.

4.2. *What technology reveals*

A last point that I would like to point our attention to is Marx's treatment of technology in *Capital*, since in his treatment he demonstrates very well how his genetic social philosophy works in its entirety as a critique via *disclosure*. For a long time, the literature on Marx and technology, especially in the Anglo-American world, was haunted by questions of instrumentalism, determinism, and historicism. These readings are based in their entirety on a misunderstanding of Marx's method and his philosophical underpinnings. A thorough reading of the long chapters in *Capital* in which Marx deals with technology show a completely different problem, which is nicely hinted at in the following passage, hidden in a footnote (see also Harvey 2010, 189):

Technology reveals man's mode of dealing with Nature, the process of production by which he sustains his life, and thereby also lays bare the mode of formation of his social relations, and of the mental conceptions that flow from them. Every history of religion, even, that fails to take account of this material basis, is uncritical. It is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly core of the

misty creations of religion, than, conversely, it is, to develop from the actual relations of life the corresponding celestialised forms of those relations. The latter method is the only materialistic, and therefore the only scientific one. The weak points in the abstract materialism of natural science, a materialism that excludes history and its process, are at once evident from the abstract and ideological conceptions of its spokesmen, whenever they venture beyond the bounds of their own speciality.

(Marx 1993, 493)

It is quite remarkable that at this point, in uncanny proximity to Heidegger, Marx does not use the word “verursachen” (*causes*), but instead speaks of “enthüllen” (*revealing/disclosing*). As we know from Heidegger, “causality as effecting” differs from to-bring-something-into-the-open (Heidegger 1993, 313, 316, 331). Similarly, 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 capital accumulation and the process of 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 analyses, including technology, can only be understood within the totality of social relations. Indeed, 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, modes of material production, daily life, mental conceptions, and institutional frameworks. Consequently, we can see here how formerly naturalized experiences and things are saved from logical (dialectical) as well as causal explanations and, instead, are genetically analyzed as phenomena in which their meaning “apprehensions” are revealed and de-naturalized. It is in this sense that critique functions as a form of disclosure by demonstrating the mystifications and veils that we encounter in our “natural” daily lives within which we just “do” things without understanding how their meaning is *constituted*.

5. Conclusion

Marx’s philosophy is phenomenological by disclosing reality on three levels: 1) on the level of the method, via a genetic reflection on what is contained in naturalized experiences, 2) on the level of philosophy, via a disclosure of what social reality in truth is, and 3) on the level of social phenomena (such as technology), via a disclosure of what is contained in these phenomena. These three (selected) aspects of Marx’s philosophy should lead us to the conclusion that a phenomenological reading of his

theory is not an arbitrarily constructed perspective; rather, it is in its core a philosophy that traces back phenomena to their true content and origin. His philosophy should be grasped as a genetic phenomenology of (capitalist) social reality and social relations that reveals their true content once properly disclosed. As such, without being directly normative, Marx’s philosophy pushes away the blind spots of what with Husserl we might call the *social-natural attitude* and, at the same time, it is critical because it reveals capitalist social phenomena in how and what they are.

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