

Understanding Marx's Normative Critique of Capitalism: Reification revisited⁺

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ABSTRACT

Marxist traditions of thought barely pay any attention to the normative dimension of Marx's critique of capitalism in *Capital*. In this respect Lukács' seminal essay on reification is an exception. Situating Marx within German Idealism, Lukács defines the fundamental normative concern of Marx's writings as an investigation of the conditions of radical freedom. Given its central role in Marx's critique, it is necessary to find an answer to the question of how to conceptualize freedom. Lukács finds that answer in a reinterpretation of the introductory chapters of *Capital*, which seemingly explores only the economic logic of capitalism. Although this is a fruitful theoretical move, I argue that Lukács' conceptualization of Marx's understanding of freedom, implicit in his concept of reification, is problematic. Still, Lukács' interpretive approach provides conceptual resources to revise the concept of reification with a view to develop a better understanding of Marx's normative critique.

It has always been controversial to look for Marx's normative critique of capitalism in his Magnum Opus *Capital*. For such a reading challenges the scientific-image of Marx, who has analyzed the laws of development and dynamics of capitalism, and foreseen its necessary demise. This image of a positivist scientist¹ was firmly established by Engels and his both social-democratic and Leninist followers, who built their case on Marx's seemingly 'objectivist' language in *Capital*. This particular reading of Marx became the dominant discourse in Marxist debates. The term, 'orthodox Marxism' has generally been used to denote this discourse, even though it is difficult to give an exact definition of the term. This is due to the fact that within the tradition of Marxism 'orthodox Marxism' has often been utilized as the most convenient ideological weapon to discredit the opposing fraction. Thus despite their radically different interpretations both Lukács in *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* (London: Red Star Press, 2000) [1923] and Althusser and Balibar, at least implicitly, in their *Reading Capital* (London: Verso, 1979) [1968] declare their own reading of

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¹ With 'positivist Image' I don't refer to any particular school of thought within Marxism. Any Marxist approach that adopts the opinion that social sciences are best to be modeled after 'natural sciences' and search for an unanimous method is however essentially positivist. The classical positivist approach can be found in Friedrich Engels, "Dialectics of Nature" in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, (New York: International Publishers, 2005), Volume 25, p. 313-590 and "Socialism Utopian and Scientific" in *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), Volume 3, p. 95-151. Most prominent Among those who read (accuse) Marx as a positivist are G.A Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*. (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), and Albrecht Wellmer, *Critical Theory of Society*, (New York: The Continuum Publ. Corp, 1971). For a critical overview of positivism-debate and a successful refutation of this claim see, James Farr, "Marx and positivism" in Ball / Farr (ed), *After Marx*, p. 217-235 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984).



Marx as orthodox. In this paper, I call both socialist (and eventually social-democratic) movement of the Second-international and Leninism as orthodox positions. Both socialists of the Second International and Leninists have claimed authority on the *true* interpretation of Marx's work and even though their view on how to overcome capitalism differs considerably, they share some basic interpretative assumptions that draw on Engels' writings rather than that of Marx.

The problem with orthodox Marxism is twofold. On the one hand, because of its misguided understanding of science that condemns any normative judgment as ideological, orthodox Marxism tends to cover up the normative foundations upon which its own project of emancipation is based – as a result, its interpretative approach to *Capital* lacks any normative interest. On the other hand, since the total absence of normative arguments is impossible within a *critical* – let alone a *revolutionary* – theory of society, orthodox Marxism finds it necessary to import a critical normative perspective to its analysis. This perspective is either borrowed from the earlier writings of 'humanist' Marx or, at its worst, is drawn out from a common-sense moral intuition, which has been criticized by Marx in all his writings. Thus, for instance, the ideal-typical orthodox-Marxist legitimates his/her political agenda with the following rhetorical question: Is it not evident that the capitalist form of exploitation is 'unjust' and 'inhuman'? Marx's own answer to this question in *Capital* however would not exactly serve to orthodox Marxist's interests. For, according to Marx, capitalist form of exploitation is both *just*² and, as a historical phenomenon, all too human.

The structuralist reading of Althusser can be best understood as a critic of this double strain in orthodox Marxism; scientism, on the one hand, humanism or common sense morality on the other. And yet, Althusser's strategy of setting a radical break between the 'humanist' early writings and the scientific later writings of Marx, perhaps inadvertently, strengthened the discourse of orthodox Marxism. This is the case despite the fact that Althusser's understanding of science significantly differs from that of orthodox Marxism.³

In many ways, it is possible to suggest that an earlier attempt to challenge the ascendancy of an amoral, "scientific" reading of *Capital* had proved to be more successful than Althusser's approach because, unlike Althusser's, this approach dealt with the problem of orthodox Marxism directly. According to this view, the normative foundations of Marx's critic of capitalism had to be uncovered and this could only be done, if we read *Capital* with

² See the Chapter on "Working Day", where he writes on the antinomy of 'rights' in Volume I (Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* in Marx/Engels Werke, (Berlin: Dietz Verlag) Volume 23, p. 209) and his definition of justice in Volume III (Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* in Marx/Engels Werke (hereafter MEW) (Berlin: Dietz Verlag) Volume 25, p. 351). In order to explain an oxymoron such as a 'just exploitation' that occupies a central place within Marx' critic of capitalism, it is necessary to unearth the normative foundations of the critique. For a plausible account that argues against this necessity see, Allen Wood, *Karl Marx*, (Oxon: Routledge, 1981). According to Wood it is possible to differentiate between 'moral' and 'amoral' goods. He suggests that the term 'exploitation' refers to a state that is detrimental to a natural, amoral good, to well-being. Thus he concludes, just exploitation is not an oxymoron at all. It seems however that Wood here presents a very Aristotelian argument, in order to define 'amoral' goods and thus points to a normative foundation without naming it.

³ See Althusser, *Reading Capital*. According to Althusser, Marx is the initiator of a *new science* and methodology and not a positivist scientist who analyses the eternal laws of society. A brief look at the neo-Althusserian texts would show, however, the similar normative conclusions drawn by this line of thought and orthodox Marxism. See Jan Hoff (among others ed.), *Das Kapital neu lesen*, (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2006).



different philosophical lenses than those of Engels.⁴ In order to substantiate this approach Lukács developed his concept of reification⁵ that primarily rests on the interpretation of Marx’s critique of the capitalist mode of social mediation⁶ presented in the opening chapters of *Capital*. Lukács convincingly argued that any attempt to understand Marx’s critique of capitalism in *Capital*, which disregards his philosophical stance within the tradition of German Idealism, is inadequate. Read within the context of Marxist debates, Lukács’ analysis of reification stands out not only by its philosophical rigor and cogency, but also by its unique attempt to search for a normative standard within *Capital* with a view to highlight Marx’s normative critique of capitalism.⁷

In this paper, I argue that although Lukács was principally right in his interpretive approach to *Capital*, he was unsuccessful in capturing the essence of Marx’s normative critique of capitalism. It is due to this failure that his account of revolutionary politics, which is based on the analysis of reification, succumbs to a politics of macro-subject – a form of politics that has been the object of legitimate concern and has raised doubts about the critical potential of the concept of reification.⁸ Although Lukács’ particular account of Marx’s relation to German idealism is responsible for this outcome, I suggest that a certain Hegelian reading of *Capital*, which Lukács occasionally seems to pursue, can not only help us to save the revolutionary core of Lukács’ analysis of reification but also contribute to a better understanding of Marx’s normative critique of capitalism. Thus, in what follows, I propose a rereading of Marx’s opening arguments in *Capital* to rethink reification and to bring to light its critical potential.

⁴ Non-Marxist writers discovered very early that Marx’ analyses of political economy has a normative critical core to it. Georg Simmel’s analysis in *Philosophie des Geldes* (Georg Simmel, *Philosophy des Geldes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989) [1900]) can be interpreted as a polemic against Marx (See below). Similarly, it would not be far-fetched to claim that Max Weber’s renowned analysis of Protestant Ethics takes its inspiration directly from *Capital*. The first analysis of *Capital*, aiming to uncover the normative foundations of the Work belongs to Franz Petry, *Der Soziale Gehalt der Marxchen Werttheorie* (Jena: G. Fischer, 1916).

⁵ Marx coins the term ‘reification’, *Verdinglichung*, in Volume III of *Capital* in reference to his analysis of the ‘fetish character of commodity’. In this context the term literally denotes the conversion of social relations to a relation between things. More accurately social relations acquire a reified, *thingly*, quality, while at the same time the relations between things, commodities, take the form of a social relation. As Marx calls it: «It is an enchanted, perverted (*verkehrte*), topsy-turvy world, in which Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre do their ghost-walking as social characters and at the same time directly as mere things.» (MEW 25, p. 838). As I will demonstrate below Lukács takes this term and develops his theory of reification in his seminal essay “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat” (Georg Lukács, “Die Verdinglichung und das Bewusstsein des Proletariats” in *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*).

⁶ By ‘social mediation’ I refer to a form of social relation that plays a constitutive role for subject positions. A constituted subject position denotes a particular attitude towards other subjects and the outside world. This attitude in return depends upon a particular conceptualization of freedom.

⁷ Only recently innovative attempts have been made to unearth the foundations of Marx’ normative critic of capitalism in *Capital* that go beyond the analysis of Lukács. See, Georg Lohmann, *Indifferenz und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991) and Moishe Postone, *Time Labour and Social Domination* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁸ Habermas is among the most eminent thinkers that pointed to this problem. See Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), p. 95-103 and Habermas, *Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns Bd.2*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), Chapters 6 and 8.



This reading draws parallels between the unfolding of Marx's critique and Hegel's discussion of dialectically unfolding knowledge models in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁹ My argument is that when read through the lenses of *Phenomenology*, the opening chapters of *Capital* do provide a criterion for the normative critique of capitalist society. This criterion, I claim, is to be found in the dialectic of recognition: for Hegel, as well as for Marx, the dialectic of recognition serves as a model for the intersubjective mediation that is necessary for the subsistence of a true, i.e. free subjectivity. Thus, like Lukács', my reading of *Capital* attributes neither an amoral, positivist understanding of scientific stance to Marx's critique of capitalism, nor searches for external normative standards in the earlier writings of Marx that will supposedly make sense of the objectivist analysis of his late work. I also share Lukács' view that Marx's normative critique of capitalism in *Capital* targets primarily the unfreedom specific to capitalist society and that in Marx's account the conception of freedom plays a fundamental role in defining other (moral and ethical) values such as justice, equality and a conception of good life.¹⁰ I part ways with Lukács, however, on the issue of how to conceptualize the understanding of freedom that is to serve as the normative standard /criterion of Marx's critique of Capitalism. According to my account, to fully grasp Marx's understanding of freedom, it is essential to rethink the concept of reification through the Hegelian dialectics of recognition.

To elaborate these points, in the first part of this paper I turn to two interpretative accounts of Lukács' concept of reification that underline Lukács' indebtedness to Hegelian philosophy. Herbert Marcuse and Axel Honneth, both members of Frankfurt School, find it necessary to have recourse to the concept of reification in search for a normative standard that enables a substantial critique of modern capitalist society on philosophical grounds. My own interpretation of Lukács draws on the insights provided by these thinkers. In the second

⁹ This Hegelian reading is not to be confused with a form of Hegelianism particularly prevalent in Germany that reads *Capital* in its relation to Hegel's *Science of Logic*, which takes its origins from what can be called as 'Value-Form-Analysis School' of Hans-Georg Bachhaus, *Dialektik der Wertform. Untersuchungen zur Marxchen Ökonomiekritik* [1974] (Freiburg: Ça Ira, 1997); Helmut Reichelt, *Zur logischen Struktur des Kapitalbegriffs bei Karl Marx* (Frankfurt am Main: Europ. Verl.-Anst., 1970) and Michail Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert. Die Marxche Kritik der politischen Ökonomie zwischen wissenschaftlicher Revolution und klassischer Tradition*. (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1991). Despite very valuable contributions to the question of late Marx' methodological considerations in their relation to Hegel's *Science of Logic*, the focus of these works remain to be a better understanding of the **scientific** critique of political economy by Marx. In other words the underlying assumption is absolutely in line with orthodox Marxism's (especially with Leninism's) claim that late Marx use of dialectical method of presentation in *Capital* is yet another proof of his critique of capitalism on purely scientific / amoral grounds. For recent examples of this approach see Leo Èeierko, "Das 'wirkliche Triebwerk des Kapitals' und seine Beziehung zu Hegels Logik" in Hoff (ed.), *Das Kapital neu Lesen* and Važjulin, Viktor A., "Entwicklung systematisch denken. Ein Vergleich der dialektischen Logik bei Hegel und Marx" in: *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 53:2, S. 203-18, (2005).

¹⁰ A recent debate between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth can be taken as the proof of how fundamentally important the issue at stake here is for contemporary emancipatory politics. See Nancy Fraser / Axel Honneth, *Umverteilung oder Anerkennung? Eine politisch-philosophische Kontroverse*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003) While Fraser opts for a liberal/social democratic double-track politics of redistribution *and* recognition in order to maintain a more *equal* terms of political participation, Honneth in his more Marxian approach calls for a rethinking of the conception of *freedom* in modern capitalist societies, which would only than make emancipatory politics possible. Then as for Marx also for Honneth the ideal dialectic of recognition presents a mode of social mediation that can serve as an orientation for contemporary political actors.



part of the paper, I give a brief analysis of Lukács’ concept of reification presented in his seminal essay “Reification and the Consciousness of Proletariat”. Here I demonstrate that Lukács’ text carries within it the conceptual resources for an alternative understanding of reification. In my concluding remarks, drawing on these resources, I provide a brief account of what a Hegelian reading of the introductory chapters of *Capital* might look like. Such an account is crucial because only a Hegelian reading of this kind can both save the revolutionary core of Lukács’ analysis of reification and contribute to a better understanding of Marx’s normative critique of capitalism.

I

Writing right after the Bolshevik Revolution, Lukács, in his famous essay “Reification and the Consciousness of Proletariat”, challenges the philosophical foundations of the economic determinist Marxism of the Second International. While making philosophical arguments to lead revolutionary Marxism away from Engels’ scientific dialectical materialism, Lukács also tries *not* to counter the latter simply by putting forward a naïve anthropological-humanist interpretation of Marx’s writings. In other words, he does not want to offer a theory of alienation that is inevitably based on an essentialist understanding of human nature. Lukács develops his concept of reification mainly to address these concerns.

As I will demonstrate below, Lukács ends up failing to accomplish this goal due to the philosophical choices he makes. Lukács’ failure, however, is productive because, even though his answers to them are inadequate, he gives a central status to two interdependent and crucial questions in his analysis: First, what is the relation of Marx’s philosophy to German Idealism in general? And second, what is Marx’s position with respect to the central ethical pursuit of this tradition, namely the investigation of the conditions of existence of radical individual freedom? In many ways, it is possible to suggest that Western Marxism in general, and Critical Theory in particular has emerged and developed in response to these questions formulated by Lukács. Because Lukács’ answer to these questions is to be found in his conception of reification, a new assessment of this concept has attained a central role in the self-understanding of Marxist traditions of thought.¹¹

It is crucial to note that those who directly engage with the concept of reification, in one way or another turn to Hegel’s philosophy. Thus, for instance, Herbert Marcuse in his reconstruction of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* uses the concept to characterize the first three sections of Hegel’s work.¹² According to Marcuse’s interpretation, all truth claims made by the succeeding models of knowledge in these introductory sections fail on the same grounds: All these models claim to secure their presumable knowledge independently of any historical definite social practice.¹³ Therefore, Marcuse argues, «Hegel attempts to show that man can know the truth only if he breaks through his ‘reified’ world. We borrow the term ‘reification’ from the Marxist theory, where it denotes the fact that all relations between men in the world of capitalism appear as relations between things [...]. The commodity, for instance, embodies in all its qualities the *social* relations of labor [...]» (Ibid, p. 112). Hereby Marcuse sets the concept of reification rightly in relation to Hegel’s *Phenomenology* as well as to

¹¹ See the classical work of Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality. The Adventures of a concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984).

¹² Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, (1941) [Oxford: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986].

¹³ See also the more recent study of Terry Pinkard, who builds on this insight of Marcuse. Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology. The Sociality of Reason*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994).



Marx's analyses of commodity fetishism. A few pages later, however, commenting on Hegel's master and slave Dialectic, Marcuse equates the position taken by Marx in his 1844 Manuscripts with the later critique formulated in the first chapter of Capitalism, with commodity fetishism or in Lukács' words with reification: «In 1844 Marx sharpened the basic concepts of his own theory through a critical analysis of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*. He described the 'alienation' of labor in the terms of Hegel's discussion of master and servant [...] Marx makes reference to Hegel's definitive insight, which disclosed to him that lordship and bondage result of necessity from certain relations of labor, which are in turn, relationships in a 'reified' world» (Ibid. 115). This conflation of two distinct concepts, that is, of 'alienation' and 'reification' by Marcuse points to an inner tension in Lukács' own analyses.

When he wrote his essay, Lukács did not yet know about the existence of 1844 Manuscripts of Marx. And yet, as I argue below, in his account of revolutionary overcoming of capitalism, building up on *Thesis on Feuerbach* and Johann Gottlieb Fichte's philosophy, Lukács reached to similar conclusions with young Marx's theory of alienation. According to Lukács, the 'proletarian standpoint' is, like the standpoint of the 'slave' in Hegel's account (presumably, for Hegel does not argue exactly in this line), inclined to freedom. For, through his work – in Lukács case also political work – slave builds /educates himself to be the *true* subject of history.¹⁴

With this line of argument Lukács privileges, as noted by Jürgen Habermas,¹⁵ a certain productivist mode of action over others, and in doing so, he comes very close to a position occupied by 'humanist' criticisms of capitalism, which attach a central importance to the role played by labor / productive action in human flourishing. Humanist critics of capitalism argue that modern (capitalist) division of labor and work processes is responsible for human being's *alienation* from (their own) nature. Because Lukács is aware of the ahistorical and essentialist nature of such a critical account, he tries to disavow this position through lengthy discussions in his essay. Despite all his efforts, however, as we will see, he cannot avoid to fall back into this perspective.¹⁶ Nevertheless, this tension in his essay does not prevent Lukács from trying to establish his own theory of *reification* in opposition to a theory of *alienation*.

By pointing to the different accent put on the normative grounding of the Marxian critique of capitalism in a theory of *alienation* in contrast to a theory of *reification*, a difference, which, as we have seen, was deliberately evaded by Marcuse, I do not want to suggest that there is 'a radical break' between 'young Marx' and 'mature Marx.' As with every thinker, however, it is possible to observe gradual shifts between different works of a given author.¹⁷ Here it suffices to note that the central role attached to 'alienated labor' as the normative ground for the critique of capitalism in *1844 Manuscripts*, leaves its place to a critique of a historically determined form of a *social mediation* in *Capital*, informed by the Hegelian theory of intersubjectivity. Although I am critical of Marcuse's erasure of the difference between a theory of alienation and a theory reification in his reconstruction of Marx's work in relation to *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, I share the fundamental premise of his interpretation: Reification is best understood as a conceptual innovation that shows and

¹⁴ For a detailed account of Lukács' usage of Hegelian Master and Slave Dialectic in his essay see Andrew Arato, "Lukács' Theory of Reification" in *Telos* 11, Spring 1972, p. 58f.

¹⁵ Habermas, *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ For the discussion of Humanism See Lukács, *ibid.*, p. 148f and 208f. Especially the explanation of the privileged status of the 'standpoint of Proletariat' (ascribed class-consciousness of proletariat) is by contrast made from the perspective of a theory of alienation. See 175f.

¹⁷ By far the best account of the positions that Marx takes in his earlier writings is given by Daniel Brudney, *Marx' attempt to leave Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).



highlights the indebtedness of Marx’s analysis of commodity fetishism to the opening sections of *Phenomenology*, specifically, I suggest, to the chapter on ‘Force and Understanding’.

Recently, Axel Honneth also revisited Lukács’ concept in his work. Unlike traditional interpretations, in his book entitled “Reification”,¹⁸ Honneth refuses to analyze the concept in terms of its relation to German Idealism, in order not to hazard the consequences of the metaphysical assumptions that then have to be made. Thus, he successfully avoids falling back to a productivist model of subjectivity that frames Lukács’ problematic discussion of the ‘ascribed class-consciousness’ of proletariat, which has burdened the Marxist theory and praxis ever since. As a result, instead of conjuring Lukács’ eschatological imagery of the macro- subject and object of history that will overcome the state of reification once again, Honneth focuses on social phenomena that helped Lukács to characterize the object of his criticism from a sociological and action-theoretical perspective. Honneth argues that even stripped from its idealist presumptions, on a purely sociological level, Lukács’ concept goes beyond the current utilizations of similar concepts, such as Nussbaum’s ‘objectification’, which either describe certain types of human behavior that violate ethical principles or point to a form of instrumental rationality that colonizes the emotional life of the actor.¹⁹ The radical core of Lukács’ argument, Honneth suggests, rests on the observation that in modern societies actors are compelled to take a contemplative attitude towards the reality, which they constitute, and in which they participate and interact. In this reading, reification refers to a distorted human praxis, which is to be contrasted with an intersubjective attitude on the part of the subject, and as such, can be reinterpreted as losing sight of a primordial form of relation to the world, as “forgetfulness of recognition”.

Although I share Honneth’s view that the concept of recognition constitutes the normative horizon of a non-reified social world, in what follows, I refuse to adopt his sociological and action-theoretical approach that sets, in Honneth’s own words, a more ‘existential mode’ of recognition as the standard of critique of a reified world.²⁰ Instead, I argue that Lukács’ own philosophical assumptions are adequate and sufficient to understand the concept of reification within the framework of a theory of recognition. For the philosophical assumptions in Lukács’ analysis of commodity fetishism provide us with the conceptual resources to develop an alternative reading, which unlike Lukács’ own account, sets the Hegelian dialectic of recognition as the standard of the critique of capitalism. When interpreted in this manner, the concept of reification continues to provide a powerful critique of a mode of social mediation *specific to* capitalist society, as intended by Lukács, rather than referring to a distorted (alienated) human praxis.

II

In order to utilize these insights provided by Marcuse and Honneth to develop an alternative interpretation of Lukács’ concept of reification, it is first necessary to give an account of his renowned essay, “Reification and the Consciousness of Proletariat”. Let me begin that account with a brief discussion on the argumentative structure of the text. Drawing on Marx’s method outlined in his “Introduction to (Grundrisse)”,²¹ Lukács divides his essay in

¹⁸ Axel Honneth, *Verdinglichung*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005).

¹⁹ Martha Nussbaum, “Objectification,” in Alan Soble (ed.) *The Philosophy of Sex* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

²⁰ See Axel Honneth, *Ibid.* p. 46.

²¹ See Karl Marx, MEW 42, p. 19-45.



three major parts. According to Marx, a scientific analysis begins with a naïve pre-conceptual perception of an empirical whole (his example is ‘population’). From this perception of a chaotic gathering of facts one has to move analytically to simple abstract concepts. A scientific theory of society brings these abstract concepts together so as to reconstruct a conceptually informed concrete totality. A conscious use of processes of thinking, abstraction and reconstruction are essential for the scientific method. For, only if scientific effort in these processes can be raised to consciousness, the theory can become immune to ahistorical generalizations.

Following this line of thinking, in the first part of his essay, following Marx and drawing on Max Weber and Georg Simmel, Lukács provides a sociological analysis of everyday life within capitalist society to give a picture of the totality that is to be overcome through revolution. This sociological analysis sets the ground for a conceptual, that is, *philosophical* discussion on the foundations of the diverse phenomena brought under the term *reification*. Hence, in the second part of his essay Lukács’ discussion is firmly situated within the tradition of German Idealism. Here Lukács puts forward his radical claim and introduces the central discussion of the subject-theoretical conditions of the existence of individual freedom: «Modern critical philosophy springs from the reified structure of consciousness.» (Lukács, *Ibid.*, p. 122) Finally, in the third and final part of his essay, following the scientific method outlined in *Grundrisse*, Lukács draws direct political consequences from his philosophical analysis and attempts to construct an account of a *true* totality. Thus, he argues that the reified world of capitalism can only be dissolved and *appropriated*, if the proletariat sets itself as the subject of socio-historical reality instead of simply being the product of capitalist social order. The moment of revolution is the moment, in which ‘the reified structure of consciousness’ gives way to Self-consciousness.

Just like its argumentative structure, the substantive content of “Reification and the Consciousness of Proletariat” is also indebted to Marx’s thinking. Hence, Lukács begins his essay with a brief analysis of Marx’s commodity fetishism. He correctly points out that the term commodity for Marx is not only, or even primarily, an economic category. Instead, Lukács suggests, ‘commodity’ refers to a social mediation specific and central to capitalism. He, then, sets out to elucidate Marx’s somewhat obscure criticism of this social mediation by focusing on the discussion on ‘commodity fetishism,’ which even today presents the key to diverse interpretations of *Capital*.

It is of theoretical significance to underline that one of the major goals of Lukács’ account of commodity fetishism is to challenge the orthodox Marxist view, which interprets commodity fetishism simply as an inverted state of social relations. According to the orthodox Marxist view, social relations between human beings *appear to be* relations between things. Thus, it is argued, this inverted state of affairs, which conceals the true relationship between human beings, has to be corrected to give way to a genuine and conscious, a *decommodified*, relationship between human beings that defy a social relation mediated by commodities. This interpretation, however, is a simplification of Marx’s argument and consequently misleading. For, Marx’s critique based on the fetish character of commodity is twofold. On the one hand, Marx criticizes the political economists, who present a historical and social relationship as a natural order, for falling victim to the ideology emanating from the commodity form. On the other hand, Marx directs his main critique towards a form of social mediation that sets the subjects of this relationship as atomistic individuals. The existence of two worlds, that is the world of human beings and the world of commodities, which are inversions of each other, is a precondition that holds this



problematic social mediation together. According to Marx, a two-world perspective is symptomatic of such an individuation process that undermines the freedom of the subject fundamentally. In other words, Marx does not directly criticize the *fact* that social mediation takes place behind the back of the producers *via* commodities – for, this is yet another *symptom* of the fundamental unfreedom that emanates from the individuation process –, but the very form of this social mediation.²²

Building on this more complex understanding of commodity fetishism Lukács defines *reification* as a specific problem of modern capitalism in contrast to *alienation*, which claims validity for a much broader historical period and is usually understood in terms of a fall from some golden age. Instead, Lukács uses the concept of reification to give an expression to the effects of commodity fetishism in all spheres of capitalist society. Thus, looking for conceptual means to explain a broader range of phenomena in modern everyday life, Lukács brings Max Weber and Georg Simmel into the discussion.

The principle of “formal equality”, on which Lukács builds his theory of reification, is an abstraction from Marx’s commodity-form analysis. The concept of “formal equality” not only helps Lukács to identify an essential feature of the social mediation specific to bourgeois society but also enables him to incorporate the rationalization theory of Weber into his critique of capitalism. Through the increasing rationalization that is peculiar to modern world, Lukács argues, instrumental-rationality is institutionalized in every sphere of life. Parallel to the commodity producing abstract labor, which generates a formal equality between the products so that they can be exchanged, instrumental rationality, too, sets everything into a relationship of formal equality. In order to function smoothly, modern society relies on instrumental rationality to reduce everything to a certain form of objectivity, which can, then, be *calculated*. Therefore, Lukács concludes, not only in the assembly line, but virtually in every sphere of life, where, in Habermas’ words, instrumental rationality colonizes the life-world, the individuals are subjected to an objective scheme of rationalized activity.

The institutionalization of instrumental rationality compels individuals to a *contemplative stance*, because, to use Lukács’ own words, ‘the activity of the agent becomes less and less active’ as the agent acts simply in conformity with the given laws of the particular sphere in which he finds himself. The notion of contemplative stance is the key to understand Lukács’ concept of reification. To explain this point it is necessary to quote Lukács at some length:

The contemplative stance adopted towards a process mechanically conforming to fixed laws and enacted independently of man’s consciousness and impervious to human intervention, i.e. a perfectly closed system, must likewise transform the basic categories of man’s immediate attitude to the world: it reduces space and time to a common denominator and degrades time to the dimension of space [...] Thus time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an ‘exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable ‘things’; it becomes space. (Lukács, *Ibid.*, p. 101)

Already with this thesis the conceptual transition to the philosophical discussion of reification is provided for, which will situate the problem within German Idealism. For here, without trying to conceal it, Lukács introduces the idea that the modern capitalist rationalization distorts even ‘time’, that is, to put it in Kantian terminology, ‘the subjective condition under

²² Hence, Marx does not propose a political strategy against the ills of ‘commodification’ as proposed by critics inspired by the orthodox marxist interpretation, but rather demands the overcoming of this form of individuation process through the constitution of an intersubjective one.



which all our intuitions take place'.²³ In other words, depriving the transcendental Subject of its inward intuition, capitalist society reverses the achievement of Kant's "Copernican Revolution" in philosophy, which gives the primary role in understanding, or more correctly, in constructing the reality, to the knowing Subject.

Before going into Lukács' discussion of the concept of reification in the philosophical part of his essay, it is necessary to take into account a significant problem that arises at this juncture of his argument. The key position, which the notion of contemplative stance attains in Lukács' analysis, reveals how deeply he is influenced by Georg Simmel's inquiry into the modern forms of subjectivity in his book *Philosophy of Money*.²⁴ Written explicitly as a polemic against Marx, Simmel's study is also one of the first works to appreciate the normative content of Marx's analysis of the social mediation in commodity-form.²⁵ According to Simmel's reading, the social mediation inherent in the workings of money economy brings into being an atomistic form of individual freedom that manifests itself as an attitude of *indifference* towards others. This attitude of indifference however, Simmel argues, is first to be understood on purely descriptive terms and for that reason cannot be judged as presumably Marx does, only in negative terms. For Simmel, it is possible to have a more balanced view of the modern form of freedom, if the enabling and empowering qualities generating from the attitude of indifference are taken into consideration. It can be argued that while appropriating Simmel's analysis Lukács rejects this balancing act. For although he doesn't explain why, in Lukács' account the contemplative stance is necessarily the undesirable outcome of capitalist socialization. And yet, Lukács' strictly negative evaluation of the contemplative stance requires a normative standard. Since Lukács identifies Kant's philosophy as a part of the problem of reification, it would be self-defeating for his argument to build his normative critique on the grounds that capitalist society presents a distortion of the capacities of transcendental subject as defined by Kant. Thus, at times Lukács tries to solve this problem of normativity by presenting the contemplative stance as a pathological state, as an outcome of dehumanization brought by capitalism: «The worker's fate is typical of society as a whole in that this self-objectification, this transformation of a human function into a commodity reveals in all its starkness the dehumanized and dehumanizing function of the commodity relation.» (Ibid., p. 104) However, this is a similarly self-defeating argument. As his lengthy discussion in the third part of his essay, which presents his 'orthodox Marxist' critique of reification as an alternative to what he takes to be the problematic account of the humanist notion of alienation makes it clear, Lukács is aware of this problem. There remains only one other option to substantiate Lukács' negative normative judgment of contemplative stance. Lukács tries to pursue this option in his philosophical discussion of reification, where he enters the realm of German Idealism.

Within the scope of this paper it is not possible to give a detailed account of Lukács' engagement with German Idealism. Suffice it to say that in a bold attempt he brings together

²³ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1998), p. 109f.

²⁴ Georg Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes*, [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989] (1900).

²⁵ In fact Simmel does not conceal his concern in writing his study, even though the main opponent Marx's name is mentioned only three times in the text. In Introduction he writes: «Methodologically the basic intention can be expressed in the following manner. The attempt is made to construct a new story beneath historical materialism such that the explanatory value of incorporation of economic life into the causes of intellectual culture is preserved, while these economic forms themselves are recognized as the result of more profound valuations and currents of psychological or even metaphysical pre-conditions.» (Ibid, p. 12) In other words Simmel wants to hold primordial facts against Marx's critique of capitalism based on value-form analysis.



the philosophical agendas of several philosophers, among them primarily Kant, Schiller, Fichte, Hegel and Marx, around a relatively simple thesis. I will conclude this part of the paper by elucidating this thesis and pointing out its unexplored potential.

On most general terms Lukács builds his argument on the fundamental assumption that our attitude towards the world depends upon how we perceive, comprehend and/or grasp (*begreifen*) it. Since our attitude *towards* the world determines how we act *in* the world, the question of perception is of normative value. On this assumption, Lukács begins the second part of his essay with two interdependent claims. First, commenting on Kant’s second preface in his first *Critique*, where he brings forward the metaphor of Copernican Revolution,²⁶ Lukács argues as follows: «Modern philosophy sets itself the following problem: it refuses to accept the world as something that has arisen (or e.g. has been created by God) independently of the knowing subject, and prefers to conceive of it instead as *its own product*» (Ibid, p. 123). The defining feature of Kant’s understanding of subjectivity is a particular understanding of freedom, that is, autonomy. Lukács broadens this conception of freedom to include a notion of self-determination, by highlighting the contribution of the subject in constructing the reality. With the notion of knowledge as ‘product’, here Lukács emphasizes his genuine Marxist and arguably ‘materialist’ concern. Second, a couple of pages later Lukács puts forward a complementary claim: «What is novel about modern rationalism is its increasingly insistent claim that it has discovered the *principle* which connects up all phenomena which in nature and society are found to confront mankind. Compared with this, every previous type of rationalism is no more than a *partial system*.» (ibid, p. 125) To cut a long discussion short, this principle is to be found in the notion of Subject, or to put it more technically in the concept of *Self-Consciousness*. The way we perceive and/or construct the world as well as our attitude towards it depends upon our understanding and construction of this very constituent Subject. Thus, Lukács reformulates the fundamental question of German Idealism: How are we to understand the Subject, so that it does not contradict its definition, namely that it is free? Or to put it in Marxian terms: What are the conditions of existence of individual freedom?

In answering these questions Lukács’ text provides conceptual resources for an alternative understanding of reification, which he does not pursue himself. In order to distinguish this alternative better, it is necessary to challenge the apparent linearity of Lukács’ account of German Idealism. For though it may seem that here Lukács is simply mapping the philosophical path leading to Marx, he actually draws different conceptual resources from different philosophical systems within German Idealism. This explains the central role given to Fichte as opposed the marginal role of Hegel in his subject-theoretical attempt to substantiate his negative normative judgment of contemplative stance. Since it is the definition of the Subject and its normative horizon that determines the ultimate definition of reification as a state that *ought* to be overcome, the central role attached to Fichte is crucial.

Lukács’ reliance on Fichte is, if partly, the result of his zealous attempt to situate Marx in German Idealist tradition. It can also be seen as a backlash of his romantic anti-capitalism.²⁷ In any case, Lukács in this part of his essay draws mainly on an earlier text of Marx rather than on the section on ‘commodity fetishism’ in *Capital*, from which, as we saw, he originally derives his concept of reification. In the first thesis on Feuerbach, young Marx coins the concept of Praxis. Lukács brings this concept in a fruitful exchange with Fichte’s ‘Subject of Action’ and concludes that at the moment the subject-object of history, that is, the

²⁶ See Kant, *Ibid*, p. 15-40.

²⁷ On this point see the detailed analysis of Michael Löwy, *From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, (London: NLB, 1979).



proletariat becomes conscious of its constituting force, the conditions of existence of individual freedom will be established.

The eschatological tone of such an account is deeply problematic and has been criticized by many others. The same account can also be criticized for its political implications, for it brings with it a series of questions that remain relevant for a certain tradition of Marxist politics. To name a few: What is the difference between a Jacobin “We” and a Fichtean-Proletarian Subject? Can the self-consciousness of the proletariat be delegated? Who decides when the proletariat is mature for a revolution? And finally, how do we know, whether the proletariat has reached to self-consciousness, if our answer is not simply to say that the proof of pudding is in eating it? All these questions refer to a normative deficit in Lukács’ account, despite his attempt to provide for a powerful normative critique of capitalism. If this is the case, then it is Lukács’ definition of reification that needs to be criticized. For it is this definition, which is responsible for the normative deficit in question.

To put it simply, with his definition of reification, Lukács targets a *state* of a Subject, which is to be exchanged with another state. The active *Subject* is the proper Subject, since it is capable of keeping in control of the reality that it posits, whereas the contemplative stance lacks this capacity and *therefore* ends up with a reified reality beyond its reach. Understood in these terms, reification turns out to be the loss of a fantasy of omnipotence. This state of omnipotence, however, is arguably itself a reified state. For this fantasy defies any mediation between subject and object, positing an immediate identity between the two. In other places, however, Lukács seems to point to a different understanding, particularly when he gives a more Hegelian account of the superceding (*Aufhebung*) of reification. Thus, for instance, despite the fact that Lukács still reads Hegel through the lenses of Fichte and consequently assigns a crucial role to the master and slave dialectics, at certain points in his account, he seems to suggest that the overcoming of reification is possible through a form of social mediation, which would constitute the subjects as constituents of the reality that they take part in. This social mediation involves a reflective self-consciousness that requires an intersubjective relationship through the construction of a plural identity, a ‘We’ that would not undermine the individual differences of its members. Lukács refers not only to Fichte, but also repeatedly to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in support of this argument and specifically to the transition from the chapter on ‘Force and Understanding’, where the ahistorical and monological conceptualization of the subject is criticized, to the chapter on ‘Self-consciousness’.²⁸ Thus Lukács sets the problem as that of finding the appropriate Subject that would strip off the limitations put on the monological Subject. Because of his essentially Fichtean approach, however, he puts his emphasis on how this appropriate Subject would overcome the separation between subject and object, instead of clarifying the intersubjective mediation required for this overcoming. Thus bringing Hegel and Fichte together in one paragraph Lukács writes:

Here in our newly-won knowledge where, as Hegel puts it in the *Phenomenology*, «the true becomes a Bacchantic orgy in which no one escapes being drunk», reason seems to have lifted the veil concealing the sacred mystery [...] and discovers [...] that it is itself the solution to the riddle. But here, we find [...] the decisive problem of this line of thought: **the problem of the subject of the action, the subject of the genesis**. For the unity of subject and object, of thought and existence, which the ‘action’ undertook to prove and to exhibit, finds both its fulfillment and its substratum in the unity of the genesis of the determinants of thought and of the history of the evolution of reality. But to comprehend this unity it is necessary both to discover the site

²⁸ Compare Lukács, *ibid.*, p.157f, 161f., 191f., 211f.



from which to resolve all these problems and also to exhibit **concretely** the ‘we’ which is the subject of history, that ‘we’ whose action is in fact history. (Ibid, p. 161)

Lukács refers above first to Hegel in pointing out the significance of the conceptualization of self-consciousness in realizing what he deems to be the radical freedom of subject. Instead of following Hegel’s definition of self-consciousness that presupposes an intersubjective mediation between subjects, however, he turns to Fichte and defines the essential feature of a free subjectivity with the notion of ‘Subject of Action’. And yet, he reintroduces the Hegelian perspective to account for the historical genesis of the ‘Subject of Action’. This historical subject, ‘we’, is the ‘proletariat as a class’. Again referring to Hegel, Lukács writes:

The individual can never become the measure of all things. For, when the individual confronts objective reality he is faced by a complex of ready-made and unalterable objects which allow him only the subjective responses of recognition or rejection. Only the class can relate to the whole of reality in a practical revolutionary way. (The ‘species’ cannot do this as it is no more than an individual that has been mythologized and stylized in a spirit of contemplation) (Ibid., p. 211).

As Hegel argues, and Lukács agrees, a plural identity, a ‘we’, cannot be constituted in reference to a pre-given nature of the ‘species’, or in reference to human nature. The revolutionary subject that will overcome the division between subject and object, has to come into being through a process of social and historical mediation. Instead of reflecting upon the process of this mediation, the necessity of which is thus grounded in his theory of reification, Lukács chooses, however, to focus on the *capacity* of this revolutionary subject to appropriate the reality. As a result both reification and its overcoming are presented as *states* of a singular and/or a plural subject rather than referring to the process of its constitution in and through social and historical relations. Thus instead of following Hegel’s perspective and Marx’s analysis of commodity and critique of commodity fetishism in defining the mode of social mediation that would overcome the atomistic subjectivity of individuals living in capitalist society, Lukács puts his hopes in a surrogate of a plural ‘Identity’, that is, a revolutionary party that has to play the role of a ‘Subject of Action’. Lukács does not clarify what form of individuation process has to replace the reified social relations. Thus, at the end of his essay, in his response to the question of how to organize the proletariat to constitute it as the subject-object of history, Lukács ends up with no choice other than to quote Engels affirmatively: «The proof of the pudding is in the eating [...] This pudding, however, is the making of the proletariat into a class: the process by which its class consciousness becomes real in practice» (ibid, p. 217). With this turn taken, Lukács’ concept of reification fails to capture the essence of Marx’s normative critique of capitalism, to which we now turn.

III

The first chapter of *Capital* gives a very tightly knit account of how we are to understand the commodity as the most abstract category and commodity-form as the most elementary form of capitalist relations of production.²⁹ As Marx argues, the key to understanding this abstract

²⁹ Marx points to the centrality of the first chapter in *Preface to the first edition of Capital* as follows: «The value-form, whose fully developed shape is the money-form, is very elementary and simple. Nevertheless, the human mind has for more than 2,000 years sought in vain to get to the bottom of it all, whilst on the other hand, to the successful analysis of much more composite and complex forms,



category lies in its *form*, that is, in the form of social mediation, which transforms labor into *Value* (MEW 23, p. 94f.). Marx begins his analysis with an individual commodity, then moves on to the analysis of a relation initially between two commodities, which gives way to an analysis of the *world of commodities*. Two difficulties arise in interpreting this chapter, if Marx's method of exposition is not taken into consideration.

First, in Marx's account there is an apparent inconsistency with respect to what constitutes value. For Marx suggests that value-creating labor is both an abstract energy quantum and *abstract labor*, understood as a product of the social mediation necessary in order to produce commodities. Second, it becomes extremely difficult to make sense of Marx's very detailed expository conceptual account that move from a single commodity to the world of commodities. With respect to the second point, many commentators find refuge in Marx's statement at the very beginning of his analysis of the commodity-form. Since in the beginning of this section Marx claims to have already solved the riddle of commodity-form, the remaining fifteen pages that constitute the value-form analysis is frequently ignored by the readers of Marx.³⁰ I suggest that a reading which draws a parallel between this chapter and the chapters of 'Perception' and 'Force and Understanding' of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* solves these difficulties.

The explanatory power of such a reading can be summarized as follows. First, through this reading it is possible to track Marx's methodological interest in his exposition (*Darstellung*) and account the seeming inconsistencies in his discussion. In the first expository step of this chapter, a single commodity, as a *thing*, is presented as the object of analysis, whereas in the value-form analysis that follows this account a *rational-relation* is at stake. Marx searches, I argue, for the adequate model of knowledge to comprehend and fully develop the object of his analysis. In doing so, Marx, just like what Hegel does, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ascribes the inconsistencies and contradictions within his exposition to the insufficiencies of the models of knowledge. Understood in this way, the insufficiency of the first model is superceded in the second model. This is why, for instance, the first definition of *value-creating labor* as energy quantum differs from the second definition of *abstract labor* as product of social relations. For this second definition follows from the first definition's insufficient understanding of the abstractness of labor.

Second, when read through the lenses of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, it becomes possible to discern the substantive content of the expository development of the object of analysis in *Capital* from a single commodity to the world of commodities. Marx conceptualizes the first, empirical object of his analysis as a *thing* with *special qualities*, that is, both as a thing to be consumed and as a thing of value. In doing so, he defines 'commodity' in terms of the object of Hegel's chapter, 'Perception'. The insufficiency in conceptualizing this thing with its double nature is superceded by the consideration of a *relation* between commodities, which can only be the object of a *rational* conceptualization.

there has been at least an approximation. Why? Because the body, as an organic whole, is easier to study than are the cells of that body. In the analysis of economic forms, moreover, neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of use. The force of abstraction must replace both. But in bourgeois society, the commodity-form of the product of labour — or value-form of the commodity — is the economic cell-form. To the superficial observer, the analysis of these forms seems to turn upon minutiae. It does in fact deal with minutiae, but they are of the same order as those dealt with in microscopic anatomy». (MEW 23, p. 12)

³⁰ See among many such interpretations Ernst Michael Lange's otherwise insightful commentary.

Ernst Michael Lange, "Wertformanalyse, Geldkritik und die Konstruktion des Fetischismus bei Marx" in *Neue Hefte für Philosophie*, Heft 13, p. 1-46.



Following the Hegelian discussion of ‘Force and Understanding,’ Marx characterizes commodities in this relation as realizations of an immaterial *force*, so that they attain a phenomenal existence, which is a “form”. It is only after establishing this that Marx begins to analyze the *commodity-form*. Parallel to Hegel’s model of knowledge in “Force and Understanding”, the relation among commodities imprints them with their *value-form*, and embodies a law, *law of value*, which regulates the world of commodities.³¹ This world presupposes its *inverted* image, the world of human beings, who exchange commodities in order to make use of their material, not *phenomenal*, qualities. The mediation between these two worlds constitutes the social relation called *capital* in the proceeding chapters.

Most importantly drawing this parallel between the opening chapters of *Capital* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* makes it possible to account for the normative core of Marx’s critique of capitalism. Within the scope of this paper, it is impossible to fully present the detailed interpretative analysis, which is necessary to substantiate this point. With this in mind, in my concluding remarks, I will limit my discussion to providing a brief account of the conclusions drawn from such an analysis.

In both Hegel’s account of *force* and Marx’s analysis of *commodity-form* a distinct form of subject-relation is thematized. The normative standard of Marx’s critique of capitalism is contained within the critique of this form of subject-relation. In the analysis of *value-form* Marx describes a social mediation, a society, which is based on a radically individualistic, atomized form of subjectivity. This is not just a descriptive account that denotes, say, the *indifference* of Subjects against each other. Marx, following Hegel’s account of *force*, describes a world of *monads* as proposed by Leibniz. Both for Hegel and Marx the form of Subjectivity described by Leibniz entails an understanding of freedom and individuality that is contradictory within itself. A monadological conception of freedom is deficient because it proves to be a fully determined relation of necessity between subjects as the monadic individuality gives way to an abstract universal form of equality, which obliterates all forms of difference. In Marx’s analysis of *value-form*, the detailed exposition of this deficient form of Subjectivity – deficient, because the self-reflection of commodities presuppose an absolute Subject (i.e. Money), which annihilates the subject status of commodities – contains, at the same time, its immanent, *determinant negation*, that is, the proper form of subjectivity. This proper form of subjectivity and the conception of freedom and individuality that lie at its core can be defined as a true, non-deficient, relationship of intersubjectivity. In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel defines this reciprocal relationship of intersubjectivity with the help of dialectics of recognition. In modeling capitalist mode of social mediation after a dialectical relation that necessarily leads to the dialectic of recognition, Marx sets the standard of his normative critique of capitalism as recognition.

This briefly sketched alternative reading of the opening arguments of *Capital*, thus, contributes to a better understanding of Marx’s normative critique of capitalism. It also enables us to rethink Lukács’ concept of reification along the lines argued by Marcuse and Honneth. Both Hegel in his chapter ‘Force and Understanding’ in the *Phenomenology*, and Marx in his analysis of commodity-form, provide a critique of a *reified* social world based on a specific social mediation. They both emphasize that the reality perceived by a Leibnizian monad-Subject, which is the outcome of such a deficient mediation, is a reality beyond the control of the subject by definition. Because, Hegel and Marx argue, insofar as the monad-Subject claims to appropriate the reality as its own, it has to posit it independently of any historically definite social practice, that is, as a reified thing in itself. Thus, the reality attains a

³¹ The parallel concept Hegel uses at this juncture is “ruhiges Reich der Gesetze”, ‘tranquil kingdom of laws’. See Hegel *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag 1988), p. 111.



detached quality, and becomes a power over the monad-Subject rendering its relation to other subjects inessential. For, the monad-Subject acquires its individuality / Identity through the mediation of an omnipotent reality, namely through God. In capitalist society, Marx argues, the constituents of society are imprisoned in such a form of individuality. The social relation among atomized individuals can be characterized by an attitude of *indifference*, for their individuality / identity is *given* through the mediation of an omnipotent subject, i.e. money. In this sense, this social mediation criticized by Marx can be called **reification** proper. This implies that the revolutionary praxis against reification *is* to reject all social relations that succumb to a deficient mode of intersubjectivity.

For the revolutionary praxis, then, the dialectics of recognition, which expresses the ideal relationship of intersubjectivity, serves as the norm for a free individuality. In other words, all social mediations that fail to adhere to the normative ideal of recognition are reified. Understood as such, this revised conception of reification retains the revolutionary impetus of Lukács' criticism of capitalism, while, at the same time, providing a critical standpoint for the constitution of a new society, in which in Hegel's words «the unity of the different independent self-consciousness which, in their opposition enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We' that is 'I'» (Ibid., p.127) is possible.

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