Reification: A Recognition-Theoretical View

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All reification is a forgetting.
MAX HORKHEIMER AND THEODOR W. ADORNO,
Dialectic of Enlightenment

Knowledge is in the end based on acknowledgment.
LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *On Certainty*

INTRODUCTION

In the German-speaking world of the 1920s and 1930s, the concept of "reification" constituted a leitmotiv of social and cultural critique. As if refracted through a concave mirror, the historical experiences of rising unemployment and economic crises that gave the Weimar Republic its distinctive character seemed to find concentrated expression in this concept and its related notions. Social relationships increasingly reflected a climate of cold, calculating purposefulness; artisans' loving care for their creations appeared to have given way to an attitude of mere instrumental command; and even the subject's innermost experiences seemed to be infused with the icy breath of calculating compliance. An intellectually committed philosopher's presence of mind was needed, however, before such diffuse moods could be distilled into the concept of "reification." It was Georg Lukács who, by boldly combining motifs from the works of Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel, succeeded in

coining this key concept in a collection of essays published in 1925 and entitled History and Class Consciousness.1 In the center of this volume so fueled by the hope of an impending revolution is a three-part treatise on "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat."2 This work moved an entire generation of philosophers and sociologists to analyze the forms of life under the then prevailing circumstances as being the result of social reification.3

After World War II, however, the primacy of the category of "reification" as a diagnosis of prevailing circumstances was lost. As if the horror of the Holocaust had crippled any speculative tendency toward hyperbolic social diagnostics, social theorists and philosophers were instead content to analyze deficits of democracy and justice, without making use of concepts referring to social pathologies such as "reification" or "commercialization." Although these notions lived on in the writings of the Frankfurter School—especially in the works of Adorno—and despite the fact that the memory of Lukács's work flared up once again in the student movements of the late 1960s,4 the project of an analysis of reification seemed to have become part of a bygone era. Merely mentioning the term "reification" might even have been taken as a symptom of obstinately desiring to belong to a cultural epoch that had long since lost its legitimacy in the wake of the postwar era, with its own cultural reforms and theoretical renewals.

Only now do there appear to be an increasing number of signs that this situation could be changing once again. Like a philosophically unprocessed nugget, the category of "reification" has reemerged from the immense depths of the Weimar Republic and retaken center-stage in theoretical discourse. There are three, if not four, indicators that lend support to this speculation that the climate in the world of contemporary social diagnostics is changing. First of all, and quite banally, one can point to a number of recent novels and narratives that radiate an

1. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), translated by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971).

2. Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. 83–222.

3. Cf. Martin Jay, "Georg Lukács and the Origins of the Western Marxist Paradigma," in Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), ch. 2; Andrew Arato and Paul Breines, *The Young Lukács and the Origins of Western Marxism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979).

4. Cf. Furio Cerutti et al., *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein heute: Diskussion und Dokumentation,* Schwarze Reihe No. 12 (Amsterdam: Verlag de Munter, 1971); Jutta Matzner (ed.), *Lehrstück Lukács* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1974).

aesthetic aura of the creeping commercialization of our everyday life. By using particular kinds of stylistic devices or drawing upon certain specific lexica, these literary works suggest that we view the inhabitants of our social world as interacting with themselves and others as they would with lifeless objects—without a trace of inner sentiment or any attempt at understanding the other's point of view. The list of authors to be mentioned in this context encompasses American writers such as Raymond Carver and Harold Brodkey, the *enfant terrible* of French literature Michel Houllebecq, and German-speaking literary figures such as Elfriede Jelinek and Silke Scheuermann.[5] Whereas in these literary works the concept of reification is present solely as an atmospheric mood, in recent sociological analysis it has come to be studied as a modified form of human behavior. There are innumerable investigations in the domain of cultural sociology or social psychology that have discerned an increasingly strong tendency on the part of subjects to feign certain feelings or desires for opportunistic reasons, until they eventually come to experience these very same feelings and desires as genuine elements of their own personality.[6] This is a form of emotional self-manipulation that Lukács already had in mind when he described journalism as being a "prostitution" of "experiences and beliefs,"[7] regarding it as the "apogee" of social reification.

Of course, in these diagnoses of a tendency to manage one's feelings, the concept of "reification" appears as inexplicitly as it does in most of those pieces of literature that create an atmosphere of cold rationality and manipulation. But this is in no way true of a third category of text that documents a return of the thematic of reification. Within the sphere of ethics and moral philosophy, there have been a number of recent endeavors to get a theoretical grasp on the kind of social phenomena that had clearly confronted Lukács in the course of his analysis. The

5. Raymond Carver, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992); Harold Brodkey, "Innocence," in *Stories in an Almost Classical Mode* (New York: Vintage, 1989); Michel Houllebecq, *Extension du Domaine de Lutte* (Paris: J'ai Lu, 1999); Elfriede Jelinek, *The Piano Teacher* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2002); Silke Scheuermann, *Reiche Mädchen: Erzählungen* (Frankfurt/Main: Schöffling und Co., 2005). In all these literary works, however, the perception of instances of "reification" is bound up with the observation of phenomena of alienation. Rahel Jaeggi has made an excellent attempt at reconstructing this concept of "alienation"—which, like "reification," also stems from the Marxist tradition—in her recent work *Entfremdung: Zur Aktualität eines sozialphilosophischen Problems* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005).

6. Arlie Russel Hochschild's study has become a classic: *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

7. Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," p. 100.

concept of "reification" is here often explicitly used without any reference to the text from which the term originates. For instance, Martha Nussbaum explicitly uses the term "objectification" to characterize particularly extreme forms in which individuals instrumentalize others.[8] To take another example, although Elisabeth Anderson abstains from explicitly using the concept of reification, her description of the economic alienation of contemporary life certainly touches on comparable phenomena.[9] In these ethical contexts, "reification" is used in a decidedly normative sense; it signifies a type of human behavior that violates moral or ethical principles by not treating other subjects in accordance with their characteristics as human beings, but instead as numb and lifeless objects—as "things" or "commodities." The empirical phenomena thereby referred to encompass tendencies as disparate as the increasing demand for surrogate mothers, the commodification of romantic and familial relationships, and the boom in the sex industry.[10]

Finally, a fourth context can be discerned in which the category of reification is once again being used to conceptualize certain striking developments in contemporary social life. Surrounding the current discussions concerning the results and social implications of brain research, it has often been remarked that the strictly physio-biological approach employed in this sphere betrays a reifying perspective. The argument goes that by presuming to explain human feelings and actions through the mere analysis of neuron firings in the brain, this approach abstracts from all our experience in the lifeworld, thereby treating humans as senseless automatons and thus ultimately as mere things. Just as in the ethical approaches described, this critique draws upon the concept of reification in order to characterize a violation of moral principles: the fact that the neuro-physiological perspective apparently does not take humans' personal characteristics and perspectives into account is thus conceptualized as an instance of "reification."[11] In both contexts, there-

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8. Martha Nussbaum, "Objectification," in *Sex and Social Justice* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch. 8.

9. Elisabeth Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993). Cf. especially chapters 7 and 8.

10. Stephan Wilkinson, *Bodies for Sale: Ethics and Exploitation in the Human Body Trade* (London: Routledge, 2003). See also Rahel Jaeggi's survey "Der Markt und sein Preis," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 47, no. 6 (1999): 987–1004.

11. This is the direction taken by Andreas Kuhlmann in his article "Menschen im Begabungstest: Mutmaßungen über Hirnforschung als soziale Praxis," in *WestEnd: Neue Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 1, no. 1 (2004): 143–53.

fore, the ontological connotations contained in this concept's allusion to mere things play a secondary, marginal role. It is thus not because a certain form of "reifying" behavior violates ontological presuppositions of our everyday activity that it is regarded as being questionable or mistaken, but because it violates certain of our moral principles. By contrast, Lukács still assumed that he could carry out his analysis without making any reference to ethical tenets. He took the concept of "reification" literally, in that he assumed it possible to characterize a certain kind of social behavior as being mistaken solely because it does not correspond with certain ontological facts.

Although Lukács abstains entirely from the use of moral terminology, his analysis of reification is obviously not without normative content. After all, his mere use of the concept of "reification" betrays his assumption that the phenomena he describes are in fact deviations from a "genuine" or "proper" stance toward the world. It also appears self-evident to Lukács that his readers will agree with him when he argues for the historical necessity of revolutionizing the existing social circumstances. Yet he deploys these implicit judgments at a theoretical level that is one step below the argumentative level upon which he formulates and justifies his corresponding evaluations. For Lukács does not regard reification as a violation of moral principles but as a deviation from a kind of human praxis or worldview essentially characteristic of the rationality of our form of life.[12] The arguments he directs at the capitalist reification of social life possess only an indirectly normative character, in that they result from the descriptive elements of a social ontology or philosophical anthropology that endeavors to comprehend the foundations of our existence. In this sense, Lukács's analysis can be said to deliver a social-ontological explanation of a certain pathology found in our life practices.[13] It is, however, in no way certain whether *we today* may

12. Charles Taylor has undertaken this kind of "deeper" form of criticism—which I have here named "social-ontological"—in his essay "Explanation and Practical Reason," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 34–60. For a summary of the problematic, see my essay "Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy," in David M. Rasmussen (ed.), *The Handbook of Critical Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 369–99. The only recent attempt at a "social-ontological," though speech-analytically oriented, rehabilitation of the concept of reification has been carried out by Christoph Demmerling in his *Sprache und Verdinglichung: Wittgenstein, Adorno und das Projekt der kritischen Theorie* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1994).

13. Axel Honneth, "Eine soziale Pathologie der Vernunft: Zur intellektuellen Erbschaft der Kritischen Theorie," in Christoph Halbig and Michael Quante (eds.), *Axel Honneth: Sozialphilosophie zwischen Kritik und Anerkennung* (Münster: LIT, 2004), pp. 9–32.

speak in such a way, whether *we* can justify objections to a certain form of life with reference to social-ontological insights. Indeed, it is not even clear whether, in the light of the exacting demands that present societies currently place on strategic and cold-calculating activity, we can use the concept of "reification" at all to express an internally coherent thought.

1. Reification in the Works of Lukács

In order to settle the question of whether the concept of "reification" still retains any value today, we should orient ourselves first of all on Lukács's classical analysis. However, we will quickly see that his own categorial means are insufficient for the task of appropriately conceptualizing the occurrences that he grasps in a phenomenologically more or less accurate way. Lukács keeps very close to the ontologizing everyday understanding of the concept of "reification" in asserting with Marx on the very first page of his treatise that reification signifies nothing but the fact that "a relation between people has taken on the character of a thing."[14] In this elementary form, the concept clearly designates a cognitive occurrence in which something that does not possess thing-like characteristics in itself (e.g., something human) comes to be regarded as a thing. At first, it is not clear whether Lukács holds reification to be a mere epistemic category-mistake, a morally objectionable act, or an entirely distorted form of praxis. After only a few sentences, however, it becomes clear that he must have more than a category-mistake in mind, because the occurrence of reification takes on a multilayered quality and stability that cannot be put down to mere cognitive error.

The social cause to which Lukács attributes the increasing dissemination and the constancy of reification is the expansion of commodity exchange, which, with the establishment of capitalist society, has become the prevailing mode of intersubjective agency. As soon as social agents begin to relate to each other primarily via the exchange of equivalent commodities, they will be compelled to place themselves in a reifying relationship with their surroundings, for they can then no longer avoid perceiving the elements of a given situation solely in relation to the utility that these elements might have for their egocentric calculations. This shift of perspective leads in many different directions, which for Lukács constitute just as many forms of reification. Subjects in commodity ex-

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14. Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," p. 83; cf. Rüdiger Dannemann's comprehensive study on Lukács's concept of reification, entitled *Das Prinzip Verdinglichung: Studie zur Philosophie Georg Lukács* (Frankfurt/Main: Sendler, 1987).

change are mutually urged (a) to perceive given objects solely as "things" that one can potentially make a profit on, (b) to regard each other solely as "objects" of profitable transactions, and finally (c) to regard their own abilities as nothing but supplemental "resources" in the calculation of profit opportunities. Lukács subsumes all these changes in the person's stance toward the objective world, society, and himself or herself under the concept of "reification," without taking the many nuances and diversities among these attitudes into account. He designates the quantitative appraisal of objects, the instrumental treatment of other persons, and the perception of one's own bundle of talents and needs from the perspective of profitability as all being "thing-like." Furthermore, diverse modes of behavior ranging from stubborn egoism and detachment to primarily economic interests all come together in the attitude defined by Lukács as being "reifying."

Lukács, however, intends to do much more in his analysis than merely provide a phenomenology of the changes of consciousness demanded of people in the process of commodity exchange. Although he at first directs his gaze almost exclusively at the phenomena described by Marx as being indicative of "commodity fetishism,"[15] he begins after a few pages to emancipate himself from a narrow focus on the economic sphere by extending the concept of reification and its various associated forms of coercion to cover the entirety of capitalist social life. It is not clear from the text how this social generalization theoretically occurs, because Lukács seems to oscillate between alternative strategies of explanation. On the one hand, he presents a functionalist argument according to which the purpose of capitalist expansion requires the assimilation of all patterns of activity to commodity exchange;[16] yet on the other hand, he asserts with Max Weber that the process of rationalization autonomously leads to an expansion of instrumental-rational behavior into social spheres in which traditional modes of behavior previously prevailed.[17] Yet however problematic his rationale for this generalizing process may be, it ultimately aids Lukács in arriving at the central proposition of his study: in capitalism, reification has come to constitute

15. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 163ff. For the connection between the analysis of fetishism and the critique of reification, cf. Georg Lohmann, *Indifferenz und Gesellschaft: Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit Marx* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), especially chapter 5.

16. Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," p. 95.

17. Ibid., p. 101f.

human beings' "second nature."[18] He thereby asserts that every subject involved in the capitalist form of life will necessarily acquire the habit of perceiving itself and the surrounding world as mere things and objects.

Before I can further pursue the question of what type of mistake reification constitutes, it is necessary to depict the next step in Lukács's analysis. As we have seen, until now he has applied the concept of "things" or "thingness" quite carelessly to every sort of phenomenon that a subject could possibly perceive in its surroundings, or in its own person, as an economically utilizable factor. Regardless of whether objects, other persons, or one's own talents and feelings are at issue, Lukács maintains that all these are experienced as thing-like objects as soon as they come to be viewed according to their potential usefulness in economic transactions. But, of course, this conceptual strategy is insufficient for the task of justifying the idea of "reification" as a "second nature," for when we speak of a second nature, we are dealing not only with economic occurrences, but with all dimensions of social activity. How can one explain what reification means outside of the sphere of commodity exchange, if this concept solely denotes an occurrence in which all elements of a social situation are redefined as economically calculable factors?

Interestingly enough, Lukács himself seems to have seen this problem, for he shifts direction in his conceptual approach relatively early in the course of his analysis. Instead of primarily attending to the changes brought about by the process of reification in the objects that a subject perceives, he shifts his gaze toward the transformations occurring in the subject's own style of acting. He asserts that it is also in the "behavior" of the subject itself that commodity exchange causes certain changes, which ultimately affect that subject's entire relation to the surrounding world. For as soon as an agent permanently takes up the role of an exchange partner, it becomes a "contemplative," "detached observer," "while its own existence is reduced to an isolated particle and fed into an alien system."[19] With this conceptual shift of perspective, the concepts of "contemplation" and "detachment" become essential to the explanation of what takes place in the modus of reification at the level of social agency. Here the subject is no longer empathetically engaged in interaction with its surroundings but is instead placed in the perspective of a neutral observer, psychically and existentially untouched by its sur-

18. Ibid., p. 86.
19. Ibid., p. 90.

roundings. The concept of "contemplation" thus indicates not so much an attitude of theoretical immersion or concentration as it does a stance of indulgent, passive observation, while "detachment" signifies that an agent is no longer emotionally affected by the events in its surroundings, instead letting them go by without any inner involvement, merely observing their passing.

It is quite clear that this conceptual strategy provides a more appropriate basis for explaining what might be meant by the notion that for human beings "reification" has come to constitute a "second nature." Although a few theoretical steps still seem to be lacking for a complete explication, the fundamental idea can certainly be summarized in the following fashion. In the constantly expanding sphere of commodity exchange, subjects are compelled to behave as detached observers, rather than as active participants in social life, because their reciprocal calculation of the benefits that others might yield for their own profit demands a purely rational and emotionless stance. At the same time, this shift of perspective is accompanied by a "reifying" perception of *all* relevant situational elements, since the objects to be exchanged, the exchanging partners, and finally one's own personal talents may be appraised only in accordance with how their quantitative characteristics might make them useful for the pursuit of profit. This kind of attitude becomes "second nature" when it develops through corresponding processes of socialization into such a fixed habit that it comes to determine individual behavior across the entire spectrum of everyday life. Under these conditions, subjects also begin to perceive their surroundings as mere thing-like givens, even when they are not immediately involved in the process of commodity exchange. Lukács consequently understands "reification" to be a habit of mere contemplation and observation, in which one's natural surroundings, social environment, and personal characteristics come to be apprehended in a merely detached and emotionless manner—in short, as things.

With this short reconstruction of Lukács's analysis, we have at least indirectly defined what kind of mistake or failure *cannot* be denoted by reification. As we have already seen, such a distorting perspective does not designate a mere epistemic category mistake. This is not only because reification constitutes a multilayered and stable syndrome of distorted consciousness but also because this shift in attitude reaches far too deep into our habits and modes of behavior for it to be able to be simply reversed by making a corresponding cognitive correction.

According to Lukács, reification constitutes a distorting "stance"[20] or mode of behavior that is so widespread in capitalist societies that it can be described as "second nature." As a result, reification for Lukács can be conceived neither as a kind of moral misconduct nor as a violation of moral principles, for it lacks the element of subjective intent necessary to bring moral terminology into play. Unlike Martha Nussbaum, Lukács is not interested in determining the point at which the reification of other persons becomes a morally reproachable act.[21] Instead, he sees all members of capitalist society as being socialized in the same manner into a reifying system of behavior, so that the instrumental treatment of others initially represents a mere social fact, and not a moral wrong.

By discussing what Lukács cannot mean by reification, it is starting to become clearer how he does in fact intend for this key concept to be understood. If reification constitutes neither a mere epistemic category mistake nor a form of moral misconduct, the only remaining possibility is that it be conceived as a form of praxis that is *structurally* false. The detached, neutrally observing mode of behavior, which Lukács attempts to conceptualize as "reification," must form an ensemble of habits and attitudes that deviates from a more genuine or better form of human praxis. This way of formulating the issue makes it clear that this conception of reification is in no way free of all normative implications. Although we are not dealing with a simple violation of moral principles, we are indeed confronted with the much more difficult task of demonstrating the existence of a "true" or "genuine" praxis over and against its distorted or atrophied form. The normative precepts reinforcing Lukács's analysis do not consist in a sum of morally legitimate principles but in a notion of proper human praxis. This kind of notion, however, draws its justification much more strongly from social ontology or philosophical anthropology than from the sphere customarily termed moral philosophy or ethics.[22]

Now, it would not be correct to say that Lukács was not aware of this normative challenge. Although he possesses a strong tendency to polemicize with G. W. F. Hegel against the idea of abstract moral duties, he knows very well that his talk of a reifying praxis or "stance" must be justified by a notion of true human praxis. It is for this reason

20. Ibid., p. 89.

21. Cf. Nussbaum, "Objectification."

22. For a treatment of the problems, see my essay "Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy."

that he intersperses throughout the text indications of what a practical human relation to the world *not* affected by the coercion of reification might look like. For instance, an active subject must be conceived as experiencing the world directly or in an unmediated [*miterlebend*] way,[23] as an "organic part of his personality,"[24] and as "cooperative," while objects can be experienced by the active subject as being "qualitatively unique,"[25] "essential,"[26] and particular in content. Yet these anthropologically thoroughly plausible passages stand in an odd contrast to the statements in which Lukács, drawing on Hegel and J. G. Fichte, attempts to summarize his vision of "true" human praxis. Here he maintains that we can speak of undistorted human agency only in cases where an object can be thought of as the product of a subject and where mind and world therefore ultimately coincide with one another.[27] As these passages demonstrate, the conception of "agency" employed in Lukács's critique of reification is decisively influenced by an identity philosophy similar to the one found in Fichte's notion of the mind's spontaneous activity.[28] There can be no doubt nowadays, however, that by grounding his critique of reification in this way he has robbed it of any chance of social-theoretical justification.[29]

Yet beneath these official, idealistic statements, there are also places in the text where Lukács expresses himself much more moderately. For example, he asserts that genuine, "true" praxis possesses precisely the same characteristics of empathetic engagement and interestedness that have been destroyed by the expansion of commodity exchange. Here Lukács does not contrast reifying praxis with a collective subject's production of an object but with another, intersubjective attitude on the part of the subject. It is with this trace found in Lukács's text that my following considerations will deal. I will now turn to the question of whether it makes sense to reactualize the concept of "reification" in such

23. Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," p. 97.

24. Ibid., p. 100.

25. Ibid., p. 126.

26. Ibid., p. 129.

27. Ibid., pp. 123, 141–42.

28. Fred Neuhouser, *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); for a treatment of Lukács's dependence on Fichte's notion of self-producing activity, cf. Michael Löwy, *Georg Lukács: From Romanticism to Bolshevism,* translated by Patrick Camiller (London: NLB, 1979), ch. 2.

29. Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, translated by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), p. 359.

a way that it can be understood as an atrophied or distorted form of a more primordial and genuine form of praxis, in which humans take up an empathetic and engaged relationship toward themselves and their surroundings.

Still standing in the way of such an act of rehabilitation, however, is a set of obstacles, which are connected with certain problems in Lukács's treatise that we have not yet dealt with. What makes Lukács's approach so questionable is not only his "official" strategy of using as his normative point of orientation a concept of praxis in which all objectivity is quite idealistically regarded as emerging from the subjective activity of the species. Just as problematic is his social-theoretical assertion that commodity exchange forms the sole cause of this behavioral transformation that gradually penetrates into all spheres of modern social life. The Marxist premise remains untouched: involvement in economic exchange processes is assumed to have such a profound significance for individuals that it engenders a permanent change, or even a total disruption, of their entire set of relations toward themselves and the world. Furthermore, the question arises in this connection whether Lukács has not gravely underestimated the extent to which highly developed societies require—for reasons of efficiency—that their members learn to deal strategically with themselves and others. If that is indeed true, then a critique of reification should not be as totalizing as Lukács conceives it, but would instead have to exclude spheres of social life in which this kind of observing, detached behavior has a perfectly legitimate place.[30] In what follows, it is not my intention to deal with all these ambiguities and problems systematically and one by one; instead I hope that by reformulating Lukács's concept of reification in an action-theoretical approach, I can prepare the ground for a perspective from which these unsettled questions lose their dramatic character and instead prompt some illuminating speculations.

2. From Lukács to Heidegger and Dewey

We have already seen that in developing his critique of reification Lukács implicitly offers two opposed alternatives for explaining his recourse to a "true," undistorted form of human praxis. In the "official" version, it seems as if he intends to criticize the reifying practices that have become "second nature" by judging them against the ideal of a comprehensive

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30. This is the strategy that Habermas pursues in reviving the critique of reification in *Theory of Communicative Action,* vol. 2, translated by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), chs. 6 and 8.

form of praxis, in which all of reality is ultimately engendered by the productive activity of the species. Apart from the fact that it is based on idealist premises, this first model is bound to fail because of its assertion that the existence of every kind of object and nonproduced entity constitutes a case of reification. It is only in the second alternative version of his theory that Lukács seems to take more seriously what he himself says about the derivative, merely "contemplative" mode of practices and attitudes that he classifies as cases of "reification." For in this "unofficial" version, which is substantiated in many places in the text, he judges the defect of reifying agency against an ideal of praxis characterized by empathetic and existential engagement. In this version, all idealist overtones are missing, since here he is dealing more with a particular form of interaction than with a kind of world-generating activity.

If we follow the indications contained in considerations such as these, we encounter an astounding affinity with ideas developed by John Dewey and Martin Heidegger shortly after the publication of Lukács's text.[31] And if we go a little further along in time, Stanley Cavell could also be said to belong to the ranks of authors whose theories display an affinity with the second version of Lukács's critique.[32] I would first like to concentrate on one point of convergence between Lukács and Heidegger in order to provide further illumination of the concept of engaged praxis.

It has often been noted in the past that there is more than one point of contact between Lukács's treatise and Heidegger's *Being and Time*.[33] This theoretical "kinship" becomes even more apparent if one consults Heidegger's 1924 lectures on Aristotle.[34] In order to be able to recognize the first point of agreement between these two authors properly, however, it needs to be pointed out that Lukács sought to do more than just

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31. I am referring here to Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962); John Dewey, "Qualitative Thought" (1930), in *Later Works,* vol. 5, pp. 243–62; and John Dewey, "Affective Thought" (1926), in *The Later Works, 1925–1953,* edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press/London: Feffer and Simons, 1981)*,* vol. 2, pp. 104–10.

32. Stanley Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging," in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 238–66.

33. Cf. Lucien Goldmann, *Lukács und Heidegger: Nachgelassene Fragmente* (Darmstadt/Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1975). Goldmann also discusses both places in *Being and Time* (pp. 72, 487) in which Heidegger explicitly speaks of "reification" and is thereby most likely referring to Lukács's famous text (Goldmann, *Lukács und Heidegger: Nachgelassene Fragmente,* pp. 113ff.)

34. Martin Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie,* in *Gesamtausgabe,* part 2, vol. 18 (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 2002).

give a critique of the reifying effects of the capitalist economic system. He also intended to demonstrate that modern philosophy is doomed constantly to run into unresolvable antimonies, because it is rooted in reified everyday culture and thus remains entrapped within the subject-object opposition.[35]

This same task of criticizing modern philosophy for its fixation on the dualism of subject and object also constitutes the starting point of Heidegger's philosophical project. Just like Lukács, the author of *Being and Time* is also convinced that the idea that we can neutrally comprehend reality is responsible for the ontological blindness that has prevented an appropriate response to the question concerning the structures of human existence. Of course, Heidegger does not share Lukács's further intention of tracing the philosophical privileging of the subject-object schema itself back to the reified form of life in capitalist society. Social-theoretical considerations remained so alien to Heidegger that he never even made the slightest attempt to question the social roots of the ontological tradition that he so thoroughly criticized. Nonetheless, Heidegger and Lukács share the intention of subverting or "destroying" the prevailing conception of an epistemic subject who neutrally encounters an external world, and they do so to such an extent that they are both compelled to present an alternative view.

Heidegger disposes of this task by offering an existential-phenomenological analysis intended to demonstrate that the world is always already disclosed to human beings in their everyday activity. According to Heidegger, we do not encounter reality in the stance of a cognitive subject, but rather we always already practically cope with the world in such a way that it is given to us as a field of practical significance. The concept that Heidegger employs in order to characterize the structure of this kind of practical relation to the world is "care."[36] This concept provides a link to Lukács's own attempts to extract a broader concept of praxis by contrasting it with behavior that is merely detached and contemplative. In the same way that Heidegger views the concept of "care," Lukács seems to regard the idea of engaged praxis as providing the key to refuting in a fundamental way the prevailing fixation upon the subject-object schema. For in engaged activity the subject no longer neutrally encounters a reality that still remains to be understood but is

35. Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," pp. 110–49.

36. Heidegger, *Being and Time,* pp. 83, 235–41; *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie,* pp. 55ff.

existentially interested in a reality that is always already disclosed as having qualitative significance.

In explaining this second point of contact between these two philosophers, however, one should bear in mind that Lukács proceeds quite differently than Heidegger. Whereas the author of *Being and Time* intends to demonstrate that the mentalist language employed by traditional ontology only obstructs our view of the factical character of care in everyday existence, Lukács proceeds from the entirely different premise that capitalism's progressive reification eliminates *any* possibility of engaged praxis. Lukács thus conceives of his project not as unveiling an already present possibility of human existence but instead as a sketch of a future possibility. With regard to the problem of traditional ontology, this methodological distinction means that, unlike Heidegger, Lukács cannot refute traditional ontology's dominance by mere reference to factical reality. He is instead compelled to find in reality reified circumstances that could only be eliminated by first overcoming capitalist society.

This complication brings up one of the most difficult problems posed by Lukács's text. Upon closer investigation, it is not at all clear whether he is really arguing that the process of reification has already eliminated all elements of "true" engaged praxis, for there are many places in the text—above all in the final chapter dealing with the "awakening" of the proletariat to its social and historical situation—that give the opposite impression. In these moments, Lukács, drawing upon Fichte and quoting Marx, attempts to argue that the abolishment of reified social relations can only be conceived as an act in which the working class becomes aware that it is both the author of and an actor in its own drama. According to this conception, it is precisely because the proletariat leads such a deeply demeaning and reified existence that the realization that "social facts are not objects but relations between men" must necessarily arise within this class like a spontaneous *volte-face*.[37] If we strip these historical-philosophical speculations of all idealist glorification and distill them down to their essence, then we are left with the realization that reification has not eliminated the other, nonreified form of praxis but merely concealed it from our awareness. Like Heidegger, Lukács would also assume that reified social relations merely represent a false framework for interpretation, an ontological veil concealing the fact of an underlying genuine form of human existence.

37. Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," p. 180.

If we follow this interpretation, to which Lukács's text hardly offers an alternative, both thinkers can be seen to agree to a great extent on the placement of their respective notions of praxis. Both Lukács's allusions to engaged praxis and Heidegger's notion of "care" designate that form of practical orientation that is especially characteristic of the structure of the human mode of existence. For in opposition to the prevailing conception that has become "second nature," and according to which humans primarily and constantly strive to cognize and neutrally apprehend reality, humans in fact exist in a modus of existential engagement, of "caring," through which they disclose a meaningful world. Lukács assumes that even in social circumstances that, due to the expansion of commodity exchange, have been reified this elementary characteristic of human activity must be present in an at least rudimentary form. Otherwise, Lukács would not be able to assert that only an act of becoming aware of what one is in fact already doing (and not, for instance, some more complex act of anticipation or recollection) is required in order to bring our practical involvement in the world to light in spite of prevailing reified social relations. In this sense, both thinkers are convinced that even in the midst of the false, ontologically blind present circumstances, the elementary structures of the human form of life characterized by "care" and existential interestedness are always already there.

This commonality has a further consequence; namely, that Lukács and Heidegger must concur on a decisive third point. Until now I have maintained that, for Lukács, "reification" indicates neither a mere category mistake nor a moral transgression but rather a false "stance" or habitual form of praxis. However, that cannot be wholly correct if both authors indeed agree that the conception of objectified and reified relations is merely a kind of interpretive veil concealing our factical care and empathetic engagement. Given this premise, Lukács must assume that reification does not represent a false form of habitualized praxis but a false interpretive habit with reference to a "correct" form of praxis that is always given in an at least rudimentary fashion. To speak of "reified" social circumstances would consequently be to allege that agents living under such conditions have a misguided understanding of the practices they have in fact always been carrying out in their everyday lives. At the same time, these false interpretations cannot be conceived as having no influence on the actual actions of these subjects, for Lukács would assert just as vigorously as Heidegger that the reign of the subject-object division and the hegemony of the ontological schema of "presence-at-

hand"[38] exercise a negative if not a destructive influence on our everyday dealings with the world.

As a consequence of this extra complication, both thinkers are compelled to advocate a proposition with something like the following content: The habit, which has become second nature, of conceiving one's relationship to oneself and to one's surroundings as an activity of neutral cognition of objective circumstances bestows over time a reified form on human activity, without ever being able to eradicate the original "caring" character of this activity completely. This antecedent characteristic must, in the form of prereflective knowledge or marginal practices, remain present in such a way that critical analysis could make us aware of it at any time. In order to complete his theoretical sketch, Lukács would only have had to add that reified habits of thought originate not so much from the predominance of a false ontology as from the social generalization of commodity exchange, that the increasing transformation of social practices into indifferent, observing activity is due to the constraints imposed upon subjects' interpretive habits by their own involvement in merely calculating processes of exchange.

With that, we have reached a point at which we can now have a go at the question of whether Heidegger's notion of "care" can in fact contribute to illuminating the concept of praxis upon which Lukács based his critique of reification. We assumed this when considering the second, "unofficial" alternative for interpreting his theory, in which Lukács characterizes the structure of genuine human praxis by attempting to determine those elements that reified, merely contemplative behavior seems to lack. This now leads us to the realization that human beings *must* in fact constantly deal with the world in the same engaged and interested manner as Heidegger aimed to show with the notion of "care." At first glance, this reference to "care" seems to indicate little more than what is described today as the "perspective of the participant" in contrast to the perspective of a mere observer. In other words, human subjects normally participate in social life by placing themselves in the position of their counterparts, whose desires, dispositions, and thoughts they have learned to understand as the motives for the latter's actions. If, conversely, a subject fails to take over the perspective of another person

38. On the schema of the "presence-at-hand" [*Vorhandenheit*] in the works of Heidegger, cf. *Being and Time,* pp. 81ff. See also the helpful elucidation of the opposition between "readiness-to-hand" [*Zuhandenheit*] and "presence-at-hand" [*Vorhandenheit*] in Heidegger's thought by Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being in the World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), ch. 4.

and thereby takes up a merely detached, contemplative stance toward the other, then the bond of human interaction will be broken, for it will no longer be maintained by their reciprocal understanding of each other's reasons for acting.[39] The elements characterizing the so-called participant's perspective thus consist of the act of taking over the perspective of another person and the resulting understanding of the other's reasons for acting.

The question that of course now arises is whether this indeed designates the same aspects of human action that Heidegger and Lukács intended to describe with their respective notions of "care" and engaged praxis. The question is, can the intuitions connecting both these authors and their critiques of the predominance of the subject-object schema be appropriately and completely translated into the assertion that the perspective of the participant enjoys a permanent and necessary priority over that of the mere observer? The fact that both Heidegger and Lukács intended their notions of praxis to encompass a person's dealings both with other persons and with his or her surroundings casts doubt on this hypothesis. They did not conceive of the stance embodied by "care" or by "empathetic" engagement as applying solely to the other subject involved in human interaction but in principle to any and every object involved in the context of human praxis. And even the use of the term "object" in this context is something that Heidegger would reject, since it remains far too entrapped within the subject-object opposition.[40] The "perspective of the participant" has neither the same range of application as Heidegger's "care" or Lukács's "empathetic engagement" [*Anteilnahme*] nor the same substantive meaning. "Care" and "empathetic engagement" are expressions that, although they designate the act of taking over the perspective of another person, also add an element of affective disposition, even of positive predisposition, which is not appropriately expressed by the notion that subjects always seek to understand each other's reasons for acting.[41]

39. On the idea of the "perspective of the participant," see the exemplary treatment by Jürgen Habermas in his essay "What Is Universal Pragmatics?" in *Communication and the Evolution of Society,* translated by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1979); Daniel C. Dennett, *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge/Mass: MIT Press, 1987).

40. In his analysis of Dasein, Heidegger avoids using the concepts of "object" and "thing" on the ontological level. Instead, he mostly employs the concept of "equipment" as a complementary category to "readiness-to-hand." See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 96–98.

41. Dreyfus has also emphasized the components of positive predisposition that go beyond its instrumental significance for the Heideggerian concept of "care": *Being in the World,* ch. 14.

This marks a razor-thin, yet all the more definite line dividing the intuitions of both our authors from the considerations formulated today with the aid of the concepts of "communicative" or "intentional" stances. While these latter notions aim to point out that human beings generally communicate with one another by reciprocally taking up the role of a second person, Lukács and Heidegger assert that this kind of intersubjective stance is always already connected with an element of positive affirmation and emotional inclination, which is not sufficiently expressed in the attribution of rational motivation to these subjects.

To understand this assertion better, we should take another look at all of its fundamental elements. We assert nothing less than that the human relationship to the self and the world is in the first instance not only genetically but also categorially bound up with an affirmative attitude, before other more neutralized orientations can subsequently arise. We can connect up with our guiding topic by pointing out that the abandonment of the originally given affirmative stance must result in a stance in which the elements of our surroundings are experienced as mere objective entities, as objects that are "present-at-hand." "Reification" correspondingly signifies a habit of thought, a habitually ossified perspective, which, when taken up by the subject, leads not only to the loss of its capacity for empathetic engagement but also to the world's loss of its qualitatively disclosed character. Before I can further pursue the question of whether this clarification could allow us to continue to employ the concept of "reification" today, I must first attempt to justify its foundational premise—that is, the assertion that the attitude of care enjoys not only a genetic but also a conceptual priority over a neutral cognition of reality. I intend subsequently to reformulate this assertion by cautiously replacing the Heideggerian notion of "care" with the originally Hegelian category of "recognition." In this way I believe it is possible to justify the hypothesis that a recognitional stance enjoys a genetic and categorial priority over all other attitudes toward the self and the world. Not until I have shown this fact will I be able to come back to my guiding question of whether we can today once again sensibly take up Lukács's concept of "reification."

In two fascinating essays that appeared shortly after the publication of *History and Class Consciousness,*[42] John Dewey sketched in the terms of his own theory a conception of human beings' primordial relation to the world that displays parallels to those of Lukács and Heidegger in a

42. Dewey, "Affective Thought," pp. 104–10; Dewey, "Qualitative Thought," pp. 243–62.

surprising number of points. Dewey's reflections boil down to the as-
sertion that every rational understanding of the world is always already
bound up with a holistic form of experience, in which all elements of a
given situation are qualitatively disclosed from a perspective of engaged
involvement. If we follow this train of thought far enough, it becomes
possible not only to make a transition from the notion of "care" to that
of "recognition" but also to demonstrate the primacy of this kind of rec-
ognition over all merely cognitive attitudes toward the world.

Just like Lukács and Heidegger, Dewey is also skeptical of the tradi-
tional view according to which our primary relationship to the world is
constituted by a neutral confrontation with an object to be understood.
Although he neither uses the concept of "reification" to characterize
this doctrine nor shares the pathos of Heidegger's worldview, as far as
the phenomenon that he is describing is concerned, Dewey agrees with
these two thinkers that the predominance of the subject-object model
cannot help but leave its impression on society's conception of itself. He
asserts with Heidegger and Lukács that the longer we hold on to the tra-
ditional opposition of subject and object, the more our life practices will
be damaged, since cognition and feelings, theory and practice, science
and art will thereby be more and more torn apart.[43]

The rationale that Dewey offers for his critique of the "spectator
model" of knowledge,[44] however, turns out to be considerably more
direct and simple than that of Lukács or Heidegger. Without any
culture-critical digressions, he attempts to demonstrate with arguments
from epistemology and the philosophy of language that our emotion-
ally saturated practical dealings with the world provide the basis for all
rational knowledge. Dewey begins his explanation with the assertion
that all existential propositions have their cognitive roots in situations
that "despite their internal complexity for the acting subject are thor-
oughly dominated and characterized by a single quality."[45] Regardless of
whether we interact with other people or deal with material objects, the
characteristics of a given situation will always be saturated in a certain
quality of experience that does not permit distinctions between emo-
tional, cognitive, and volitional elements. That which we experience in
such moments, and which constitutes the "moods" or "attunements"
(Heidegger) of these kinds of situations, dominates our understanding

43. Cf. Dewey's introduction to his essay "Affective Thought," p. 104.
44. John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1960).
45. Dewey, "Qualitative Thought," pp. 245–46.

of ourselves and our world in such a comprehensive way that it is impossible for us to isolate one particular aspect of a given situation.

According to Dewey, it is in this underlying quality of all our experience that the existential immediacy and practical involvement of our dealings with the world are brought to bear. He employed the term "interaction"[46] to indicate that our everyday activity is not characterized by a self-centered, egocentric stance but by the effort to involve ourselves with given circumstances in the most frictionless, harmonious way possible. Just as is true of the mode of care, in interaction the world is not centered around us; instead we experience situations in such a way that we "take care" to maintain a fluent interaction with our surroundings. In what follows, I will refer to this primordial form of relating to the world as "recognition" in its most elementary form. For the moment, I merely want to emphasize the fact that our actions do not primarily have the character of an affectively neutral, cognitive stance toward the world but rather that of an affirmative, existentially colored style of caring comportment. In living we constantly concede the situational circumstances of our world a value of their own, which brings us to be concerned with our relationship to them. On this elementary level, the concept of "recognition" thus shares a fundamental notion not only with Dewey's concept of "practical involvement" but also with Heidegger's "care" and Lukács's "engaged praxis"—namely, the notion that the stance of empathetic engagement in the world, arising from the experience of the world's significance and value [*Werthaftigkeit*],[47] is prior to our acts of detached cognition. A recognitional stance therefore embodies our active and constant assessment of the value that persons or things have in themselves.

Dewey intends to demonstrate that we can succeed in rationally breaking down and analyzing an experienced situation only by detaching ourselves from the qualitative unity of this situation, by distancing ourselves from this experience. The analytic components that we require in order to deal intellectually with a problem of action result from the reflexive attempt to separate retroactively the components that we have experienced in their unity as part of a single qualitative experience. Only

46. Cf. John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover, 1958), ch. 5.

47. According to this interpretation, Heidegger's notion of "care" always has a de-centering element, in that a concern for the inner claims made by the respective object is also always at issue. This contrasts with Ernst Tugendhat's portrayal in his essay "Schwierigkeiten in Heideggers Umweltanalyse," in Ernst Tugendhat, *Aufsätze 1992–2000* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), pp. 109–37.

at this point, when we secondarily "process" a situation by dissecting it into emotional and cognitive elements, can we distill an object of cognition, which the acting individual can then encounter as an affectively neutral subject. This subject can now employ the whole of its attention, which had previously been fully "lost" in the act of immediate experience, as cognitive energy toward the intellectual handling of a problem that, as the object of the subject's attention, banishes all other situational elements to the background. However, Dewey never fails to emphasize that the primordial, qualitative content of experience cannot be allowed simply to vanish in this cognitive process of abstraction; otherwise, the harmful fiction of a merely existing object—of a mere "given"[48]—may emerge. For as soon as we have forgotten the kind of qualitative experience that obtained at the beginning of our reflective endeavors, we lose sight of the reason for which we undertook this reflection in the first place. In order not to lose sight of the goal of our entire mental operation, we must constantly and consciously keep this operation's origin in qualitative experience in the background.

Dewey makes this demand clear in the case of simple predication, which he regards as an example for the linguistic act of abstraction involved in the attempt to fixate upon an object of cognition. If we take any arbitrary statement possessing a subject-object form, this linguistic form itself suggests that hereby a characteristic has merely been attributed to a given entity. If we remain at this level of predication, it ultimately remains ontologically impossible to determine the relationship in which the characteristic actually stands with the apparently independent entity. This riddle cannot be solved until we subsequently realize that the predicative statement results from the attempt to abstract from an original qualitative experience. For it then becomes clear that subject and object "correlatively" complement one another by virtue of having originally indicated the direction of movement contained in a qualitatively experienced engagement with the world.[49] In a manner clearly reminiscent of Heidegger's distinction between "readiness-to-hand" and "presence-at-hand," Dewey illustrates his argument with the predication that "Man is mortal." This statement does not lose the character of mere attribution until we translate it into the original, transitive form "men die," which articulates the "care" for "human destiny" that stood at the origin of the linguistic process of abstraction.[50]

48. Dewey, "Qualitative Thought," p. 253.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.

Dewey is evidently convinced that all statements in which humans are defined by a predicate can be deciphered following this pattern. He sees these kinds of predications as being merely the result of an analytical reformulation of the fears, concerns, and hopes that we feel toward other persons when we encounter them in our customary stance of recognition. At this point, both elements of the later declarative sentence are still "correlative" to each other, as they form underlying qualities of experience that reveal the direction of our care only in their interplay. Consequently, there "is" no already clearly outlined and fixed entity with the name "man" existing independent of the qualitative effect that we anticipate in our existential engagement. Not until this experience has been transformed into a general declarative statement is the context torn apart that previously connected the experienced person and the felt effect. It is at this point that the ontological fiction can arise that there "exist" humans lacking all characteristics, fictive because we ascribe these attributes to these humans only in the act of predication. This is why Dewey speaks, just as Winfried Sellars later does and in a formulation whose substance—if not its wording—is once again reminiscent of Heidegger, of the "deceptive idea of the 'given'": "The only thing that is unqualifiedly given is the total pervasive quality; and the objection to calling it 'given' is that the word suggests something to which it is given, mind or thought or consciousness or whatever, as well possibly as something that gives. In truth 'given' in this connection signifies only that the quality immediately exists, or is brutely there. In this capacity, it forms that to which all objects of thought refer."[51] Taking these considerations as my starting point, I would like to demonstrate that recognition enjoys both a genetic and a conceptual priority over cognition.

3. The Priority of Recognition

To explain why I believe that empathetic engagement precedes a neutral grasping of reality, that recognition comes before cognition, I must go beyond the theoretical-historical framework within which I have been moving up to this point. Independent evidence and arguments are required in order to demonstrate without merely invoking philosophical authorities that a layer of existential engagement indeed provides the basis for our entire objectifying relation to the world. Not until we have taken this step can we sketch how the concept of "reification" must be constituted if it is to preserve Lukács's intuitions in a recognition-

51. Ibid.

theoretical form. As a contrast against which I intend to set off my own assertions, I will once again employ the idea that human behavior is distinguished by the communicative stance achieved through taking over a second person's perspective. I contend by contrast that this ability to take over the perspective of another person is itself rooted in a kind of antecedent interaction that bears the characteristic features of existential care. I intend to substantiate this hypothesis first of all from a genetic point of view by taking a look at the cognitive preconditions that are contained in the way in which children acquire the ability to take over the perspective of another (A). I will then turn to the much more difficult task of a systematic or categorial proof of this hypothesis (B).

(A)

In the fields of development psychology and socialization research, it has long been agreed that the emergence of children's abilities to think and interact must be conceived as a process that occurs in the act of taking over another person's perspective. According to this conception, which derives from a synthesis of either Jean Piaget and G. H. Mead[52] or Donald Davidson and Sigmund Freud,[53] the acquisition of cognitive abilities in the child's development process is peculiarly bound up with the formation of primary relations of communication. A child thus learns to relate to an objective world of stable and constant objects by taking up the perspective of a second person, and thereby gradually decentering its own primarily egocentric perspective. The fact that an infant begins very early on to come into contact with its figure of attachment, its "psychological parent," taking up this person's view and steering it toward certain significant objects, is interpreted by these theories to be an indication of a phase of experimentation in which a child tests out the independence of another perspective on the surrounding world. To the extent that it succeeds in placing itself in the perspective of this second person and then in perceiving the surrounding world, an infant acquires an authority who can correct its judgments about the world, allowing it for the first time to perceive objects in an impersonalized, objective way. The age at which children acquire the ability to carry out this kind of

52. Cf. Jürgen Habermas, "Individuation through Socialization: On George Herbert Mead's Theory of Subjectivity," in *Postmetaphysical Thinking,* translated by William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).

53. Cf. Marcia Cavell, *The Psychoanalytic Mind: From Freud to Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

triangulation[54] is generally considered to be nine months. This is why recent research speaks of the "nine month revolution,"[55] because it is at this age that a child acquires the ability to perceive its attachment figure as an intentional agent, whose stance toward the surrounding world is likewise goal-oriented and therefore of the same significance as the child's own relation to the world.

What is notable about all these development-psychological theories —which like either G. H. Mead or Donald Davidson emphasize the necessity of taking over another's perspective for the emergence of symbolic thought—is the extent to which they ignore the emotional side of the relationship between children and their figures of attachment. Mead had a certain tendency to describe a child's early step of taking over the perspective of a concrete second person as if the child's affective connection to this second person did not play any significant role.[56] And indeed, a certain tendency toward cognitivism can be said to prevail among the greater majority of attempts to explain the origin of mental activity in the child's communicative relationship to a figure of attachment. The triangular relationship in which a child after phases of proto-conversation places itself as soon as it has suspected the independence of a second person's perspective is described by these theories as being a largely emotionless space. Only very recently have there been some attempts to reverse these cognitivist abstractions by making comparative investigations of children with autism. These investigations have demonstrated with astounding regularity that a small child must first have emotionally identified with an attachment figure before it can accept this person's stance toward the world as a corrective authority. It is on these kinds of findings that I would like to build in order to be able to prove the ontogenetic priority of recognition over cognition.

It is most likely the empirical comparison with autistic children that has allowed these investigations to develop a greater sensitivity to the affective components of the infant's interaction with people and objects in its surroundings. These theories generally trace the cause of autism back

54. Much of the following analysis is based on Michael Tomasello, *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); Peter Hobson, *The Cradle of Thought: Exploring the Origins of Thinking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Martin Dornes, "Die emotionalen Ursprünge des Denkens," *WestEnd, Neue Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 2, no. 1 (2005): 3–48.

55. Tomasello, *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition,* pp. 61ff.

56. Axel Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p. 80.

to the fact that diverse and usually constitutional barriers prevent the affected child from developing feelings of attachment to its primary parent figure. By contrast, both Peter Hobson and Michael Tomasello—to name just two researchers in this field—point out that in the case of children *not* affected by autism this kind of emotional identification with others is absolutely necessary in order to enable the taking over of another person's perspective, which in turn leads to the development of the capacity for symbolic thought.[57] The starting point of these investigations consists in the same transition from primary to secondary intersubjectivity that the cognitivist approaches also have in mind. These theories suggest that at the age of nine months a child makes several notable advances in its interactive behavior. It acquires the ability to point out objects to its attachment figure by means of protodeclarative gestures and then to view these objects with this person. It can further make its attitude toward meaningful objects dependent upon the expressive behavior with which this other person reacts to these objects. And, finally, the child appears, in doing what G. H. Mead calls "playing," gradually to grasp the fact that familiar meanings can be uncoupled from their original objects and transferred to *other* objects, whose new borrowed function can then be creatively dealt with. The theoretical approaches I have been distinguishing concur with each other to a great extent as to the proper description of these or similar advances in the child's learning process. They both emphasize the developments in communicative interaction by which a child learns step by step and through the perspective of a second person to perceive objects as entities in an objective world that exists independently of our thoughts and feelings about it. Unlike the cognitivist approaches, however, Hobson and Tomasello contend that a child could not make all these advances if it did not already develop a feeling of emotional attachment to its psychological parent. For it is only by way of this antecedent identification that the child is able to let itself be moved, motivated, and swept along by the presence of a concrete second person in such a way that it can comprehend this person's changes of attitude in an interested way.

The specific nature of this theory can best be illuminated by turning once again to the differences between this approach and the cognitivist approach in explaining the causes of autism. Whereas the customary,

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57. Cf. Peter Hobson, *Autism and the Development of Mind* (Hove/Hillsdale: Psychology Press, 1993); Tomasello, *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition,* pp. 78ff.; Dornes gives an excellent summary in his text "Die emotionalen Ursprünge des Denkens," pp. 23ff.

cognitivist approaches are compelled to trace the origin of autistic be-
havior back to cognitive deficits related to disturbances in the child's
abilities to think and speak, Tomasello and Hobson attribute the deci-
sive cause to the child's lack of receptiveness to the emotional presence of
attachment figures. This psychological detachment may itself be geneti-
cally conditioned, but what is decisive is the fact that an autistic child
is thereby structurally prevented from emotionally identifying with a
concrete second person. Martin Dornes summarizes the results of this
explanation's awareness of the role of affectivity in autism in a way that
links up well with my original topic. Because autistic children are "emo-
tionally unreceptive, they remain entrapped within their own perspec-
tive on the world and don't become familiar with any other perspective.
They don't see, or rather they don't *feel* that facial expressions, bodily
movements and communicative gestures give expression to attitudes.
They are blind to the expressive mental content of such phenomena,
or rather to their meaning. An autistic infant thus isn't 'mentally blind'
due to a cognitive deficit, but rather because it is in the first instance
emotionally blind."[58]

   I would like to point out in passing that Theodor W. Adorno made
some similar remarks in certain places in his works—above all in *Min-
ima Moralia* and *Negative Dialectic*. Formulations can be found again
and again in these texts, which indicate that Adorno, like Hobson or
Tomasello, recognized that the human mind arises out of an early imita-
tion of a loved figure of attachment. Indeed, he states in a well-known
aphorism from *Minima Moralia* that a person does not become a person
until it imitates other persons. Immediately afterward he writes that this
kind of imitation constitutes the "archetype of love."[59] At issue here is the
same act of decentering that the other two authors regard as the starting
point of the child's mentation—that is, a kind of existential, even affec-
tive sympathy toward other persons that allows the child to experience
their perspectives on the world for the first time as having significance.
The act of placing oneself in the perspective of a second person requires
an antecedent form of recognition that cannot be grasped in purely
cognitive or epistemic concepts, as it always and necessarily contains
an element of involuntary openness, devotedness, or love. This devo-
tion to—or, as Adorno states in psychoanalytical terms, this "libidinal

   58. Dornes, "Die emotionalen Ursprünge des Denkens," p. 26.
   59. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (London/New York: Verso Books, 1984),
aphorism 99.

cathexis" of—objects is what allows children to place themselves in the perspective of another in such a way that they can acquire a broader and ultimately depersonalized conception of reality.

Of course, this development-psychological notion cannot be equated with the ideas that I have derived from the works of Lukács, Heidegger, and Dewey when I tried to demonstrate the convergence of the various notions that the three of them employ. There I was concerned with arguing for the general priority enjoyed by a particular stance of engagement or recognition over all other forms of relating to the world; but here I am concerned with showing that emotional receptivity "comes before" the transition to cognition of intersubjectively given objects in a strictly temporal sense. Neither the type of priority nor the specific character of that which is said to have priority is the same in both cases—emotional attachment or identification with another concrete person is indeed distinct from the concepts of fundamental existential care or concern that Heidegger or Dewey had in mind. I do believe, however, that this ontogenetic finding offers a first indication of the plausibility of my general assertion. For it appears to be true that it is from the perspective of a loved one that small children first gain an inkling of the abundance of existential significance that situational circumstances can have for people. Therefore, it is through this emotional attachment to a "concrete other" that a world of meaningful qualities is disclosed to a child as a world in which it must involve itself practically. Genesis and validity—or, in Marxist terms, history and logic—should not be torn apart to such an extent that the conditions under which a child's thinking originates lose their relevance for the categorial significance of our knowledge of the world.

This is precisely how Adorno intended for his statements on the affective basis of our cognitive acts to be understood. The fact that it is from the perspective of a loved figure of attachment that children arrive at an objective understanding of reality indicates at the same time that the more perspectives on a single object of perception we can gather, the more appropriate and precise our knowledge of objects will be. Just as is true of small children, however, so also for adults this act of taking over other perspectives, which will always reveal to us a new aspect of an object, is attached to the hardly accessible prerequisite of emotional receptivity or identification. In this sense, Adorno holds that the preciseness of our knowledge depends on the extent of emotional recognition or affective acceptance of as many perspectives as possible. With that, I

have already left the sphere of development-psychological argumentation and have subtly slipped into the arena of rather categorial substantiation.

(B)

What I hope to have been able to show by this point in my account is that in ontogenesis—that is, in a chronologically understood process—recognition must precede cognition. If the investigations previously mentioned are indeed correct, then the individual's learning process functions in such a way that a small child first of all identifies with its figures of attachment and must have emotionally recognized them before it can arrive at knowledge of objective reality by means of these other perspectives. Although my last comments on Adorno were intended as a hint that these intersubjective emotional conditions surrounding the origin of our thinking processes most likely also reveal something about the conditions of validity of our thought, these kinds of speculations cannot of course substitute for the arguments that would be necessary if one wished to assert the priority of recognition over cognition in a conceptual sense. Both Heidegger and Dewey, and presumably Lukács as well, had this kind of conceptual priority in mind when they asserted that our epistemic relation to the world must be preceded by a stance of care, existential involvement, or recognition. These authors intended to demonstrate that our efforts to acquire knowledge of the world must either fail or lose their meaning if we lose sight of this antecedent act of recognition. Thus Heidegger regards even the most objectified, "scientific" knowledge of behavior as a derivative of the antecedent stance that he describes with the term "care."[60] John Dewey writes that all research must remain aware of its origin in the diffuse problematic of everyday uncertainty so as not to lose sight of its "regulative principle."[61]

I would now like to take up a third approach—one that is closer to our topic—in order to demonstrate that our cognitive relation to the world is also attached in a conceptual sense to a stance of recognition. Stanley Cavell's reflections on the relation between cognition and recognition are certainly worth a look in this connection.

Cavell arrives at his concept of acknowledgment through his critique of the notion that we could ever have direct, unmediated knowledge of

60. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 175.
61. Dewey, "Qualitative Thought," p. 261.

other persons' mental states, of so-called other minds.[62] He is convinced that the proponents of such an assumption are much too accepting of a premise that actually stems from their opponents—the skeptics—who doubt the possibility of such certainty. Skeptics have always regarded the issue of possible access to other people's mental states as an epistemic challenge, demanding an answer to this challenge in categories of certain knowledge. Yet Cavell contends that as long as anti-skeptics attempt to refute skeptics head-on on these terms, they will be condemned to failure, for they ultimately cannot dispute the fact that our knowledge of others' mental states can never have the kind of qualitative certainty that characterizes the first person perspective. The attempt to describe our access to another subject's mental states on the model of a cognitive relation does not do justice to the fact that mental states simply are not objects of knowledge. Even the mere assertion that I "know" about my own pain or my own envy belies the fact that I am far too caught up in or "impaled upon"[63] these mental states to be able to claim that I have detached cognition or knowledge of them. In my relations to others, I am not an object about which I impart information through descriptive statements; rather, as Cavell says with Wittgenstein, a subject discloses its mental states to another person by bringing these states to the other person's attention.

Up to this point, Cavell's line of reasoning proceeds very similarly to that of Jean-Paul Sartre in the third part of *Being and Nothingness,* where Sartre presents his own critique of skepticism.[64] He is also convinced that skepticism concerning other minds cannot be refuted as long as one retains the premise that our access to other persons is primarily cognitive. To assume this kind of relation to others is to construct an ideal of epistemic certainty that is not attainable, simply because my own mental states can in no way be objects of knowledge or cognition for me. According to Sartre, this asymmetry can only be overcome by conceiving of a subject's relation to another person in the same way in which

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62. Cf. Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging." On Cavell's theory of intersubjectivity, see Espen Hammer, *Stanley Cavell: Skepticism, Subjectivity and the Ordinary* (London: Polity Press, 2002), ch. 3.

63. Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging," p. 261.

64. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology,* translated and with an introduction by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1993), part III, ch. 1. See also Axel Honneth, "Erkennen und Anerkennen: Zu Sartres Theorie der Intersubjektivität," in Axel Honneth, *Unsichtbarkeit: Stationen einer Theorie der Intersubjektivität* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2003).

we conceive of the relation between a second subject and *its own* mental states. Just as we do not in this case speak of knowledge, but of affectedness or involvement, we should not conceive of a communicative agent as an epistemic subject but instead as an existentially engaged subject who does not merely neutrally take notice of other persons' emotional states but is rather affected by them in its own self-conception.

On this topic, despite all their methodological differences, Cavell and Sartre agree to a great extent. After demonstrating that assertions about one's own emotional states cannot be understood as statements of knowledge, Cavell draws consequences for our understanding of elementary relations of interaction that come very close to those found in Sartre's phenomenological analysis. Just as a speaker normally discloses his emotions to a second person by bringing attention to them without recourse to knowledge, the linguistic reaction of the listener cannot be interpreted as an act of cognition either. Rather, it is only through the listener's "sympathy" with the emotions that the speaker has brought to her attention that she gives her response. Cavell remarks, "I might say here that the reason 'I know you are in pain' is not an expression of certainty is that it is a response to this exhibiting; it is an expression of *sympathy*."[65]

In describing this notion of "sympathy," we have come very close to the issue in Cavell's line of argumentation that is most relevant for my concern. Following Wittgenstein, he wants to claim that a certain stance, in which a subject feels existentially involved in the emotional world of another subject, must precede all possible cognitive knowledge of that other subject's mental states. Once I have done this and thereby established a connection to another person, I can then perceive the other's expressions of emotion as that which they really are: that is, as making a claim on me and demanding an appropriate reaction. For Cavell, "to acknowledge" is thus to take up a stance in which the behavioral expressions of a second person can be understood as demands to react in some specific way.[66] A person who does not react in any way, not even in a negative way, only thereby expresses the fact that he or she has not properly understood the emotional expression of the other person. In this sense, Cavell connects the understanding of statements of emotion with the need to adopt a recognitional stance. Conversely, he regards the

65. Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging," p. 263 (emphasis in original).
66. Ibid.

inability to take up such a stance as ultimately signifying an inability to maintain social relationships.[67]

It is at this point that Cavell and Sartre part ways. It is true that both authors replace the cognitivist model of social interaction, which they hold to be a burden inherited from the tradition of skepticism, with a model of reciprocal affectedness that both label "recognition"—indeed, subjects are generally certain of having another subject with mental properties before them, since they are touched by this second subject's emotional states in such a way that they see themselves compelled to react in a certain way. Whereas Sartre concludes negatively from this existential fact that subjects reciprocally limit each other's freedom for boundless transcendence,[68] however, Cavell is content to make a therapeutic reference to the necessary priority of acknowledgment. He sees the danger implied in the everyday seduction of the cognitivist model to be so great as to demand a constant reminder of the fact of mutual sympathy. Cavell's language-theoretical discussion is intended primarily to defend against a false image of interpersonal communication. He maintains that the fabric of social interaction is not, as philosophers often assume, spun out of the material of cognitive acts but instead out of that of recognitional stances. The reason that we do not normally have any difficulty understanding the emotional statements of other subjects is that we have already taken up a stance in which the invitation to act contained in these statements appears to us as a self-evident given.

This last summary should have made clear why I feel that Cavell's analysis systematically reinforces the position I have been presenting here, but to which I have until now taken a merely historical approach. In my view, Lukács, Heidegger, and Dewey were all already convinced that recognition must generally precede cognition in the sphere of social activity. The findings that I presented from the realm of developmental psychology have reinforced this conceptual sketch in a temporal or genetic sense. But only now with recourse to Cavell has it become possible to go beyond the temporal sense of this assertion and defend its *categorial* meaning, for, according to his analysis, we are able to understand the meaning of a particular class of linguistic propositions only if we are in that stance or attitude which he describes as "acknowledgment." To put it briefly, the acknowledgment of the other constitutes a nonepis-

67. See also Cavell's fascinating analysis of "King Lear" in his essay "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear,*" in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (pp. 267–356).

68. See Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, part III, ch. 2.

temic prerequisite for linguistic understanding. Cavell also appears to agree with the intentions of our other three authors in holding that this form of recognition signifies something more or something else than is customarily understood when we speak of "adopting a communicative stance" or "taking over another person's perspective." Just as is the case with Heidegger's concept of "care," Cavell's concept of "acknowledgment" contains an element of empathetic engagement or sympathy, of an antecedent act of identification, which is ignored by those who claim that understanding other people requires nothing more than an understanding of their reasons for acting.

Cavell is not claiming that by taking up such a stance of acknowledgment we will always demonstrate a sympathetic and affectionate reaction. He also regards mere indifference or negative feelings as possible forms of intersubjective acknowledgment, as long as they solely reflect a nonepistemic affirmation of the other person's human personality.[69] Thus the adjective "positive," as I have used it in connection with the concept of "empathetic engagement" [*Anteilnahme*], must not be understood as referring to positive, friendly emotions. This adjective instead signifies the existential fact—which certainly has implications for our affects—that we necessarily affirm the value of another person in the stance of recognition, even if we might curse or hate that person at a given moment. But perhaps we could go a step beyond Cavell and assert that even in cases where we recognize other persons in an emotionally negative way, we still always have a residual intuitive sense of not having done full justice to their personalities. In such a situation, that element in our recognitional stance which we customarily call "conscience" would be at issue.

In any case, we can see that the recognitional stance at issue here represents a wholly elementary form of intersubjective activity, but one that does not yet imply the perception of the *specific* value of another person. The stance that Heidegger names "care" [*Sorge*] or "solicitude" [*Fürsorge*] and that Dewey names "involvement" lies below the threshold at which that particular form of mutual recognition takes place in which the other person's specific characteristics are affirmed.[70] Nevertheless,

69. Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging."

70. We are thus dealing with a more elementary form of recognition than the one that I have dealt with in my previous treatments of the issue. See my *Unsichtbarkeit: Stationen einer Theorie der Intersubjektivität*, pp. 10–27. As a result, I now assume that this "existential" mode of recognition provides a foundation for all other, more substantial forms of recognition in which the affirmation of other persons' specific characteristics is at issue.

there remains a difference between Cavell and our other authors that makes it difficult simply to add Cavell's analysis to the philosophical tradition I have been describing. Unlike Heidegger, Dewey, or Lukács, Cavell appears to limit the validity of that which he calls a "stance of acknowledgment" solely to the sphere of interpersonal communication. Any notion suggesting that we also necessarily find ourselves already in a recognitional stance toward nonhuman objects is apparently wholly alien to his theory. I will have to come back to this contrast in now turning once again to the issue of "reification," the explanation of which I am above all concerned with here.

4. Reification as Forgetfulness of Recognition

In the preceding section, I have presented several pieces of evidence that, although they vary in their respective emphasis, all ultimately point in the same direction. Both the above-described theories of development psychology and Cavell's analysis reinforce the assertion that, in human social behavior, recognition and empathetic engagement necessarily enjoy a simultaneously genetic and categorial priority over cognition and the detached understanding of social facts. Without this antecedent act of recognition, infants could not take over the perspectives of their figures of attachment, and adults would be incapable of properly understanding the linguistic propositions of those with whom they interact. Of course, none of these reinforcing theories asserts that we must also necessarily take up this kind of engaged recognitional stance when encountering nonhuman objects. For developmental psychology, emotional identification with a concrete second person is regarded as a prerequisite of all thought, without it being necessary, however, that we take up a specific stance toward objects. Due to the particular interests of his philosophical project, Cavell does not address the issue of our relation to nature at all. For the moment, I would like to put aside this difficulty in order once again to pick up the thread of my argument where I last left it before diving into the elucidation of the primacy of recognition. My original question was: How can the concept of "reification" be formulated once again for us today in a way that takes as much account as possible of Lukács's original intentions?

As shown above, reification can be understood neither as an epistemic category mistake nor as a transgression against moral principles. Unlike a category mistake, reification refers to something that is not simply epistemic, but a habit or form of behavior. It can also be dis-

tinguished from a moral wrong by the fact that it cannot be traced to an ascribable instance of liability or guilt. As was made especially clear in our comparison with Heidegger, Lukács intended "reification" to be understood as a kind of mental habit or habitually ossified perspective, which when taken up by human subjects causes them to lose their ability for empathetic engagement in other persons and occurrences. He was convinced that to the same degree to which this loss occurs, subjects would become transformed into neutral spectators, to whom not only their social and physical surroundings but also their own mental life necessarily appear as an ensemble of merely thing-like entities.

We can now assert with hindsight that for Lukács "reification" must be a name for both a process and a result.[71] It indicates *both* the occurrence of a loss—the substitution of a secondary and false human stance for a genuine and correct one—*and* the result of a reifying perception. In the meantime we have come to see that there are many good reasons for assuming that prior to all our cognitive attitudes, at least with regard to the world of social relations, we take up an antecedent stance of recognition or engagement. But how can Lukács justify the assertion that a loss of this genuine form of behavior is possible, if it is indeed so deeply rooted in the human way of living? This question contains the greatest difficulty for an attempt to revive the concept of "reification"; for unlike Heidegger, who can here point out the deforming effect of ontological world-pictures, Lukács is compelled to explain this loss by means of social circumstances—in other words, by means of a network of social practices and institutions in which, as I have shown, these recognitional stances must have effect. How then can the process of "reification" be explicated as a social occurrence, if that which is supposedly lost is of such major significance for human sociality that it must somehow be expressed in *all* social occurrences?

There is really only one answer to this question that can be found in *History and Class-Consciousness*, which is, however, so unconvincing that Lukács himself later rejected it.[72] We must consequently conceive of the process of reification as precisely that occurrence through which the genuine, involved human perspective is neutralized to such a degree that it ultimately transforms into objectifying thought. One could say with Dewey that in this case reification consists in nothing but this reflexive

71. Cf. Lohmann, *Indifferenz und Gesellschaft: Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit Marx,* p. 17.

72. Georg Lukács, "Preface" (1967), in *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. ix–xlvii.

act of detachment through which we, for the purpose of attaining objective knowledge, extract ourselves from the experience of qualitative interaction in which all of our knowledge is always already anchored. If this view is correct, if reification is indeed identical with an objectification of our thought, then every social occurrence demanding such objectification would be a manifestation of the process of reification.

In fact, many passages in *History and Class-Consciousness* suggest that Lukács intends to assert that reification consists solely of a socially compelled neutralization of our antecedent stance of empathetic engagement. We can already see that this assumption must be inaccurate, because it would have overly totalizing ramifications; until now we have understood the antecedent act of recognition not as the contrary of objectified thought but as its condition of possibility. In the same way that Heidegger conceived of scientific knowledge as a possible and legitimate continuation of "care,"[73] Dewey was also convinced that all objective thought is rooted in the reflexive neutralization of our original qualitative experiences. Both of these thinkers, just like Stanley Cavell or the development-psychological theories I have cited, regarded the recognitional stance as a practical, nonepistemic attitude that must be taken up if one is to attain knowledge of the world or other persons. It thus appears highly implausible to assume with Lukács that this kind of recognitional perspective must stand in any kind of tension with cognition or that they might even be irreconcilable. In fact, the objective understanding of persons, objects, or issues is a possible product of an antecedent act of recognition, and not its polar opposite.

Moreover, the way in which Lukács equates reification and objectification leads to a highly questionable conception of social processes of development. Essentially, Lukács must hold that every social innovation that requires that we neutralize our original act of recognition and make this neutralization institutionally permanent is a case of reification. Thus he ultimately cannot avoid regarding everything that Max Weber described as part of the process of social rationalization in the European modern age as a social totalization of reification. Yet because Lukács is also compelled to assert that this original stance of empathetic engagement can never be lost—since, after all, it lies at the base of all social relations—his conception of society here comes up against its limit: If everything within a society is reified just because it urges the adoption of an objectifying attitude, then human sociality must have vanished com-

73. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §33 and §44.

pletely. All these regrettable consequences result from Lukács's conceptual strategy of reducing objectification to reification. For my purposes here, it suffices to note that reification must be understood differently than Lukács understands it in his own work.

To a certain extent, Lukács's conception of reification is not sufficiently complex, not sufficiently abstract. By treating every situation in which recognition gets supplanted by an objectifying stance of cognition toward objects and persons as an instance of reification, he implicitly repudiates the significance of the increase of objectivity in social development processes. One possible way of avoiding Lukács's mistake might be to draw upon external criteria in order to decide in which spheres a recognitional stance is required, and in which spheres an objectifying stance is more functionally appropriate. Habermas, for instance, took this functionalist path in his *Theory of Communicative Action,* in attempting to conceive "reification" as precisely the process through which strategic, "contemplative" [*beobachtende*] modes of behavior penetrate into social spheres in which communicative orientations are "functionally necessary."[74] The disadvantage of this kind of conceptual strategy, however, is quite clearly that it implicitly loads these functionalist distinctions with a normative burden of proof that they cannot possibly shoulder. The question concerning the point at which objectifying attitudes unfold their reifying effects cannot be answered by speaking of functional requirements in an apparently non-normative way.[75]

For this reason, I suspect that the question of finding appropriate criteria for reification must be posed in a different way altogether. As long as we retain the simplistic conception that every form of detached observation is opposed to antecedent recognition, we do not take sufficient account of the fact that the neutralization of recognition and engagement normally serves the purpose of intelligent problem solving. So instead of allowing the danger of reification to arise wherever the recognitional stance has been abandoned, as Lukács does, we should orient ourselves in our search toward the superordinate criteria for judging the kind of relation that these two distinct attitudes have to one another. At this higher level, where we are concerned with the modus of this relationship, we can discern two poles capable of replacing the

74. Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action,* vol. 2, ch. 8, 1 and 2.

75. This problem ultimately hangs together with the distinction that Habermas makes between "system" and "lifeworld," in which normative and functional considerations are subtly joined together. See my analysis in *Critique of Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), ch. 9.

opposition with which Lukács had been operating. We have, on the one hand, forms of knowledge sensitive to recognition and, on the other, forms of knowledge in which every trace of their origin in an antecedent act of recognition has been lost.

These somewhat complicated formulations are intended to articulate the fact that it is *prima facie* most advisable for us to distinguish between two modes in which these two kinds of stances relate to one another: they are either transparent to each other or obscure, accessible or inaccessible. In the first case, the act of cognition or detached observation remains conscious of its dependence on an antecedent act of recognition; in the second case, it has freed itself of this dependency and deludes itself that it has become autonomous of all nonepistemic prerequisites. By further pursuing Lukács's intention at a higher level, this kind of "forgetfulness of recognition" can now be termed "reification." I thereby mean to indicate the process by which we lose the consciousness of the degree to which we owe our knowledge and cognition of other persons to an antecedent stance of empathetic engagement and recognition.

Before I proceed to make this assertion more plausible, I would first like to demonstrate briefly that this assertion is wholly compatible with the intentions of some of the authors that I have already dealt with above. John Dewey, to whom the continental notion of "reification" was of course wholly alien, repeatedly hints in the essays cited above that our reflexive thought risks becoming pathological as soon as it loses sight of its roots in a qualitative experience of interaction. By shutting out the origin of these thoughts, an increasing tendency emerges in all of our scientific efforts to forget those elements of existential affectedness for the sake of which we undertook these efforts in the first place.[76] Stanley Cavell does not argue very differently when he asserts that this antecedent act of recognition must be conceived as an "exhibiting of the object of knowledge";[77] this conversely means that if we are not conscious of this original experience of direct engagement, we do not even really know what we are dealing with when we interact with other persons. Theodor W. Adorno emphasized more than any other the fact that the appropriateness and quality of our conceptual thought is dependent upon the degree to which we are capable of remaining conscious of the original connection of our thought to an object of desire—a beloved person or thing. He even regarded the memory of this antecedent act of

76. Dewey, "Qualitative Thought," p. 261; Dewey, "Affirmative Thought," pp. 104f.
77. Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging," p. 259.

recognition as providing a kind of guarantee that a given act of cognition has not constructed its object but has grasped it in all its concrete particularity.[78]

None of these three authors set the nonepistemic requirement of empathetic engagement in polar opposition to conceptual thought; rather, they were all convinced that it is at the moment in which our reflexive efforts lose consciousness of their origin in an act of antecedent recognition that we cross the threshold to pathology, skepticism, or—as Adorno would have called it—identity thought. It is this element of forgetting, of amnesia, that I would like to establish as the cornerstone for a redefinition of the concept of "reification." To the extent to which in our acts of cognition we lose sight of the fact that these acts owe their existence to our having taken up an antecedent recognitional stance, we develop a tendency to perceive other persons as mere insensate objects. By speaking here of mere objects or "things," I mean that in this kind of amnesia we lose the ability to understand immediately the behavioral expressions of other persons as making claims on us—as demanding that we react in an appropriate way. We may indeed be capable in a cognitive sense of perceiving the full spectrum of human expressions, but we lack, so to speak, the feeling of connection that would be necessary for us to be affected by the expressions we perceive. In this respect, forgetting our antecedent recognition, which I take to be the core of all forms of reification, indeed corresponds to the result produced by a perceptive reification of the world. In other words, our social surroundings appear here, very much as in the autistic child's world of perception, as a totality of merely observable objects lacking all psychic impulse or emotion.

By shifting the concept of "reification" from a simple level, at which it merely signifies the opposite of engagement or recognition, to a complex level, at which it describes a particular relation between recognition and cognition, we of course raise a series of problems that are not exactly easy to solve. First of all, we require at least a rough idea of how the cognitive process can cause our antecedent recognition to be forgotten. Where Lukács describes in his overly simple model the way in which merely contemplative behavior displaces activity and praxis, he

78. Cf. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, aphorism 79; Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectic,* translated by E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1997), p. 226. Unlike Martin Seel, *Adornos Philosophie der Kontemplation* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), I believe that the idea of "recognitional knowledge" (ibid., 42ff.) in the work of Adorno can be explained only in connection with his psychoanalytical speculations about all knowledge's grounding in our drives [*Triebgrund*].

inserts the social factor of "the market." He is convinced that it is the anonymous behavioral compulsions of the capitalist free market system that cause subjects to take up a merely cognitive stance toward their surroundings. But when we replace this simple concept of reification with our higher-level concept, then we cannot move as directly and immediately to the sociological level of explanation as Lukács did. Instead we must explain beforehand in what way it is at all possible for us subsequently to lose sight of the recognitional prerequisites of social practices while carrying out these very practices. Normally it is said that the particular rules that we learn more through habitual practice than through explicit instruction cannot later be unlearned—so how could it be possible that the both chronologically and categorially antecedent act of recognition could be forgotten in the course of our everyday acts of cognition?

I feel that it becomes easier to answer this question once it has been made clear that "to forget" does not here possess the strong meaning that is generally employed in the term "to unlearn" [*verlernen*]. It cannot be true that our consciousness can simply be dispossessed of this fact of recognition and that recognition thereby simply "vanishes" from view. Instead, a kind of reduced attentiveness must be at issue, which causes the fact of recognition to fall into the background and thus to slip out of our sight. Reification in the sense of "forgetfulness of recognition" therefore means that in the course of our acts of cognition we lose our attentiveness to the fact that this cognition owes its existence to an antecedent act of recognition.

Now, there are at least two exemplary cases of this form of reduced attentiveness that are quite helpful for the task of distinguishing between different types of reification. To start with the first case, in the course of our practices we might pursue a goal so energetically and one-dimensionally that we stop paying attention to other, possibly more original and important motives and aims. An example of this phenomenon might be the tennis player who, in her ambitious focus on winning, forgets that her opponent is in fact her best friend, for the sake of whom she took up the game in the first place. The way in which her goal becomes independent of the context in which it originated is in my opinion one of the two patterns according to which we can make sense of how reification comes about: we stop attending to the fact of antecedent recognition, because in the course of our practices the purpose of observing and cognizing our surroundings asserts its independence, so to speak, to such a degree that it banishes everything else to the back-

ground. The second kind of reduced attentiveness that provides a model for explaining how reification is possible derives not from internal but from external factors influencing our actions: a series of thought schemata that influence our practices by leading to a selective interpretation of social facts can significantly reduce our attentiveness for meaningful circumstances in a given situation. I would prefer to abstain from giving an example here, because the case is so well-known that it does not require a trivial illustration. In the course of our practices, our attentiveness to the fact of antecedent recognition can also be lost if we allow ourselves to be influenced by thought schemata and prejudices that are irreconcilable with this fact. In this sense, it would make much more sense to speak here not of "forgetting" but of "denial" or "defensiveness" [*Abwehr*].

By distinguishing between these two cases, we have become familiar with two patterns according to which the process of reification can be explained within the framework of our more complex model. I could summarize by saying that we are dealing either with a process in which cognitive goals have become completely detached from their original context, with the result that our cognitive stance has become rigid or overemphasized, or, in the second case, with a retroactive denial of recognition for the sake of preserving a prejudice or stereotype. With this explanation, we have acquired the means to move over to a sociological level of explanation. We now possess a sufficiently differentiated and sophisticated concept of the forms of reification, which in turn enables us to investigate the social reality of the present day with regard to how these processes could have come about. It is clear that we are dealing here either with institutionalized practices, which cause contemplation and observation to become independent of their roots in recognition, or with socially effective thought schemata, which compel a denial of antecedent recognition. For now, however, I would prefer to leave this point aside and turn to a problem that I have left on the sidelines until now. This is the question of whether we can draw any conclusions from our previous arguments for the primacy of recognition about humans' relation to their natural surroundings and themselves.

The three philosophers that I dealt with in the first two sections were convinced that engaged praxis, care, and recognition all enjoy a priority over disinterested contemplation with regard to our relationship to nature. Just as we must be affected by other people before we can take up a more neutral stance, so also our physical surroundings must be disclosed to us in their qualitative value *prior to* our more objective dealings with

them. Unlike this more comprehensive assertion, the theories I cited in the third section as independent exhibits are limited to assertions about the *interpersonal* world. It is solely with relation to other persons that Tomasello, Hobson, and Stanley Cavell speak of the primacy of identification or acknowledgment—not at all in relation to nonhuman living entities, plants, or even things. Yet the concept of "reification" that I have attempted to resuscitate here in connection with the work of Lukács demands that we account for the possibility of a reifying perception not only of our social world but also of our physical world. The things we encounter in our everyday dealings with the world must also be regarded as entities to which we relate in an inappropriate way when we apprehend them merely neutrally and according to external criteria. It is therefore not difficult to see that this intuition confronts me with a problem that is partly due to the narrow basis of my talk of "recognition." After all, how can the idea of a reification of nature be justified, if until now I have demonstrated only that we must preserve the priority of recognition in our relations toward other persons?

Here, too, I do not simply want to resort to the solution that Lukács had in mind but prefer to take a wholly different path. If we wished to stick with Lukács, then it would not suffice for him to demonstrate that we must always necessarily take up a stance of engagement toward nature as well. As we have seen, this would not be a difficult task with the help of Heidegger and Dewey, because both in their diverse ways insisted on the fact that our physical surroundings must always already have been disclosed to us in their qualitative significance, before we can relate to them in a theoretical fashion. Beyond this, Lukács would also have to show that abandoning this kind of perspective would ultimately be irreconcilable with the goal of apprehending nature as objectively as possible. Only when it could be claimed here as well that recognition enjoys a categorial priority over cognition could he prove in the end that in treating nature instrumentally we violate a necessary precondition of our social practices. I do not see how one could carry off such a proof today. Even in the works of Heidegger or Dewey I see hardly any support for the strong hypothesis that an objectification of nature could in any way harm the primacy of care or qualitative experience. Thus the direct path that Lukács takes in justifying his idea of a possible reification of nature has been closed off to us. We may regard the possibility of interactive, recognitional dealings with animals, plants, and even things to be ethically desirable, but this normative preference cannot provide

any sound arguments for claiming that society cannot go beyond these forms of interaction. Instead, the attempt to pursue Lukács's intuition along the detour of the priority of intersubjective recognition seems to me to be more promising. For this assertion I can lean on a thought that I have already mentioned briefly in referring to Adorno's idea of a primordial act of imitation.

As we have seen, Adorno also argued that our cognitive access to the objective world can be opened up only through our identification with an important figure of attachment, through the libidinal cathexis of a concrete other. Yet he also drew an additional conclusion from this argument, which throws some light on the question with which we are concerned here. He believed that a child learns to separate attitudes toward objects from the objects themselves, thereby gradually forming a concept of an external and independent world only via this prior act of identification. Finally, he also asserts that a child will continue to preserve the perspective of the loved person to which it feels attached, regarding this perspective as a further aspect of the now objectively fixed object. This act of imitating a concrete second person, which draws upon libidinal energies, becomes transmitted, so to speak, onto the object by endowing it with additional components of meaning that the loved figure of attachment perceives in the object. The more second person attitudes a subject can attach to this same object in the course of its libidinal cathexis, the more rich in aspects the object will ultimately appear in its objective reality.

In this sense, Adorno was certainly convinced that it is possible to speak of "recognition" with relation to nonhuman objects; but for him this manner of speaking had only the borrowed meaning that we show respect for those particular aspects and meanings of the object that owe their existence to the attitudes of other persons toward these objects. Perhaps one should formulate Adorno's conclusion more sharply and reproduce it as an internal context of morality and knowledge. This would produce the following: our recognition of the individuality of other persons demands that we perceive objects in the particularity of all those aspects that they attach to these objects in their respective views of them.[79]

79. Cf. Martin Seel, "Anerkennende Erkenntnis: Eine normative Theorie des Gebrauchs von Begriffen," in *Adornos Philosophie der Kontemplation,* pp. 42–63. As I have already mentioned (see footnote 78), my interpretation differs from that of Seel only in the sense that I take Adorno's speculations about the contribution of libidinal cathexis to knowledge as a basis of explanation for this normative epistemology.

This normative escalation, however, goes far beyond what is necessary for reformulating with Adorno's aid the idea of a possible "reification" of nature. By pursuing his line of reasoning, we have the opportunity to justify this concomitant idea without having to resort to speculations about interactive dealings with nature. As I argued before, the reification of human beings signifies that we have lost sight of or denied the fact of antecedent recognition. With Adorno, we could add that this antecedent recognition also means respecting those aspects of meaning in an object that human beings accord that object. If it is indeed the case that in recognizing other persons we must at the same time recognize their subjective conceptions and feelings about nonhuman objects, then we could also speak without hesitation of a potential "reification" of nature. It would consist in our failing to be attentive in the course of our cognition of objects to all the additional aspects of meaning accorded to them by other persons. Just as is the case with the reification of other persons, a "certain blindness"[80] is here at hand. We then perceive animals, plants, or things in a merely objectively identifying way, without being aware that these objects possess a multiplicity of existential meanings for the people around us.

Unfortunately, I must conclude my lectures with these vague suggestions concerning the possibility of a reification of our natural surroundings. Nevertheless, we could perhaps draw a conclusion from the peculiar status of these last considerations—one that concerns the entire intention of my efforts in these lectures. In the last three decades, social criticism has essentially restricted itself to evaluating the normative order of societies according to whether they fulfill certain principles of justice. Despite its success in justifying some normative standards and despite its efforts at differentiating the various fundamental aspects involved in the act of defining such standards, this approach has lost sight of the fact that violating generally valid principles of justice is not the only way in which a society can show itself to be normatively deficient. Recent social criticism has not only failed to pay sufficient attention to those deficiencies that are still best described by the term "social pathologies,"[81] but it has even failed to establish plausible criteria for judging certain social practices to be pathological.

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80. William James, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," in John McDermott (ed.), *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 629–44.

81. Honneth, "Pathologies of the Social."

This restriction cannot be justified with reference to the fact that democratic societies evaluate their own social and political orders primarily in relation to standards of justice, because deliberations within the democratic public sphere are constantly confronted with issues and challenges that raise the question of whether particular social developments might be regarded as desirable beyond all consideration of what is just. In answering such questions—which are often termed "ethical" questions—a philosophically inspired social criticism can obviously not reserve for itself a sacrosanct interpretive authority. My hope, however, is that social ontology can provide us with the means to understand and criticize the social developments described here, which would in turn enrich public discourse with solid arguments and stimulate it in the process. My attempt to reformulate Lukács's concept of reification from a recognition-theoretical perspective is dedicated to just such a task, and my attempt has not been unaffected by my concern that our societies could be developing in the direction that Lukács, with insufficient theoretical analysis and exaggerated generalization, anticipated over eighty years ago.