

VERSACHLICHUNG AND VERDINGLICHUNG
— BASIC CATEGORIES OF MARX'S THEORY OF
REIFICATION AND THEIR LOGICAL CONSTRUCTION —

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I. *Reification and Thingification (Versachlichung and Verdinglichung)*

In this paper, I attempt to establish the basic categories constituting Marx's theory of reification (*Versachlichung*) and thingification (*Verdinglichung*), and to explain their logical construction in order to reconsider the actual meaning of Marx's theory of reification and thingification.

The German language has two words standing for the thing (*la chose* in French) : *Sache* and *Ding*. *Sache* and *Ding* have different meanings even in everyday German. *Sache* stands for matter, business, case, cause (political or social), briefly something that owes its existence to complicated social relations as background while *Ding* stands for a natural or material thing. Marx regards the common essence of commodity, money and capital as a phenomenal conversion of the relations between persons into those between things, and further differentiates two different levels of conversion in terms of *Sache* and *Ding*. The relations between commodity producers convert themselves into those of things (*Sachen*). At this stage, the mystification of economic relations just takes the first step because the thing (*Sache*) itself represents a social relation. However, when the conversion takes a further step from *Sache* to *Ding*, the dimension of the relations between things (*Sachen*) is removed, and a thing (*Ding*) shows itself only as a bearer of different properties. To illustrate the second phase of conversion, profit, interest and ground rent are in essence nothing but different phenomenal forms of objectified surplus- labor that the industrial capital gratuitously extracts from wage laborers. However, at the phenomenal level, their relations to the surplus- labor of laborers are completely removed; means of production, money and ground appear to be endowed by nature with the ability to spontaneously bear profit, interest, and ground rent as their fruits. This type of mystification of economic relations in the final phase is termed thingification (*Verdinglichung*), which means the conversion of *Sache* into *Ding*, and is conceptually differentiated from reification (*Versachlichung*), which means the conversion of person into thing (*Sache*).

Now, we would like to explain the conceptual development of reification into thingification in terms of commodities.

Marx grasps the capitalist economic system as a reified relation of producers and formulates basic categories constitutive of reification in the theory of commodities. As is known, *Capital* begins with the following famous sentence:

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Der Reichtum der Gesellschaften, in welchen kapitalistische Produktionsweise herrscht, erscheint als “ungeheure Warensammlung,” die einzelne Ware als seine Elementarform. Unsere Untersuchung beginnt daher mit der Analyse der Ware. (Karl Marx, *Das Kapital, Erster Band*, Karl Marx/ Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Bd. 23, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1962, S. 49. Hereafter, quotations from Marx Engels *Werke* are abbreviated as MEW, 23: 49.)

The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an “immense collection of commodities”; the individual commodity appears as its elementary form. Our investigation therefore begins with an analysis of the commodity. (*Capital, Volume I*, translated by Ben Fowkes, Penguin Books, London 1976, p.125; hereafter abbreviated as Fowkes: 125).

The first sentence of *Capital* is fundamentally significant for an understanding of Marx’s theory of reification and thingification as well.

In *Capital*, Marx calls labor that produces commodities private labor. This means that labor must assume a social character because, although it is conducted without regarding others’ labor, it must depend on others’ labor as a constituent of the social division of labor; namely, each unit of labor must assume a social character in spite of being deprived of it. In order that each private labor may function as a member of a spontaneous system of social division of labor, it must assume the following double social character: First, each private labor as a special and useful one must satisfy special social needs. Second, each private labor must be valid and exchangeable as equal to another. However, it is not qualified to prove this double social character in its working action because it is done independently without regard to others’ labor. Therefore, it cannot express its social character as a constituent of a social division of labor until its product is exchanged with another. Through the necessity that social relations between persons in their production indirectly appear as social relations between things [Sachen], the social character of private labor constituting a social division of labor must be objectified as properties of labor products, namely as dual material [dinglich] properties that represent use-value and value as two elements of a commodity.

What matters here is the specific character of being [Seinscharakter] of the value of a commodity because the use-value of a commodity is immediately embodied in a commodity as a thing [Ding]. Whether it can satisfy any special social needs in the spontaneous division of labor or not depends on the social quality it contains while, to the contrary, the value of a commodity is an invisible property in each commodity itself although the value forms itself as a material [dinglich] property immanent in a commodity. Therefore, the value requires a specific way of expression for itself. The task of the theory of value-form consists in explaining how this essentially invisible value can be phenomenally expressed.

In *Capital*, Marx begins the analysis of the appearance (expression) of value-form with a well-known example: 20 yards of linen are worth 1 coat. Within this simple value-relation, 20 yards of linen represent a commodity whose value is expressed while 1 coat does nothing but offer the other commodity (20 yards of linen) a material for the value-expression. Marx calls the former commodity the relative value-form and the latter the equivalent form (or simply equivalent [Äquivalent]). In the simple value-relation, the linen first equalizes the coat as its own value-mirror (Wertspiegel) or value-body (Wertkörper) with itself. By value-mirror, Marx understands a mirror reflecting a value that exists as an invisible property in a commodity (the

linen in this case) while the value-thing means a use-value (the coat in this case) that immediately in its concrete use-form embodies the value. In this way, a commodity playing as an equivalent (the coat) acquires a property of “direct exchangeability.” Through this detour in which a commodity playing as an equivalent is recognized as a valid value-body, the concrete useful labor (sewing in this case) that produces the coat is also factually reduced to common abstract human labor. Thus, the linen first gives the coat a competency to directly in its concrete form of use-value embody the value-character common to commodities. Then, the linen expresses its own value-character or exchangeability as far as it can be equalized with the coat. Weaving that produces the linen can also be recognized as abstract human labor as far as it objectifies value. This is the second detour in the expression of value.

The value of a commodity playing as a relative value-form (the linen) exhibits value as a social relation because this value must be expressed in a certain quantity of use-value of another commodity (the coat). On the other hand, the other commodity as an equivalent in its specific concrete form can be recognized as a tangible form of value, and phenomenally appears as having an inherent natural property of direct exchangeability. In the commodity as equivalent, the value-form is agglutinated with use-value and transformed into a property of a thing (Ding). Through this transformation, the equivalent appears to keep the property of direct exchangeability even outside the above-mentioned value-relation although this competency can be effective only in a value-relation in which the linen is related to the coat as an equivalent. Marx defines the social relation that causes a social natural property [gesellschaftliche Natureigenschaft] as thingification [Verdinglichung] as will be considered below.

All labor has such a double character as concrete useful labor and at the same time a certain amount of expenditure of human labor force in general that could be applicable to other productive purposes as well. In this sense, abstract human labor is omnipresent in the human history. What characterizes capitalist commodity production is, however, the fact that the objectification of abstract human labor assumes a specific value-form as distinct from use-value, and cannot be socially recognized as wealth until the value of the product is realized, i.e., exchanged with money as a value-body [Wertkörper]. The labor that is expended in products that cannot be exchanged loses even its own useful character. This is really a fatal problem for workers as possessors of labor force as a commodity. Therefore, the value as a thing that opposes itself to use-value and is provided with social power to determine the fate of use-value is itself a thingified [verdinglicht] social relation.

In his manuscript concerning the theory of value-forms in preparation for the second edition of *Capital*, Marx clearly understands value to be a unique social relation:

das *Verhältniss der Arbeitsproducte zueinander als Ausdrücke dieser selben Einheit* ist ihr *Wertsein*...Ein Arbeitsproduct, für sich isolirt betrachtet, ist also nicht Werth, so wenig wie es Waare ist. Es wird nur *Werth*, in *seiner Einheit* mit andrem Arbeitsproduct, oder in dem *Verhältnis*, worin die verschiedenen Arbeitsproducte, als Krystalle *derselben Einheit*, der menschlichen Arbeit, einander gleichgesetzt sind....Da der *Werth* der Waaren nichts ist ausser ihrem *Verhältniss zur Arbeit* als ihrer gemeinschaftlichen Substanz oder ihr *Verhältnis zueinander* als Ausdruck dieser gemeinschaftlichen Substanz kann dieser Werth einer Waare auch nur erscheinen in *einem Verhältnis*, worin sie sich zu andrer Waare als Werth verhält, oder nur im *Werthverhältnis* verschiedner Waaren. Hence kann Werthausdruck nur gefunden werden, oder die Waaren können nur Werthform erhalten, im

Verhältnis verschiedner Waaren. Diess zeigt uns, wie die Werthform aus der Natur des Werthes selbst entspringt.

[*the relation of labor products to each other* as expressions of this same unity is their *value-being*...Therefore, a labor product is, if it is considered in an isolated way, no more value than it is commodity. It becomes *value* only in *its unity* with other labor products, or in the *relation* in which different labor products, as crystals of *the same unity*, i.e., human labor, are equalized with each other...The *value* of commodities is nothing outside their *relation to labor* as their communal substance or their *relation to each other* as expression of this communal substance so that this value of a commodity can also appear only in a *relation* in which a commodity relates itself to another one as value, or only in the *value-relation of different commodities*. Hence, value expression can be found or commodities can assume the value-form only in *relation to different commodities*. This shows us how the value-form derives from the nature of value itself.] (Ergänzungen und Veränderungen zum ersten Band des 'Kapitals', *Marx- Engels- Gesamtausgabe, II/6*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1987, p.31. Hereafter the quotation from *Marx- Engels- Gesamtausgabe* is abbreviated as MEGA II/6: 31.)

What characterizes the capitalist commodity society derives from the uniquely (indirectly) social character of private labor that, although totally dependent on each other, is deprived of socialness. In this society, the social relations of private workers to each other do not appear as social relations in the dimension of labor but assume a converted [verkehrt] form of appearance as the social relations of things (Sachen) to each other. Thus, the conversion [Verkehrung] of social relations of persons to persons into social relations of things (Sachen) to things can be defined as reification (Versachlichung); this means a process that, in the dimension of social relations, switches from the person to the thing. Through this switch, furthermore, the social character of private labor appears as a socio- natural property (gesellschaftliche Natureigenschaft) inherent in a commodity as a thing (Ding). The commodity phenomenally appears to inherently acquire this natural property even outside the social relations of things (Sachen) to each other. The conversion of social relations of things (Sachen) into social natural properties of things (Dinge) and the following deepening of concealment and mystification of social relations can be defined as thingification (Verdinglichung), which Marx distinguishes from Versachlichung as the first stage of the mystification process.

II. *The Problem of Translation of Reification and Thingification*

Marx elaborately differentiates thingification from reification. However, the English and French translators of *Capital* have completely ignored such elaborate conceptual difference between Sache and Ding as well as that between reification and thingification. This confusion has been leading them to incorrect or a less sufficiently correct translation of Marx's economic texts.

In this chapter, we try to illustrate the extent to which the most important original German texts are mistranslated in the English and French editions of *Capital*.

The following translations are to be critically compared and examined:

- ① *Capital, Volume I*, translated from the third German edition by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling and edited by Frederick Engels (1887), Marx/ Engels Collected Works (MECW), Volume 35, International Publishers, New York 1996.
- ② *Capital, Volume I*, translated by Ben Fowkes, Penguin Books, London 1976.
- ③ *Le Capital Livre premier*, publié sous la responsabilité de Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, Messidor/ Editions Sociales, Paris 1983
- ④ *Le Capital*, traduction de M. J. Roy, entièrement révisée par l'auteur. Paris 1872-1875, MEGA II/7, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1989.
- ⑤ *Capital Volume III*, MECW, Volume 37, International Publishers New York 1998.
- ⑥ *Capital Volume III*, translated by David Fernbach, Penguin Books, London 1991.
- ⑦ *Le Capital Livre III*, traduction de Madame Cohen-Solal et Monsieur Gilbert Badia, Editions Sociales, Paris 1976.
- ⑧ *Le Capital Livres II et III*, Édition Établie et Annotée par Maximilian Rubel, Gallimard, Paris 1963 et 1968.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Marx's theory of reification and thingification consists of three logical stages: (1) the conversion of relations between persons into those of Sachen (reification); (2) the conversion of reified relations of Sachen into the socio- natural properties of Dinge (thingification); and finally (3) the conversion of production relations among persons into the reified- thingified relations of things (Sachen- Dinge) that embody socio- natural properties (reification- thingification) . The following quotation from the first volume of *Capital* corresponds to the logical transition from the second stage to the third.

Das Geheimnisvolle der Warenform besteht also einfach darin, daß sie den Menschen die gesellschaftlichen Charaktere ihrer eignen Arbeit als gegenständliche Charaktere der Arbeitsprodukte selbst, als **gesellschaftliche Natureigenschaften dieser Dinge** zurückspiegelt, daher auch das gesellschaftliche Verhältnis der Produzenten zur Gesamtarbeit als **ein außer ihnen existierendes gesellschaftliches Verhältnis von Gegenständen**. Durch dies **Quidproquo** werden die Arbeitsprodukte Waren, **sinnlich übersinnliche oder gesellschaftliche Dinge**. (MEW 23: 86)

There are three fundamental notions for the theory of thingification: (1) the socio- natural properties (gesellschaftliche Natureigenschaften) of Dinge; (2) conversion (Quidproquo); and (3) sensuously suprasensible or social things (sinnlich übersinnliche oder gesellschaftliche Dinge). From the context, it is evident that "sensuously suprasensible or social" in the third notion stands for having socio- natural properties. Therefore, sensuously suprasensible or social things mean things (Dinge) that embody socio- natural properties.

Now, what interests us in this chapter is to carefully inquire how these three key notions are translated in the above-mentioned editions (①, ②, ④, and ⑥).

- ① A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as **an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour**; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as **a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour**. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, **social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses**. (MECW 35: 82-83)

Translation ① is the most doubtful translation because (1) “gesellschaftliche Natureigenschaften dieser Dinge” is not correctly translated. (2) Quidproquo is not translated. And (3) “sinnlich übersinnliche oder gesellschaftliche Dinge” is not correctly translated. Problem (3) is critically treated in the next translation ②.

② The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as **the socio-natural properties of these things**. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as **a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers**. Through this **substitution**, the products of labour become commodities, **sensuous things which are at the same time suprasensible or social**. (Fowkes: p.164-165)

Translation ② by Ben Fowkes is a much better than MECW’s translation because the translator makes efforts to correctly translate such keywords as “gesellschaftliche Natureigenschaften” or “Quidproquo” into English. A serious problem still remains unsolved: he does not understand what “sinnlich übersinnliche oder gesellschaftliche Dinge” means in the context of thingification. It means the things (Dinge) that embody something that is properly a social relation among persons, and is, in this sense, suprasensible or social as its own natural (sensuous) property. In the phrase “sinnlich übersinnliche oder gesellschaftliche Dinge” “sinnlich” must be taken as an adverb, not an adjective. However, Ben Fowkes mistranslates this as “sensuous things which are at the same time suprasensible or social.” The same mistake is repeated in the French translations as well. This witnesses that none of them understands the conceptual difference between Sache and Ding or between reification and thingification.

③ Ce qu’il y a de mystérieux dans la forme-marchandise consiste donc simplement en ceci qu’elle renvoie aux hommes **l’image des caractères sociaux de leur propre travail eux-mêmes**, comme **des qualités sociales que ces choses possèderaient par nature** : elle leur renvoie ainsi **l’image du rapport social des producteurs au travail global**, comme un **rapport social existant en dehors d’eux, entre des objets**. C’est ce **quidproquo** qui fait que les produits du travail deviennent des marchandises, **des choses sensibles supra-sensibles, des choses sociales**. (Lefebvre: 82-83)

The French translation has the following problems: (1) “gesellschaftliche Natureigenschaften dieser Dinge” must be one of the most important technical terms for the theory of thingification. If it is translated as “des qualités sociales que ces choses possèderaient par nature” [qualities which these things possess by nature], we are liable to lose sight of this technical term. (2) The French rendition of “sinnlich übersinnliche oder gesellschaftliche Dinge” into “des choses sensibles supra-sensibles, des choses sociales” [sensible supra-sensible things, namely social things] is incorrect because (a) “sinnlich” must be taken as an adverb, not an adjective, and (b) “sinnlich übersinnliche oder gesellschaftliche Dinge” must correctly be translated as “des choses sensuellement supra-sensibles ou sensuellement sociales.” (3) The most serious problem in ③ lies in such sentences as “elle renvoie aux hommes **l’image** des caractères sociaux de leur propre travail eux-mêmes, comme des qualités sociales que ces choses possèderaient par nature : elle leur renvoie ainsi **l’image** du rapport social des

producteurs au travail global, comme un rapport social existant en dehors d'eux, entre des objets." The French translator inserts a doubtful word, "l'image" (the image), which does not exist in the original text. By this insertion, the translator misleads us to believe that the ongoing conversion of Sache into Ding could take place just at the dimension of images, not as an objective reality.

One of the reasons why, in the long history of studies on Marx, researchers have paid little attention to the difference between reification and thingification is related to the fact that, in the original texts of *Capital*, reification is used no more than four times, and thingification only two times. As we have seen, this does not mean that such notions are of little importance for Marx's critique of the economic theory.

Now, we are going to investigate how and in what context Marx uses them.

Der der Ware immanente Gegensatz von Gebrauchswert und Wert, von Privatarbeit, die sich zugleich als unmittelbar gesellschaftliche Arbeit darstellen muß, von besondrer konkreter Arbeit, die zugleich nur als abstrakt allgemeine Arbeit gilt, von **Personifizierung der Sache und Versachlichung der Personen**—dieser immanente Widerspruch erhält in den Gegensätzen der Warenmetamorphose seine entwickelten Bewegungsformen. (MEW 23: 128)

① The antithesis, use value and value; the contradictions that private labour is bound to manifest itself as direct social labour, that a particularized concrete kind of labour has to pass for abstract human labour; the contradiction between **the personification of objects and the representation of persons by things**; all these antitheses and contradictions, which are immanent in commodities, assert themselves, and develop their modes of motion, in the antithetical phases of the metamorphosis of a commodity. (MECW 35: 123-124)

In translation ① "Versachlichung der Personen" is incorrectly translated as "the representation of persons by things." As a result, "Versachlichung" (reification) is not rightly qualified as an important technical term. The correct translation of "Personifizierung der Sache" must be "the personification of the object (or the thing)" instead of "objects."

② There is an antithesis, immanent in the commodity, between use-value and value, between private labour which must simultaneously manifest itself as directly social labour, and a particular concrete kind of labour which simultaneously counts as merely abstract universal labour, between **the conversion of things into persons and the conversion of persons into things***; the antithetical phases of the metamorphosis of the commodity are the developed forms of motion of this immanent contradiction. * "*Personifizierung der Sachen und Versachlichung der Personen.*" More succinctly, "Personification of things and reification of persons." (Fowkes: 209)

The translator does not qualify personification and reification as important technical terms by translating "Personifizierung der Sache und Versachlichung der Personen" as "conversion of things into persons and the conversion of persons into things." However, what interests us is that he inserts into the text the following footnote: "Personifizierung der Sache und Versachlichung der Personen." More succinctly, "Personification of things and reification of persons." From this, we see that he takes into consideration "personification of things and

reification of persons” as a possible translation. In addition, “Personifizierung der Sache” must correctly be translated as “personification of the thing” instead of “things.”

③ L’opposition immanente à la marchandise entre valeur d’usage et la valeur, entre le travail privé, qui doit en même temps se présenter comme travail immédiatement social, et le travail concret particulier, qui ne vaut en même temps que comme travail abstract universel, entre **la personification des choses et l’objectivation des personnes**—cette contradiction immanente acquiert ses formes de mouvement développées dans les termes contradictoires de la métamorphose de la marchandise. (Lefebvre : 129)

In French translation ③ as well, “Versachlichung der Personen” is translated as “l’objectivation des personnes” instead of “la réification des personnes” so that reification is not qualified as an important term. This contradicts the fact that in the French translation of the third volume of *Capital*, as we will soon see, “Versachlichung” is translated as “la réification.” Furthermore, “Personifizierung der Sache” must be translated as “la personification de la chose” instead of “la personification des choses.”

What interests us is that Marx in the corresponding sentence in the French edition of *Capital* revised by himself (1872-75) deletes the phrase: “la personification de la chose et la réification des personnes.”

④ Les contradictions que recèle la marchandise, de valeur usuelle et valeur échangeable, de travail privé qui doit à la fois se représenter comme travail social, de travail concret qui ne vaut que comme travail abstrait; ces contradictions immanentes à la nature de la marchandise acquièrent dans la circulation leurs formes de mouvement. (MEGA II/7 : 89)

Reification signifies the phenomenal conversion of the production relations among persons into those of things (Sachen) to each other or persons. The reification of persons (or subjects) implies the personification (or subjectification) of things (or objects) and vice versa. To express this twofold conversion, Marx generally mentions reification and personification in pairs.¹ This constitutes the essence of reification different from thingification that generally pairs with socio-natural properties. Reification is also conceptualized as “the reversal of subjects into objects” (MEGA II/4.1: 64) or “the reversal between things and persons.”²

¹ “In diesen zwei Formen des Mehrwerths ist also die Natur desselben; das Wesen des Capitals und der Charakter der capitalistischen Production vollständig nicht nur ausgelöscht, sondern ins Gegenteil verkehrt. Aber insofern auch der Charakter und die Gestalt des Capitals vollendet, als die Versubjectivirung der Sachen, die Versachlichung der Subjekte, die Verkehrung von Ursache und Wirkung, das religiöse quid pro quo, die reine Form des Capitals G-G’, sinnlos, ohne alle Vermittlung dargestellt und ausgedrückt wird.”

[In these two forms of surplus-value, therefore, the nature of itself, the essence of the capital and the character of the capitalist production is completely not only deleted but also reversed into the opposite. However, as far as subjectivation of things, reification of subjects, reversal of cause and effect, religious substitution, and the pure form of capital M[oney]-M’ are described and expressed in a senseless way without any mediation, the character and the figure of capital is also completed.] (MEGA II/3.4, S.1494)

² “Der bestimmte ökonomische Charakter von *Lebensmitteln*, sich Arbeiter zu kaufen, oder von *Productionsmitteln*, von Leder und Leisten - Schustergesellen *anzuwenden*, diese Verkehrung zwischen Sache und Person, also der capitalistische Charakter ist mit dem stofflichen Charakter der Productionselemente so untrennlich verwachsen in der capitalistischen Production und daher in der Phantasie der politischen Oekonomen.”

[The definite *economic* character of the *means of subsistence* to buy laborers, or that of the *means of production*, for examples of skins and lasts to *apply* shoemakers, this reversal between thing and person, therefore, the capitalist

In the third volume of *Capital* we find one single sentence where reification and thingification are explained in a way different from each other.

Im Kapital—Profit, oder noch besser Kapital—Zins, Boden—Grundrente, Arbeit—Arbeitslohn, in dieser ökonomischen Trinität als dem Zusammenhang der Bestandteile des Werts und des Reichtums überhaupt mit seinen Quellen ist die Mystifikation der kapitalistischen Produktionsweise, **die Verdinglichung der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse, das unmittelbare Zusammenwachsen der stofflichen Produktionsverhältnisse mit ihrer geschichtlich- sozialen Bestimmtheit** vollendet: die verzauberte, verkehrte und auf den Kopf gestellte Welt, wo Monsieur le Capital und Madame la Terre als soziale Charaktere, und zugleich unmittelbar als **bloße Dinge** ihren Spuk treiben. Es ist das große Verdienst der klassischen Ökonomie, diesen falschen Schein und Trug, diese Verselbständigung und Verknöcherung der verschiedenen gesellschaftlichen Elemente des Reichtums gegeneinander, **diese Personifizierung der Sachen und Versachlichung der Produktionsverhältnisse**, diese Religion des Alltagslebens aufgelöst zu haben.

[Capital—profit (or much better capital—interest), land—ground-rent, labour—wages, this economic trinity as the connection between the components of value and wealth in general and its sources, completes the mystification of the capitalist mode of production, **the thingification of social relations, namely the immediate coalescence of the material relations of production with their historical and social specificity**: the bewitched, distorted und upside-down world where Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre, who are at the same time social characters and **mere things (Dinge)**, go on a ghostly spree. It is the great merit of classical economics to have dissolved this false appearance and deception, this autonomization and ossification of the different social elements of wealth vis-à-vis one another, **this personification of things and reification of the relations of production.**] (MEW 25:838)

In the above-quoted sentences we can see what reification means from this phrase: “this personification of things and reification of the relations of production.” On the other hand, what distinguishes thingification from reification consists in the definition of thingification as “the immediate coalescence of the material relations of production with their historical and social specificity.” In the quoted sentences, Marx treats the so-called economic trinity, according to which capital, ground, and labor automatically bear respectively interest, ground rent, and wages. Here, “the material relations of production” refers to the technical functional relations of material elements constituting the production process like ground, the means of production and labor to each other while “their historical and social specificity” refers to specific social determinations like ground rent, profit (interest), and wage that the above-mentioned elements of production create in capitalist production. By thingification Marx understands “the immediate coalescence of the material determinations of elements constituting the capitalist production process with their specifically social determinations, and, more generally, the inseparable

character is so inseparably conglutinated with the material character of the production elements in the capitalist production, and, therefore, in the phantasy of the political economists.] (MEGA II/4.1, S.82)

In this quotation, the “reversal between thing and person,” which means the reversal of thing to person and of thing to person, namely subject, refers to reification while the inseparable conglutination “with the material character of the production elements” refers to thingification.

coalescence between the socially determined and the naturally determined conditions of production elements (means of production, ground, labor, etc.). This coalescence causes the disappearance of specific social determinations in the capitalist mode of production in which, on the surface of capitalist production, nothing but the natural and material relations of production without any social-historical limitations appear. Thingification assumes its most complete form in the economic trinity. However, it already begins in the world of commodities. In this sense, the logic of *Capital* stands for the logical processes of the deepening mystification of capitalist production from commodity and money through industrial, commercial, and interest-bearing capital to property on the ground.

Now, we will critically examine the English and French translations of the above-quoted text.

⑤ In capital — profit, or still better capital — interest, land — rent, labour—wages, in this economic trinity represented as the connection between the component parts of value and wealth in general and its sources, we have the complete mystification of the capitalist mode of production, **the conversion of social relations into things, the direct coalescence of the material production relations with their historical and social determination.** It is an enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world, in which Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre do their ghost-walking as social characters and at the same time directly as **mere things**. It is the great merit of classical economy to have destroyed this false appearance and illusion, this mutual independence and ossification of the various social elements of wealth, **this personification of things and conversion of production relations into entities**, this religion of everyday life. (MECW 37: 817)

In MECW, “die Verdinglichung der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse” is translated as “the conversion of social relations into things,” and “Versachlichung der Produktionsverhältnisse” as “conversion of production relations into entities.” We can find neither reification nor thingification. To be sure, we find in translation ⑤ “the conversion into things” for Versachlichung and “the conversion into entities” for Verdinglichung. But we are unable to place confidence in the terminology selection by the translators because they do not in a consequent way apply these terms to the whole texts of *Capital*. Here, distinguishing Sache from Ding in order to adequately distinguish reification from thingification is significant. However, as long as both words are translated as “thing,” conceptual confusion is inevitable.

⑥ Capital— profit (or better still capital— interest), land- ground— rent, labour— wages, this economic trinity as the connection between the components of value and wealth in general and its sources, completes the mystification of the capitalist mode of production, **the reification of social relations, and the immediate coalescence of the material relations of production with their historical and social specificity:** the bewitched, distorted and upside-down world haunted by Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre, who are at the same time social characters and **mere things**. It is the great merit of classical economics to have dissolved this false appearance and deception, this autonomization and ossification of the different social elements of wealth vis-à-vis one another, **this personification of things and reification of the relations of production.** (Fernbach: 968-969)

The fatal mistake in translation ⑥ by David Fernbach consists in the conceptual confusion

between *Versachlichung* and *Verdinglichung* because he translates both words as a single word: “reification.” This confusion is derived from his inability to distinguish between *Sache* and *Ding*.

⑦ Dans la formule capital—profit, ou, mieux, capital—intérêt, terre—rente foncière, travail—salaire, dans cette trinité économique qui veut établir la connexion interne entre les éléments de valeur et de richesse et leurs sources, la mystification du mode capitaliste de production, **la réification des rapports sociaux, l'imbrication immédiate des rapports de production matériels avec leur détermination historico-sociale** se trouvent accomplies ; et c'est le monde enchanté et inversé, le monde à l'envers ou *Monsieur le Capital* et *Madame la Terre*, à la fois caractères sociaux, mais en même temps **simples choses**, dansent leur ronde fantomatique. C'est le grand mérite de l'économie politique classique d'avoir dissipé ces fausses apparences et ces illusions : l'autonomisation et la sclérose des divers éléments sociaux de la richesse, **la personnification des choses et la réification des rapports de production**, cette religion de la vie quotidienne. (Cohen-Solal et Badia: 750)

In French translation ⑦ as well, the same mistake as seen in translation ⑥ is repeated.

⑧ « Capital—profit », ou, mieux, « capital—intérêt », « terre—rente foncière », « travail—salaire » : dans cette trinité économique qui représente la relation des éléments de la valeur et de la richesse avec leurs sources, la mystification du mode de production capitaliste, **la réification—métamorphose des conditions sociales matérielles en choses—la fusion immédiate des conditions de la production avec leurs détermination historique et sociales** se trouve achevées; c'est un univers ensorcelé, perversi, un monde sens dessus dessous, où *Monsieur le Capital* et *madame la Terre*, caractères sociaux en même temps que **simples choses**, mènent leur danse macabre. L'économie classique a le grand mérite d'avoir mis fin à toute cette fantasmagorie, à cette individualisation et à cette ossification des divers éléments sociaux de la richesse, à **cette personnification des choses et à cette transformation des rapports de production en choses** ; elle a détruit cette religion profane. (Rubel: 2000)

Rubel translates “die Verdinglichung der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse” as “la réification—métamorphose des conditions sociales matérielles en choses” [reification—metamorphosis of material social conditions into things] and, on the other hand, “Versachlichung der Produktionsverhältnisse” as “cette transformation des rapports de production en choses” [this transformation of production relations into things]. Although he tries to distinguish between *Versachlichung* and *Verdinglichung*, his attempt fails because in his translation *Versachlichung* translated as transformation into things loses conceptual status for the sake of reserving the term: “reification” for “Verdinglichung.” The fatal problem also consists in his failure to properly distinguish between *Sache* and *Ding*. In the above translation, “things” (*choses*) appears three times. But the first two things (*choses*) refer to *Dinge* while the last things (*choses*) refer to *Sachen*.

As we have considered above, Marx characterizes natural determinations that, resulting from the coalescence of social and natural ones, veil the social ones in themselves in terms of properties (*Eigenschaften*)³. Things as *Sachen* still reserve the determinations of social relations of *Sachen* to one another or to persons while, on the contrary, things as *Dinge* are purged of

any determinations of them and related to nothing but their own natural properties that are often characterized as properties immanent in things (Dinge).

das Ding nun als Capital und das Capital als **blosses Ding** erscheint, das gesammte Resultat des capitalistischen Productions- und Circulationsprocesses als **eine dem Ding inhärente Eigenschaft**

[Now, the thing (Ding) appears as capital and capital as a **simple thing (Ding)**, the whole result of capitalist production- and circulationprocess as **a property immanent in the thing (Ding)**] (MEGA II/3.4: 1455).

In spite of the conceptual difference between these two notions, we should not comprehend them in inflexible, fixed way because they both represent the inseparable double factors constituting the whole reversal process of the capitalist system. Thingification neither exists without reification, nor does the latter function without thingification. Therefore, they neither contradict nor exclude each other at all. The conceptual difference consists in the difference of aspect focused upon or referred to in the context of the text. In the case of Ding, the focus is set on a specific relation of a thing to certain socio-natural properties while, in the case of Sache, the focus is placed on a specific reversal of relations among persons into those of things (Sachen)⁴.

Based on the conceptual characteristics of both notions, we can discover a number of passages in Marx's texts in which he discusses them in a loaded way without explicitly mentioning them. We should take all important passages of this type into consideration in order to adequately comprehend the entire implications of both notions. As an example, I introduce a very significant passage concerning thingification from the third volume of *Capital*:

Wir haben bereits bei den einfachsten Kategorien der kapitalistischen Produktionsweise, und selbst der Warenproduktion, bei der Ware und dem Geld den mystifizierenden Charakter nachgewiesen, der **die gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse**, denen die stofflichen Elemente des Reichtums bei der Produktion als Träger dienen, **in Eigenschaften dieser Dinge selbst verwandelt** (Ware) und noch ausgesprochener **das Produktionsverhältnis selbst in ein Ding** (Geld). Alle Gesellschaftsformen, soweit sie es zur Warenproduktion und Geldzirkulation bringen, nehmen an dieser Verkehrung teil. Aber in der kapitalistischen Produktionsweise und beim Kapital, welches ihre herrschende Kategorie, ihr bestimmendes Produktionsverhältnis bildet, entwickelt sich diese verzauberte und verkehrte Welt noch viel weiter.

[We have already shown in considering the simplest categories of the capitalist mode of

³ "Daß nun, 'obgleich Gold und Silber nicht von Natur Geld, Geld von Natur Gold und Silber is,' zeigt die Kongruenz ihrer Natureigenschaften mit seinen Funktionen."

[The fact that "although gold and silver are not by nature money, money is by nature gold and silver" shows the congruity of natural properties of gold and silver with functions of money.]" (MEGA II/6: 118)

⁴ "Ihr wechselseitiger Zusammenhang erscheint ihnen [den Individuen] selbst fremd, unabhängig, als eine Sache. Im Tauschwerth ist **die gesellschaftliche Beziehung der Personen in ein gesellschaftliches Verhältnis der Sachen verwandelt; das persönliche Vermögen in ein sachliches.**"

[The mutual relations of individuals appear to themselves as alien, independent, namely as a thing (Sache). In exchange-value the social relation of persons is transformed into a social relation of things (Sachen), personal competency into a thing-like (sachlich) one.] (MEGA II/1.1: 90)

production, and even commodity production in general, namely commodity and money, the mystifying character that transforms the social relations for which the material elements of wealth serve as bearers in the course of production into properties of these things [Dinge] themselves (commodity), and still more explicitly transforms the relation of production itself into a thing [ein Ding] (money). All forms of society are subject to this reversal, insofar as they involve commodity production and monetary circulation. In the capitalist mode of production, however, where capital is the dominant category and forms the specific relation of production, this bewitched and reversed world develops much further.] (MEW 25: 835)

From the above-quoted text, we can see that thingification involves three phases in its logical development: (1) The first phase is where certain determinations of social relations appear as certain properties of things (Dinge). This phase corresponds to the thingification in commodities with use-value and value as their socio-natural properties. (2) The second phase refers to thingification (mystification) which transforms the production relation itself into one thing (Ding). This phase corresponds to the thingification in money. (3) The third phase refers to thingification in capital, which further develops the reversal and mystification.

Thingification as the coalescence of social determinations with natural-material ones constitutes a base for fetishism in the everyday representations of bourgeois society and, therefore, in the bourgeois economy.⁵ However, thingification itself must be distinguished from fetishism because the latter is related to the reversed- distorted consciousness caused by the former while the former is related to the reversed reality of the economic system, which cannot be reduced to a reversed-distorted consciousness.⁶

The necessity of conceptually distinguishing thingification from fetishism does not become urgent until we fully comprehend the capital-thingification in terms of the production powers of capital [Produktivkräfte des Capitals] instead of reversed distorted consciousness. Capital in its real subsumption of labor under capital [reale Subsumtion der Arbeit unter das Capital] acquires a competency to continually revolutionize the production processes in accordance with capital's needs and requests.

⁵ “Daher auf Grundlage des kapitalistischen Produktionsprocesses dieses unzertrennliche Zusammenschmelzen der Gebrauchswerthe, worin das Capital in der Form von *Produktionsmitteln* existirt, und der Bestimmung dieser Produktionsmittel, dieser *Dinge* als *Capital*, was sein bestimmtes gesellschaftliches Produktionsverhältniß ist, grade, wie innerhalb dieser Produktionsweise, den in ihr Befangnen *Product* an und für sich als *Waare* gilt. Dies bildet eine Basis für den Fetischismus der Politischen Oekonomen.”

[Therefore, on the base of the capitalist production process, this *inseparable coalescence* of use-values in which capital exists in the forms of *means of production* with the determination of these means of production, namely these *things* (Dinge) as *capital*, which is itself a determined social production relation, is just the same as inside this mode of production a *product* in itself passes to the people captured in it for a *commodity*. This constitutes a base for fetishism of the political economy.] (MEGA II/4.1: 58-59)

⁶ “...ist diese Verdrehung und Verkehrung eine *wirkliche*, keine *blos gemeinte*, blos in der Vorstellung der Arbeiter und Capitalisten existirende.”

[This distortion and reversal is a really existing one, not merely a conceived one, merely existing in the representation of capitalists and laborers.] (MEGA II/1.2: 698)

III. *Fetishism and Personification of Things*

In commodity production, value appears as a socio-natural property of things, and the law of value (Wertgesetz) like a natural law holds sway over commodity producers. In this sense, commodities become sensuously supersensible or social things [sinnlich übersinnliche oder gesellschaftliche Dinge]. The social power acquired by labor products as things derives from the necessity that the labor of producers, although totally dependent on each other, are nevertheless unable to immediately obtain social competence in the dimension of labor as action so that they must totally transfer their own social characteristics to their own products. Marx defines a thing equipped with this social power (to rule over persons or productive subjects) as fetish [Fetisch]. This fetishism [Fetischismus] means the consciousness of producers and other economic agents who accept the fetish as a self-evident social fact. In societies producing commodities, social relations of productions appear as relations of things equipped with socio-natural properties and, as a result, products must appear as fetishes. These relations are themselves objective ones. The producers involved in them are conscious of them as self-evident relations. Fetishism is a reversed consciousness as long as it falls victim to reification and thingification. In this sense, it can be criticized in a scientific way as Marx did in his critique of political economy. However, this consciousness itself is inevitably formed as “natural” consciousness in societies producing and exchanging commodities.

As we have seen, in the capitalist economic system, the social relations of productive subjects appear as those of things to things (Versachlichung der Person), and things acquire the social power to decide the fate of productive subjects. However, things such as commodities, money, and capital cannot move about in the market of their own accord. In order to socially function as things, they require specific agents who move them about. In this way, the further development of reification establishes subjects who subjectively represent the functions of things and satisfy their demands. Marx calls this process the personification of things (Personifizierung der Sachen). Capitalism can function as an economic system only because producers accept the social functions of things by their own subjective will and actively act as faithful agents to things.

Le capitaliste n'a ...aucune raison d' être sociale, qu'autant qu'il fonctionne comme capital personnifié....Le capitaliste n'est respectable qu'autant qu'il est le capital fait homme. . . Sa volonté et sa conscience ne réfléchissant que les besoins du capital qu'il représente.

[Except that the capitalist functions as capital personified, he has no reason for social existence....The capitalist is respectable only as far as he is capital made human....His will and consciousness reflect nothing more than the needs of the capital he represents.] (French Edition of *Capital*, MEGA II/7: 514)⁷

What is said of the capitalist in the above quotation is applicable to all forms of personification of things: i.e., a commodity producer as commodity personified, a money holder

⁷ “Nur soweit der Kapitalist personifiziertes Kapital ist, hat er einen historischen Wert und jenes historische Existenzrecht....Nur als Personifikation des Kapitals ist der Kapitalist respektabel.”

[Except as capital personified, the capitalist has no historical value and no right to that historical existence....Only as a personification of capital is the capitalist respectable.] (MEW 23: 618)

as money personified, and a worker as labor personified. The personification of things explains that the action performed by persons, although they act of their own free will, is nothing but the function of things provided with will and consciousness in persons as bearers of things. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the independent subjectification (Subjektivierung) of things is based upon specific subjective activeness on the part of subjects. Commodity exchange is not possible without spontaneous interaction of commodity holders who have a concrete desire for commodities. In this exchange relation, they recognize each other as free and equal commodity holders only in terms of personified commodity. In the production process of capital, the capitalist and the worker actively behave only as personified capital and personified labor respectively. Although the subjects act of their own free will, they act in such a way that the capital as independent and self-valorizing value is transformed into a dominant subject in the production process. Thus, the reified economic system is maintained by the action of human subjects with the reified consciousness under the sway of the reified system.

IV. *Thing as Thingified Community (Verdinglichtes Gemeinwesen)*

What is decisively important for Marx's theory of reification is that the social relation or communality is alienated from the human subjects and transferred to things. Functions that the community [Gemeinwesen] fulfilled in premodern societies are in the capitalist societies monopolized by things opposed to producers and workers like value, money or capital.

In der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft...die Sache, die ihm [dem Arbeiter] *gegenübersteht*, ist das *wahre Gemeinwesen* nun geworden, das er zu verspeisen sucht, und von dem er verspeist wird.

[In bourgeois society...the thing *opposed to* the worker is the *true community*, which he tries to consume but by which he is consumed.] (MEGAII/1.2: 400)

The first form of the reified and thingified community is money as independent value. As the reified and thingified community alienated from the individuals, money keeps the social power over themselves.

Geld ist "unpersönliches" Eigentum. In ihm kann ich die allgemeine gesellschaftliche Macht und den allgemeinen gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhang, die gesellschaftliche Substanz in der Tasche mit mir herumtragen. Das Geld gibt die gesellschaftliche Macht als Ding in die Hand der Privatperson, die als solche diese Macht übt.

[Money is "impersonal" property. In it, I can carry the general social power and general social connections about with me. The money gives the social power as a thing into the hands of a private person who, as such person, exercises this power.] (MEGA II/2: 20)

When capital goes through Money- Commodity- Money' (= Money + Suplus-Value) and valorizes itself in this process, what is accumulated under the capital is nothing less than a reified "community." Capital in terms of "general social power" can rule over workers because it represents the reified community.

V. *Thingification of Capital in the Capitalist Production Process*

1. **Thingification of Capital as Subsumption of Labor under Capital**

Marx's theory of reification and thingification begins with reification and thingification of commodities and develops through those of money into those of capital. One of the reasons why his notion of thingification has attracted little attention of scholars of Marx is the fact that they have reduced thingification to fetishism. Marx's theory of thingification is applicable to dual theoretical fields: one field refers to the explanation of fetishism, while the other refers to the development of thingification of capital. It is just on the stage of capital-thingification that capital as a special relation of production not only transforms itself into properties coalescent with use-value such as value or equivalent on the stage of commodity-thingification but also coalesces (thingifies itself) with machinery, sciences, and technology so that capital can create the productive forces unique to capitalism.

Now, let us consider the development of thingification in the capitalist production process. As soon as capital formally subsumes an existing production process under itself, the production process assumes a double character as a labor process in general as well as a self-valorizing process. In terms of the former, it represents a consciously controlled activity by which the worker as a productive subject processes labor material with labor means. However, because this process is performed for purpose of self-valorizing capital, a reversal of the subject and the object in the production process takes place. In this reversal, it is not the worker that applies the means of production but it is the means of production (objectified or dead labor) that applies him. In this case, the means of production functions as an absorber [Einsauger] (MEGA II/4.1: 63) that absorbs as much living labor as possible. Living labor done by the worker is exploited only as a means to capitalize the advanced value.

Und...erscheinen grade deswegen wieder die Produktionsmittel éminemment der lebendigen Arbeit gegenüber als Dasein des *Capital*s, und zwar jetzt als Herrschaft der vergangnen, toden Arbeit über die lebendige.

[And...just for this reason the means of production opposed to living labor again eminently appears as the existence of *capital*, and now as the sway of the past, dead labor over living one.] (MEGA II/4.1: 63)

Marx defines thingification in the capitalist production process as the coalescence of the capital as a determined production relation with the means of production itself in the following way:

Auf Grundlage der capitalistischen Produktion erscheint diese Fähigkeit der vergegenständlichten Arbeit sich in *Capital* zu verwandeln, . . . als ihnen [den Produktionsmitteln] an und für sich zukommend. . . . Diese erscheinen daher an und für sich als *Capital* und das Capital daher, welches ein *bestimmtes Produktionsverhältnis* ausdrückt, . . . als ein Ding.

[On the basis of capitalist production, this competency of objectified labor to transform itself into *capital* appears . . . as inherent in the means of production itself. . . . Therefore, it appears eminently as *capital* and, therefore, capital appears as a thing although it

represents a *determined relation of production*.] (MEGA II/4.1: 63f.)

Thus, thingification in the capitalist production process can be defined as a process that makes capital representing a specific relation of production appear as inherent in the means of production as things. It is the labor of workers that valorizes capital. The reason why this labor does not manifest itself as a creative activity to the worker himself is that, in the capitalist production process, the labor of workers is beforehand subsumed under capital and merges into it as a process of consumption of labor forces bought by capital.

2. The Real Subsumption of Labor under Capital

The formal subsumption [die formelle Subsumtion] of labor under capital Marx defines as a process of formally transforming a production process provided with existing productive facilities and techniques into a capitalist mode of production simply by introducing wage labor. On the other hand, the real subsumption [die reale Subsumtion] of labor under capital is defined as a process in which the capitalist relation of production is able to create a completely new mode of production and productive forces that can never be developed without the capitalist mode of production. These historically new productive forces which are unique to the capitalist mode of production are called the productive forces of capital. The predominance of the economic relation of capital to wage labor is not yet a condition sufficient enough to define such an economic system as a capitalist mode of production in the strict sense. The production relation of capital to wage labor cannot be fully characterized as capitalistic until this relation is equipped with productive forces unique to capitalism.

Marx defines the real subsumption of labor under capital as a capitalist mode of production that makes the production of relative surplus-value possible. This production depends upon the following two presuppositions:

First, through the concentration of a large number of workers into a large-scale factory and the introduction of rational planned organization, capital continuously develops the social productive forces of labor [gesellschaftliche Produktivkraft der Arbeit] and transforms them into the productive forces of capital alienated from working individuals.

Unter allen Umständen ist die spezifische Produktivkraft des kombinierten Arbeitstags gesellschaftliche Produktivkraft der Arbeit oder Produktivkraft gesellschaftlicher Arbeit. Sie entspringt aus der Kooperation selbst. Im planmäßigen Zusammenwirken mit andern streift der Arbeiter seine individuellen Schranken ab und entwickelt sein Gattungsvermögen.

[Under all circumstances, the special productive force of the combined working day is the social productive force of labor or the productive force of social labor. This originates from cooperation itself. In the systematically planned cooperation with other workers each worker grows out of his own individual limits and develops his genus ability.] (MEW 23: 349)

Thus, each worker develops in planned cooperation his own genus ability [Gattungsvermögen]. However, it is not the worker himself but the capital that develops this genus ability. Therefore, this ability does not appear to be the productive force of the worker but of capital.

Second, by introducing machinery into the production process, capital frees it from the physical and mental limitations of human beings. At the same time, capital causes continuous revolution of the technological bases in the production process by applying the sciences to it.

Mit der realen Subsumtion der Arbeit unter das Capital findet eine völlige [und sich beständig fortsetzende und wiederholende] Revolution in der Productionsweise selbst statt, in der Productivität der Arbeit und im Verhältniß von Capitalist und Arbeiter.

[Together with the real subsumption of labor under capital, a complete [and constantly continuing and repeated] revolution takes place in the mode of production itself, in the productivity of labor and in the relation between capitalist and worker.] (MEGA II/4.1: 105)

3. The Mode of Production Unique to Capitalism

The mode of production unique to capitalism is defined by Marx as a mode of production that enables capital as a special relation of production to constantly cause technological revolution in the production process. Capital owes it to thingification that capital obtains such power to intervene in the natural material world that this world constantly becomes transformed in a technological way. The coalescence of social elements with material- natural ones in capital thingification enables capital to fundamentally change material- natural processes by manipulating social elements. Capital has created a production system in which it subsumes the sciences under itself, accommodates them to the requirements of capital and constantly applies any scientific achievements to the production process. In this sense, the theory of the real subsumption of labor under capital must theoretically cover that of the sciences under capital. Capitalist production no longer depends on the skill of workers but mainly on the application of the sciences to production. In this sense, capitalism transforms technique into technology that represents scientifically supported and organized techniques. Technology, therefore, stands for a system of knowledge, information, and techniques that develop the sciences as thingified capital motivated by profit and connects them with the capitalist production process.

Die Produktivkräfte direkt *gesellschaftlicher, vergesellschafteter* (gemeinsamer) Arbeit, durch die Cooperation, die Theilung der Arbeit innerhalb des Ateliers, die Anwendung der Maschinerie, ...die *Anwendung der Wissenschaft*, dieses *allgemeinen* Products der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung, auf den *unmittelbaren Productionsprocess*, diess alles stellt sich dar als *Productivkraft des Capitals*, nicht als Productivkraft der Arbeit, oder nur als Productivkraft der Arbeit...weder des einzelnen Arbeiters, noch der im Productionsprocess combinirten Arbeiter. Die Mystification, die im Capitalverhältnis überhaupt liegt, wird jetzt viel weiter entwickelt, als es bei der nur formellen Subsumtion der Arbeit unter das Capital der Fall war und sein konnte. Andererseits tritt hier auch die historische Bedeutung der capitalistischen Production, eben durch die Umwandlung des unmittelbaren Productionsprocesses selbst und die Entwicklung der gesellschaftlichen Productivkräfte der Arbeit erst hervor.

[The production forces of directly social, *socialized (common)* labor by means of cooperation, the division of labor within the workshop, the application of machinery, . . . the application of science, this *general* product of social development, to the immediate

production process, all of these manifest themselves as productive force of capital, not as productive force of labor . . . neither of the particular worker nor of the workers combined in the production process. The mystification that lies in the relation of capital in general is now much more developed than it was or could have been in the merely formal subsumption of labor under capital. On the other hand, here, the historical meaning of capitalist production also for the first time appears just through the transformation of the immediate production process itself and the development of the social productive forces of labor.] (MEGA II/4.1: 95f.)

4. The Sciences as a Productive Force of Capital

In the dimension of the productive forces of capital, the productive forces (the material elements generally applicable to different historical forms) and the relation of production (the historic-socially determined elements) are inseparably combined with each other and coalesce into one entity. Capital not only introduces into the capitalist relation of production sciences and technologies that spontaneously develop independently of capital (formal subsumption) but also takes the initiative in creating completely new sciences and technologies. In this sense, sciences and technologies in the capitalist era are imprinted with the capitalist character. They embody thingified capital. At the same time, they enable the capitalist production system to intervene in the natural ecology and the body and soul of human beings on an unprecedented scale. This is a reason why production technologies developed in capitalism can hardly be transferred into countries and regions void of capitalist relations of production that create and secure them, as the many examples of failure to introduce advanced technologies to the developing countries demonstrate. This is also a reason for the tragic history of former socialist countries that, under the slogan of scientific technological revolution, in vain pursued super-historical scientific technologies intended to be capitalist productive forces without capitalist relations of production while, in the introduction of technologies originally developed in a capitalist system, they created a monstrous production system that was functionally analogous to the capitalist system. Any sciences and technologies, like nuclear weapons, atomic power generation and genetic recombination and modification, which endanger the preservation of the natural ecology and the survival of human beings, have been discovered and invented through the reified productive forces of capital.

The sciences are the most influential form of fetishism in modern capitalism. They seem to be general intellectual achievements of human beings free from any capitalist determinations. Even many Marxist scholars who are free from economic fetishism are deeply enmeshed by the notion of the sciences as neutral products without any capitalist restraints. If the constant revolution of capitalist production essentially depends upon the development of social productive forces of capital by applying the sciences to production, their development itself must deeply be determined by the requirements for this application to production. This is persuasively illustrated by the tremendous progress of various kinds of technologies and applied sciences from the nineteenth century. Even the pure natural sciences like mathematics, physics, and chemistry could have capitalist power relations built in although they appear to be general achievements of humanity. So-called scientific socialism that a priori distinguishes the sciences as such from their capitalist use and regards the defense of scientific truth as one of the driving

forces to overcome capitalism is a typical form of fetishism in capitalism; this is because the scientific socialism disregards thingification of the sciences and regards nothing but their form of truth and generality in the phenomenal sphere.

Erst die kapitalistische Production verwandelt den materiellen Produktionsprozess in Anwendung *der Wissenschaft auf die Production*— science mise en pratique

[Capitalist production for the first time transforms the material production process into the application of science to production—namely science put into practice] (MEGA II /3.6: 2065).

Wie der Produktionsproceß zur *Anwendung der Wissenschaft*, wird umgekehrt die Wissenschaft zu einem Factor, so zu sagen zu einer Function des Produktionsprocesses. Jede Entdeckung wird Basis neuer Erfindung oder neuer verbesserter Methoden der Production. Erst die kapitalistische Produktionsweise macht die Naturwissenschaften dem unmittelbaren Produktionsproceß dienstbar..... *Exploitation der Wissenschaft*, des theoretischen Fortschritts der Menschheit. Das Capital schafft die Wissenschaft nicht, aber es exploitirt sie, eignet sie dem Produktionsproceß an. Damit zugleich *Trennung der Wissenschaft*, als auf die Production *angewandter Wissenschaft von der unmittelbaren Arbeit*

[As the production process is transformed into the *application of science*, science is, on the contrary, transformed into a factor of the production process, so to speak, to a function of it. Each discovery becomes a base for a new invention or new improved method. Capitalist production for the first time makes natural sciences serve the immediate production process... *the exploitation of science*, of the theoretical progress of humanity. Capital does not create science but exploits it, adapts it to the production process. Together with this, *the separation of science as science applied to production from immediate work*] (MEGA II/3.6: 2060).

Marx in his various versions of Economic Manuscripts often underlines the following phrase: the application of science to production. This shows how much he comprehends it as an essential moment for the mode of production unique to capitalism. The relation of the sciences to capitalism for Marx is clearly expressed in the following sentence: capital does not create science but exploits it, adapts it to the production process. As far as capital does not create sciences, they must be created in fields relatively independent of the capitalist relation. When Marx places “natural science and its application” in “the field of mental activity” (MEGA II/4.2: 159), or characterizes “scientific work” as “general work,” or, furthermore, classifies scholars and inventors as “unproductive workers,” he regards another aspect of the sciences that goes beyond those determined by capital. However, as long as capital subordinates them to the capitalist production process, they must be more or less characterized as thingified capital.

Although it is conceptually possible to distinguish science itself from its capitalist application, a highly complicated analysis is required to identify this distinction in a concrete way. On the other hand, if we dare to reduce all sciences to capitalist ones, we thoughtlessly disregard the real relations between the sciences and capitalism full of contradictions and tensions. We are unable to comprehend these relations until we take the whole range of relations of material and mental production in different historical periods into consideration. At

all events, the theory of thingification is essential for elucidating how far the sciences have been determined by the capitalist system because the sway of capitalism over the sciences does not appear as such in the phenomenal dimension.

5. Rift in the Metabolism between Nature and Human Beings

In *Capital*, Marx gives a detailed account of the process in which the metabolism between nature and human being has been disturbed through the transformation of productive forces into those of capital in the tenth section of the thirteenth chapter of the first volume of *Capital: Modern Industry and Agriculture*.

Häuft die kapitalistische Produktion einerseits die geschichtliche Bewegungskraft der Gesellschaft [in großen Städten], stört sie andererseits den Stoffwechsel zwischen Mensch und Erde, d.h. die Rückkehr der vom Menschen in der Form von Nahrungs- und Kleidungsmiteln vernutzten Bodenbestandteile zum Boden, also die ewige Naturbedingung dauernder Bodenfruchtbarkeit.

[Capitalist production on the one hand concentrates the historical motive power of society [in great cities] while on the other hand it disturbs the metabolism between man and soil, namely prevents the return to the soil of its elements consumed by man in the form of food and clothing. it therefore violates the conditions necessary to lasting fertility of the soil.] (MEW 23: 528)

Jeder Fortschritt der kapitalistischen Agrikultur ist nicht nur ein Fortschritt in der Kunst, den Arbeiter, sondern zugleich in der Kunst, den Boden zu berauben.... Die kapitalistische Produktion entwickelt daher nur die Technik und Kombination des gesellschaftlichen Produktionsprozesses, indem sie zugleich den Springquellen alles Reichtums untergräbt: die Erde und den Arbeiter.

[Any progress in capitalistic agriculture is progress in the art, not only of robbing the laborer, but of robbing the soil.... Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combination of the social production process only by sapping the original sources of all wealth, namely the soil and the laborer.] (MEW 23:529-530)

Marx concludes that the development of capitalist production saps the original sources of all wealth, namely the soil and the laborer. In the last phase of the writing of *Capital*, in 1864 to 1865, he intensively studied such agricultural chemists as Justus von Liebig (*Die Chemie in ihrer Anwendung auf Agricultur und Physiologie*. 7. Auflage, Braunschweig 1862) and James Finlay Weir Johnston (*Notes on North America, agricultural, economical, and social*. Vol.1, London 1851). By adopting the latest achievements in contemporary agricultural chemistry, he gained the new perspective that capitalist agriculture is essentially incompatible with the preservation of the soil and natural ecology. Thus, he opens up a new scientific field which is now called ecology. A huge number of extracts from the history of technology, physiology, geology, mineralogy, pedology, agricultural chemistry, inorganic and organic chemistry and the other natural sciences are contained in the excerpt notebooks by the latest Marx, especially in those in MEGA IV/23,26, and 31. Recent studies on Marx have made it clear that one of the main interests in the last phase of writing *Capital* lies in elucidating a contradictory relation

between capitalism and the soil (nature). In this sense, Marx could count as a pioneer in ecology, which started in the second half of the twentieth century.

VI. *Alienation*

As we have seen, the labor process appears as a self-valorizing process of capital because workers must be related to their own works and products as “alien to themselves” although they create them. In this case, they act as personification of the labor force as a commodity. As a result of the subsumption of labor force under capital, value as a thing is transformed into a self-valorizing value through the specific behavior of workers who relate themselves to the things created by them as alien to themselves.

Diese *Wertherhaltende* und *Neuwerth* schaffende Kraft ist daher die Kraft des Capitals und jener Prozess erscheint als der Process seiner *Selbstverwerthung*, und vielmehr der Verarmung des Arbeiters, der den von ihm geschaffnen Werth zugleich als *ihm selbst fremden* Werth schafft.

[This power to *maintain value* and create *new value* is therefore the power of capital and that process appears as that of *self-valorization*, and rather as that of impoverishment of the worker who creates the value as a value *alien to himself*.] (MEGA II/4.1: 63)

Thus, the process of self-valorizing value can be regarded as a self-impoverishing process for workers. By impoverishment, Marx understands not only impoverishment in living standards of workers but also a more fundamental reversal in the labor subsumed under capital through which self-creating activities take place as a self-deprivation process for workers.

It follows from the notion of impoverishment that reification and thingification, if they are grasped from the viewpoint of laboring subjects, represent alienation from labor. For Marx, the theory of reification and the theory of alienation are closely connected to each other just like two wheels of a vehicle. In his manuscript preparing for the first volume of *Capital* entitled *Resultate des unmittelbaren Produktionsprozesses*, Marx explains the inseparable interrelation between reification and alienation in the following way:

Die Herrschaft des Capitalisten über den Arbeiter ist daher die Herrschaft der Sache über den Menschen, der todten Arbeit über die lebendige, des Products über den Producenten,... Es ist diess ganz *dasselbe* Verhältnis in der materiellen Production... welches sich auf dem ideologischen Gebiet in der *Religion* darstellt, die Verkehrung des Subjekts in das Objekt und umgekehrt. *Historisch* betrachtet erscheint diese Verkehrung als der notwendige Durchgangspunkt, um die Schöpfung des Reichthums als solchen, d.h. rücksichtslosen Produktivkräfte der gesellschaftlichen Arbeit, welche allein die materielle Basis einer freien menschlichen Gesellschaft bilden können, auf Kosten der Mehrzahl zu erzwingen. Es muss durch diese gegensätzliche Form durchgangen werden, ganz wie der Mensch seine Geisteskräfte zunächst sich als unabhängige Mächte gegenüber religiös gestalten muss. Es ist der *Entfremdungsprozess* seiner eigenen Arbeit. Insofern steht hier der Arbeiter von vorn herein höher als der Capitalist, als der letztere in jenen Entfremdungsprozess wurzelt und in ihm seine absolute Befriedigung findet, während der Arbeiter als sein Opfer von vorn herein dagegen in einem rebellischem Verhältniss steht

und ihn als Knechtungsprozess empfindet.

[The sway of the capitalist over the worker is consequently that of the thing over the human being, of dead labor over living labor, of the product over the producer. . . . This is just *the same* relation in material production that is exhibited in the ideological field, in *religion*, namely the reversal of the subject into the object and vice versa. *Historically* considered, this reversal appears as the inevitable transit point in order to force the creation of wealth as such, namely of such ruthless productive forces of social labor that can only form the material basis for a free human society at the cost of the majority of people. The human being must go through this antagonistic form in the same way as he must build his own spiritual forces first as independent powers opposed to him in the form of religion. This is the *alienation process* of his own labor. Here, the worker from the start stands higher than the capitalist as far as the latter is rooted in that alienation process and finds his absolute satisfaction in it while, to the contrary, the worker as a victim of it bears a rebellious relation to it and suffers it as an enslavement process.] (MEGAI/4.1: 63)

Because the capitalist is personified capital, “the sway of the capitalist over the worker” is essentially the power of the means of production as thingified capital over human being. The sway of the thing (reification and thingification) comprises the following double reversal: firstly, the reversal of object to subject, according to which the means of production is reversed to a subject ruling over the worker, and, secondly, the reversal of subject to object, according to which the laboring subject becomes reversed to an object from which the means of production absorbs as much labor as possible. This rule of the thing is subjectively founded on the above-mentioned impoverishment or alienation of the worker. The alienation of labor means that the self-creation of the worker is performed as his self-deprivation or self-enslavement. In this sense, the theory of reification and the theory of alienation have inseparable relations with each other because in the theory of reification the same relations are investigated in terms of a reified social system that in the theory of alienation is investigated in terms of specific behavior of laboring subjects.

However, as is seen in the above-mentioned quotation, Marx places a higher epistemological value on the concept of alienation than reification because the concept of alienation opens up a dimension of negative experiences of the worker in which he behaves towards his own labor as “a value alien to himself” and, as a result, this concept leads to a recognition of the historical limits of the capitalist production system. The capitalist roots himself in the alienation process and finds absolute satisfaction in it while, to the contrary, the worker as a victim of this alienation process must revolt against it.⁸ Consequently, the concept of alienation plays a decisive role in bridging the theory of reification with historical prospects to overcome the reified economic system.

⁸ “Die verselbständigte und entfremdete Gestalt, welche die kapitalistische Produktionsweise überhaupt den Arbeitsbedingungen und dem Arbeitsprodukt gegenüber dem Arbeiter gibt, entwickelt sich also mit der Maschinerie zum vollständigsten Gegensatz. Daher mit ihr zum erstenmal die brutale Revolte des Arbeiters gegen das Arbeitsmittel.”

[Hence, the independent and alienated form that the capitalist mode of production in general gives to the conditions of labor, and the product of labor, in opposition to the worker, develops into the most complete antagonism with the advent of machinery. It is therefore when machinery arrives on the scene that the worker for the first time revolts savagely against the instruments of labor] (MEW23: 455).

Besides, the above quotation testifies to the continuity of the epistemological framework of the young Marx in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* into the later Marx. The analogy between the alienation of labor and that of religion had been playing an important role from the younger to the older Marx.

Wie der Mensch in der Religion vom Machwerk seines eignen Kopfes, so wird er in der kapitalistischen Produktion vom Machwerk seiner eignen Hand beherrscht.

[Just as the human being is governed, in religion, by the products of his own brain, so, in capitalist production, he is governed by the products of his own hand.] (MEW 23: 649)

Marx first constructed the theory of alienation in the *Manuscripts of 1844* and developed it into a more comprehensive theory of the contradictions in the capitalist mode of production from the *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* of 1857/58 onward. In comparison with the theory of reification, the theory of alienation has the following special methodological aspects: (1) Firstly, it opens up a negative-practical dimension in which the worker must concern himself negatively (rebelliously) with his conditions of production and his own products. (2) Secondly, it is demonstrated in this theory that the rule of things alienated from the worker establishes itself as an economic system that ruthlessly pursues the creation of “forces of production of social labor.” (3) Thirdly, the second aspect leads to the last and the most important aspect according to which the capitalist economic system is grasped as a historically limited economic system that plays a role as a historical transition to a free human society, namely a society based upon the association of workers.

The “historical meaning of capitalist production” in the above-quoted passage refers to an “inevitable transition” to a “free human society” that presupposes the creation of social productive forces; capitalist production historically forces it at the cost of a large number of people. We have mentioned that value represents reification of the social relations of private labor and that money as value-body [Wertkörper] functions as a community [Gemeinwesen] in a totally commodity-producing and exchanging society. The ensuing consideration now leads us to capital (self-valorizing value), which monopolizes the function of the community in the direct production process in opposition to workers by means of organization of large-scale cooperative production.

Es ist nachgewiesen worden... das “Gesellschaftliche” etc. seiner Arbeit dem Arbeiter nicht nur fremd, sondern feindlich und gegensätzlich, und als im Capital vergegenständlicht und personifiziert gegenübertritt.

[It has been demonstrated... that the “social,” etc. of the labor of the worker does not only stand against him in an alien way but also in a hostile and antagonistic way, and as objectified and personified in the shape of capital.] (MEGA II/4.1: 95f.)

The rule of things develops the socialization of the whole society through the marketization of society as well as the socialization of any particular workplace. However, at the same time, capital devastates nature in terms of objective nature as well as human nature because it pursues the development of social productive forces in a limitless way merely for the purpose of self-valorizing value. Thus, Marx ultimately derives the power to resist the rule of things from material nature ruined and devastated by capital.

As far as reification and alienation as two closely interrelated methodological concepts in

Marx's critique of the political economy are concerned, we could summarize them in the following way: The theory of alienation refers to the method by which the automatic process of the reified system can be reformulated into the living activity [Lebenstätigkeit] of individuals; in other words, reification as the theory of the process with the system as a subject can be converted into alienation as the theory of action with individuals as subjects. Here, process-like moments in the reified system can be reinterpreted as the active moments of individuals acting in a negative-positive way. The theory of alienation refers to the multiple modes of the formation of subjects within the reified system and deals with such themes as the split between life, consciousness and cultivation of competence of individual subjects to socialize themselves in a multiple way. In conclusion, the method of Marx's critique of the political economy consists of reification and alienation as two inseparably combined methodological elements in which the former stands for the analysis of objects (as reified subjects), and the latter for the analysis of subjects alienated under the power of things.

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Abbreviation

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MEGA: Marx/ Engels Gesamtausgabe, Dietz Verlag oder Akademie Verlag, Berlin.

MECW: Marx- Engels- Collected Works, International Publishers, New York

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