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<th>REIFICATION-THINGIFICATION AND ALIENATION: BASIC CONCEPTS OF MARX'S CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY</th>
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<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>TAIRAKO, TOMONAGA</td>
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REIFICATION-THINGIFICATION AND ALIENATION
— BASIC CONCEPTS OF MARX’S CRITIQUE OF
POLITICAL ECONOMY AND PRACTICAL MATERIALSM —

TOMONAGA TAIRAKO*

Marxist scholars and researchers of the last half of the twentieth century failed to develop Marx’s theory of alienation to go beyond achievements of the 1960s. Althusser played an important role in discrediting Marx’s concept of alienation as presupposing humanistic essentialism and at the same time contaminated with Hegelian idealism, which had profoundly influenced the young Marx. According to Althusser, giving up the concept of alienation is a necessary step towards the scientific Marx that culminates in Capital.

Since the 1970s, the dominance of “postmodern” thinking had almost completely swept away any sincere attempts to deal with Marx’s concept of alienation in a philosophical and scientific way. Under the sway of postmodernism, any serious philosophical projects to introduce the subject (or subject-object relations) as a key concept for comprehending human society and history were simply ignored or treated as contaminated with an obsolete “modern” way of thinking. In Japan, Wataru Hiromatsu, much influenced by Althusser, criticized the idea of alienation in the young Marx and characterized the development of Marx’s thoughts as a transformation from the theory of alienation to that of reification. With this transformation hypothesis, he contributed to the propagation of the interpretation among Marxist scholars that the theory of alienation and that of reification are incompatible.

This paper is based upon the paper: Versachlichung and Verdinglichung – Basic Categories of Marx’s Theory of Reification and Their Logical Construction, published in Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies, Vol. 48-1 (Tairako 2017), and its further development. This paper presupposes the conceptual difference between Versachlichung (reification) and Verdinglichung (thingification) in detail considered in the previous paper. We will introduce the definition of reification and thingification before examining the relation of alienation to reification and thingification.

The capitalist commodity society is characterized by the uniquely (indirectly) social character of private labor that, although workers are totally dependent on each other, they are 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 a person to a 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

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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 (Tairako 2017: 4).

Marx’s theory of reification and thingification consists of the following 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) (Tairako 2017: 5).

Reification signifies the phenomenal conversion of production relations among persons into those of things (Sachen) to each other. The reification of persons (or subjects) implies the personification (or subjectification) of things (or objects) and vice versa. To express this two-fold conversion, Marx generally mentions reification and personification in pairs (Tairako 2017: 8).

On the other hand, what distinguishes thingification from reification consists in ‘the immediate coalescence of the material relations of production with their historical and social specificity’ (MEGA II/4.2: 852, MEW 25: 838). In the mentioned passage, 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 such as ground, the means of production and labor to each other while ‘their historical and social specificity’ refers to specific social determinations such as ground rent, profit (interest), and the wage that the above-mentioned elements of production create in capitalist production. By thingification Marx understands ‘the immediate coalescence of the material determinations of the elements constituting the capitalist production process with their specifically social determinations,’ and, more generally, the inseparable 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. It already begins in the world of commodities. In this sense, the logic of Capital stands for the logical development of the deepening mystification of capitalist production from commodity and money through industrial, commercial, and interest-bearing capital to property on the ground (Tairako 2017: 9-10).

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. 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 (Tairako 2017: 13).

The following passage in Grundrisse helps us consider alienation in relation to reification-
thingification:

...... die Existenz des Geldes die Versachlichung des gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhangs voraussetzt; ...... Hier sagen die Ökonomen selbst, daß die Menschen der Sache (dem Geld) das Vertrauen schenken, was sie sich nicht als Personen schenken. Aber warum schenken sie der Sache das Vertrauen? Doch offenbar nur als versachlichtem Verhältniß der Personen unter einander; als versachlichtem Tauschwerth und Tauschwerth ist nichts als eine Beziehung der produktiven Thätigkeit der Personen unter einander. ...... Geld nützt ihm nur als "Faustpfand der Gesellschaft", aber solches Faustpfand ist es nur wegen seiner gesellschaftlichen (symbolischen) Eigenschaft; und gesellschaftliche Eigenschaft kann es nur besitzen, weil die Individuen ihre eigne gesellschaftliche Beziehung als Gegenstand sich entfremdet haben.

[The existence of money presupposes the reification of social relationship. ...... Here, economists say that people put their trust in a thing (money) that they do not in themselves as persons. But why do they put their trust in money? Certainly, they lay their trust in money only because it is just the reified relation of persons to each other, or just the reified exchange value, and exchange value is just the relationship of people’s productive activities to each other. ...... Money serves as a “mortgage of society,” but money is such a mortgage only because of its social (symbolic) property; and it can get such social property only because individuals alienate their own social relationship as an object from themselves.] (MEGA II/1.1: 93)

In the above-quoted passage, reification consists in the reification of people’s social relationships of persons (in the first sentence). In the fourth sentence, the thing (Sache) consists of the following two elements: (1) the thing as the reified relation of persons to each other, and (2) the thing as the reified exchange value; The first element corresponds to reification in the narrow sense of the meaning while the second element corresponds to thingification, namely exchange value as a ‘socio-natural property’ created by the coalescence of social determination with natural material determination. The exchange value is related to reification as long as it is defined as a ‘relationship of people’s productive activity to each other’ while it is related to thingification as long as it appears as a ‘socio-natural property’ belonging to a certain amount of precious metals. In the last sentence, the reason for reification and thingification is explained in terms of alienation: ‘individuals alienate their own social relationship as an object from themselves.’ By alienation Marx understands the activity of individuals to alienate their own social relationships in the form of objects, in opposition to themselves, from themselves. Here, we discover that alienation shares the same logical framework as reification-thingification; in other words, reification-thingification as a process in which the social relationships of individuals are, in the form of alien objects, distanced from, and made independent of them can be reformulated as alienation when this process is redefined in terms of the activity of individuals to relate to the action itself and its objects as alien to themselves. As long as the objects to which laborers relate their alienated labor are in essence their own thingified social relationship, alienation by definition presupposes reification-thingification. On the other hand, as long as reification-thingification as a social relationship detached from persons and transformed into a ‘socio-natural property’ is ultimately based upon the activity of laborers to relate to objects and products of labor, and even to labor itself, as alien and opposed to themselves, reification-thingification is logically founded upon alienation.
Therefore, alienation and reification-thingification are two sides of the same coin. Marx had, already from *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, understood both concepts as two aspects of the same social structure. Regarding that, in the above-quoted passage, alienation refers to money, we can understand that alienation has a broad range of conceptual validity, and must not be reduced to alienated labor in the capitalist production process as is often the case in conventional Marx literature.

I. *Alienation Presupposes Reification-thingification*

In this section, we establish the meaning of alienation for the mature Marx by examining the use of this term in texts in which the conceptual difference between Sache and Ding is introduced.

As already shown, the most basic meaning of alienation in *Economic Manuscripts* preparing *Capital* can be described as such circumstance that the objective conditions of labor (instruments of labor, objects of labor and means of subsistence) are made independent as ‘alien objects’ of, opposed to, and dominant over laborers. Therefore, they are not only alienated from the means of production but also from the means of subsistence.

Die der Arbeit entfremdete, verselbstständigte und verwandelte Gestalt der Arbeitsbedingungen, worin also die producirten Productionsmittel zum Capital und die Erde zum Privateigenthum, zur monopolisirten Erde wird, zur Grundgeeigneten, fällt daher zusammen mit dem Dasein und der Function der producirten Productionsmittel und der Erde im Arbeitsproceß, Productionsproceß überhaupt.

[Therefore, the form of conditions of labor, alienated from labor, made independent and transformed, in which, therefore, the produced means of production becomes capital, the ground private property, namely monopolized ground, or ground property, becomes congruent with the existence of, and the function of the produced means of production and the ground in the labor process, the production process in general.] (MEGA II/4.2: 846)

The means of production alienated from laborers are not such simple things as machines, raw materials or foods but those in which the social relationships of producers are thingified as ‘socio-natural properties.’ Labor products alienated from laborers under the rule of capital are not simply things but thingified social relationships of individuals to each other. As a bearer of thingified social relationships, the means of production and of subsistence are able to gain ‘social power’ not only over laborers but also over capitalists.

Das Capital zeigt sich immer mehr als gesellschaftliche Macht (deren Functionär der Capitalist ist und die in gar keinem möglichen Verhältnisse mehr zu dem steht, was die

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1 In the First Volume (the Second Edition) of *Capital* (1872), Marx uses alienation (Entfremdung) and alienated (entfremdet) four times: MEGA II/6: 417, 527, 558, 588 (MEW23: 456, 596, 635, 674). In the First Manuscript to the Third Volume of *Capital* (1864-65), he uses the term five times: MEGA II/4.2: 119, 120, 337, 649, 846, 851. These terms are not found in the Second Volume of *Capital* edited by Engels.

2 Marx includes in the objective conditions of labor “Grund und Boden, Rohmaterial, Lebensmittel, Arbeitsinstrumente, Geld [ground, raw material, means of subsistence, instrument of labor, money]” (MEGA II/1.2: 406).
Arbeit eines einzelnen Individuums schaffen kann), aber als entfremdete, verselbständigte gesellschaftliche Macht, die als Sache — und als Macht des Capitalisten durch diese Sache — der Gesellschaft gegenübertritt.

[Capital more and more shows itself as social power, (whose executive the capitalist is, and that has no longer any possible relation to what the work of a particular individual can create), but as alienated, independent social power that, as thing (Sache) — and as the power of the capitalist through this thing (Sache) — becomes opposed to society.] (MEGA II/4.2: 337)

From the above-quoted passage, we can understand why alienation must be interpreted in the theoretical framework of reification-thingification. Some Marxian scholars criticize the theory of alienation as taking into consideration nothing but a subject-object relationship without regarding aspects of social relations. They describe ‘alienated labor’ as a particular labor process isolated from the social division of labor in which a capitalist takes what a laborer produces. The most serious mistake in such interpretation of alienation lies in their incompetence to comprehend objects alienated from subjects as reified-thingified social relations. All of the means of production used by laborers in a labor process, the means of subsistence consumed by them and the products made by them are in essence the embodiment of reified social relations, and nevertheless, as a result of thingification (the coalescence of social determination with natural-material determination), appear as simple natural things (Dinge) in which any moments of social relations disappear.

Consequently, it follows that the theory of alienation and that of reification can be mediated by thingification. This inevitably leads us to a new interpretation about the concept of ‘alienated labor’ in the First Manuscripts of The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844.

Many Marxian scholars are dissatisfied with the description of ‘alienated labor’ by the young Marx because (1) he analyzes nothing but the subject-object relation of a subject of labor to its object while he has not yet taken the aspects of mutual social relations of a subject to another subject (der gesellschaftliche Verkehr) into consideration; (2) the theory of alienation remains too ‘subjectivist’ as long as it presupposes ‘not-alienated,’ ‘authentic’ human essence so that the theory of alienation should be given up and replaced by the theory of reification focused upon social relations.

Such criticisms and interpretations are incompatible with Marx’s texts in The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844.

Marx says: Wir gehn von einem Nationalökonomischen, gegenwärtigen Factum aus. [We start from a national-economic, present fact.] (MEGA I/2: 364) The concept of ‘alienated labor’ theoretically presupposes a society in which full-scale commodity exchange and capitalist production take place, the price of a commodity consists of wages, profit (interest) and ground rent, and the rule of value in the production and the exchange of commodities prevails; circumstances that serve as the theoretical starting point for the political economy since Adam Smith serve as a stage for alienation.

Dieß Factum drückt weiter nichts aus, als : Der Gegenstand, den die Arbeit producirt, ihr Product, tritt ihr als ein fremdes Wesen, als eine, von d[em] Producenten unabhängige Macht gegenüber. Das Product der Arbeit ist die Arbeit, die sich in einem Gegenstand fixirt, sachlich gemacht hat, es ist die Vergegenständlichung der Arbeit. The
Verwirklichung der Arbeit ist ihre Vergegenständlichung. Diese Verwirklichung der Arbeit erscheint in dem nationalökonomischen Zustand als Entwirklichung des Arbeiters, die Vergegenständlichung als Verlust des Gegenstandes und Knechtschaft unter dem Gegenstand, die Aneignung als Entfremdung, als Entäusserung. ...... In der Bestimmung, daß der Arbeiter zum Product seiner Arbeit als einem fremden Gegenstand sich verhält, liegen alle diese Consequenzen. ...... Die Entäusserung des Arbeiters in seinem Produkt hat die Bedeutung, nicht nur, daß seine Arbeit zu einem Gegenstand, zu einer äussern Existenz wird, sondern daß sie ausser ihm, unabhängig, fremd von ihm existirt und eine selbstständige Macht ihm gegenüber wird, daß das Leben, was er dem Gegenstand verliehn hat, ihm feindlich und fremd gegenübertritt.

This fact expresses no more than that the object produced by labor, namely its product is opposed to labor as an alien entity, as a power independent of the producer. The product of labor is a labor that is fixed in an object, namely is reified; it is the objectification of labor. The realization of labor is the objectification of labor. This realization of labor, in the national-economic situation, appears as the deprivation of reality of the laborer, the objectification as the loss of object and subordination of the laborer to the object, the acquisition as alienation, as externalization. ...... all of these consequences lie in the determination that the laborer relates to the product of his labor as an alien object. ...... The externalization of the laborer not only signifies that his labor becomes an object, namely an external existence, but also that it exists outside him, independent of, and alien to him and becomes in opposition to him an independent power, that the life he has given to the object becomes opposed to him in a hostile and alien way.] (MEGA I/2: 364-365)

Descriptions similar to the above-quoted passages from The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 are repeatedly found even in the Economic Manuscripts preparing Capital. Here, an object, opposed to the laborer, as 'an alien entity' (ein fremdes Wesen), as 'a power independent' is not a labor product as a barely natural thing but an object as a thingified social relation. 'Labor that is fixed in an object, namely is reified' is a product equipped with such determinations as value, money and capital. A product to which a laborer relates as 'an alien object' can function as a social power to subjugate him just because it embodies the total social relations of laborers to each other in a thingified way. The genus-social character [Gattungscharakter] of laborers’ activity is thingified into the social property of labor products. Thus, we can fully understand the significance of Marx’s following sentence:

Indem daher die entfremdete Arbeit dem Menschen den Gegenstand seiner Production entzießt, entzießt sie ihm sein Gattungsleben, seine wirkliche Gattungsgegenständlichkeit.

[Therefore, the alienated labor, by snatching from the human being the object of his labor, snatches from him his genus life, in other words, his real genus objectivity.] (MEGA I/2: 370)

In sum, Marx’s concept of alienation presupposes the thingification of production relations in the ‘national-economic circumstance.’ Thingification results from reification. Thus, Marx links the theory of alienation and that of reification through thingification.
II. Max’s Concept of Capital — Capitalist Results from Capital

Now, we return to Economic Manuscripts preparing Capital.

Marx is distinguished from other economists by his unique concept of capital, according to which capital is not derived from capitalist but, to the contrary, capitalist is derived from capital. According to non-Marxist economics, the capitalist is firstly presupposed, and at the second step the goods and money that he invests for the sake of profit are called capital. As is the case in the controversy on productive and unproductive labor, the commodities and money, resulting from saving by capitalists and, reserved for productive investment are defined as capital. This is a sort of definition of capital derived from the capitalist. On the contrary, Marx defines capital as independently self-valorizing value (der verselbsändigte, verwertende Wert) so that the definition of capital precedes that of capitalist.

Die objektiven Bedingungen des lebendigen Arbeitsvermögens sind vorausgesetzt als ihm gegenüber selbstständige Existenz, als die Objektivität eines von dem lebendigen Arbeitsvermögen unterschiednen und ihm selbstständig gegenüberstehenden Subjekts; die Reproduction und Verwerthung, d. h. die Erweiterung dieser objektiven Bedingungen ist daher zugleich die Reproduction und Neuproduction ihrer als des Reichtums eines fremden Subjekts, dem Arbeitsvermögen gleichgültig und selbstständig gegenüberstehend. Was reproduziert und neu produziert wird ist nicht nur das Dasein dieser objektiven Bedingungen der lebendigen Arbeit, sondern ihr Dasein als selbstständiger, d. h. einem fremden Subject angehöriger Werthe, gegenüber diesem lebendigen Arbeitsvermögen. Die objektiven Bedingungen der Arbeit erhalten subjektive Existenz gegenüber dem lebendigen Arbeitsvermögen — aus dem Capital wird der Capitalist.

[The objective conditions of the living labor-ability (Arbeitsvermögen) are presupposed as an existence independent of it, as the objectivity of a subject different from it and independently opposed to it; the reproduction and valorisation (Verwerthung), namely the expansion of these objective conditions is therefore at the same time the reproduction and new production of them as the wealth of an alien subject indifferent to, and independently opposed to labor-ability. What is reproduced and newly produced is not only the existence of these objective conditions of living labor but also the existence of them as independent values, namely belonging to an alien subject in opposition to this living labor-ability. The objective conditions of labor receive a subjective existence in opposition to the living labor-ability — from capital emerges the capitalist.] (MEGA II/1.2: 370)

Die Production von Capitalisten und Lohnarbeitern ist also ein Hauptprodukt des Verwerthungsprocesses des Capitals3. ..... Indem in diesem Process die vergegenständlichte Arbeit zugleich als Nichtgegenständlichkeit des Arbeiters, als Gegenständlichkeit einer dem Arbeiter entgegengesetzten Subjectivität gesetzt ist, als Eigentum eines ihm

3 It follows from this sentence that the mutual personal contractual relationship between a capitalist and a laborer (as the starting point) does not cause self-valorizing capital as a result but, on the contrary, the relationship between both persons is secondarily as a main product of the self-valorizing process of capital. This procedure corresponds to the theory of reification-thingification in which the logical transition from a thing (Sache) to a person as a personification of the former takes place.
fremden Willens, ist das Capital nothwendig zugleich Capitalist ...... Im Begriff des Capitals ist gesezt daß die objektiven Formen der Arbeit — und diese sind ihr eignes Product — ihr gegenüber Persönlichkeit annehmen, oder was dasselbe ist, daß sie als Eigenthum einer dem Arbeiter fremden Persönlichkeit gesezt sind. Im Begriff des Capitals ist der Capitalist enthalten.

[Therefore, the production of capitalists and wage laborers is the main product of the valorizing process (Verwerthungsprozess) of capital. ...... Since in this process the objectified labor is at the same time established as the non-objectivity of the laborer, as the objectivity belonging to a subjectivity opposed to the laborer, as the property of a will alien to him, capital is inevitably at the same time capitalist. ...... It is established in the concept of capital that the objective forms of labor — although they are its own products — assume personality in opposition to labor, or what is the same, that they are set as property belonging to a personality alien to the laborer. The capitalist is included in the concept of capital.] (MEGA II/1.2: 414-415)

In order to precisely comprehend Marx’s concept of capital, which is summed up in the proposition: capitalist results from capital, we should not directly regard ‘an alien subject independently opposed to the labor-ability’ in the above-quoted passages as a capitalist. In Marx’s economic texts, a subject does not always stand for a personal subject. Firstly, the objective conditions of labor, separated from the living labor-ability, functioning as independently self-valorizing value are established as ‘an alien subject,’ because the capital itself principally appears as a subject. Secondly, from capital as an original subject is derived the capitalist, who personally represents the subjectivity of capital as an original alien subject, opposed to the living labor-ability. This refers to Marx’s concept of subjectification (Subjektivierung) — personification (Personifizierung) of capital that consists of the following two elements: (1) the capital itself subjectifies-personifies itself as things (the objective conditions of labor) opposed to the laborer; (2) the capitalist as a person that represents the alien subjectivity of the subjectified-personified thing. In this circumstance, things (the objective conditions of labor) do not hold a social power over laborers because they belong to the capitalist but because they embody the thingified social relations that enable capital to valorize itself.

The German adjective fremd (alien), which is frequently used as an important key-word in Capital and Economic Manuscripts has very often been interpreted as of the other person or belonging to the other person. By such careless interpretation the exquisite logical implication that Marx gives to such categories as reification-thingification and personification has simply been ignored. As shown above, Marx firstly posits the object and the product of labor as a subjectivity alien to the laborer, and secondly derives from this the other person or man as a personal bearer or representative of this alien subjectivity. If we directly assign the German adjective fremd to the other person, the personal character of the subjectivity in an alien object, which should first be treated in terms of personification of capital in the second phase, would be introduced from the beginning; as a result, it would turn out that Marx’s concept of capital could no longer be different from the non-Marxian economics according to which capital results from the capitalist.

4 “Das Capital seinerseits erscheint daher als das übergreifende Subject und Eigenthümer fremder Arbeit.” [Therefore, the capital itself appears as the overall governing subject and proprietor of alien labor.] (MEGA II/1.2: 378)
III. The Concept of Alienation in The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844
— Alienation and Private Property

If we reformulate, from the aspect of labor, the process in which capital establishes itself as an alien subjectivity opposed to the laborer, this process is determined as the 'alienation of labor.'

In the First Manuscript of The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, the 'alienation of labor' is firstly determined as (1) the activity of the laborer to relate to the objects of his own labor (means of production and those of subsistence) as 'alien objects,' secondly as (2) the activity of the laborer to relate to his own labor itself as 'alien labor.' From these two determinations Marx derives a third one: namely (3) the activity of the laborer to relate to his own 'genus life' (Gattungsleben), or 'his own genus being' (Gattungswesen), as an 'alien entity.'

If we had no access to Marx's writings other than those written in the First Manuscript, this restriction could cause various interpretations and involve researchers in endless disputes. However, as long as we notice that, in Marx's Economic Manuscripts, the object or the product always stands for a specific form of thingified social relations, we can reasonably comprehend that the first determination refers to 'alien object' as thingified social relations, the second refers to labor as 'alien activity' that causes the thingification of social relations; Based upon these considerations, Marx comes to comprehend the thingified social relations themselves in terms of various determinations of genus such as genus entity (Gattungswesen), genus life (Gattungsleben), genus activity (Gattungstätigkeit) or genus character (Gattungscharakter). As long as we keep reification and thingification in the capitalist production process in mind, there is no theoretical difficulty in the logical transition of the four determinations of alienated labor in the First Manuscript. Of course, one question remains: is a concept such as genus that Marx borrows from Feuerbach suitable to theoretically express the reified-thingified social relations in 'national-economic' circumstances? As a matter of fact, it is not a valid or effective concept. This might be the reason why Marx, in Capital and Economic Manuscripts, gives up genus as a key-word to express reified-thingified social relations. However, Marx's argument to treat reified-thingified social relations as such in the third determination is acceptable and reasonable.


[The division of labor is the national-economic expression of the socialness of labor within alienation. Or, since labor is nothing but an expression of human activity within externalization, namely of the manifestation of life as the externalization of life, the division of labor is also nothing but an alienated, externalized way positing human activity]
as a real genus activity, or as an activity of the human being as genus entity. Regarding the essence of the division of labor ...... namely this alienated and externalized form positing human activity as a genus activity, national-economists are confused and contradictory.]
(MEGA I/2: 429)

Comprehending the division of labor as ‘an alienated, externalized way positing human activity as real genus activity’ dates back to Adam Smith. Following the above-quoted passage, Marx quotes the following sentences from Adam Smith:

...... die verschiednen Producte jeder ihrer respektiven Industriezweige, vermittelst dieses allgemeinen Hangs zum Handel und Austausch, sich so zu sagen, in eine gemeinschaftliche Masse geworfen finden, wo jeder Menschnach seinen Bedürfnissen kaufen ghn kann irgendeinen Theil des Products der Industrie d[er] andern. — Weil dieser Hang zum Austausch der Theilung der Arbeit ihren Ursprung giebt, so ist folglich das Wachsthum dieser Theilung immer beschränkt durch die Ausdehnung der Fähigkeit auszutauschen oder in andern Worten durch die Ausdehnung des Marktes.
[...... the various products of each of the different industrial sectors, through this general inclination to trade and exchange, are found to be thrown, so to speak, into a common stock, where each human being, according to his needs, is able to go to buy some of the industrial products of other people. ...... Since this inclination to exchange originates in the division of labor, the increase of this division is always constrained by the expansion of the competence to exchange or, in other words, by the expansion of the market.] (MEGA I/2: 430)

Die Betrachtung der Theilung der Arbeit und des Austausches ist vom höchsten Interesse, weil sie die sinnfällig entäusserten Ausdrücke der menschlichen Thätigkeit und Wesenskraft, als einer Gattungsmässigen Thätigkeit und Wesenskraft sind.
[The consideration about the division of labor and exchange is enormously interesting because they are sensorially externalized ways to express human activity and essential power as an activity and essential power suitable to genus.] (MEGA I/2: 433)

IV. Alienation in Exzerpte aus James Mill: Élémens d’économie politique

If the division of labor and exchange are social relations to realize the social character of human labor in an alienated or externalized way, in other words, they embody reified social relations, these reified relations are, furthermore, corporeally condensed into matter, which is money. Money is a product of the thingification of social relations. In Exzerpte aus James Mill: Élémens d’économie politique, Marx analyzes (1) trade and exchange as reification of social relations, and (2) money as thingification of social relations.

We now consider how, in Exzerpte aus James Mill: Élémens d’économie politique, the logical transition from (1) to (2) is explained by Marx:

Der Tausch oder der Tauschhandel ist also der gesellschaftliche, der Gattungsakt, das Gemeinwesen, der gesellschaftliche Verkehr und Integration der Menschen innerhalb des Privateigenthums und darum der äusserliche, der entäusserte Gattungsakt.
[Exchange or trade is, therefore, the social action, the genus action, the community, the social intercourse and integration of people within private property, and, consequently, the external, externalized genus action.] (MEGA IV/2: 454)

Die Nationalökonomie nun faßt das Gemeinwesen des Menschen, oder ihr sich behäbigendes Menschenwesen, ihre wechselseitige Ergänzung zum Gattungsleben, zum wahrhaft menschlichen Leben unter der Form des Austausches und des Handels auf. Man sieht, wie die Nationalökonomie die entfremdete Form des geselligen Verkehrs als die wesentliche und ursprüngliche und der Menschlichen Bestimmung entsprechende fixirt.

[Now, the national-economics comprehends the community of the people, or their working entity of mankind, their mutual complement to a genus life, namely to an authentically human life, under the form of exchange and trade. We see how the national-economics in a fixed way grasps the alienated form of the social intercourse as a form that is essential and initial, and corresponds to the mission of mankind.] (MEGA IV/2: 453)

(1) Firstly, Marx grasps private property in terms of the division of labor and the trade, and characterizes it as ‘the externalized genus action’ [der entäusserte Gattungsakt], or ‘the alienated form of the social intercourse’ [die entfremdete Form des geselligen Verkehrs]. This first phase constitutes the alienation = externalization in the dimension of social relations, and, consequently, corresponds to reification: namely private property as reified social relations. Then Marx goes forth to the second phase, introducing money in the following way:

Das Wesen des Geldes ist zunächst ...... daß die vermittelnde Thätigkeit oder Bewegung, der menschliche, gesellschaftliche Akt, wodurch sich die Producte des Menschen wechselseitig ergänzen, entfremdet und die Eigenschaft eines materiellen Dings ausser dem Menschen, des Geldes wird. ......; die Beziehung sel|bst der Sachen, die menschliche Operation mit denselben, wird zur Operation eines Wesens ausser dem Menschen und über dem Menschen. ...... Daß dieser Mittler nun zum wirklichen Gott wird, ist klar, denn der Mittler ist die wirkliche Macht über das, womit er mich vermittelt. ...... Dieser Mittler ist daher das sich selbst abhanden gekommne, entfremdete Wesen des Privateigenthums, das sich selbst äusserlich gewordne, entäusserte Privateigenthum, wie es die entäusserte Vermittlung der menschlichen Production mit der menschlichen Production, die entäusserte Gattungsthätigkeit des Menschen ist. Alle Eigenschaften, welche dieser in der Production dieser Thätigkeit zukommen, werden daher auf diesen Mittler übertragen.

[The essence of money is, firstly, that the mediating activity or movement, namely the human, social action through which the products of the human being mutually complement each other has become alienated, and becomes the property of a material thing (Ding) outside the human being, namely that of money. ......; the relationship itself of things, the human operation towards them is transformed into the operation of an entity (Wesen) outside and over the human being. ...... It is evident that this mediator now becomes the actual God because the mediator is the actual power ruling over things with which he mediates me. ...... Therefore, this mediator is the lost, alienated essence of private property, the externalized private property that has become exterior to itself in the same manner as private property is the externalized mediation of human production with human production, namely the externalized genus activity of mankind. Consequently, all properties that, in the production of genus activity, belong to this activity are transferred into this mediator.]
The second phase is characterized as the transformation of human, social action through which the products of the human being mutually complement each other into ‘the property of a material thing (Ding) outside the human being.’ This material thing is named money as the mediator of trade and exchange. The relationship of things to things in terms of Sachen or the operation of the human being in relation to things is transformed into ‘the operation of an entity (Wesen) outside and over the human being.’ This transformation constitutes the second phase of the alienation=externalization of private property, which stands for the reversal of social intercourse to the property of a thing. Money as the ‘externalized private property’ corresponds to thingification. The young Marx had already recognized the two-fold transformation of alienation=externalization, namely (1) in terms of the externalized relation, and (2) in terms of the property of a thing. And he regarded categories such as thing and property as key words for the second phase, namely thingification5.

Having determined private property as the two-fold transformation of alienation=externalization, Marx further discusses the theoretical relation between (1) and (2) in the following way:


[Why must private property advance to the money system? Because the human being as a social entity must advance to exchange, and because the exchange must — under the presupposition of private property — advance to value. The mediating movement of the exchanging human being is, namely, no social movement, no human movement, no human relation; it is the abstract relation of private property to private property, and this abstract relation is the value, whose first real existence as value is money. ...... The metallic

5 “Das Geld, indem es die Eigenschaft besitzt, alles zu kaufen, indem es die Eigenschaft besitzt, alle Gegenstände sich anzueignen, ist also der Gegenstand im eminenten Besitz. Die Universalität seiner Eigenschaft ist die Allmacht seines Wesens; es gilt daher als allmächtiges Wesen. ...... Das Geld ist der Kuppler zwischen dem Bedürfniß und dem Gegenstand, zwischen dem Leben und dem Lebensmittel d[es] Menschen. Was mir aber mein Leben vermittelt, das vermittelt mir auch das Dasein d[es] andern Menschen für mich. Das ist für mich der andre Mensch.” [Since money possesses the property to buy everything, since it possesses the property to acquire all objects, it is, consequently, also the object of eminent possession. The universality of its property is the omnipotence of its essence; therefore, it is regarded as an omnipotent entity...... Money is the procurer between the need and its object, between the life and the means of subsistence of the human being. However, what mediates my life to me also mediates to me the existence of the other man for me. It is the other human being for me.] (MEGA I/2: 435) Marx twice underlines the word: property [Eigenschaft]. This witnesses that the young Marx had already paid attention to property as a key word for defining thingification. Last but not least, the last sentence in the quotation: money is the other human being for me is well worth consideration because, in a market society, money represents the other person for each person, and embodies in its material form human relations.
existence of money is only the official sensory expression of the money-soul that lies concealed in all parts of production and movements of civil society.] (MEGA IV/2: 448-449)

From the above-quoted passage we can see that (1) exchange as 'the mediating movement of the exchanging human being' is regarded as 'the abstract relation of private property to private property' (private property as a relation), and (2) this abstract relation is transformed into a property of a commodity, whose first germinal form is value; and (3) the first visible and official form of value is money while value concealed in commodities still remains invisible and, consequently, publicly unrecognizable. Thus, money is an officially acceptable visible manifestation of value ('money-soul') of commodities. Stage (1) refers to reification, Stage (2) refers to the first phase of thingification (on the stage of commodities), and the last stage, Stage (3) refers to the second thingification (on the stage of money). Therefore, money is a more developed form of thingification on the stage of commodities in the form of value or equivalent.

At the last phase of consideration on private property, Marx reformulates the alienation=externalization of private property in terms of the alienation=externalization of labor, which is expressed as the 'labor to earn money (die Erwerbsarbeit)'.

Das Verhältniß des Tausches vorausgesetzt, wird die Arbeit zur unmittelbaren Erwerbsarbeit. Dieß Verhältniß der entfremdeten Arbeit erreicht seine Höhe erst dadurch, daß 1) von der einen Seite die Erwerbsarbeit, das Produkt des Arbeiters in keinem unmittelbaren Verhältniß zu seinem Bedürfniß und zu seiner Arbeitsbestimmung steht. ...... Das Product wird als Werth, als Tauschwerth, als Aequivalent, nicht mehr seiner unmittelbaren persönlichen Beziehung zum Producenten wegen producirirt. ...... In der Erwerbsarbeit liegt: 1) Die Entfremdung und Zufälligkeit der Arbeit vom arbeitenden Subjekt; 2) die Entfremdung und Zufälligkeit der Arbeit vom Gegenstand derselben; 3) die Bestimmung des Arbeiters durch die gesellschaftlichen Bedürfnisse, die ihm aber fremd und ein Zwang sind, dem er sich aus egoistischem Bedürfniß, aus Noth unterwirft. ...... 4) daß dem Arbeiter die Erhaltung seiner individuellen Existenz als Zweck seiner Thätigkeit erscheint und sein wirkliches Thun ihm nur als Mittel gilt; daß er sein Leben bethätigt, um Leiftensmittel zu erwerben.

[As soon as the relation of exchange is presupposed, labor is transformed into direct labor to earn money. This is the relation of alienated labor, and this relation reaches its climax only when, on the one hand, labor to earn money or the product of the laborer bears no
direct relation to his need or his purpose of labor. ..... As value, as exchange value, as equivalent, the product is no longer produced because of its direct personal relationship to the producer. ..... What is implied in labor to earn money is 1) the alienation and contingency of labor from the laboring subject; 2) the alienation and contingency of labor from the object of labor; 3) the determination of the laborer by social needs, which are, however, alien to him and the coercion to which he is subject due to his egoistical needs or wants. ..... 4) that the maintenance of his individual existence appears to the laborer as the purpose of his activity and his actual action is regarded by him only as means.] (MEGA IV/2: 455)

To sum up, alienated labor is labor to earn money (die Erwerbsarbeit), and this is labor that creates value. Therefore, the theory of alienation consists in a series of transformations: (1) the transformation of relations of persons to persons in the production into those of things to things (the first phase of the alienation = externalization of private property, namely reification), (2) the transformation of relations of things to things into material properties of labor products (the second phase of the alienation = externalization of private property, namely thingification), and (3) the transformation of property of a thing from value or equivalent to money, and further to capital. The last transformation is characterized as an increase of the dominion of things or products over the laborer or labor.

This is why the theory of alienation at first leaves the existence of the capitalist out of consideration in order to comprehend the relation of the laborer to capital as his own activity to relate himself to the objective conditions of labor as alien objects. Only under such theoretical setting are we able to grasp the labor process under capital as a process in which things in the forms of means of production absorb the labor of laborers as value, namely as the self-valorizing process of value (Verwertungsprozess). This is why the theory of alienation, in principle, does not regard the relation of capital to labor as a process in which the capitalist as a person exploits surplus-labor from the laborer as another person. This theory at first grasps the dominion of capital over labor as the thing (Sache-Ding) over the person, and afterwards, as an inevitable consequence of the principal dominion, establishes the dominion of the capitalist over the laborer (the capitalist as personification of capital).

It follows from this that the theory of alienation does not place a theoretical rupture between alienation in the form of money and that in the form of capital because this theory focuses on the increasing independence of things from the laboring subjects. Money is regarded as the first completed form of the independence of value as alienated from commodities while capital is principally defined as independently self-valorizing value. Money and capital stand for different phases of the same developmental process of alienation and the independence of value from the laboring subjects. This is the reason why Marx consistently applies the concept of alienation to the determination of money as well as that of capital.

On the contrary, as soon as we identify the alienation of labor with the exploitation of surplus-labor, this indispensable connection between money and capital must be cut off. The incredible theoretical confusion and many absurd interpretations result from this.
V. Alienation in the First Manuscript of the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844

After confirming the theoretical setting and framework of alienation, we are finally able to correctly interpret the concept of alienation in the First Manuscript of the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844.

We are ready to accept that Marx achieved a series of significant theoretical developments from the First to the Second, and further to the Third Manuscript. However, we do not agree to such interpretation as to suppose as if there were a theoretical rupture among three manuscripts so that, while writing the First Manuscript, Marx could not have taken into consideration what he wrote in the Second and Third Manuscripts. By means of text hermeneutics, we should determine in what manner the theoretical achievements that he acquires in the later manuscripts are already in an immature form anticipated in the First Manuscript.

The world where alienated labor prevails is a ‘national-economic circumstance,’ namely a society where the social division of labor and the overall exchange of products as commodities take place; this is a society of reified-thingified production relations. As we have already seen, the theory of alienation presupposes reification-thingification of production relations, and at the same time provides the logical foundation for reification-thingification in terms of the activity of the laboring subject.

Many researchers have discovered in the First Manuscript theoretical defects or flaws while, on the other hand, they have often highly estimated descriptions in the Second and Third Manuscripts; this could easily lead them to a rather popular supposition about the above-mentioned theoretical rupture among the three manuscripts.

A common type of misunderstanding of the First Manuscript comes from such interpretation as to immediately identify alienated labor with the relation of capitalist to laborer that, as the relation of one person to another person, enables the capitalist to exploit surplus-labor. This interpretation fails to explain why Marx introduces the capitalist and considers the personal relation of the capitalist to the laborer only in the fourth determination of alienated labor, and why up to the third determination he leaves the relation between the capitalist and the laborer as that between different classes out of consideration.

This misinterpretation is closely connected with another misinterpretation, according to which the adjective: fremd (alien) as a most important key word for the concept of alienated labor is simply interpreted or translated as of another person or belonging to another person. If we interpreted the term: fremd to be of another person, then we would introduce the capitalist as a person alien to the laborer to the consideration on the first determination, which would reduce the theory of alienation to that of surplus-labor.

Die Entfremdung erscheint sowohl darin, daß mein Lebensmittel eines andern ist, daß mein Wunsch der unzugängliche Besitz eines andern ist, als daß jede Sache selbst ein andres als sie selbst, als daß meine Thätigkeit ein andres, als endlich, — und dieß gilt auch für den Capitalisten — daß überhaupt die unmenschliche Macht her[sch]t.

[Alienation appears not only in the fact that my means of life belong to something else, that which I desire is the inaccessible possession of this something else, but also in the fact that everything is itself something different from itself—that my activity is something else

REIFICATION-THINGIFICATION AND ALIENATION — BASIC CONCEPTS OF MARX’S CRITIQUE 2018] 15
and that, finally (and this also applies to the capitalist), the sway of inhuman power in general prevails.] (MEGA I/2: 426)

In the above-quoted passage, it is evident from the context that ‘eines andern’ (the genitive case) does not refer to ‘ein andrer’ (the nominative case of the masculine) but to ‘ein andres’ (the nominative case of the neuter), which, consequently, does not mean someone else but something else. This something else (ein andres) as an impersonal and inhuman power not only holds sway over the laborer but also over the capitalist. However, in the existing translations, this distinction between ‘ein andres’ (something else) and ‘ein andrer’ (someone else), which is crucial for correctly comprehending alienation has simply been disregarded. For example, the translator of Marx Engels Collected Works, Volume 3 translates ‘eines andern’ as ‘belonging to someone else’ or ‘of another,’ which distorts the understanding of alienation.

Estrangement is manifested not only in the fact that my means of life belong to someone else, that which I desire is the inaccessible possession of another, but also in the fact that everything is itself something different from itself—that my activity is something else and that, finally (and this applies also to the capitalist), all is under [the sway] of inhuman power. (The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, MECW 3: 314)

Now, we quote some passages from the First Manuscript in order to confirm where, why and how the misinterpretation of the texts is liable to occur.

Der Arbeiter wird um so ärmer, je mehr Reichthum er producirt, je mehr seine Production an Macht und Umfang zunimmt. Der Arbeiter wird eine um so wohlfeilere Waare, je mehr Waaren er schafft. Mit der Verwerthung der Sachenwelt, nimmt die Entwerthung der Menschenwelt in direktemVerhältniß zu. Die Arbeit producirt nicht nur Waaren; sie producirt sich selbst und d[en] Arbeiter als eine Waare und zwar in dem Verhältniß, in welchem sie überhaupt Waaren producirt.

[The more wealth the laborer produces, in other words, the more his production increases in power and size, the poorer he becomes. The more commodities he creates, the cheaper a commodity he becomes. In direct proportion to the value-increase of the thing world does the value-decrease of the human world advance. Labor not only produces commodities; it produces itself and the laborer as a commodity, and, moreover, in the relation in which the labor in general produces commodities.] (MEGA I/2: 364)

When Marx writes: The more wealth the laborer produces, the poorer he becomes, he does not mean by this that the poorer the laborer becomes, the richer the capitalist becomes. What is in direct proportion to the value-decrease (Entwerthung) of the human world is the value-increase (Verwerthung) of the thing world (die Sachenwelt). Consequently, the value-increase does not stand for the increase of the surplus-labor in this context².

Here comes the most important proposition in the First Manuscript:

² “Die Aneignung des Gegentandes erscheint so sehr als Entfremdung, daß je mehr Gegenstände der Arbeiter producirt, er um so weniger besitzen kann und um so mehr unter die Herrschaft seines Products, des Capitals, gerath.” [The acquisition of the object appears so much as alienation that the more objects the laborer produces, the less he can possess, and the more he falls under the dominion of his product, namely of capital.] (MEGA I/2: 365) Here, alienation does not refer to the dominion of the capitalist but to that of the product of the laborer as capital.
In der Bestimmung, daß der Arbeiter zum Product seiner Arbeit als einem fremden Gegenstand sich verhält, liegen alle diese Consequenzen.
[All of these consequences are implied in the determination that the laborer relates himself to the product of his labor as an alien object.] (MEGA I/2: 365)

As we already mentioned, ‘an alien object’ does not immediately mean an object that belongs to the capitalist. Up to the third determination, the capitalist as a person must not come on the stage of theoretical consideration while, as a person, only the laborer is permitted to appear on the scene.

[By not regarding the direct relation between the laborer (labor) and production, national-economics conceals the alienation in the essence of labor. ...... The direct relation of labor to its products is the relation of the laborer to the objects of his production. The relation of the man of means to the objects of production and to production itself is nothing but a consequence of this first relation.] (MEGA I/2: 366)

In the above-quoted passage, ‘the direct relation between the laborer (labor) and production’ that national-economics does not regard means taking into consideration the relation between the laborer (or labor) and capital directly, namely without the interposition of the capitalist, as a relation of the laboring subject to his objects. Only under this theoretical setting, can we separate out the concept of alienation as a special mode of behavior of the laborer to relate himself to his activity as an alien one, which causes the increasing dominion of the thing over the laboring subject.

The following passage might be the most famous but at the same time most often misunderstood one in the discussion on alienation of labor:

Worin besteht nun die Entäusserung der Arbeit? Erstens, daß die Arbeit dem Arbeiter äusserlich ist, d. h. nicht zu seinem Wesen gehört, daß er sich daher in seiner Arbeit nicht bejaht, sondern verneint, nicht wohl, sondern unglücklich fühlt, keine freie physische und geistige Energie entwickelt, sondern seine Physis abkasteit und seinen Geist ruinirt. Der Arbeiter fühlt sich daher erst ausser der Arbeit bei sich und in der Arbeit ausser sich. ...... Seine Arbeit ist daher nicht freiwillig, sondern gezwungen, Zwangsarbeit. Sie ist daher nicht die Befriedigung eines Bedürfnisses, sondern sie ist nur ein Mittel, um Bedürfnisse ausser ihr zu befriedigen.
[What does the externalization of labor consist in? Firstly, labor is exterior to the laborer, namely does not belong to his essence, and, consequently, during his labor he does not affirm but denies himself, does not feel happy but unhappy; he does not develop his physical and spiritual energy but inflicts pain upon his body and breaks down his spirit. Therefore, the laborer feels himself at home only outside labor and lost during labor. ...... Therefore, his labor is not voluntary but forced, namely forced labor. Therefore, it is not
the satisfaction of a need but is nothing but the means to satisfy needs exterior to it.] (MEGA I/2: 366)

Many researchers regard the descriptions in the above-quoted passage to connote labor in the capitalist production process under the control of the capitalist. However, as long as we take the whole context in The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 into consideration, externalized labor by definition signifies labor in general to create value, namely labor to earn money (die Erwerbsarbeit). In Exzerpte aus James Mill: Élémens d’économie politique, Marx characterizes the Erwebsarbeit, namely labor that produces its product as a commodity to earn money, in a similar way:

Dieser Mittler [=Geld] ist daher das sich selbst abhanden gekommne, entfremdete Wesen des Privateigenthums, das sich selbst äusserlich gewordene, entäusserte Privateigenthum, wie es die entäusserte Vermittlung der menschlichen Production mit der menschlichen Production, die entäusserte Gattungsthätigkeit des Menschen ist. Alle Eigenschaften, welche dieser in der Production dieser Thätigkeit zukommen, werden daher auf diesen Mittler übertragen. Der Mensch wird also um so ärmer als Mensch, d. h. getrennt von diesem Mittler als dieser Mittler reicher wird.

[Therefore, this mediator [=money] is the lost, alienated essence of private property, the externalized private property that has become exterior to itself in the same manner as private property is the externalized mediation of human production with human production, namely the externalized genus activity of mankind. Consequently, all properties that, in the production of the genus activity, belong to this activity are transferred into this mediator. Therefore, the richer this mediator becomes, the poorer the human being as mankind becomes.] (MEGA IV/2: 448)

Es ist daher ein identischer Satz, daß der Mensch sich selbst entfremdet, und daß die Gesellschaft dieses entfremdeten Menschen die Carikatur seines wirklichen Gemeinwesens, seines wahrenGattungshebens sei, daß daher seine Thätigkeit als Qual, seine Eigne Schöpfung ihm als fremde Macht, sein Reichthum als Armuth, das Wesensband, was ihn an den andern Menschen knüpft, als ein unwesentliches Band und vielmehr die Trennung vom andern Menschen als sein wahres Dasein, daß sein Leben als Aufopferung seines Lebens, daß die Verwirklichung seines Wesens als Entwirklichung seines Lebens, daß seine Production als Production seines Nichts, daß seine Macht über den Gegenstand als die Macht des Gegenstands über ihn, daß er der Herr seiner Schöpfung als der Knecht dieser Schöpfung erscheint.

[Consequently, it is an identical proposition that the human being alienates himself, and that the society of this alienated human being is a caricature of his actual community, or of his authentic genus life, that, therefore, his activity appears as torment, his own creature to him as an alien power, his wealth as poverty, the essential bonds that tie him to other human beings as an insignificant one, or rather the separation from the other human being as his true existence, that his life appears as sacrifice, that the realization of his essence appears as the loss of the reality of his life, that his production appears as the production of his nothing, that his power over the object appears as the power of the object over him, that he (the master of his creature) appears as the slave of this creature.] (MEGA IV/2: 452-453)
Dein eigner Gegenstand ist dir nur die sinnliche Hülle, die verborgne Gestalt meines Gegenstandes; denn seine Production bedeutet, will ausdrücken: den Erwerb meines Gegenstandes. Also bist du in der That für dich selbst zum Mittel, zum Instrument deines Gegenstandes geworden, dessen Knecht deine Begierde ist, und du hast Knechtsdienste gethan.

[Your own object is for you no more than the sensory cover, the concealed form of my object, as the production of the object means, or will express the earning of my object. Therefore, you are really for yourself transformed into a means of, or an instrument of your object, whose slave your desire is, and you have done slave services.] (MEGA IV/2: 466)


[Under the presupposition of private property, my individuality is externalized to such a point that this activity is hated by me, a torment and rather nothing but a pretense of an activity, and, consequently, only a forced activity. ...... Therefore, my labor appears as no more than the objective, sensorially observed ...... expression of my self-loss and my helplessness.] (MEGA IV/2: 466)

From the Third Manuscript, we quote the following passages:

Jeder sucht eine fremde Wesenskraft über den andern zu schaffen, um darin die Befriedigung seines eigenen eigennützigen Bedürfnisses zu finden. Mit der Masse der Gegenstände wächst daher das Reich der fremden Wesen, denen der Mensch unterjocht ist. ...... Der Mensch wird um so ärmer als Mensch, er bedarf um so mehr des Geldes, um sich des feindlichen Wesens zu bemächtigen und die Macht seines Geldes fällt grade im umgekehrten Verhältniß als die Masse der Production, d. h. seine Bedürftigkeit wächst, wie die Macht des Geldes zunimmt.

[Each person tries to create an alien power of essence ruling over the other person in order to satisfy in this way his own egoistic needs. Therefore, together with masses of the objects the realm of the alien entities increases, to which the human being is subjugated. ...... [the richer this realm becomes,] the poorer the human being as mankind becomes, the more money he requires to seize the hostile entity, and the power of his money decreases in inverse proportion to the mass of production, namely his scarcity increases in proportion as the power of money increases.] (MEGA I/2: 418-419)

Je weniger du bist, je weniger du dem Leben äusserst, um so mehr hast du, um so grösser ist dein entäussertes Leben, um so mehr speicherst du auf von deinem fremdeten Wesen. Alles was dir der Nationalökonom an Leben nimmt und an Menschheit, das alles ersetzt er dir in Geld und Reichthum. Und alles das, was du nicht kannst, das kann dein Geld.

[The less you are, the less you manifest life, the more you have, the greater your externalized life, the more of your alienated essence you store up. Everything that the
national economics deprives you of in terms of life and humanity he replaces for you by money and wealth. And everything that you cannot do your money can do.] (MEGA I/2: 421)

In all quotations from Exzerpte aus James Mill: Élémens d’économie politique as well as the Third Manuscript, descriptions concerning alienation refer to money and commodity markets. There are no manifest descriptions concerning the capitalist production process. The sway of the capitalist over the laborer as a relation of one person to another person is nowhere discussed. From this we can reasonably infer that, in the First Manuscript, Marx mainly discusses alienation through money and the value-creating labor in terms of the sway of the object or the thing over the labor or the laboring subject while he intentionally in the first three determinations of alienation leaves the existence of the capitalist out of consideration. We have already discussed this sufficiently to understand the reason for it.

Now, we discuss the fourth determination. For the first time in this last determination the other human being (der andere Mensch) is introduced as a category and the alienation of one human being from another human being (die Entfremdung des Menschen von dem Menschen) is discussed. However, even here, we must not directly identify the other human being with the capitalist.


[The proposition that from the human being his genus entity is alienated generally means that a human being is alienated from the other human beings in the same way as each of them is alienated from the human essence. The alienation of the human being, in general, any relation in which the human being relates to himself is only realized, expressed in the relation in which he is to the other human being. Therefore, in the relation of alienated labor, each human being regards the other according to the standard and the relation in which each finds himself as a laborer.] (MEGA I/2: 370-371)

From the context of the above-quoted passage, ‘the other human being’ does not refer to the capitalist but to any other laborer that also works to earn money, because, in the context, every human being is supposed to ‘find himself as a laborer.’ The capitalist for the first time comes on the stage just after Marx presents the following question:

Wenn meine eigne Thätigkeit nicht mir gehört, eine fremde, eine erzwungne Thätigkeit ist, wem gehört sie dann? Einem andern Wesen als mir. Wer ist dieß Wesen?

[If my own activity does not belong to me, namely is an alien activity, a forced one, to whom/what does it then belong? To another entity [Wesen] other than me. Who is this entity?]} (MEGA I/2: 371)

As already explained, alienation must in principle be formulated in terms of the sway of the thing over the person. As long as we are engaged in the fundamental determination of
alienation, we do not need to pose a question: to whom a thing that, alienated from human beings, holds sway over them belongs to because the thing does not owe its own competence to rule over the people to a certain person while even a person that is assumed to be a holder of the thing must be under the sway of the thing. Consequently, the question: to whom the thing belongs, must not be the primary one for providing the foundation of the concept of alienation but a secondary one, which could be raised after the fundamental determinations of alienation are given. According to the mature Marx, capitalist results from capital, but not vice versa. The young Marx as well applies this principle to analysis on alienation.

Also durch die entfremdete, entäusserte Arbeit erzeugt der Arbeiter das Verhältniß eines der Arbeit fremden und ausser ihr stehenden Menschen zu dieser Arbeit. Das Verhältniß des Arbeiters zur Arbeit erzeugt das Verhältniß d[es] Capitalisten zu derselben. [Therefore, through the alienated, externalized labor the laborer produces the relation of a man alien to labor and standing outside it to this labor. The relation of the laborer to his labor produces the relation of the capitalist to the labor.] (MEGA I/2: 372)

Regarding the second sentence in the above-quoted passage: the relation of the laborer to his labor produces the relation of the capitalist to the labor, but not vice versa, by the fourth determination, the theory of alienation attains a new theoretical dimension; namely comprehending the personal relation between the capitalist and the laborer as a personification of the thing. In this final phase, we can adequately discuss the exploitation of the laborers by the capitalist.

Wir haben die eine Seite betrachtet, die entäusserte Arbeit in Bezug auf d[en] Arbeiter selbst, d. h. das Verhältniß der entäusserten Arbeit zu sich selbst. Als Produkt, als nothwendiges Resultat dieses Verhältnisses haben wir das Eigenthumsverhältniß des NichtArbeiters zum Arbeiter und der Arbeit gefunden. Das Privateigenthum, als der materielle, resumirte Ausdruck der entäusserten Arbeit umfaßt beide Verhältnisse, das Verhältniß des Arbeiters zur Arbeit und zum Product seiner Arbeit und zum Nichtarbeiter und das Verhältniß des Nichtarbeiters, zum Arbeiter, und dem Product seiner Arbeit. [We have considered one side: externalized labor in relation to the laborer himself; namely the relation of externalized labor to itself. We have found as a product of, or as an inevitable result of this relation the property relation of the non-laborer to the laborer and the labor. Private property as a material, summarized expression of the externalized labor comprises both relations: namely the relation of the laborer to the labor, to the product of his labor and to the non-laborer as well as the relation of the non-laborer to the laborer and to the product of his labor.] (MEGA I/2: 374)

For the first time in the final phase, the concept of the property relation of the non-laborer to the laborer and the labor (das Eigenthumsverhältniß des NichtArbeiters zum Arbeiter und der Arbeit) comes on the stage of theoretical consideration. It follows from this that, as far as we follow Marx’s method, we must not analyze the capitalist production system from the property relation of the capitalist as a theoretical presupposition, which, on the contrary, must be derived as an inevitable consequence from the independence of value alienated from and opposed to the laborer.
VI. *Alienation and Perspective on the Change of the Capitalism*

We have discussed the inseparable relation of the theory of alienation to that of reification-thingification in detail. In this chapter, we are going to throw light on a specific implication that Marx assigns to alienation. Marx often mentions revolts of the laborers against the reified-thingified economic system when introducing alienation as a category. By considering this aspect of alienation, we can clarify a new aspect of the theory of alienation, different from that of reification-thingification, as a special kind of theory of building of subjects that are competent to change the capitalist system.

As we have seen, the labor process appears as a self-valorizing process of capital because laborers must be related to their own labor and products as “alien to themselves.” 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 laborers that relate themselves to the things created by them as alien to themselves.

Diese Wertherhaltende und Neuerwerths 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 laborer that creates 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 laborers. By impoverishment, Marx understands not only impoverishment in living standards of laborers 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 laborers. In his manuscript preparing for the first volume of *Capital* entitled *Resultate des unmittelbaren Produktionsprozesses*, Marx explains the inseparable interrelation between reification-thingification 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 dies 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 Entfremdungsprocess seiner eigenen Arbeit. Insofern steht hier der Arbeiter von vorn herein hoher als der Capitalist, als der letztere in jenen Entfremdungsprocess wurzelt und in ihm seine absolute Befriedigung findet, während der
Arbeiter als sein Opfer von vorn herein dagegen in einem rebellischen Verhältniss steht und ihn als Knechtungsprocesse empfindet.

[The sway of the capitalist over the laborer is consequently that of a thing over a 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 antagonist 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 laborer 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 laborer as a victim of it bears a rebellious relation to it and suffers it as an enslavement process.] (MEGAII/4.1: 63)

Since the capitalist is personified capital, “the sway of the capitalist over the laborer” is essentially the power of the means of production as thingified capital over the human being. The sway of the thing (reification-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 laborer, 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 laborer. The alienation of labor means that the self-creation of the laborer is performed as his self-deprivation or self-enslavement. In this sense, the theory of reification-thingification and that 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 the 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-thingification because the concept of alienation opens up a dimension of negative experiences of the laborer in which he behaves towards his own labor as “a value alien to himself” and, as a result, this concept leads to the 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 laborer as a victim of this alienation process must revolt against it.

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 laborer, develops into the most complete antagonism with the advent of machinery. It is therefore when machinery arrives on the scene that the laborer for the first time revolts savagely against the instruments of labor] (MEGA II/6: 417)
Die Erkennung des Products als seines eignen, und die Beurtheilung der Trennung von den Bedingungen seiner Verwirklichung als eines Unrechts — Zwangsverhältnisses — ist ein enormes Bewußtsein, selbst das Product der capitalistischen Productionsweise und sehr das knell to its doom, wie mit dem Bewußtsein des Sklaven, daß er nicht das Eigenthum eines Dritten sein kann, die Sklaverei nur noch künstlich fortvegetirt, und aufgehört hat als Basis der Production fortdauern zu können.

Consequently, the concept of alienation plays a decisive role in bridging the theory of reification with historical prospects to overcome the reified economic system.

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 mature Marx. The analogy between the alienation of labor and that of religion plays 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.

Marx first constructed the theory of alienation in the *Manuscripts of 1844* and developed it into a more comprehensive theory of contradictions in the capitalist mode of production from the *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* of 1857/58 onward. We have already seen that Marx for the first time in the *Grundrisse* introduces reification as a significant concept for characterizing the capitalist economic system. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx understands by reification (1) reification as reified social relations, and, at the same time, (2) thingification as a transformation of reified relations into the properties of a thing. Although Marx has not yet differenciated thingification from reification, he pays attention to the two different phases of reification in the following way:

In allen diesen Bezeichnungen scheint es (=das Capital) blose Sache zu sein und ganz mit der Materie, in der es besteht, zusammenzufallen. ..... Es ist so, selbst den Oekonomen klar, daß Geld nichts Handgreifliches ist; sondern daß dieselbe Sache bald unter der Bestimmung Capital, bald unter einer andren und entgegengesetzten Bestimmung subsumirt sein kann und danach Capital ist oder nicht ist. Es ist offenbar so ein Verhältniß und kann nur ein Productionsverhältniß sein.

In all these descriptions, capital seems to be a bare thing and completely identical with
the matter of which it consists. ...... Thus, it is, even to economists, clear that capital is nothing tangible but the same thing can now be subsumed under the determination of capital, now under another and contrary determination, and, consequently, the same thing is capital or not capital. It is evidently in this way a relation, and can be nothing but a production relation.] (MEGA II/1.2: 415)

Capital consists in (1) a specific production relation in a reified form while, on the other hand, (2) it appears to be a thing or completely identical with a matter of which it consists. Marx in the Grundrisse in fact comprehends that reification consists of these two phases but has not yet conceptually differentiated the both phases in terms of reification and thingification so that, in the Grundrisse, the term Ding has not played any differentiated role although the term Sache with regard to reification has played a significant role. It is during the time when Marx was writing the final manuscripts for Capital in 1864-65 that he deliberately differentiates as significant analytical concepts Ding from Sache, and thingification from reification. Texts of this period such as Manuscripts for the Third Volume of Capital and Results of the Immediate Production Process witness the completed phase of the theory of reification-thingification as well as of alienation.

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 laborer 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 laborer establishes itself as an economic system that ruthlessly pursues the creation of 'forces of the 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 working individuals.

Almost all significant categories discussed in this paper such as reification-thingification, personification, alienation and externalization, their logical interrelation and their implications in relation to the historical character of the capitalist economic system are summed up in the following passage from the Grundrisse:

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

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9 Here, we have to pay attention to the two phases of personification of capital: namely (1) capital as personified conditions of production is itself personification in the first phase and then (2) capitalist is personification of capital in the second phase.

10 This passage supports our interpretation of reification-thingification and alienation = externalization: namely a process that, from the viewpoint of capital, is seen as the intensifying independence of objective conditions of production in opposition to the living labor, which means reification-thingification, is, from the viewpoint of living labor, seen as alienation-externalization.
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 (as self-valorizing value), which monopolizes the function of the community in the direct production process in opposition to laborers 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 personificirt gegenübertritt.

[It has been demonstrated ...... that the “socialness” etc. of the labor of the laborer 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-thingification 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 a method according to which the automatic process of the reified system can be reformulated into a special mode of the living activity (Lebenstätigkeit) of individuals that relate to their own objects as alien and hostile to themselves; 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-thingification 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.

References

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