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## **“La chose maudite”. The concept of reification in George Bataille’s *The Accursed Share***

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### Abstract

This paper deals with the concept of reification, which is analyzed taking into account two main lines of thought. The former is the Marxist theory of reification, which is similar to and converges with the concept of alienation. The latter focuses on the phenomenon of convention that allows us to deal with extra-linguistic objects, non-computable objects, aiming at producing a shared reality; in other words, to produce simulacra through mass media. This paper analyses in particular the transformation of the understanding of the concept of reification as enabled by Bataille’s work, *The Accursed Share*. In this work, George Bataille highlights the existence of the phenomenon of reification outside the relationships built by the capital.

### Keywords

Reification, Digital technology, George Bataille, Infocapital, Posthumanism

George Bataille’s philosophical theorization blossoms within economic, social and political contexts of transformation. Indeed, his works were first published in the interwar period and then especially in the aftermath of the Second World War. And it is during this latter phase that the concept of reification undergoes a radical change. From then on, this concept broadened from the sphere of material production, strictly

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tied to the economic milieu, to the sphere of the production of the imaginary, which was subjected to the newly-emerged notion of cultural industry. More specifically, in a first stage, the concept of reification was deeply affected by the Marxist worldview and it can be identified with the process through which the relationship between objects, represented by the products of labor, modifies the relationship between people. According to this view, the process of reification reaches the point where it transforms the human beings involved in the production of value into proper objects. In a second stage, which proceeds from a question that is incidental to the Marxist analysis, the phenomenon of reification is tentatively placed outside the capitalistic model of production and, therefore, in the anthropological dimension preceding the establishment of capitalist social relationships.<sup>1</sup> This second hypothesis, which directly results from existentialistic and phenomenological stances such as Jean Paul Sartre's and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's, made it possible for the Frankfurt School to develop.

The present paper aims to analyze in depth the transformations undergone by the concept of reification. This concept acquires indeed a fundamental importance within the digital context, especially if one considers the simulation or exteriorization of the cognitive activity, the development of artificial intelligences, and the reproduction – that is, reification – of the human being through humanoids that are able to perform complex activities in interaction with the surrounding environment.

### **1. From praxis to reification**

As briefly mentioned above, in a first stage influenced by Marxist theories, the concept of reification was understood as the transition from a state of nature to an economic state.<sup>2</sup> More precisely, according to Friedrich Engels, reification stems from the overcoming of natural limits. This overcoming moves human beings from the natural sphere and places them in an economic one.<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx builds up his theory of reification starting from this early definition. Nevertheless, in later analyses, reification is often reduced to the mere concept of alienation. In this framework, I would then return to the Marxist concept of praxis to highlight the origin and roots of the meaning attached to the term

reification during the first of the two stages identified above. And this would also allow us to understand the conceptual change undergone by this notion during the 1960s.

The Marxist concept of praxis is aware of the role of the human being in relation to technology. But let me take a step back. Within classical culture, the concept of praxis somehow imposed a state of passivity on the human being. Praxis was in fact subjected to the Greek *theoría* or Roman *contemplatio*. The Greek tragedian Aeschylus clearly highlights the preeminence of the theory on praxis by stating that no human action might go beyond/overstep nature: "Craft (*techné*) is far weaker than necessity".<sup>4</sup> *Poiesis* and praxis found therefore their limit in nature, which was insurmountable. And this placed the episteme at the heart of the relationship between human beings and nature. In turn, the episteme established the man-nature relation on an action of imitation, relation and measure.<sup>5</sup>

The Judeo-Christian tradition radically broke with this worldview through the introduction of the notions of 'original sin' and 'creation', which both contributed to transform the perception of the man-nature relationship. Consider for instance Genesis 1, 1:2 where the Earth is described as an empty and formless space, thus a non-space in which the "Spirit of God was hovering over the waters", or Genesis 3, 17:3 in which God condemns Adam, after he has eaten the forbidden fruit, to work the soil and obtain nourishment from it only through painful work. These two passages demonstrate, on the one hand, that nature is no longer understood as an infinite entity, and on the other hand that the original sin transforms Classical human passivity, which mainly appears in the observation and translation of the *physis*, into an obligation to act directly on nature in order to find some path to redemption and get closer to God.<sup>6</sup>

During the Early Modern Period, this view headed for a key turning point. In fact, if the passive contemplation of nature coincides with the impossibility to operate on it, this would also coincide with the impossibility to improve living conditions and to allow real progress. Francis Bacon was the first to speak about the possibility to rule over nature. In Bacon's works God's estrangement from the philosophical and scientific sphere appears for the first time. In *Novum Organum*, Bacon

acknowledges the epistemological imperfection of the human being and grants the new instrument (science) the status of a real prosthesis that is able to guarantee progress. This new view brings with it a new way of understanding nature, which, from then on, could be examined through experimenta.<sup>7</sup> In this phase, the experimentum represented the only means to operate/realize a direct action on nature, to open the door to the 'universal truth: God'.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the meaning of experimentum seems to be literally: 'make the truth'.<sup>9</sup> The human being becomes then the creator of his own truth and his own world, and the master of his own fate. Only the divine energy (*élan vital*), which moves the universe and creates life, surpasses the human being. And the only way to bridge this gap is to 'translate', through mechanics, natural objects and phenomena into a space mathematically calculated. It follows that the human being needs to establish a space in which intelligible abstractions can allow them to write 'the truth of nature'.

The translation and transformation of nature require the constant improvement of technique (science). The relationship between human beings, nature and technique could then be summarized as follows: the analysis and transformation of nature pass through science, which becomes the essential instrument of the man-nature relationship. In addition, science also becomes the only instrument to improve technique, to create and improve the prostheses (i.e. technology) that allow us to rule and analyze nature. It follows that science, and thus technique, stops being a mere instrument to improve living conditions. It becomes a real aim. Becoming an aim, science starts to exclude human beings from the analysis and representation of nature. In fact, human beings, who always seek 'objectivity', cannot do anything else but establish a relationship with nature that is completely mediated by instruments.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. The Marxist Approach

The concept of praxis developed by Karl Marx could be understood as the highest expression of the action upon nature as theorized by the Judeo-Christian tradition. According to Marx, mankind's essence is 'activity', while nature is definitively understood as a source of working tools. Further on, the action on nature manifests itself through work.

Therefore work is seen as the fundamental condition for the existence of any form of society. It is an eternal human need through which, according to Marx, it is possible to establish an organic exchange with nature.<sup>11</sup> The relationship between mankind and nature is therefore seen as something that is fully mediated by praxis. By acknowledging the indispensable role played by technology in the human-nature relationship, Marx also highlights the transformation of mankind through praxis. Mankind eliminates in fact the extraneousness of nature: nature is no longer *an sich*, it becomes *für uns*.

In a worldview in which nature is the rule, technology, which is embodied by both tools and the production of use value (*Gebrauchswerten*), focuses on the fulfillment of human needs. In other words, mankind embodies the aim, and the tools represent a way to guarantee the existence of mankind. However, the primacy of the market transforms mankind's essence – that is, work – which is the production of *Gebrauchswerten*. Through the primacy of the market, the final aim of work is no longer the production of use values but of exchange value (*Tauschwert*) and this phenomenon creates a clear division between the goals 'to produce' and 'to profit'. The value of use values which, within the worldview of the primacy of nature, satisfies human needs, is transformed by the acquisition of value through its capacity to be exchanged for other goods. The exchange of this new value is based on market laws. Following this new schema, human needs find a solution in the production of value – that is, money – which, in turn, totally influences the organic exchange as Marx theorized it.

The concept of alienation derives precisely from this distortion of the organic exchange, an exchange that guarantees the production and use of products. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of alienation grows when mankind and nature no longer represent an aim but a means acting under the logic of the market. At this point, one can see a new phenomenon: reification (*Verdinglichung*). The change from aim to means, presented above, imposes the rule of the product over the producer, the rule of the thing over mankind, and consequently, the thing dominates mankind, interrupting the organic exchange with nature by replacing it with the pure production of commodities. In addition, commodities acquire a kind of independent life. Their movement determines and

completely defines the meaning of human life, as well as the value of everything.<sup>12</sup> Following Marx, this system would transform – that is, reify – human relations and even humans themselves:

“Das Geheimnisvolle der Warenform besteht also einfach darin, dass sie den Menschen die gesellschaftlichen Charakter ihrer eigenen Arbeit als gegenständliche Charakter der Arbeitsprodukte selbst, als gesellschaftliche Natureigenschaften dieser Dinge zurückspiegelt, daher auch das gesellschaftliche Verhältnis der Produzenten zur Gesamtarbeit als ein außerihnen existierendes gesellschaftliches Verhältnis von Gegenständen.”<sup>13</sup>

### **3. The Accursed Share as projection of a new understanding of the concept of reification**

Bataille's oeuvre was developed at that stage of the understanding of the phenomenon of reification. The idea of reification inherited from Marxism, which was raised by some scholars such as György Lukács, imposed a rigid interpretation in which its existence was strictly related to the primacy of market. Therefore, reification derived directly from the model of capitalist production. How else could we understand Bataille's words, "C'est ne pas la nécessité mais son contraire, le 'luxe', qui pose à la matière vivante et à l'homme leurs problèmes fondamentaux", if not as the desire to develop an analysis of the phenomena of reification and alienation that deeply embody the accursed share that Bataille seeks to highlight?

In the *Accursed Share*, one can perceive Bataille's attempt to identify a new universal structure that would develop a new reading of the process that established the primacy of the market. Thus, Bataille proposes an analysis of reification outside the relationships built by the capital. In other words, he proposes the analysis of these phenomena on the anthropological constitutive plane, and therefore allowing a phenomenological analysis. In fact, in the first part of the *Accursed Share*, *Le sens de l'économie générale*, Bataille focuses on the theorization of a universal structure independent from market forces. He analyzes production and the use of wealth as a particular aspect of the 'earthly activity', which is related to movement. The author sees movement as the result of a kind of path of energy at a precise point in the universe.

Bataille wonders whether the determination of this energy (*l'élan vital*) is altered by human activity or if it is governed by a kind of determination foreign to mankind, thus foreign to praxis. He questions the aims that set in motion the consumption of vital energy in order to understand whether human needs are the aim and, consequently, to understand if human needs cause this divine energy to generate the action or, on the contrary, if this energy is an aim in itself. Hence his interest on expenditure, profit and the role played by surpluses of energy in the growth of a system. Through the study of expenditure, Bataille posits that economy is never seen as a general science that considers human energy, since it does not exert a detailed analysis of the expenditure. The mistake of human beings, according to him, lies in the impossibility to conceive the economy in general. He adds that the governing structure is unable to see the interdependence of each entity, either on a social field, or in a natural field. Therefore, it is possible to understand the economic system as foreign to human action, or worse, as a regulator of human action and even of energy.

For Bataille, it was of fundamental importance to focus his analysis on the flow of energy, and above all, on the surplus of this energy. In fact, the analysis of the surplus of energy represented the possibility to study the phenomenon of expenditure, consumption and the production of plus value with the instruments of phenomenology. He sees the excess of energy as a natural fact on earth, which is a surplus that is embodied in luxury and at the same time, it sets in motion any human activity. Furthermore, he states that this energy cannot be accumulated without a limitation on the productive forces. Thus, the excess of energy, which is in constant flux in the world, generates the need of destruction in humans. Within this framework, destruction is the only way to eliminate additional energy, the unusable energy.<sup>14</sup> According to Bataille, examples of the destruction of the excess of energy would be the construction of magnificent useless monuments or even the organization of feasts.<sup>15</sup>

Through these statements, Bataille establishes a new kind of organic exchange that is characterized by a direct and inevitable relationship between mankind and nature. His ideas of organic exchange consider nature as an infinite source of energy, but at the same time nature requires the waste of the surpluses of energy.

The system theorized by Bataille imposes an analysis of economy via biological terms. Bataille highlights a particularity in nature, which is unlike the economy, namely that the source of wealth, the sun, "gives without receiving". The sun, as a source of wealth, represents, according to Bataille, a kind of unproductive glory that was eradicated by the logic of production. That is to say, the unproductive glory is the basis of growth in nature, where the squandering of the excess of energy results in the growth of the system. In nature, once the growth of a being or of a group is limited, the squandering of excess begins. This mechanism is inconceivable in the capitalistic economic system, in which unproductive glory is completely opposite to the growth of a group that is based primarily on the accumulation and use of surplus energy through both exchange value and plus value. According to Bataille, the growth of any entity is due to a luxurious squandering of energy. In nature, this luxury occurs in death, sexual reproduction and manducation. In humans, the excess of energy is embodied in the increase of inert material, that is to say, a non-biological increase, a technical increase and an increase in wealth. And the tools created by this excess allow an extension of the governance of man over nature (and expansion of the *regnum hominis*), a demographic growth – a release of the excess of energy through reproduction – and an increase in the excess of energy.<sup>16</sup> The excess of energy sets in motion in our system a kind of wasteful mechanism which is realized through destruction, wars and the oppression of beings and groups. It happens because the overabundance of energy sets in motion an expenditure mechanism, which demands from us the consumption of wealth.<sup>17</sup> That is to say, the curse lies in the vector that feeds back the excess of energy into the system without allowing its release, as well as the human impossibility to avoid the logic of profit that has its roots in the deepest parts of our being. It is a curse that finds its source in the impossibility to conceive the gift as a solution. It is a curse that makes the human being unable to conceive a general situation, in other words, to conceive the interdependent nature of the system.<sup>18</sup>

It is not coincidence that Bataille starts his research with the study of consumption in the Aztec world. According to him, the Aztec world is diametrically opposed in our conception of human activity. Thus, this pre-Columbian civilization represented an interesting example to



highlight the phenomenon of reification in a pre-capitalistic period. In particular, Bataille focused on the value of human sacrifices in this civilization.

“Ils arrachaient le cœur encore battant et l'élevaient ainsi vers le soleil. La plupart des victimes étaient des prisonniers de guerre, ce qui justifiait l'idée des guerres nécessaires à la vie du soleil : les guerres avaient le sens de la consommation, non de la conquête, et les Mexicains pensaient que, si elles cessaient, le soleil cesserait d'éclairer.”<sup>19</sup>

War, for the Aztecs, was not a method of controlling the empire. Warlike activity did not meet the logic of wealth dilapidation. Warlike activity represented an act of human sacrifice, a substitution, or consumption.<sup>20</sup> Prisoners represented the excess in an economy that does not store excess. Further, Bataille highlights a kind of reification phenomenon in these human sacrifices. Slaves, subject to work, become things. They become property. There is no longer a relationship between subjects; this relationship is destroyed. Slaves are no longer similar to their master. The servile use transforms the subject into a thing, into an object. However, the destruction of the object must be carried out through ritual in order to establish again a communion. The victim of the ritual cannot be consumed in a simple way. The ritual restores the relationship between victims and their executioners. Through sacrifice, the Aztecs gave back to the sacred world what the servile use profanes.

From this analysis, it is already possible to draw some conclusions: the effect of reification is no longer a phenomenon that directly derives from the primacy of the market as it was theorized by Marx. In Bataille's words:

“L'introduction du travail dans le monde substitua dès l'abord à l'intimité, à la profondeur du désir et à ses libres déchaînements, l'enchaînement raisonnable où la vérité de l'instant présent n'importe plus, mais le résultat ultérieur des opérations. Le premier travail fonda le monde des choses, auquel répond généralement le monde profane des Anciens. Dès la position du monde des choses, l'homme devint lui-même l'une des choses de ce monde, au moins dans le temps où il travaillait. C'est à cette déchéance que l'homme de tous les temps s'efforça d'échapper. Dans ses mythes étranges,

dans ses rites cruels, l'homme est dès l'abord à la recherche d'une intimité perdue."<sup>21</sup>

Praxis and its technical component (the non-organic world) reifies nature; it creates the world of objects. But in turn, the expansion of the non-biological world moves mankind away from human self-awareness since the prosthesis – the non-biological – intervenes as a translator object between nature – which is made a thing – and mankind. At this point one can see that Bataille opposes Marx in a radical way. On the one hand, Marx states that nature is the source of working tools. On the other hand, Bataille sees nature as a source of energy, as the source of the *élan vital*. For Marx, nature becomes a thing from the moment in which nature ceases to be a source of use values and begins to be a source of tools that produces exchange values. This idea is in opposition to Bataille's theory which states that the commodification of nature derives directly from human activity. Hence, Bataille's interest in the system established by the Aztec civilization, where human sacrifice meant the restoration of the organic exchange through the divine. However, to give back to the divine the things from the real world required consumption without profit, the destruction of excess. A thing goes back to the divine through its consumption. Thus, the victim becomes a surplus of wealth that must be destroyed by means of the same consumption: it is the accursed share, which, through its destruction, assures the survival of the community. The blood flowing from the tops of the pyramids was indeed a waste of wealth, it was a gift that guarantees the well-being of the community, because this gift guarantees the survival of the sun, the source of eternal energy.

#### **4. Towards media reification**

With the primacy of the market, the transformation of human beings into proper things becomes definitively manifest. Human beings are turned into merchandise and are faced with the impossibility of developing any awareness of themselves. The capitalistic system provides meaning through a kind of interiorization of the 'thing' or, to put it even better, through a mutation into a 'thing'. This interiorization of the thing corresponds undoubtedly to the complete break of the organic exchange

theorized by Marx. If the production becomes the essential aim, a world ruled by things arises, since human activity revolves around things. But this is a world existing exclusively to serve mankind. And this represents the point which allowed Bataille to find the source of the estrangement of mankind from itself. In fact, when human activity focuses on the production and accumulation of things, a production ruled and pushed by things themselves, the natural desire to find oneself is pushed aside.<sup>22</sup> However, this does not mean that the Marxist solution establishing the total independence of the thing from other needs is correct. The innate 'trap' in the Marxist theorization is that it seeks to clear the 'world of things' of any element diverging from 'things'<sup>23</sup> and that it seeks, thereby, to undertake a liberation of mankind which starts from the thing itself. Socialism, just like capitalism, eliminates the possibility of a full possession of intimacy, which Bataille calls 'conscience de soi' (self-consciousness). Within the ritual sacrifice, mankind finds a way to externalize intimacy by way of the sacred. Capitalism, like socialism, imposes the death of intimacy by means of the development of an extreme opposition between the sacred and the thing in which the sacred must cease to exist and be replaced by production and the development of the means of production.

The Marxist critique of capitalism, grounded on the critique of the surplus made by the labor force that is reified by the conservation of the surplus – that is, money or exchange value – developed a system that simply suggested the appropriation of things by the proletariat. But the proletariat, in turn, had already been transformed into a thing by the ruling economic system.

The theorization of Bataille shows that although it is possible to speak about the transformation of mankind into a thing within a capitalistic system, there also exists a reification phenomenon preceding the development of the social relationships imposed by capitalism. Bataille demonstrates this assertion through his analysis of the intimate meaning attached to ritual sacrifices among the Aztecs. It seems indeed that in the Aztec world a prisoner is reduced to a thing, either because he becomes a productive thing, or because he becomes a thing offered (during a ritual sacrifice) to the universal energy in order to perpetuate the life of the entire community. However, in this performance, Bataille highlights

the presence of a connection with the self, an attempt to escape from reification by means of ritual. Bataille demonstrates therefore that even in the event that the social sphere succeeds in releasing itself from the ties of the capitalistic system, it would still be unlikely that reification would simply cease to exist. In addition, he also demonstrates that the solution to reification suggested by Marxism would not bring about the disappearance of this phenomenon; rather it would exacerbate it.

### 5. Reification in the Infocapital Era

We mentioned above that Biblical religions have played a fundamental role in the process which has led humankind to become master of nature. Following Bataille's logic, it would be possible to state that from that moment on the man-nature relationship started separating humankind from self-awareness. However, this estrangement could be due to two essential phenomena. On the one hand, nature, becoming *für uns* and thus losing its infiniteness, also turns itself into an object. As a consequence, it can no longer be equated with the source of the 'vital impetus' (*élan vital*) or supreme energy that sets the Whole in movement. If humankind has externalized itself from nature, humankind as a subject independent from nature considered as an object (*Gegenstand*) starts to perceive itself as the source of the energy which can modify the Whole. In considering the 'vital impetus', or, rather, in trying to determine if the vital impetus is altered by human activity or if, on the contrary, praxis is ruled by the vital impetus (namely, the natural energy emanated by the universe) Bataille seeks to move the conceptual axis that regards humankind as an isolated entity in the Universe, a Universe which disposes autonomously of its energy, and places humankind inside the thing itself. From this point of view, it would seem that reification simply represents the estrangement of humankind from nature (humankind = subject / nature = *Gegenstand*), since nature, as Bataille posits out, is the origin of the vital impetus. Therefore, the understanding of nature as a thing can only generate a symmetrical phenomenon, which results in humankind seeing itself as a thing. Bataille's interest in Aztec rituals can be interpreted in light of this last assumption. In the rituals analyzed by Bataille the subject that has been transformed into an object becomes a subject again before being offered to the objects' world in order to

guarantee the continuity of the energy source. The elimination of the surplus through the offering of a gift is nothing but the restitution of the energy to nature. And this restitution provides humankind with a moment/instant of complementarity with the object, and this moment allows it to have awareness of itself.

Materialism led Marx to perceive the organic exchange as a relationship in which humankind find useful and essential objects in nature. On the contrary, according to Bataille, the organic exchange is an exchange of energy. Humankind then uses this energy to stimulate (economic) growth. However, at the same time, humankind would also need to find a way (e.g., through the gift) to eliminate the surplus and thus prevent it from becoming a thing, or to grant an exchange value to the use values, and thus reestablish a communion with nature.

Within these antithetical scenarios, technique can also play two antithetic roles. According to Bataille, the development of technique originates from the application of the surplus to the growth of the non-biological realm. On the contrary, Marxism theorizes that the development of technique represents the essential condition to conquer nature completely, since through technique humankind could theoretically release itself from the effects of both alienation and reification. It is no coincidence that Marx claims that the essential condition which can allow the establishment of a socialist system is the full assimilation of the technique that appears in the industrialization of a society. Humankind, confronting the 'natural imperfection' of nature, can do nothing else but focus science on the feverish research on instruments/tools in order to fully conquer nature, turning nature itself into the world of objects. Therefore, as already discussed in the first part of this paper, the object starts to be definitively transformed and analyzed through instruments/tools. This engenders an even more radical estrangement between humankind and nature and, therefore, strengthens the impossibility of developing self-awareness. The object-subject relationship turns into a relationship that is completely mediated by technique, which, in turn, leads humankind to look for an illusory objectivity, one provided by technique. At this point, humankind starts to prefer the representation of the object to the object itself. This marks a proper breaking point.

When nature is nothing but a codification realized through technology, how could we reestablish a direct relationship between mankind and nature in order to liberate us from our condition of thing? In my opinion, reification must undergo a conceptual shift towards the criticism of media technology. It would be possible to ask the same question that the phenomenological position asked materialism (is a form of reification possible outside the capitalism system?), a question that has generated a new understanding of the phenomenon of reification. Could a form of technically-mediated communication exist that escapes the phenomenon of reification? That is precisely the focus of media studies, for example Baudrillard's or Perniola's analysis. In fact, the creation of copies without prototype or simulacra is the reification exerted by media. These objects exist in the communicative relationship but they are not replicas of existing objects. One can see, even before McLuhan's theories – theories that focused the criticism of communication more on the phenomenon of social formatting than on contents and ideologies –, that some problems arose within the Marxist critique when dealing with the subject of reification. Consider for instance Habermas' critique of Lukács' oeuvre.<sup>24</sup> One can also consider the work of some Frankfurt School scholars, like Horkheimer's *Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft*, which appeared in 1967 and, with Adorno, the *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, published in 1947. These works focus the phenomenon of reification on the effect of the dislocation of art and its transformation into a cultural commodity.<sup>25</sup> It is through these analyses that it was possible to understand the phenomenon of reification as the act, or desire, to defend the established reality created by mass media. Marcuse's and Horkheimer's theories focused on the use that political and economic powers made of media. Through their analyses, the understanding of reification started to be guided towards the criticism of the reality established by media, and that made possible the revolution initiated by McLuhan, namely, the change of paradigm in which reification is no longer seen as a phenomenon derived from contents and ideologies but as a phenomenon generated from the mediated relationship exerted by technology, which changes proportions, distances and spatial organizations.

Even though Bataille focuses his analysis on the economic field,

through his concept of the excess of energy one can see that reification lies in the impossibility to develop what he calls self-awareness. In my opinion, this is the impossibility of establishing a human-nature relationship that is free from the mediation of non-biological entities.

In our technical context, especially during the digital revolution that we are experiencing, reification has achieved another dimension. Reification is articulated through the form of production imposed by the info-capital and the codification of every human action. Mankind believes, as Baudrillard posits, in high-definition, which removes us completely from a real connection with nature.

“La plus haute définition du medium correspond à la plus basse définition du message – la plus haute définition de l’information correspond à la plus basse définition de l’événement – la plus haute définition du sexe (le porno) correspond à la plus basse définition du désir – la plus haute définition du langage (dans le codage numérique) correspond à la plus basse définition du sens – la plus haute définition de l’autre (dans l’interaction immédiate) correspond à la plus basse définition de l’altérité et de l’échéance, etc.”<sup>26</sup>

When *Physis* began to be interpreted as an entity modifiable by human action, humankind started an action on the *Physis* that completely transformed it. Through either the extension of the non-biological kingdom, or through the materialistic need to liberate mankind from alienation, mankind became foreign to both the analysis of and the acting upon nature. From the camera obscura, through the microscope, the panoramas, photographic technology, and cinematography to video technology, mankind has always sought a technology that allows it to analyze and represent nature with an apparent objectivity. Mankind has tried to solve its epistemological imperfection. However, by doing this, mankind has codified nature to the point of being totally dependent on technology. Furthermore, mankind has made of nature a thing and thereby, it has reified itself.

Some years before the advent of digital technology and its consolidation in everyday life, Lyotard had already foreseen a kind of full dependence on the machine:

“On ne peut donc tirer la prévision que tout ce qui dans le savoir constitué

n'est pas ainsi traduisible sera délaissé, et que l'orientation des recherches nouvelles se subordonnera à la condition de traduisibilité des résultats éventuels en langage de machine".<sup>27</sup>

What is more,

"L'encyclopédie de demain, ce sont les banques des données. Elles excèdent la capacité de chaque utilisateur, elles sont la 'nature' pour l'homme postmoderne".<sup>28</sup>

Humankind's dependence on the machine to decode nature (the latter having already become, by now, pure information), allows us to assume that our condition as objects – that is, entities reified by a relationship with nature that is fully dependent on technique – leads us to project ourselves onto the infosphere. At a first stage, computers, following a logic inherited from Renaissance, translated information and displayed it for us through a window, the screen. Subsequently, we started to project ourselves onto nature in an almost morphological way. From that point on, on the one hand, technology started to intrude our bodies, a phenomenon appearing most clearly as cyborg, and on the other hand, we began researching the possibility of creating humanoids able to interact directly with both the world of objects and information. These two phenomena, the former dealing with the interiorization of technology into the organism, the second dealing with the projection of the organism (morphologically) onto the world of communication, could be interpreted as not only the need to establish a direct communication channel with nature, but also as humankind's complete acceptance of being a thing, a thing that technology, its creator, can transform, combine, consume and reproduce.

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<sup>1</sup> On this subject, see my observation in Duarte, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> According to J. Zerzan (<http://green-anarchy.wikidot.com/that-thing-we-do>), time is the first reification: 'Calendars and clocks formalized and further reified time, which was likely the first reification of all. The divided social structure is a reified world largely because it is a symbolic structure of roles and images, not persons'.

<sup>3</sup> See Engels, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> See Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound (513).

<sup>5</sup> This phenomenon is best witnessed by the Pythagorean philosophy, according to which mathematical principles can be applied to every existing thing. As reported by Aristotle, within Pythagorean philosophy, numbers represented abstractions which were able to translate the immutable laws of

Nature (see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 985b 34 – 986a 4). This also applies to the Greek concept of truth (*alêtheia*). Indeed, in the Greek world, the truth directly stems from the passive observation of Nature, from the translation of Nature into the language of science, represented by numbers. That is why the truth was understood as the action of discovering or highlighting something. According to Heidegger, 1954: 15: "Wenn wir *alêtheia* statt mit 'Wahrheit' durch 'Unverborgenheit' übersetzen, dann ist diese Übersetzung nicht nur 'wörtlicher', sondern sie enthält die Weisung, den gewohnten Begriff der Wahrheit in Sinne der Richtigkeit der Aussage um- und zurückzudenken in jenes noch Unbegriffene der Entborgenheit und der Entbergung des Seienden".

<sup>6</sup> Note the transformation undergone by the Greek concept of 'truth' (*Aletheia* – *ἀλήθεια*). Truth gradually began to be connoted with the Hebrew word *emet* – *אמת*, which is strongly linked to the verb 'to do'. It would be possible to say that the difference between the Greek *aletheia* and the Hebrew *emet* is that the first is something one knows and the second is placed in the sphere of what one does. Certainly, the second concept of truth is closely linked to the historical context and especially to the technological development of a concrete period (*Zeitraum*). Since the industrial age, this has become clearer, particularly with the possibility of a technical reproduction of nature. In Walter Benjamin's words: "Innerhalb großer geschichtlicher Zeiträume verändert sich mit der gesamten Daseinsweise der menschlichen Kollektiva auch die Art und Weise ihrer Sinneswahrnehmung. Die Art und Weise, in der die menschliche Sinneswahrnehmung sich organisiert – das Medium, in dem sie erfolgt – ist nicht nur natürlich sonder auch geschichtlich bedingt." Benjamin, 1939: 365.

<sup>7</sup> Note that the concept of progress was initially developed within a religious context; later it turned into the engine of scientific developments. Bacon illustrates the notion of progress in his *Nova Atlantis* (1638), in which he developed the concept of Utopia.

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note Descartes' position with respect to God. In fact, he considers God as the basis of the truth of human thinking. God's word means that human thought is conceived as divine, and as divine it transforms the world through science. For Descartes, this domination of the world is realized through mathematics. See Descartes *Discours de la Méthode* part V, p. 318.

<sup>9</sup> Galimberti, 2005: 312.

<sup>10</sup> This phenomenon becomes explicit in the visual media, especially in the process that began with the camera obscura and finished with the cinematographic camera. The improvement of this technology for the translation of nature, embodied by visual media, decisively changed the

understanding of these prostheses. While the camera obscura was perceived as a device which improved the analysis of natural phenomena, the microscope as well as the photographic camera were seen as instruments that not only improved our sense of sight but also as media that allowed mankind to discover natural objects and phenomena that cannot be perceived with the naked eye.

<sup>11</sup> See Marx, 1960: Buch I Kap. I.

<sup>12</sup> See Galimberti, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Marx, 1960: 77.

<sup>14</sup> The analogies to the principles of thermodynamics become clearer at this point. The system designated by Bataille manifests the second law of thermodynamics, or the principle of a system's evolution. This principle is used to measure the disorder or to demonstrate the impossibility of a system moving from a state of disorder to a state of order without external intervention. Note that since antiquity the initial state of the universe was understood as a state of chaos which allowed life after a divine intervention; God ordered, divided, separated and defined the universe. In contrast, according to Leibniz, the chaotic state means a group of opportunities. Leibniz' understanding of chaos allows us to better understand Bataille's idea of the utilization and the spending of energy. The excess of energy on earth must be spent in order to maintain a kind of balance that ensures human survival. Therefore, mankind would not only be in the position of an organic exchanger, which would ensure the passage from a state of disorder to a state of order of the universal system theorized by Bataille, but it would also be faced with an endless amount of opportunities to lead the expenditure of the excess of energy.

<sup>15</sup> Consider, for instance, the Roman festival of Saturnalia.

<sup>16</sup> According to Bataille, this was the case in the two World Wars. Quoting Bataille, 1949: 43: "Après un siècle de peuplement et de paix industrielle, la limite provisoire du développement étant rencontrée, les deux guerres mondiales ont les plus grandes orgies de richesse – et d'êtres humaines – qu'eût enregistré l'histoire. Néanmoins ces orgies coïncident avec une sensible élévation du niveau de vie général : la masse de la population bénéficie de services improductifs de plus en plus nombreux, le travail est réduit, le salaire accru dans l'ensemble."

<sup>17</sup> In Bataille's words, "l'altération du mouvement qu'exige de nous la consommation des richesses." (Bataille, 1949: 44).

<sup>18</sup> This was also the case with the Marshall Plan which represents for Bataille the elimination of excess in the United States. In fact, the sum of the Marshall

Plan, which was vital for Europe, represented only the cost of alcohol in the United States in 1947, or the cost of three weeks of war.

<sup>19</sup> Bataille, 1949: 55.

<sup>20</sup> In fact, prior to being sacrificed, the prisoner enjoyed the treatment of a king. The prisoner had a precise role in the feast and was the center of attention.

<sup>21</sup> Bataille, 1949: 62.

<sup>22</sup> XXII It is very interesting to see how Flusser, 1996: 12, follows in the footsteps of Bataille in his analysis of technical images: "Die Handlung abstrahiert das Subjekt aus der Lebenswelt, klammert es aus ihr aus, und was übrigbleibt, ist das dreidimensionale Universum der zu fassenden Gegenstände, der zu lösenden Probleme. Dieses Universum der Objekte kann nun vom Subjekt ungeformt, 'informiert' werden. Kultur ist die folge".

<sup>23</sup> Bataille, 1949: 129.

<sup>24</sup> "Ihn interessiert nur der Verdinglichungseffekt, der in dem Maße eintritt, wie die Arbeitskraft der Produzenten zur Ware wird." Habermas J. in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* Band 1. IV : Von Lukács Zu Adorno : Rationalisierung Als Verdinglichung.

<sup>25</sup> In Horkheimer's words: "Diese Verdinglichung ist typisch für die Subjektivierung und Formalisierung der Vernunft. Sie überführt Kunstwerke in Kulturelle Waren und ihren Konsum in eine Reihe von zufälligen Gefühlen, die von unseren wirklichen Intentionen und Bestrebungen getrennt sind. Kunst ist ebenso von der Wahrheit abgelöst wie Politik oder Religion." Horkheimer, 1992: 47.

<sup>26</sup> Baudrillard, 1995: 51.

<sup>27</sup> Lyotard, 1979: 13.

<sup>28</sup> Lyotard, 1975: 84-85.

### **Biographical note**

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