Reification of nonhuman nature

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ABSTRACT

Reification is a concept of critical theory that denotes certain problematic, habitualised forms of objectification. In this paper, I examine whether the concept can be applied in environmental philosophy and what value it has for environmental critical theory. I begin the examination by introducing the concept and the two senses in which reification of the nonhuman world has been discussed in the literature: a) denoting the misrecognition of others' attitudes towards the natural world; and b) denoting a misconceived relationship between humans and their environment. After this, I introduce two potentially new subjects of reification: nonhuman animals and nonhuman nature. I also discuss two phenomena that could count as reification: industrial meat production and the commodification of ecological systems.

Keywords: reification, objectification, critical theory, nature, meat production

Introduction: what is reification and what's wrong with it?

The concept of reification emerged in early twentieth-century Marxist philosophy as introduced by

Georg Lukács and became a central notion for describing and explaining the themes of class struggle and social critique, and problems of capitalist production and the exchange system. After this, the notion was almost forgotten in philosophy until Axel Honneth revived it in 2008 as a part

30 of his work in contemporary critical theory.

Lukács (1971) defines reification as a process in which certain entities or social relations take on the character of a thing: they are considered and treated merely as (quantifiable) things and take on an illusory objectivity that conceals how the reified entities or relations are of human origin.[1]

35 Reification is a social pathology that alters the reifying subject's relationship to the world and deprives the reified entities of their qualitative properties. This also tends to influence how one approaches the reified entities: reified people are treated only as a means for some ends (Lukács 1971) or 'dehumanised' (Pitkin 1987), for example as sources for profit in the capitalist system. Reified institutions, in turn, are considered as immutable and as necessary as the laws of nature:

40 they cannot be otherwise (or if they can, it is not up to humans but some uncontrollable force to change them). This prevents the possibility for social change and the empowerment of individuals whose freedom is restricted by the prevailing institutional arrangements. These ideas form the core of the phenomenon of reification. Since Lukács, the notion has been interpreted and applied in modified ways that are discussed later in this paper.

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Reification is not identical with objectification (Lukács 1971; Honneth 2008; Hull 2013; Testa 2015)[2]. Objectification has multiple meanings and it may be positive, neutral, or negative; reification represents a particular, negative type of objectification. Some amount of objectification

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1   'Merely a thing' denotes that an entity is reduced into a much simpler object than it really is: what this means, varies depending on different accounts of reification. For Lukács, reification deprived social entities their social and qualitative characters and 'thinglikeness' denoted essentially the commodity form that "stamps its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man" (Lukács 1971). Other interpretations are discussed later in this article.

2   Lukács was criticised for equating reification and objectification at certain points and he revised his views later (with some self-criticism) on the difference between the two in the 1967 preface to *History and Class Consciousness*.

is a necessary and inseparable part of human life (Lukács 1971), and in some spheres of social life

50 (in certain scientific studies, for example) an objectifying and detaching stance is legitimate

(Honneth 2008, 28; see also Hayward 1997). This kind of objectification through which humans

synthesise and organise the world into cognisable things is principally neutral or positive. There is

also another conventional sense of objectification that is negative yet different from reification. In

that sense, objectification characterises intentional instrumentalisation of other persons that denies

55 their autonomy and subjectivity (Nussbaum 1995). This phenomenon is different from reification

for the following reasons. First, it involves a deliberate decision of treating another person in a way

that denies her autonomy, whereas reification does not involve such deliberateness. A second,

related objectification in Nussbaum's sense is intentional and hence morally blameworthy, whereas

reification is habitual, unintentional, and does not involve direct blameworthiness (Hull 2013, 58–

60 62)[3]. The main feature that distinguishes reification from the morally blameworthy objectification,

then, is that reification has become habitualised to the extent of becoming a 'second nature'[4], a

natural and normal practice in society (Lukács 1971).

Reification may concern persons, social constructions such as institutions, or the nonhuman part of

65 the world (Lukács 1971; Honneth 2008; Ikäheimo forthcoming). Lukács discusses reification in

multiple realms: for him, the capitalist exchange system necessarily captures people into a

disempowered stance where humans regard their labour merely as "an objective character stamped

upon the product of that labour", each other as the objects of profitable transactions, and themselves

as resources in the capitalist system (Lukács 1971, Ch. I). Honneth, in turn, focuses on the inter-

70 and intrapersonal realms of reification. He defines reification as forgetfulness of recognition. It

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3   Hull names one more difference, namely that Nussbaum's objectification is of persons whereas reification in
     Lukácsian sense is of actions or human relations. This point is contested: Honneth, for example, talks about
     reification of persons.
4   'Second nature' is not identical with socially constructed reality. Social constructions become second nature only
     when they are viewed as necessary, immediate, 'acting like nature': this makes them appear natural and necessary,
     which makes changing them difficult (Hegel 1991).

occurs when humans forget the 'antecedent' recognitional stance towards others in a way that creates a tendency to perceive other persons as mere objects: the feeling of empathetic connection and involvedness towards the others is lost (Honneth 2008, 56–57). In addition to social philosophy, sociological literature addresses reification in its institutional realm, denoting the misapprehension of human activity, humanly engendered products and institutions as 'given' and unchangeable, rather than socially constructed and socially transformable (Pitkin 1987).

Reification constitutes an epistemic category mistake for it involves misapprehension that something is a 'mere thing' though it is not; yet there is more that makes reification subject to social critique. Interpersonal reification tends to result in morally inappropriate patterns of behaviour towards fellow humans (whether the persons conducting reification can be blamed for it or not) and is a regrettable phenomenon. In the institutional realm, problems are of course different because institutions are not moral subjects that can experience morally inappropriate treatment. However, reification of institutions makes people feel powerless and helpless to influence the conditions that affect their lives and so it impedes transformative action (Pitkin 1987; Hull 2013). Reification also weakens autonomy, either of the reified entities and/or of those who conduct the reifying practices. As one of the aims of critical theory has been to provide contemporary social critique that promotes the empowerment of people, reification is an interesting notion in this respect.

The emerging literature on interpersonal reification and self-reification is diverse[5]. In contrast, reification of nonhuman nature or the humanised environment has been addressed in only a few texts although it has been present 'in the background', visible in brief remarks by various authors. The lack of discussion on reification of nature is surprising for several reasons. First, there has been increasing interest in environmental philosophy and political theory influenced by critical theory, and one could expect that in this field the concept of reification would have gained more attention.

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5   See for example Honneth 2008; Butler 2008; Jütten 2010; Ikäheimo forthcoming.

Secondly, especially in the first generation Frankfurt School, authors build much on the domination thesis that views the domination over nature and the domination of humans as closely connected and associated with rational instrumentalisation (e.g., Horkheimer 1947, 105; Adorno 2006, 16), an argument that comes close to the idea of reification. Thirdly, at least some parts of Lukács's work

100   on reification are relevant to environmental struggles today (Feenberg 2015). The problem of reification bears a close resemblance to the common critique about the inappropriate instrumentalisation of nature and ignorance about the integrity and vulnerability of the ecological world. This evokes an interesting question whether the notion of reification is applicable to environmental and ecological concerns.

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Reification and the environment

There are three potential (and partly overlapping) realms of reification that may be relevant to

110   environmental philosophy and ethics: 1) the environment (the realm of the natural world that is constructed or transformed by humans), 2) nonhuman animals, and 3) nonhuman nature. In his revival of the notion of reification, Axel Honneth (2008, 61–63) speaks about reification of nonhuman entities as a derivative or indirect form of reification. Later, Steven Vogel (2015; 2016) and Simon Hailwood (2015) have incorporated the notion of reification into environmental

115   philosophy regarding reification of the environment. Elsewhere, reification has been linked to environmental or nonhuman issues in passing remarks concerning reification of climate change (Hull 2013) and how environmental movements constitute 'dereifying' activism (Feenberg 2015). Interestingly, Judith Butler (2008, 99–100) has also provided short yet sharp criticism about the anthropomorphism of Lukács.

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Among the three potential realms of environmentally relevant reification, the existing literature has mainly addressed reification of the environment, where the issue at stake is the relationship between humans and their surroundings and the human-madeness of the environment. I will next introduce and discuss the existing literature on reification and the environment. After that, I will address two other potential realms of reification that deserve attention (nonhuman animals and nonhuman nature).

Honneth and derivative reification of nature

Axel Honneth (2008), who modifies the notion of reification in a cognitivist direction, associates reification with a model of interpersonal recognition and suggests that reification denotes 'forgetfulness of recognition' (of a person's personhood). Reification means a tendency to perceive other persons as mere objects, which causes a forgetting of their personhood, lacking the feeling of connection, and dismissing the appropriate way to approach them (Honneth 2008, 56–59)[6]. For Honneth, reification primarily concerns relations to other persons and oneself, but nature (Honneth does not distinguish between the environment and the rest of the natural world here) can also be reified – though only in a derivative sense. Honneth notes that when we recognise other persons, we must also recognise their conceptions and feelings about the nonhuman world, and a failure to do this reifies nature. This is reification only in an indirect sense because it is actually the attitudes and meanings of other persons that are 'forgotten', rather than nature itself. Honneth (2008, 64) argues that reification of persons is a violation of the preconditions of our cognitive relationship to other persons, but taking an objectifying stance towards nature does not (in his view) violate any

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6   To be precise, the commodification of other human beings cannot be literal. Economic exchange partners are viewed as humans (a precondition for partnership in exchange). Jütten (2010) argues that reification must be understood metaphorically, as a stance where one approaches a fellow human *as if* she were a thing (not *as* a thing). Honneth (2008) proposes restricting the notion of reification only to the literal thingification that neglects all human features of reified persons. Such reification hardly exists in reality: even in human trafficking, victims are assumed to understand human speech, for example.

preconditions of our cognitive relationship to nature.

145 As Hailwood (2015, 87–98) notes, Honneth views nature as a vehicle for interpersonal recognition. From the environmental viewpoint, Honneth's approach is problematic for several reasons. Perhaps the greatest problem is that for Honneth, reification of nature occurs when we are not aware '...that these [nonhuman] objects possess a multiplicity of existential meanings for the people around us' (Honneth 2008, 63). To not reify other persons, I must then recognise their subjective conceptions

150 about nonhuman objects. Yet, what if those people already relate to the nonhuman world in a merely instrumentalising way? How should I relate to those instrumentalising or hostile feelings? The problem is also on the opposite side, as Hailwood (2015, 98) notes: any concern for nature represents reification when it is articulated independently of human-related concerns. As a result, the Honnethian account of reification may indeed promote anthropocentric instrumentalism in a

155 concealed way. Only the existing attitudes of other people towards nature matter, and they do so regardless of their epistemic or ontological appropriateness. It also seems that Honneth finds this a perfectly normal way to approach those matters. Overall, Honneth's account does not appear very useful for discussing environmental concerns due to its emphasis on personhood and the cognitive aspects of interpersonal relations.

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Hailwood (2015, 100–101) suggests that Honneth's passages on the reification of nature may, however, be plausibly interpreted as denoting more precisely reification of landscape (the 'humanised' part of the natural world; the environment in my terms). Reification occurs when people neglect the role of their fellow humans and themselves in constructing and modifying those

165 landscapes. This results in a belief that those surroundings are 'not one's business' or that one is not involved in constructing or transforming them. Careless littering or spoiling of one's surroundings (that appear merely as a neutral background for human activities) and the denial of human

responsibility for climate change are examples of practices that relate to reification of landscape.

Vogel and reification as misapprehension of our relationship with the environment

Steven Vogel connects reification to environmental philosophy in a way that remains true to Lukácsian origins of reification. Vogel argues that the equation of the environment with nature (the latter denoting everything that is not the product of human acts of making), done by many environmentalists, 'starts to look like a symptom of reification' (Vogel 2016, 157)[7]. He follows Lukács in defining reification as a process where human-made things appear to humans as fixed items, hiding the fact that humans were needed for bringing those things into existence. Lukács was concerned about reification in the context of institutions and of economic relations; Vogel applies the notion further and claims that the environment, including all forms of life that inhabit this planet, is built by humans both socially and materially. A view of the environment as something not-human-made, as independent of us instead of a result of our making, involves reification: it fails to acknowledge the human role in creating that world and prevents humans from taking real responsibility for environmental problems (Vogel 2015; 2016). The emphasis on the builtness and sociality of the environment leads Vogel to call for postnaturalist environmental philosophy. In his view, acknowledging the human impact on the world means accepting that it is human to 'think like a mall', and this involves giving up the normative idea that we should minimise human impact on nonhuman nature (or 'think like a mountain'). We need to accept that the environment is nowadays built by us and decide to build it better (Vogel 2015, 129–166).

Climate change exemplifies this kind of reification. Climate change is reified when it is taken as a 'mere natural happening' (Hull 2013, 67; Hailwood 2015, 101) although it is a result of human

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7   It is worth noting that Vogel does not take an explicit stance here, and that he speaks of a symptom rather than an instance of reification. This leaves it somewhat unclear whether Vogel thinks that environmentalists reify nature.

action and could be mitigated by humans. The human relationship with the environment is reified if humans forget or deny their influence on it and view the consequences of human actions as inevitable as the consequences of natural laws. Reification of human-environment relations is akin to reification of social structures: both deny the human choice and agency in constructing the world[8]. This manifests an epistemic (or in Vogel's view ontological) category mistake that is characteristic of reification. Also typical of reification, the mistaken view might be more habitual than deliberate (I would say it is about 'forgetting' the human impact on the environment). This forecloses the possibility to assess the reified practices critically because they are conceived as 'natural happenings' (Hull 2013), which rejects human responsibility for them. Acknowledging the human-madeness of the environment is both an ontological and a moral matter (Vogel 2015, 164). Environmentalist movements might be one of the dereifying forces in society and promote the acknowledgement urged by Vogel: they contest relations that have been assumed immutable, such as the 'imperatives of technology' (Feenberg 2015, 500–501). Dereification breaks the illusory thinghood and recovers the contingency and changeability of social structures or relations.

Vogel's definition of reification of the environment is akin to what Hailwood calls reification of landscape. The crucial difference, though, is Vogel's postnaturalism: for Vogel, the whole world is nowadays essentially human-made, everything is part of the environment, and there is no nonhuman nature. This excessive social constructionism is unacceptable for many environmental thinkers and falls prey to the criticism that a view of the world as already humanised supports the domination of nature as unrestricted transformation (Hailwood 2015, 133). One can accept the critique of reification of the environment without committing to Vogel's excessive social constructionism: Hailwood's discussion about reification of landscape exemplifies this. In my opinion, this

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8   There is one crucial difference, though. Social institutions like money are often ontologically contingent (Testa 2015) in their full sense: money comes into existence only through the acceptance of its status as an institution. However, in the case of climate change, the physiochemical processes exist regardless of the acceptance of their existence or anthropogenic origin.

215 'mitigated' view about reification of the environment or landscape constitutes a convincing point of criticism that calls for further research about the ways in which the prevalent societal structures produce and maintain a tendency for such 'forgetfulness'. Even this framing, however, passes over a further question which interests those who agree on the existence of nonhuman nature: can one speak of reification of nonhuman nature? In what follows, I will address this question regarding two

220 issues: reification of nonhuman yet 'humanised' animals and nonhuman nature.

Reification and de-animalised animals

Nonhuman animals[9], at least the sentient ones, are individual beings with their own life and

225 experience of that life as something. They also engage in interactive relations with other beings. The difference between humans and other animals is of a degree rather than of a kind. For these reasons, I consider the reification of animals beginning from discussions that concern reification of other human beings and intersubjective relations.

230 Affective change plays a central role in reification of human beings: reification involves the loss of empathetic engagement towards the reified subject (Lukács, 1971; Honneth, 2008). Lukács describes how subjects in the capitalist commodity exchange begin to regard each other merely as profitable units of economic exchange. In the case of modern intensive animal farming, the customary human relation to those animals significantly resembles Lukács's description of the

235 reification of humans in the economic exchange system. The relation could also be described in Honneth's terms: as a tendency to regard others [here animals] merely as objects, without feelings of connection or empathetic engagement (Honneth 2008, 57–58). Indeed, Peter Singer (2005) claims that our treatment of nonhuman animals is an evident instance of how privileging an instrumental reason achieves a domination of subjects through reification. Unfortunately, Singer

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9   Hereafter also animals (for the sake of convenience).

240 does not discuss in any detail what he means by reification but rather treats the term as self-explanatory.

Intensive and industrialised meat production reduces animals to commodities and quantitative units in the food system. They are objectified and situated within the framework of production. This

245 results in a cognitive process of de-animalisation, where the sight of animals as animals is lost and they become viewed as mere production units (Pachirat 2011; Harfeld et al. 2016, 408–409). Animal welfare might be a concern for some actors in business, but it is approached through a productionist and functionalist framework, which implies minor rather than transformative improvements that do not question the production system itself. Moreover, increased animal welfare

250 is in this discourse often linked to increased productivity, product surplus value or some other benefit for *humans*. Welfare improvements are made in the first place to increase consumer satisfaction or profit rather than for the sake of the animals (who are no more viewed as animals).

The above-described stance is reifying for the following reasons. First, it represents a category

255 mistake of conceiving production animals as if they were merely products or a resource mass to be turned into food. De-animalisation results in illusory thinglikeness that reduces animals to numb and lifeless things (cf. Honneth 2008, 19) and deprives them of other characteristics. Secondly, like in the case of persons, reification precludes the possibility for empathetic engagement towards 'production animals', which has implications for their treatment. Thirdly and relatedly, reification

260 forecloses the possibility to critically examine production practices in a transformative way, since the practices have become deeply rooted: it is normal and 'natural' to use the methods of industrialised mass production to ensure that humans can get affordable meat to eat. Fourth, due to this normalisation, de-animalisation is unintentional rather than deliberate for the general public[10].

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10 The animal ethics discourse and animal rights movements do acknowledge these issues in their discourse. Yet, this discourse has not permeated society in general. This is evident in the extensive scale and increase in industrialised

Provided that animals can be considered as beings that can be recognised, the praxis of
265 objectification present in meat production also manifests the 'forgetfulness of recognition' that
constitutes the core of reification for Honneth (2008).

The 'habituality' that is central to reification is deep-rooted in the case of industrial meat
production, whose conditions of existence and economic significance maintain and reproduce the
270 de-animalisation in ways that prevent 're-animalisation'. It is difficult to see animals as animals,
with their complex qualitative characteristics, when they are 'hidden' in the production system. This
hiddenness is created both materially and socially. In material terms, the production system
prevents animals from expressing complex behaviour that would make them appear more animal-
like (Hartfield et al. 2014, 414).[11] Socially, a reifying and detaching stance is maintained with the
275 language that approaches animal-based food products via 'mass terms' (pork, beef) rather than
words that would refer to the individual and distinct character of animals (Adams 2015). Though
these terms have existed before mass production and do not conceptually necessitate mass
production, they essentially support the detachment from 'production animals', which strengthens
the perceived normality of the prevailing practices.

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The industrialised meat production system is ossified in the industrialised world's food system to
the extent that it obscures from people the ethical concerns that could otherwise be relevant to their
deliberations, and this obscurity is one of the problems of reification (Hull 2013, 68). The
fundamental character of animals, or what Hailwood (2015, 134–135) calls the 'remainder' to
285 denote the characteristics that are left outside the meaning the animal has in relation to human-

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meat production, the normality of a diet that includes mass produced meat on a daily basis, and the public discourse where concerns for animal welfare do not usually call for transformative changes in production.

11 This might also explain why many people intuitively consider 'production animals' and pets so differently: pets have the opportunity to express complex behaviour and interact with humans.

oriented uses, is concealed by the production system that 'hides' the animal.[12] This, in turn, shuts out the possibility for a transformative critical examination of that system.

Nonhuman nature and reification

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Nonhuman nature represents the third potential (environmentally relevant) realm of reification. By nonhuman nature (hereafter also nature) I refer to those parts of the natural world – its living organisms, ecological systems, and ecological or biogeochemical processes – whose existence has taken place or could do so without human impact, even if human actions affect them[13]. There is no

295   such thing as 'pristine nature' that is entirely free from human handprints: climate change alone disproves such ideas. A large part of the world, however, exists or could exist on a non-anthropogenic basis; some of it is near to us, and some of it exists at a greater distance from everyday human lives and may never be visited by humans. This nonhuman nature is my concern in the following section. I begin by describing how humans turn parts of nonhuman nature into

300   humanised landscape for human use. This transformation that occurs largely through social rationalisation does not necessarily count as reification but may become such.

Social rationalisation is based on the calculability of things and on the institutionalisation of this calculating, technical rationality. Lukács (1971) argued that capitalism makes social rationalisation

305   become the governing principle of the whole society. Although Lukács's critique of the totalising force of capitalism is idealistic, his point about the large-scale extension of calculability into various domains of life in the name of 'morally neutral' rationalisation is interesting. When nonhuman

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12   Some theorists would perhaps characterise the situation as one where the 'commodity form' has actually become the true character of those animals (rather than just concealed it). Lukács and Honneth, however, view reification as a process that conceals rather than erodes the fundamental character of reified entities. I follow their thinking here: I believe that the fundamental character of those animals 'is still there' in the background, and is actually visible for people who (for some reason) have acquired a different perception of those animals.

13   Humans can 'make up' a forest but forests may also emerge on their own; in contrast, human-made artefacts or cultural systems could not emerge without human makers. Resolving the status of borderline cases is not decisive for the purposes of this paper.

entities are regarded as calculable resources for human utilisation, they may be thingified, reduced to a means for human ends or from 'nature-in-itself' to 'resource-for-us(e)'[14]. Such reductionism was criticised by the first generation Frankfurt School thinkers Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, albeit they did not use the term reification (Biro 2016). Due to instrumental reason, nature becomes conceived as a mere tool of man (Horkheimer 1947, 108). The domination thesis of the first generation Frankfurt school theorists linked the domination of humans and domination of nature: both resulted from instrumental rationalisation (Horkheimer 1947; Adorno 2006). The connection between instrumental rationalisation and reification is noted by Andrew Biro (2016, 91): 'while instrumental rationality is obviously useful, it also has some disturbing implications: the process of reification that abstracts from things only what is useful to the task at hand ... can be seen in how we treat non-human nature, other humans, and our own selves'. The instrumental rationalisation reduces a nonhuman entity (from an entity-in-itself) to merely an entity-for-use, which significantly narrows down how the given entity is conceived and approached. This process may count as reification, yet further conditions must be discussed before making that claim. Another question is *who* conducts reification and to what extent. My claim here is that reification is an existing phenomenon in contemporary Western societies, yet the extent and structural explanation of that phenomenon require further investigation[15].

Instrumental rationalisation promotes the commodification of nature[16], which is an interesting candidate for further investigation at this point. The commodification of nature has led to an

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14 Reification literature is vague about the meaning of 'thing' in the process of thingification. I view it as essentially depending on the kinds of entities that may be subject to reification: even humans and social institutions are thingified differently. The conceptual question is then not about a unified meaning of a 'thing' in thingification but whether reification should denote only the (habitualised) thingification of socially constructed entities and intersubjective relations or also processes that deprive nonhuman entities of their meanings beyond their use value for humans.

15 Critical theory has been accused of adopting 'the universalising absolute' and totalising explanations where 'we all' equally contribute to a problematic and 'all-encompassing' phenomenon. I do not commit to such views but I believe that even I may, albeit unconsciously, instrumentalise nonhuman entities sometimes (due to the habitual nature of such practices).

16 Commodification is not the only road to reification: a socialistic system, for example, is not a shield against instrumental rationalisation either.

increasing appropriation of the ecological world into the domain of economic interactions and its

transformation into humanised landscape. Social theorists, including the Frankfurt School, worried

330 about the effects of the commodification of nature already in the mid-1900s. Karl Polanyi remarked

that commodifying land as a property is mistaken in two ways: it involves an illusion of the

possibility to detach land from ecological relationships, and it squeezes out the *meaning* attributed

to land and threatens the human values and experiences of it as something more than a commodity

(Polanyi 2001, 187–200; Meyer 2005). Commodification is 'fiction' that twists the perception of

335 the environment and reduces it to an 'item-for-use' (Vatn 2000). Even the commodification of

protection might be suspicious: the corporate-led restoration of nature appropriates an image of

nature for capital interests and it seems that such restoration projects encourage a view in which

nature is viewed '…just a pleasant background to consumption' (Light and Higgs 1996, 242).

Similar themes have been emphasised in the discourse of ecological injustice and misrecognition of

340 nature, which is instantiated for example in a failure to recognise the integrity or agency of

nonhuman nature (Schlosberg 2007; Hailwood 2015).[17] The commodification of nature, at least in a

full-fledged form, makes it into a mere resource and detaches it from the qualitative attributes

beyond the commodity meaning. Hailwood (2015, 143–144) calls this the misrecognition of nature

because it neglects the consideration of the nonhuman in other terms than its potential place in the

345 humanised landscape.

Two waves of the commodification of nature can be identified during the dominant period of the

prevailing capitalist system in Western societies[18]. In the first wave, the motivation was to turn

materials and processes into profit through human appropriation. This relatively simple 'profit-in-

350 nature' view became challenged due to the detrimental impact of economic activities on the

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17 The framing of justice separates that discourse from the one presented here, though there is a connection: acknowledging the autonomy and integrity of nature is both an epistemic and normative issue (Heyd 2005).

18 Contrary to Lukács, I do not suggest that the capitalist system would necessarily entail reification (let alone 'all-embracing reification') or that reification would always originate from capitalism; see also footnote 15.

environment and nonhuman world, a problem that was increasingly recognised during the late twentieth century. The critique of 'profit-in-nature' had both normative and ontological aspects: according to the ontological critique, natural resources do not act the way conventional economic units are supposed to do (Polanyi 2001). When something is appropriated from nature, it is not a single, independent good whose utilisation would have no effect on other goods; rather, the use of ecological materials and processes has far-reaching impacts external to this utilisation. These remarks gave rise to the second wave of the commodification of nature, a concern about how the negative externalities and harmful impacts of economic activities on the environment and the ecological world could be restricted. The second wave created a broad acceptance that environmental markets, including the monetisation (economic inclusion) of negative externalities and for-profit conservation strategies, are an appropriate way to protect nature (McAfee 1999; Liverman 2004; Dempsey and Suarez 2016). The nonhuman world can be priced in different ways[19] to regulate how extensively and in which ways it can be utilised for human purposes.

The commodification of nature, as described above, represents a form of instrumental rationalisation of nonhuman nature. Does it count as reification too? To evaluate this, I will draw on different accounts of reification: any single framework that concerns reification of persons or social institutions is not directly applicable here because the entities in question are so different. I begin by considering the features that form the core of reification in Lukács's works since they constitute the foundation for other approaches to this phenomenon.

Two integral features of reification are consistently present in Lukács's writings: illusion and thinglikeness (Hull 2013, 52–54). Illusion means that the 'fundamental nature' of the perceived entity becomes obscured or distorted in reification, and thinglikeness denotes the character of this

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19 Recently, non-monetary mechanisms such as ecological compensation (or biodiversity offsetting) have been brought into discussion (e.g., Coralie et al. 2015; McKenney et al. 2010); the implications of this new discourse to the 'mainstream of commodification' are still unclear, and call for further investigation.

375 distortion, namely that the entity is deprived of essential (qualitative) characteristics and reduced

into a simple thing (for Lukács, a commodified object). The commodification of nature tends to

involve these misapprehensions. Commodification obscures the fundamental characteristics of

nonhuman nature that exist beyond, and regardless of, commodification and human

acknowledgement (cf. Hailwood 2015, 135). Fully commodified nonhuman entities are viewed as

380 contingent objects of exchange rather than living, self-regulating, self-reproducing and

interconnected entities: for unaware consumers and companies, they are mere 'things-for-use' rather

than entities with a variety of meanings beyond use value.[20] In addition to these features, there is a

third essential element of reification in Lukács's writings: reification conceals the social

constructedness of reified entities. This point, notably, is inapplicable in the case of the *nonhuman*

385 characteristics of nonhuman nature. I will return to this remark later.

Structurally, the commodification of nature clearly resembles the process (described by Lukács and

Honneth) where people begin to perceive human-made objects and exchange partners merely as

objects of profitable transactions. Reification constitutes a 'second nature' for humans, which

390 makes it a structurally false praxis (Honneth 2008, 25–26): an assemblage of habits and attitudes

that diverges from 'truer' forms of praxis (those that are not based on the illusory objectivity of

social phenomena)[21]. Whether the commodification of nature really has become a habitual praxis

requires further examination, but there is some support for this claim regarding the industrialised

world's activities (e.g., Light and Higgs 1996). In a common Western setting, the economic

395 parlance steers governance and nature is present as a background whose value is mainly economic

and comparable with others through cost-benefit analyses, even if the existence of some boundary

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20 For both Lukács and Honneth, reification also involves the loss of empathic engagement. It is possible that
perceiving nature merely as a commodity results in the loss of empathic engagement with it, though I leave this
open since it is unclear what the empathic engagement means in other than interpersonal relations.

21 The critique of reification focuses on the ontological and/or epistemic aspects of how humans comprehend the
reified entities. However, there is no one-to-one relation between a particular ontological stance and a set of
normative commitments. The case of ecological holism exemplifies this (Hayward 1997; James 2007). This point
also relates to the legitimacy of an objectifying stance in particular contexts like doing science.

conditions is acknowledged. This commodifying view has become normal even in environmental politics, which is evident in popular procedures like the economic valuation of 'ecosystem services'. Alternative approaches tend to be contested as unrealistic, irrational or ideological, and

400 the equally ideological origin of commodification remains unnoticed because it is masked as 'morally neutral' instrumental rationalisation.

The differences between the first and the second wave of the commodification of nature become interesting in this light. In the second wave, the extension of commodification (environmental

405 markets and for-profit protection) is offered as a remedy to the problems caused by commodification in the first place. This, in my view, signifies the normalisation of the commodification of nature. Herbert Marcuse (1964, 123–143) argued that capitalism succeeded in absorbing its contradictions by using reforms that integrated the proletariat or its concerns into the capitalist system itself, removing the opposition between the two. The integration of the issues of

410 protection into the economic framework causes the critique of commodifying nature to lose much of its power. Commodification becomes the solution to the problems of commodification and so habitualised. For-profit protection also disempowers people, which is typical of reifying processes: corporate restoration of nature in the US has suppressed the democratic potential of restoration (Light and Higgs 1996, 240).

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In contrast to the initial idea of reification, however, the commodification of nature appears 'inverted'. It is not about forgetting the human-madeness of social constructions, but about forgetting that there is 'more to nature' than its socially constructed aspects. The fully commodified entities appear as 'numb and lifeless things' malleable by the principles of economics. Putting a

420 price tag on an endangered species makes its status open to market negotiations. The existence of a species is brought into the realm of 'human-built laws', mutable by human decisions. Due to this

'invertedness', Hailwood (2015, 98) maintains, the notion of reification cannot apply to nonhuman nature though it might be objectified in problematic ways. Since Hailwood draws on Honnethian terminology, albeit with some modification, his view on this matter involves a conceptual tension:

425 for Honneth, entities that can be recognised can also be reified (reification is forgetfulness of recognition). For Hailwood, nonhuman nature can be recognised but not reified. It remains somewhat unclear what term Hailwood would use for the habitualised forgetting of recognition of nature.

430 One reason for the need of a new concept here is that the phenomenon I have discussed is not identical with inappropriate objectification, nor does not it fit Hailwood's (admirably thorough) categorisation concerning the different forms of alienation from the environment and nonhuman nature. Hailwood distinguishes three types of alienation: reification (which he finds inapplicable to nonhuman nature), property alienation, and estrangement. Property alienation concerns the

435 justifications and limits of the property system (Hailwood 2015, 156). In my discussion, there are broader ensembles of structures and practices at stake, and the property system is not the only factor that may result in reification of nature. Nor can my concerns be viewed as a negation of 'estrangement from nature'. Estrangement marks a separation from nonhuman nature that allows respecting for, and living with, its otherness; this kind of estrangement is positive and its rejection

440 negative, since overcoming it would entail transforming nature into humanised landscape (Hailwood 2015, 125–133). Estrangement from nature is a way to resist the domination of nature. The processes I have discussed are not merely the negation of such estrangement. Reification essentially involves undesirable forms of estrangement (blindness to the fundamental characteristics of the reified entity) and dereification requires achieving a certain positive re-engagement with the

445 entities in question[22]. Moreover, the feature of habituality that is essential for the notion of

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22 This does not mean the appropriation of the nonhuman realm for human use. Analogously, recognising different cultures requires overcoming some estrangement from them and empathetic engagement towards their members,

reification is not captured in the notion of estrangement (and even less with its negation, the intentional transformation of nature).

450 **Discussion**

Three forms of reification are relevant to environmental and ecological concerns. Reification of the environment means neglecting the way in which human activities influence the environment or forgetting the human-madeness (and mutability) of our surroundings or the humanised landscape.
455 Secondly, reification of nonhuman animals significantly resembles reification of persons; intensive industrial meat production is an instance of this process that de-animalises the animals in food production and reduces them to mere production units. The third potential realm of reification, nonhuman nature, is more controversial. I propose that reification of nonhuman nature is an appropriate and useful notion, with some reservations. First, it differs from reification of the
460 environment: the latter resembles reification of social institutions, since both deny or forget the human-builtness of the reified entities. Nonhuman nature, however, is not built by humans. Hence, it is more apt to think about reification of nature as a further, modified development of the concept. I assert that reification can concern both socially constructed realms and nonhuman nature: these ideas are not mutually exclusive.[23] Admittedly, the notion of reification of nature modifies one core
465 feature of the term: it does not concern 'naturalisation' of socially constructed entities. Rather, it concerns the misapprehension of nonhuman entities by either mistaking them for humanly made objects or by lumping them all, living and lifeless, into the same group called 'natural objects' that have a meaning only in relation to human appropriation.

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which does not involve the transformation of those cultures into something else.
23   Vogel likely finds them incompatible, though, because he maintains that there is no 'nonhuman nature'.

470 Reification processes cannot be fully captured with the established terminology in environmental philosophy. Terms denoting instrumentalisation are too vague and neglect the aspects of habitualisation and involuntariness that are essential for reification. Nor are the different realms of environmentally relevant reification adequately captured by the existing terminology of alienation or estrangement, as the previous section illustrates. Granted, it is still possible to maintain that

475 reification should be delimited to denote only the humanised realm, in which case it also concerns reification of the environment and human-animal relations. In that case, the phenomenon I have discussed as the third form of reification could alternatively be called something like 'the habitualised instrumentalisation of nonhuman nature'. I view that as a clumsy expression for describing such a relevant phenomenon, but let the future discussions show the viability of

480 alternative notions.

Reification holds promise as a concept for studying the socially induced practices of the misapprehension of the environment, animals, and nonhuman nature, practices that have become so normalised in society that some of them are accepted as basic social facts (Thompson 2017).

485 Identifying various instances of reification and studying their origins reveals deep-rooted patterns and practices that lie beyond the ecologically detrimental courses of human action. The notion is also useful in allowing the examination of certain structurally rooted and habitualised patterns of domination of nature without a need to adopt the language of justice or to defend the intrinsic moral value of nonhuman entities. The point is, rather, that by distorting the comprehension of the world,

490 reification forecloses the possibilities for addressing the moral (and political) questions that relate to reified entities because those questions become merely technical. One purpose of environmental philosophy is to point out questions in places where they are not noticed: studies on reification significantly contribute to this purpose.

495 Hailwood (2015, 252) suggests that the idea of 'alienation from nature', with its different meanings, provides useful tools for structuring deliberation about the environmental problems. Reification is an essential term for this discourse and helps clarify particular forms of detachment and their entrenchment in (post)modern societies. The epistemic and social-structural orientation of the concept is particularly interesting and directs attention towards the questions of how patterns of

500 reification emerge and how they could be overcome. A major concern in critical theory is that freedom and autonomy are compromised in our society in different ways that need to be identified and resolved. Reification of nonhuman animals and nature is at the heart of that concern.

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