Axel Honneth, reification, and "Nature"

Marco Angella

1. Introduction

In a recent work (Honneth 2008), the German philosopher Axel Honneth attempts to renovate the concept of reification starting from a critique of its best-known, classical version Lukács (1972, 83-222)[1]. Disconnecting it from its link with the capitalist market, countering the tendency to use it to designate a phenomenon embracing "the *entirety* of capitalist social life," and removing the speculative notes it inherited from idealistic philosophy, Honneth (2008, 21-28; 76-79) helps reintroduce an important tool for social criticism into the philosophic field. He does so with his "elementary" notion of recognition that constitutes the anthropologic-philosophical basis of his thought.

In this article, I begin by reconstructing Honneth's position on reification, showing its significance not only for the relationship between human beings, but also for the interaction between human beings and the non-human environment. Honneth's model gives the

---

[1]Honneth's approach could be criticized for not taking into account the further development of Lukács' work, especially *The Ontology of Social Being*. See e.g. Tertulian (2006).

reification of the non-human environment a marginal position in comparison to the reification of human beings, thereby detracting from its explanatory and critical potential. In order to avoid this outcome, in the second part of this article I present a paradigm in which not only affectively-based intersubjective interactions ("elementary recognition"), but also affectively-based interactions with the non-human environment are, in both a "genetic" (chronological) and a "conceptual" ("categorial" or "systematic") sense, essential to the formation of the subject and to his/her capacity to establish an objective and meaningful relation with external reality. On the basis of this paradigm a closer connection can be identified between the reification of human beings and the reification of the non-human environment – a connection in which the reification of the latter may reinforce human reification (and vice versa).

The endeavor here to rethink the reification of the non-human environment aims to re-evaluate themes close to the first generation of the Frankfurt School that still have a contribution to make to current political and social debate. Of these themes, the one pertaining to "external nature" proved particularly important.[2] Given its centrality to our societies, it is essential to inquire into the capacity of today's Critical theory to take this subject into account.

---

[2]See, for instance, Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), and Marcuse (1972). By contrast, in the work of Habermas the relegation of (internal and external) nature to a marginal role came about very early (See for example Whitebook [1979], Vogel [1996] and the volume *Habermas, Critical Debates* which contains Habermas' replies to some critics [especially p. 238-251]), although he never completely abandoned the challenge of a more adequate recasting (Haber, "Ethique de la discussion"). For recent debate on the Frankfurt School, external nature and ecological crisis, besides the book by Vogel cited, see also Biro (2005, 2011)

2. Elementary Recognition and Reification in Axel Honneth. The Marginality of the Non-human Environment.

Honneth's position on reification may be seen to revolve around two points: first, the importance of "elementary recognition," which Honneth (2008, 49-50) sees as the indispensable condition for our cognition as well as for our social relations and, second, the structural marginality of non-human reification vis-a-vis inter-subjective reification (Honneth 2008, 60-63; Deranty 2009, 460-465).

2.1 Genetic and Conceptual Priority of Recognition.

Honneth maintains that human cognitive ability and social interaction are based on a mimetic posture or attitude (Haltung), in which emotional and affective interactions are essential. Although it is mimetic and thus unreflective, this posture is not blind. Through it, human beings learn and share the multiple values of their age. In other words, this posture of "elementary" or "existential" recognition is the affective layer which makes social integration possible. According to Honneth (2008, 49), without this kind of recognition, human beings would not be able to establish any objective relation with external reality and would not have objective knowledge of it, nor would they be able to maintain social relations. Therefore, social life would become literally impossible. To give plausibility to the idea of the priority of elementary recognition and its necessity for human life, Honneth (2008, 40-52) shows that it preexists our cognition both genetically and conceptually.

Honneth (2008, 41- 44) sees the awakening of the "cognitive abilities" that characterize a healthy individual as depending upon the capacity of the latter to adopt "the perspective" of another person. Only by learning, starting from childhood, to take the other's perspective, can we come to de-center ourselves and to interact with the surrounding

environment in an objective manner. However, this ability to see the world with the eyes of another person is not mainly a cognitive one. Rather, it is first necessary to establish an affective-emotional relation with one another.[3]

To justify this thesis, Honneth resorts to object relations theories (1999) as well as theories of cognitive development (2001; 2008). Starting from the symbiosis in which the baby lives in the early days of life, he/she acquires the ability to identify him/herself with his/her caregiver (Bezugsperson), and then with the other people of his/her entourage. Thanks to this identification, the process of the social integration of the baby begins. Through the gestures, bodily movements and facial expressions of these people, the baby learns, little by little, those values, appreciations and behaviors which ensure that a qualitatively characterized environment can be disclosed to itself (Honneth 2001, 116-120; 122). Gradually, the newborn baby enriches external reality with the multiplicity of values and sights that family and friends have shown toward it.

However, this genetic primacy of recognition is not sufficient to demonstrate that it is the primary foundation of human cognition (Honneth 2008, 46-47). The mimetic and affective posture Honneth speaks about has to precede cognition not only chronologically, i.e. in the process of the formation of the subject, but also conceptually, in each cognitive act. Agreeing with the American philosopher Stanley Cavell, Honneth (2008, 47-52) maintains that the "mental states" of the other cannot be considered as *mere* objects of cognition. Just as we do not relate to our own emotions as objects of cognition (above all because we are too deeply involved), we do not treat the mental states of other human beings (pain, jealousy, sorrow, joy, etc.) as the object of a scientific study. Rather, we are affected by these states as part of our relationship with ourselves. Properly speaking, we do not *know* the mental states

---

[3]If for some reason the infant does not succeed in establishing a mimetic relation with his/her attachment figure, the development of his/her cognitive and relational faculties are compromised. Honneth (2008, 44) gives autism as an example.

of the other subjects; rather, we are touched by them, we feel them close to us and we express sympathy towards them.

At the basis of this kind of participating interaction (anteilnehmendes Verhältnis) with oneself and with others is the ability of every human being, if correctly socialized, to feel "existentially involved in the emotional world of another subject," to identify him/herself with it. Such an ability – this is the thesis sustained – precedes any other kind of knowledge of the other and determines the quality of the relationship that we can have with one another. Before knowing someone, we must recognize her or him affectively and emotionally; otherwise we could not understand his/her expressions or his/her actions. Without this form of recognition, we would not be able to understand the questions she or he explicitly or implicitly addresses to us and we could not answer these questions properly (Honneth 2008, 49-50). Every act of knowledge is therefore based, for Honneth, on elementary recognition. Objective comprehension and knowledge of the world as well as our social relations find both their genetic and conceptual prerequisites in it.

2.2 The Marginality of Non-human Reification.

For Honneth (2008, 56-59), the concept of reification designates the phenomenon through which, as we move towards objective knowledge, we stop paying attention to the emotional and affective ground on which it stands. Certainly, insofar as it is necessary for correct knowledge, abstracting from this substrate (i.e. elementary recognition) is admissible. It would be impossible for us to know another person if we stopped at a mimetic and unreflective attitude towards him/her (2008, 38-40). However, through a combination of ideology and unilateral and systematically repeated social practices, one can unintentionally lose sight of this substrate. In this case, one risks forgetting the values constituted by

recognition. Recognition is still operating as a basis of our actions, (otherwise we would no longer be able to have social relations), but it is, so to speak, put in parentheses and set aside.[4]

In formulating this concept of reification, Honneth refers primarily to studies that focus on interactions between human beings, without taking into account interactions with external nature (living or not).[5] Thanks to the relation with his or her attachment figure (Bezugsperson), the baby progressively learns the values the latter recognizes with regard to other individuals and things and learns to transfer these values to the individuals and things that surround and will surround his/her future life. Through the recognition of his/her human companions, the increasingly objective world of the baby will be filled with these values and ways of seeing. At the same time, these values and ways of seeing are precisely those that are forgotten and, so to speak, psychologically repressed during the process of reification.

On this basis, we can understand the reification of the non-human environment only in an extremely indirect way (Honneth 2008, 60-63). If we were to maintain that renouncing direct, affective interactions with the non-human environment was to reify it, we would have to demonstrate that renouncing "this kind of perspective would ultimately be irreconcilable with the goal of apprehending" the non-human environment "as objectively as possible." For Honneth, this is precisely what is impossible to demonstrate: in contrast to our inter-subjective relationships, our "dealings" (Umgang) with "nature" do not play any important role in the process enabling us to acquire an objective view of and mature interaction with reality. Of course, "we may regard the possibility of interactive, recognitional dealings with animals, plants, and even things to be ethically desirable, but this normative preference

---

[4]See Honneth (2008, 59-60) for some concrete examples of reification. See also chapter VI, p. 75-85, and Honneth (2008b, 105).

[5]In chapter III, Honneth focuses in particular on studies by Hobson, Tomasello and Cavell. There is a wide gap between the first two chapters of *Reification* – where Honneth describes the concept of reification through analysis of classics of philosophy such as Lukács, Heidegger and Dewey – and the third chapter of the book, where Honneth begins to develop *his* account of reification based on "elementary recognition". This transition leads to minimizing the importance of interactions other than inter-personal interactions, which in turn reduces the scope of the concept of reification. See Deranty (2009, 463).

cannot provide any sound arguments for claiming that society cannot go beyond these forms of interaction" (Honneth 2008, 61-62). What is missing, in fact, in this "dealing," is the genetic and conceptual primacy characterizing elementary recognition.

That is why reification of the non-human environment simply means giving up paying attention, in our interactions with it, to the qualities that other people put in it or, in other words, not caring about the fact that it could have a value for them. For Honneth (2008, 63), only when we perceive "animals, plants, or things in a merely objectively identifying way, without being aware that these objects possess a multiplicity of existential meanings for the people around us," are we allowed to speak of reifying the non-human environment. Insofar as "elementary" recognition has priority over all the other forms of interaction and is the only and true ground of our knowledge and our social life, the reification of the non-human environment can be only indirect: another form of reification of the other.

3. The importance of the non-human environment in the formation of the subject.

In reopening the debate on the importance of the concept of reification, Honneth offers a version of it which attempts to avoid some of the problems inherent in the Lukácsian model (Lukács 1972).[6] However, one of the weaknesses of this enterprise concerns both the reification of the non-human environment, and its relation with the reification of human beings. Let us be clear on this point: The reification of the non-human environment is not disregarded in Honneth's work. One can speak of it when persisting lack of consideration for the non-human environment negatively affects our partners, i.e. when uninvolved and disrespectful interactions with it imply disrespecting our human companions. Yet interaction

---

[6]I do not have sufficient room here to develop this point. See my chapter "Les limites du concept de réification" for further details. Despite the merits of Honneth's endeavor, his account of reification came in for criticism on various fronts and with different aims. See for example Deranty (2009, 460-465), Lazzeri (2011), Strydom (2012), and Jütten (2010). For further explanations of Honenth's concept of reification and response to some criticisms, see Honneth (2008b).

with the non-human environment is much more important than Honneth's theory of recognition is willing to acknowledge.[7] In what follows I employ the instruments of psychology to show that, like inter-subjective relations, this interaction is essential to the subject's identity formation and his/her capacity to establish an interactive, mature, rich, decentered and objective exchange with surrounding (human and non-human) reality. Building upon these results, I will then briefly draw up a paradigm of reification in which social (intersubjective) reification and reification of the non-human environment are dialectically intertwined.

However, before presenting my argument on these subjects, let me briefly clarify some points regarding the concept of "non-human environment" and my use of psychology. How do I define the "non-human environment"? Here, I am deliberately keeping this concept as wide as possible, leaving in-depth differentiations for further research[8]. With it, I designate anything that is not a human being (*whether* made by human beings *or not*). This entails non-human living beings (e.g. animals), natural objects, but also artificial objects (i.e. made by humans, or hybrids). Thus, when I speak of the "non-human environment," I am referring neither to human individuals, nor to cultural environments (human thought [*Geist*]), but to non-humans, material environments. The importance of these environments for the formation and flourishing of the human being is attested by a great number of works ranging over as many disciplines as anthropology, sociology, psychology, archaeology, historical studies, design and technological studies,[9] and of course by the social theories of the environment which I will use to support my claims throughout the paper (see especially the footnotes).

---

[7]The importance of interaction with "external nature" loomed larger in Honneth's very first work (written with Hans Joas), *Social Action and Human Nature* ([1980] 1989), where the authors delineated a philosophical anthropology in which the intersubjectivist conception of social action did not imply the loss of material interaction. We can find an attempt to retrieve this "materiality" within the theory of recognition in the work of Jean-Philippe Deranty (2005, 2007, 2009).

[8]Although extremely important, a detailed study aiming to distinguish the *different roles* that interaction with *different kinds* of non-human environment play *respectively* in developing a decentred perspective, or in causing regression into forms of reification, is beyond the scope of the present paper.

[9]For an overview, see Tilley, Keane, Küchler, Rowlands, and Spyer (2006). See also the *Journal of Material Culture*.

However, I think that psychology and psychoanalysis are still the best conceptual tools we have to elaborate a richer concept of reification *from a subjective viewpoint, and from the perspective of a critical theory*. In the following pages I will take Harold Searles' work on schizophrenia as my main reference for the very good reason that while dealing with the problem of reification he, more than others,[10] attempts to reconnect the symbolic meaning of the non-human environment with its material value, thus avoiding *complete* reduction of the material to the social – and this is essential to move on from Honneth's *overly* intersubjective (i.e. social) account of reification.

With these few essential clarifications, I can now embark upon my exposition by establishing the issues at stake. As we have seen, with Honneth's paradigm we are not able to provide a radical account of non-human reification and its possible relations with human reification, because interaction with the non-human environment does not affect our ability to apprehend it objectively and meaningfully. Now, what if we were able to show that interaction with the non-human environment not only affects this ability, but also the ability to maintain flourishing social practices? What if we could plausibly argue that *to a certain extent* the way we interact with the non-human environment affects the objectiveness and richness of our "apprehension" of the human- and non-human environment, and the richness and meaningfulness of our social practices? But how could we possibly argue this point?

Here it may be useful to draw a parallel with Honneth's methodology. For him, only intersubjective (inter-human) interactions are important in the formation of the subject: not only our identity from a normative viewpoint (second-level recognition), but also our "elementary" openness to the world (first level or primordial recognition, which open up for the subject the possibility of a normal life) depend solely on intersubjective interactions – which is the very reason why only intersubjective interactions really matter in reifying

---

[10]E.g. Winnicott (1971); Tisseron, (1999, 1999a); Habermas, T. *Geliebte Objekte* (1996).

processes. Thus, to demonstrate that interaction between human beings and the non-human environment also plays a certain role in these processes (section 4), I need first of all to show that this kind of interaction is also essential to the formation of the subject at a first, "elementary" level (that is, to open up the subject to objective, rich and meaningful interaction with reality) (sections 3.2 & 3.3). Since I will be grounding my arguments on Harold Searles's reflection on interaction with the non-human environment, I will first provide a brief introduction to his work (section 3.1).

3.1 The work of Harold Searles.

In the course of his life, the American psychiatrist Harold Searles (1918-2015) encountered – in situations ranging from intensive therapeutic care to private consultation – 1500 schizophrenic and border-line patients, which adds up to an exceptional wealth of clinical experience (Souffir 2005, 30).[11] After completing the Harvard Medical School, and while taking residency training, Searles begun his analytic training at the Washington Psychiatric Institute (Winer 2015, 246). In the meantime, in 1949, he started working as a therapist at the Chestnut Lodge Hospital (Rockwell, Maryland), a sanatorium for schizophrenic patients. His interest in the therapy of schizophrenia emerged in this period and continued well after he had decided to leave for private activity in 1964 (Balbuena, 2018).[12]

Initially influenced by Harry S. Sullivan – whose courses he followed in Washington – and Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, who was supervising the therapeutic activities at Chestnut Lodge, Searles began early to develop his original approach to psychoanalysis. Although he never abandoned the analytical framework of classical psychoanalysis (Souffir 2005, 90-91), he was highly critical of the orthodox version of it, especially when it came to counter-

---

[11]Thomas Ogden (2007, 365-67) sees Searles' clinical work as complementing and clarifying Bion's more theoretical account of psychoanalysis.

[12]For a comprehensive presentation of the life and work of Harold Searles, see Souffir (2005).

transference and symbiotic phenomena, which were for him essential to the therapy of both schizophrenic and neurotic patients. Hence, along with Balint, Winnicott and Little – to cite the best-known – Searles was among the first to question the orthodox view according to which the analyst's attitude during therapy should reach "objectivity" by being detached, i.e. by leaving outside of the analytical situation his or her emotions and feelings.[13]

Searles' works on counter-transference and symbiosis constitute his major contribution to the field of psychoanalysis and clearly point to a convergence with the thought of D.W. Winnicott (Souffir 2005, 58, 69-70; Payne & Winnicott 1963). However, transference and symbiotic phenomena are "generally restricted to human object relations". Searles "expanded" them "to include the non-human environment" (Balbuena 2018, 295).[14] By doing so, he greatly enriched his contribution to the field of psychoanalysis (Young 2000). Convergence with Winnicott's work includes this theme, which he considers a "sound one" (Payne & Winnicott 1963, 237). The role of the non-human environment, not only in schizophrenia but also in normal development, is the subject of the following sections.

3.2 The centrality of the non-human environment.

Searles dedicated his first work to illustrating the centrality of the non-human environment in the formation of the subject.[15] According to Searles, "the human individual," not only in the case of psychotic affection, but also in the "normal" case, feels a "sense, whether at a conscious or unconscious level, of relatedness to his nonhuman environment." Moreover, he/she feels "that this relatedness is one of the transcendentally important facts of

---

[13]See Searles ([1949] 2017, 1965, 1979); Benatar (2008); Young (1995); and Souffir (2005, 71-77).
[14]See also Searles e.g. (1960, 1979c).
[15]For the importance of the interaction with the non-human environment from the point of view of psychology, see also Tisseron (1999, 1999a). Searles' psychological approach may support – and indeed be supported by – the socio-naturalistic ontology to be found in some contemporary social theories of the (human/non-human) environment, especially those of Ted Benton (1993, 1994) and Peter Dickens (1996). For introductory works on social theory and environment, see Barry (1999a), Cudworth (2003), and, with particular attention to alienation processes, Dickens (2004).

human living, that–as with other very important circumstances in human existence–it is a source of ambivalent feelings to him, and that, finally, if he tries to ignore its importance to himself, he does so at peril to his psychological well-being." (Searles 1960, 6).[16]

Like many developmental psychologists, psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, Searles attributes considerable importance to the first periods of infantile development. Initially, the newborn baby is not able to distinguish him/herself from the surrounding environment. However, this environment is constituted not only of human beings, but also of the non-human reality. The newborn baby experiences moments of fusion with it, where he/she is not able to tell the difference between what is animated and what is not. It is only through a long process that he/she comes to perceive him/herself as an individualized human being, someone who is differentiated from the others.[17] This subjective symbiosis with the human and non-human environment

> has repercussions which flow throughout the subsequent development of the personality, even in the years of adulthood, in "normal" as well as psychiatrically ill human beings (…). The human being is engaged, throughout his life span, in an unceasing struggle to differentiate himself increasingly fully, not only from his human, but also from this nonhuman environment, while developing, in proportion as he succeeds in these differentiations, an increasingly meaningful relatedness with the latter environment as well as with his fellow human beings (Searles 1960, 30).

The non-human environment is essential for the psychic health of the subject; it also marks a decisive stage in the process of individualization (i.e. the progressive differentiation of the ego from the surrounding human- and non-human environment) that, consequently, does not depend solely on intersubjective interactions.

---

[16]For the importance of relating with the non-human environment for human well-being, see also Benton (1993, chapters 6-7). Searles' psychological explanation of the importance of human/non-human relatedness might be seen to complement Benton's more articulated analysis of human organic embodiedness and ecologic embeddedness (Benton 1993, 1994).

[17]During its formation, the ego apprehends itself initially as something inanimate and inorganic, thereafter as a non-human living being, and only at the end as a living being that is truly human. See Searles (1960, 9).

During its development, the ego experiences the different stages of a symbiosis with its surrounding environment, both human and non-human. These experiences will be psychologically repressed in the unconscious of a healthy subject (i.e. a subject who is succeeding in differentiating her- himself form the external environment by overcoming the *early* stages of fusion with it), while emerging into the consciousness of the mentally ill subject (i.e. a subject who has regressed to an earlier stage of differentiation from the surrounding environment): Searles infers from therapy with schizophrenic patients that they often do not differentiate themselves from their non-human environment, and therefore see themselves or a part of their body as if it was an inanimate thing (1960, chap. 6, Tisseron 1999, 58), or they are terrified by the (real) possibility of regressing to a former stage of their development, thus losing the richness in life so far achieved (Searles 1960, chap. 7).

During the episodic states of symbiosis that we experienced in the first weeks of our lives, the surrounding environment must have presented itself both as "a chaotically uncontrollable nonhuman environment that was sensed as being a part of us", and a "harmonious extension" of the self. The anxiety that the unconsciously repressed "memory traces" of those experiences provoke throughout the entire course of adulthood is "of a double-edged sort: the anxiety of subjective oneness with a chaotic world, and the anxiety over the loss of a cherished, omnipotent world-self". To this anxiety Searles ascribes the reluctance of psychoanalysts to interest themselves in the non-human environment. If indeed the analyst were totally incapable, consciously or unconsciously, of perceiving his/her (potentially distressing) relatedness to the non-human environment, it would be impossible for him/her to perceive the anxiety of the schizophrenic facing the concrete eventuality of regressing to a lower level of differentiation toward the surrounding environment (i.e. of regressing to a lower level of individualization) (Searles 1960, 37-39).

It is well-known how important the interaction of the newborn baby with his/her attachment figure is for object relations theories in order to explain the formation of the individual (e.g. Winnicott 1971). Searles does not disagree. Indeed, he thinks it is probably the attachment figure that helps the infant to differentiate the animate from the inanimate. However, these theories often ignore the importance of the non-human environment. The baby learns to differentiate him/herself through "the spectacle" of the emotions painted on the mother's face (Searles 1960, 60; Spitz 1945, 66-70). If things, plants, animals, artifacts or landscapes assume an important role in psychic life, it is because they have a symbolic value, thanks "to a displacement of cathexis, either from an important person, or from the child's own body". When necessary, the non-human environment can become "a kind of shock absorber", i.e. it acquires a defensive value: unable to recognize, and bear, the unconscious emotional conflicts underlying her/his anxiety, the subject projects them into the surrounding non-human environment. Thus, the non-human environment is always and only considered as something that represents something else: as a symbol (Searles 1960, 65).

Everything surrounding the human being, his/her creations, animate and inanimate nature, is so charged – through mechanisms like psychological projection and displacement – with personal and cultural meanings, that it is quixotic to try to discern a purely non-human meaning (Searles 1960, pp. 29-30). Nevertheless, without being able to clearly isolate it from its symbolic value, the materiality characterizing the non-human environment retains a great importance in the psychic development of a healthy subject. At the age in which the newborn baby establishes an interaction with a transitional object (Winnicott 1971, chap. 1), he/she considers this object as a part of him/herself, endowing it with a close affective link with his/her attachment figure, while perceiving every other object with which he/she is in contact as something definitely belonging to external reality. Emotionally reassuring the baby, the transitional object helps him/her to become conscious of the existence of an external world.

But the transitional object also has another meaning for the baby: it is a stage along the path bringing him/her to awareness of the fact that he/she is a living being,

> for here we see that an inanimate object is experienced as being a part of the infant's body, to a degree at least approximating that of his own thumb, before the next phase is reached when inanimate objects (toys, blankets, and so on) are experienced as coming from, or "belonging to" the outside world rather than being a part of his own alive self (Searles 1960, 70).[18]

The healthy subject is one in whom the ego succeeds in distinguishing itself from the non-human environment, while maintaining, at the same time, unconscious traces of its previous symbiotic relatedness with it and awareness of the importance of a mature, i.e. objective, relationship with it.[19] Searles describes patients in whom the level of regression is so severe that they are no longer able to maintain this differentiation. In these patients, the boundaries of the ego are too weak for them to live the non-human as something exterior to their selves. That is why these patients are unable to dream, because they perceive the psychic reality of the dream as if it were external reality; they are incapable of metaphorical and allegorical thought, because, being too close to the objects, for them the symbolization becomes impossible. In order for such thought to be possible, "there must first be established firm ego boundaries which demarcate him, subjectively, from the external world." (Searles 1960, 73, 1965b)

---

[18]See also Winnicott (1971, 8), for whom "It is true that the piece of blanket (or whatever it is) is symbolical of some part-object, such as the breast. Nevertheless, the point of it is not its symbolic value so much as its actuality. Its not being the breast (or the mother), although real, is as important as the fact that it stands for the breast (or mother)".

[19]One differentiates oneself from the non-human environment through (conflictual) physic and psychic recognition of relatedness with this same environment. This is one of the ways to explain one of the three decisive species-specific elements of distinctiveness of human beings, namely flexibility in social coordination (Benton 1994, 41). The "symbolic communication" which is the ground of this flexibility is made possible by the ability of human beings to differentiate themselves psychologically and physically from the non-human environment, whose relatedness to them remains nonetheless decisive.

3.3 First- and second-level interaction with the non-human environment.

Important implications follow. In addition to serving as "a kind of shock absorber" – i.e. to having the function of a defensive object, which symbolizes internal conflicts – the non-human environment contributes to the formation of the subject in two ways:

1) For Searles, the non-human environment

> provides, in the life of the normal infant and child, a significant contribution to his emotional security, his sense of stability and continuity of experience, and his developing sense of personal identity. The child's relatedness to his nonhuman environment–to animal pets, to plants, to inanimate objects–provides a context in which his own getting to know himself, his becoming aware of his own feeling-capacities and personality traits, is facilitated (Searles 1960, 78).[20]

Thus, the non-human environment contributes to the formation of the subject normatively, although *indirectly* so: that is, insofar as our interaction with it reinforces our confidence and "emotional security" (Searles 1960, 78), which according to Honneth's theory of recognition are at the basis of human creativity and the capacity to participate actively in social life. Insofar as interaction with the non-human environment supplements mutual recognition in the sphere of primary relations (love, friendship) in grounding the confidence and emotional security of the subject,[21] it is, like mutual recognition, an essential condition for subject's ability to contribute to both "the public process of will-formation" and "to the realization of societal goals".[22]

---

[20]See also Searles (1960, 78-89, 127-131), and Benton (1993, 64-65, 181). The latter holds that "our interaction with and symbolic investment in stably identifiable and re-identifiable elements and configurations in our external environment are essential to the formation and maintenance of a stable personal identity" (181), without thereby implying any kind of conservatism (184-186) or reductionism (1993, 50-57; 1994).

[21]Honneth (1996, 95-107) ascribes this kind of confidence and emotional security to the relations in which we feel loved by a (for us) important person.

[22]Honneth (1996, 117, 122). The confidence of the subject, which, according to Honneth, derives from recognition in the sphere of strong primary relations (love, friendship), is the foundation of the inter-subjective capacity to participate in public will-formation (sphere of rights) and realization of the common ends of the society (sphere of solidarity).

2) But Searles' analysis allows for further conclusions. Instead of just making of the interactions with the non-human environment a simple integration of the sphere of primary relations (love, friendship) that Honneth describes in his *Struggle for Recognition*, that is, a simple supplement to the affective ground of the second-level recognition, where the normative formation of the subject is at stake, one can attribute them with a more significant role, placing them on the same basic level as "elementary recognition." As previously pointed out, those who do not differentiate themselves from the non-human environment will have difficulties in establishing a rich and objective relationship with reality as will those who do not adequately differentiate themselves from their attachment figure. Hence, these two processes of differentiation are entangled. Although the relation between the baby and his/her attachment figure is the most important, focusing exclusively on it is insufficient, according to Searles, to explain the successful growing out from the early stages of "fusion" with the human and non-human environment, and thus to explain the achievement of a mature ego. Insofar as not only the confidence of the subjects and their emotional security, but also their capacity to establish an objective interaction with reality depend on affectively-based interaction with the non-human environment,[23] this interaction, like "elementary" recognition, becomes essential to "the emergence of" the subjects' "abilities to think and interact" (Honneth 2008, 41) and to their capacity to participate fully in (the reproduction of) social life.

For Honneth (2008, 41), a child "learns to relate to an objective world of stable and constant objects by taking up the perspective of a second person, thereby gradually decentering his or her own primarily egocentric perspective". However, theories conceiving the "emergence of children's abilities to think and interact" as the consequence of a "process that occurs in the act of taking over another person's perspective" are mistaken in that "they

---

[23]Beside Searles (1960), see Benton (1993), especially page 180-187.

ignore the emotional side of the relationship between children and their figures of attachment" (42). Honneth aims to counter this mistake by focusing on intersubjective emotional and affective relations. I am not contending this point. Rather, I am arguing that Honneth is ignoring the importance of the affective side of the interaction with the non-human environment in the process of becoming conscious of ourselves as *human living beings* (Searles 1960, 9), as well as in the "decentering" of our "egocentric perspective" (Honneth 2008, 41). This kind of decentering of the subject, which is only possible by taking over another person's perspective, does not rest solely on inter-subjective interaction with the attachment figure (or another human being). We do in fact need to take the perspective of another person to have an objective interaction with reality and to be able to develop metaphorical thought. But what opens this very possibility up for us is not only "elementary recognition." It is also, at least to a certain extent, the affectively-based interaction with the non-human environment.

Starting from these conclusions, one can reconceive the concept of reification in order to render it less dependent on recognition. The purpose of this revision is twofold: to convey the importance of the non-human environment in human reification and to provide tools for thinking more incisively about human and non-human reification.

4. Human and Non-Human in the Process of Reification.

Let us recapitulate our argument so far. I am not claiming that Honneth disregards the reification of the non-human environment and its negative influence on human reification. However, the connection between human and non-human reification does not seem sufficiently robust in his theory. In order to speak of a centrality of the non-human environment in processes of (human and non-human) reification, it is necessary not only that 1) there exists an "interactive, recognitional", and affective "dealing" with this environment,

but also 2) that this dealing constitutes an indispensable precondition both for knowing it and for the unfolding of our social practices (Honneth 2008, 61). But this is exactly what, according to Honneth, nowadays we have no possibility of demonstrating (2008, 60-63). The "involved" attitude, the qualitative and affective interaction with the non-human environment, is not necessary for objective knowledge of it, nor for the unfolding of our social interactions.

As we have seen, these conclusions change if we consider that the establishment of an objective interaction with external (human and non-human) reality partly hinges on affectively characterized interactions with the non-human environment. As Searles demonstrates, if, due to the absence of such interactions, we do not differentiate ourselves from it adequately, we cannot have mature and rich interaction with external reality, because our faculty for forming symbolic thought is undermined. And this outcome compromises our capacity not only to know something (human or non-human) meaningfully, but also to interact and have relations with others (humans). What opens human beings to the possibility of objectively interacting with the (human and non-human) environment is, therefore, not only the affective interaction with the attachment figure, but also the affective interaction established with the non-human environment.

However, this outcome proves only that, from a *genetic* (or *chronological*) point of view, acquisition of an objective perspective on the world does not depend entirely on intersubjective (inter-human) relations, but also to a certain extent on human-non-human interactions. If we wish to maintain the parallel with Honneth's argumentation and ground reification of the non-human environment on the same basic level upon which he grounds reification between human beings, the genetic priority of the affectively-based interaction with the non-human environment is not sufficient. We also need to prove its *conceptual* (*systematic* or *categorial*) priority over cognition. Can we affirm that knowing an object,

from a systematic point of view, presupposes a mimetic attitude towards it? Once genetically (chronologically) differentiated, would not a subject be able to know a non-human object without presupposing some kind of relatedness or affective interaction with it? If the answer to this last quandary were affirmative, then the prerequisite to speak of a richer concept of reification (i.e., a concept which includes a closer connection between human and non-human reification) would be lost because, from a conceptual point of view, no direct interactive and affective attitude would be required to know the non-human environment.

So, are there sufficient grounds to argue the case for this conceptual priority? Searles (1960, 30) was certain that relatedness to the non-human environment is essential not only during infancy, but also throughout the entire lifetime of a human being. To reach, maintain, and further develop an objective, meaningful, and decentered perspective on the surrounding human *and* non-human environment, subjects need to engage in a lifelong struggle[24] – and the socio-economic, material context in which subjects live impacts on the way they relate with the non-human environment and may either facilitate or hamper development of rich and meaningful interaction with it by either raising or lowering the level of individualization thus far attained (Searles 1960, Benton 1993, Dickens 1996).[25]

---

[24]In Winnicott (1971, 18, 119-21), too, the "maturational process" of the baby entails a struggle (although not in exactly the same way), as does the subsequent ability to maintain a balance between individualization and symbiosis. See also Honneth (1996, 101-107).

[25]We can reach similar conclusions from the point of view of a socio-naturalistic ontology. Indeed, for Searles as well as for Benton and Dickens, relatedness with the non-human environment is essential in forming and maintaining subjects' identities, enriching their interactions and consequently enhancing their flourishing and well-being. For Benton, see especially *Natural Relations*, chapters 2, 6 and 7. He sees as essential for human beings "acknowledgement of the interweaving of ecological and socio-cultural relations both as necessary conditions for well-being and as 'moments', or components, in the constitution of identity, where identity is itself central to well-being", p. 187. Dickens particularly insists in his *Reconstructing Nature* on the centrality of our reified knowledge of the human and non-human environment – which complex processes occurring in modernity (e.g. capitalism, industrialism, division between abstract, tacit and everyday knowledge, etc.) increasingly tend to fragment – in alienating us from nature. In turn, however, this alienation (i.e., for Dickens, people's lack of knowledge and understanding "of themselves and of the world", [58]) contributes to the alienation of human beings (65). From this viewpoint, a non-reified knowledge of the non-human environment would prove essential to decrease alienation for both human beings and the non-human environment (chap. 2). But this means that a non-reified knowledge of the non-human environment (i.e. an involved, affective and meaningful interaction with it) is not only *genetically*, but also *conceptually* essential to a meaningful and objective understanding of the non-human environment and of the human beings.

But how is it that the social, economic, and material context in which we live can have such an impact? For Searles (1960, 383-407), western civilization seems to separate us from a relation of proximity to the non-human environment, both "natural" [26] and humanmade. Amassed in enormous metropolises, we are surrounded by an artificial environment, which has a strong influence on the perception we have of ourselves and others.[27] The houses in which we dwell, and often change with repeated moves[28], the production and consumption of objects[29] with programmed obsolescence to keep trade going, become emotionally distant from us. Pollution, the blind exploitation of the natural environment, products that are made with monotonous applications of technologies by workers possessing no theoretical know-how[30] – all this seems to obstruct and reduce affective and sense-full attachment to the non-human environment surrounding the subjects.[31]

Even though Searles indicates some positive aspects Western modernity has introduced (e.g. partially helping free us from animism and superstition), he has the tendency, especially in his speculations on the socio-cultural causes of reification, to interpret Western society rigidly as a context in which we lose "proximity" to the non-human environment (humanmade or not) because our technological development is too fast to assimilate, and introduces too many mediations (e.g. a tool we buy for work has undergone so many processes to be produced that we can neither relate it to the raw materials with which it was made nor see the connection between it and the "natural" environment that it is meant to

---

[26]See also Dickens (1996, 65), for whom "in all modern forms of society people are systematically removed from contact with, and understanding of, non-human species".

[27]The negative influence of urbanisation on the human psyche has long come under investigation by sociologists like Tönnies and Simmel, see Cudworth (2003, chapter 4). The work of Anthony Giddens offers a more contemporary perspective on this topic; see Goldblatt (1996, chap. 2) for a critical assessment.

[28]For the deleterious effects that frequent "moving home" may have on one's sense of identity, see also Benton (1993, 185-86).

[29]For a critique of today's gap between production and consumption from the point of view of green political theory, see Barry (1999, 173-184).

[30]For an attempt to update the importance of the autonomy of workers in the work processes and the relevance of the subjective and material aspects of work, see Angella (2016); Deranty-Smith (2011); Dejours, Deranty, Renault, and Smith (2018); and Sennett (2008). For the centrality of contemporary division of labor in influencing our interaction with and understanding of the non-human environment, see Dickens (1996).

[31]In addition to the already mentioned passages of Searles' *The Non-Human Environment in Normal Development and in Schizophrenia*, see Dickens (1996) and Marcuse (1972, 60).

modify).[32] However, this may convey the impression that Searles proposes some sort of return to the non-human environment as an idealized paradise lost, i.e. a less developed society, in which there are fewer mediations in the interaction between human beings and between them and their non-human environment. This is certainly not my intention, and I think we can find in Searles' own work elements to reject this view (which, by the way, would contradict his own reflection to the extent that, in psychological terms, it may be seen as a regressive symbiotic idealization). Relations of "proximity" with the non-human environment should be seen as independent of the level of mediation of a society. In other words, facilitating proximity, that is, unrepressed affective relatedness, does not necessarily imply a return to a less complex society forgoing technological, cultural, economic and normative development.

But, from a *conceptual or systematic* point of view, how does reduction of proximity negatively affect our knowledge of the non-human environment and, moreover, compromise flourishing relations between human beings? In other words, once we have reached a good level of individualization, why should reduction of affective and sense-full relatedness with the non-human environment decrease the objectiveness and richness of our knowledge of it, and even of our social practices (i.e. of our intersubjective relations)?

The context in which we live may facilitate "a conscious ignoring of the psychological importance" of the non-human environment (living and not living) not only for schizophrenics, where it is acute, but also for psychologically healthy people (i.e. people who have achieved a good level of individualization). Searles' hypothesis is that this conscious ignoring of importance comes "with a (largely unconscious) overdependence upon that environment". The socio-cultural and material context can seriously hinder our "growing out of that state", which is "normal in infancy, of subjective oneness with the totality of the

---

[32]Searles (1960, 383-407; 1979b, 237).

environment" (1960, 395-396). Subjects thus behave in relation to it as the neurotic or the psychotic behaves with a person with whom he/she has unconsciously identified (because he/she has difficulties in separating from him/her), while, however, consciously rejecting any affective attachment: they will be less able both to perceive their own singularity as differentiated human beings, and to see the depth of their relatedness with the non-human environment with which they have identified.[33]

Thus, the context in which successfully individualized subjects live may lead them to ignore the psychological importance of affective relatedness with the surrounding non-human environment. Rejection of its importance comes along with unconscious identification with it, that is, with an overdependence in its regard which makes them susceptible to a regression in individualization (i.e. in ego differentiation). However, just like being unconsciously overdependent on a – for us – important person, being unconsciously overdependent on the non-human environment implies anxiety, as do the psychological defenses to make it bearable (Searles 1965a p. 316, 1965c pp. 467-73, 1965d, pp.565-66). Defenses based on psychological mechanisms such as projection, introjection and dedifferentiation impact on our relational life and weaken the ego, which becomes less able to successfully fulfil its mediating functions, i.e. to effectively manage the interaction between the intrapsychic authorities, and between them and external (human and non-human) reality (Freud 1990; Searles e.g. 1965a). This could result in a qualitative loss in interaction and a higher degree of psychic suffering. From the standpoint of the psychic life of the subject, the various possible socio-economic causes of reification that I listed above may impact on the ego's ability to

---

[33]Dickens' analysis (1996, chap. 4) casts further light on this outcome, for the "failure to understand" (alienation), facilitated by the reification between abstract and everyday knowledge (caused by underlying division of labor), drives people to project a "relatively familiar, and indeed messy, social world onto the world of nature (…) People are unconsciously constructing the largely unknown ways in which human societies are intervening in nature in familiar terms. Such a mechanism would mean that people are constructing a world in which they still feel relatively secure" (101). In the effort to remedy their lack of understanding of the non-human environment (Dickens) and their unconscious dependence upon it (Searles), people attempt – through psychic mechanisms such as projection and displacement – to make sense of this environment, to render it familiar. "'Environmental misperceptions'" Dickens argues "are the result" (101).

maintain a good level of individualization, and thus to recognize unconscious emotional conflicts and foster an empathic, interactive, qualitative exchange between the subject and its surrounding human and non-human reality, as well as a richer interaction with her/himself.

Interaction with the non-human environment is neither the only nor the primary source of reification. However, consideration of the role of such interaction in the formation of the subject deepens the understanding of the concept of reification insofar as it contributes – along with interaction between human beings – to accounting for the weakening of our psychic and relational life in specific material, social, political, and economic contexts. The subject may see her/his creative abilities drying up not only as a consequence of reified interaction between human beings, but also as a consequence of reified interaction with the non-human environment. In need of reassurance and stability to fight off anxiety, she/he may be induced to seek relief in regressive, reified attitudes. Instead of trying to realize her/himself by creatively changing the surrounding reality, she/he may try to take the shortcut of recreating the once experienced oneness with the surrounding human and non-human environment directly, i.e. without being able to follow the path of differentiation. But recreating relatedness backwards fosters formation of an ego which is well individualized and independent only in appearance, but in reality, more vulnerable to violent and authoritarian (social and political) conditioning, or just uninvolved, and indifferent toward the way we relate to our human and non-human environments.[34] Insofar as we can refer anxiety and the psychological defenses against it to interaction not only between human beings but also with the non-human environment, we can also extend the causes of vulnerability and apathy to the reification of the way we relate with this environment.

---

[34]Both Adorno (e.g. 1991) and Honneth (2009) – to stay within the Frankfurt school – used psychoanalytic explanations (broadly speaking, similar to the one I outlined) to account for such phenomena of vulnerability and apathy, although they did so in different ways respectively, the former mainly insisting on the flimsiness of the ego in current society, the latter on regressive forms of symbiosis.

As for the specific processes of reification related to the "ecological crisis", i.e. the degradation or consumption of the resources that make the earth a planet in which we can live, and so live well (Searles 1979b), we can refer to the same psychological dynamics I mentioned above. To put it schematically: The ways we reproduce our societies cause ecological crisis; but the threat of its possible effects provokes anxiety, which requires of us development of various psychological defenses against it, which in turn induce apathy towards (involving into finding a solution to) the crisis (Searles 1979b, 229, 232, 241-42). Among these ego defenses, the one which is probably the most directly connected with interaction with the non-human environment hinges on the concept of omnipotence[35]. For Searles, "the proliferation of technology, with its marvelously complex integration and its seemingly omnipotent dominion over nature, provides us with an increasingly alluring object upon which to project our 'nonhuman' unconscious strivings for omnipotence; hence we tend increasingly to identify, unconsciously, with this" (Searles 1979b, 237). Identification with "what we perceive as omnipotent and immortal in technology", while protecting us from "intolerable feelings of insignificance, of deprivation, of guilt, of fear of death, and so on", makes us more vulnerable to apathic behavior. Absorbed in this unconscious identification with something so amazingly diverse, powerful and immortal (because inanimate), we "fail to cope with the life-threatening scarcity of usable air, food, and water on our planet", for identification shields "ourselves from feeling the full extent of the deprivation, the impoverishment, of our human lives" (Searles 1979b, 239-40). Addressing these kinds of unconscious psychic defenses against anxiety means creating the conditions to strive for an overall better differentiation from the human and non-human environment (including the inanimate products of technology), for this could create the possibility of reducing apathy insofar as it could help deal with our feeling of omnipotence more successfully.

---

[35]Searles (1979b, 235-42). For the other forms of ego defenses see pp. 232-35.

Thus, we are now able to meet the requirements we set in order to be able to outline a richer concept of reification of the non-human environment: by reducing our unconscious dependence, while increasing the differentiation that fosters rich and non-reified interaction, affective relatedness with the non-human environment is essential not only for an objective and meaningful interaction with it, but also with ourselves and our partners (i.e. for social practices). And this is true from a genetic as well as systemic or conceptual point of view. Since "no human being is" ever "free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality" (Winnicott 1971, 18), and individualization "is not a once-and-for-all, irreversible process" (Searles 1979a, 177), then once genetically differentiated, human beings continue to need a rich affective interaction with their human and non-human environment, for maintaining a good level of differentiation has an impact on how they relate with their surrounding reality and with themselves.

5. Conclusions

What, then, is reification from this viewpoint? It is the process through which a socially rooted weakening of the affective attachment to the non-human environment leads subjects to become both consciously detached (distant) from it, while being unconsciously too close to it (and hence over-dependent on it). Reification of the non-human environment implies a decreased level of individualization (we are unconsciously identified with the object, undifferentiated from it), which impacts on the subject's ability to apprehend human *and* non-human reality "as objectively as possible", and to interact with it meaningfully, possibly leading to higher levels of apathy, and indeed of (social and psychological) vulnerability.

We might, therefore, revive a concept of reification in which it is possible to identify a closer connection between the reification of the non-human environment and reification in human relationships. The more the reification of the non-human environment increases, the more the interactions of the subject with him/herself and with others will be negatively affected (Dickens, 1996: chap. 2): A minor degree of differentiation and individualization – caused by our reified interaction with the non-human environment – implies a loss of qualitative aspects in the relation of the human being with him/herself and with his/her partners. This means that reification of the non-human leads to reification of the human – which in turn fixes the reification of the non-human through the psychological repression of our emotional and affective interaction with it.

In conclusion, there are a few further clarifications to be made regarding the concept of reification emerging from the above analysis.

First, I am not claiming that dealing with the non-human environment instrumentally means reifying it. Here too, I am following a parallel with Honneth's theory: just as interacting with other human beings as instruments (i.e. as simple means to achieve one's own goals or to maximize one's own utility) does not *necessarily* lead to their reification, especially when this kind of interaction is embedded in codified normative rules ("legal protection") (Honneth 2008, 76, 80), treating the non-human environment as an instrument does not *automatically* reify it. Also, in order to be able to treat the (human and non-human) environment as an instrument, I must have previously attained a sufficient degree of detachment *from it* through affective and emotional acknowledgment of my relatedness *with it*. Otherwise, I would not even be able to establish objective interaction with the non-human environment (and of course with my human fellows), just like a schizophrenic who cannot use a thing as an object or a symbolic tool because he or she is too close to it.

Secondly, like Honneth's, here my position vis-à-vis the non-human environment is anthropocentric (i.e. human begins are the source of any kind of value), but less rigidly so, allowing us to identify a closer connection between human and non-human. Reifying the non-human environment *still* means ignoring the importance it has *for* human beings. However, on the basis of the foregoing analysis we can maintain that interaction with it is much more important than Honneth is willing to admit. Following Searles, Benton, and Dickens, I am arguing that the material, socio-cultural, and economic context may facilitate an interaction with the non-human environment and its objects that has the tendency to hide our relatedness to them. And this, hindering the *differentiation* that makes developing a living and creative interaction with the human and the non-human environment possible, generates a reification of the relation of the subject with his/her environment, both human and non-human.

Finally, as pointed out in the introduction, I conceive my endeavor here to integrate the interaction with the non-human environment into a theory of reification as an attempt to focus more attention on some of the dimensions of critical theory which were essential for the first-generation critical theorists, and which have been neglected thereafter. In line with Marcuse and Adorno, and using the principles of psychoanalysis as they did, I define the concept of reification as a fixing of the cathexis (Marcuse 1972, 59-78), and as a decreased ability of human beings to maintain a living exchange, and balance, between subjective projection onto the object and subjective perception of the object (Horkheimer-Adorno 2002, 154-165). However, I do not intend to follow Adorno and Marcuse in their inclination to provide an all-embracing concept of reification. Countering their claim to identify reification with Western modernity as a whole is, in my view, one of the merits of the second- and third-generation critical theorists. We do not need to think that Western society, and especially the instrumental rationality characterizing Western modernity, *totally* thwart the human capacity to establish rich and flourishing interactions with the human and non-human environment.

Rather, the hypothesis here is that a certain social and material configuration of society (from the utilization of technology to the organization of work, the treatment of natural resources, the form we give to the material environments in which we dwell, etc.) might have more impact than another given configuration in obstructing (Marcuse 1972, 60) or distorting (e.g. Horkheimer-Adorno 2002, 147-165) libidinal investment in the surrounding environment (cathexis), so that human beings may increasingly become both more distant from the object, and unconsciously too close to it – and therefore experience the (conscious or unconscious) anxiety of regressing further towards the once cherished, and feared, oneness with the surrounding environment, thus losing the previously attained level of individualization (Searles 1960, 37-39; Horkheimer-Adorno 2002, e.g. 22-27).[36]

From this point of view, an "emancipatory" practice should promote social transformations that enable us to deal with the non-human environment, without ignoring its relatedness with human beings. Becoming aware that, because of the connection between human and non-human, the deterioration of the interactions with the latter could imply a deterioration in the human relations, should stimulate change in our interactions with the non-human environment in the sense of *a proximity increased through distance*: the more we are individualized – distant from the object in a positive sense (i.e., by maintaining affective relatedness toward it, and without being unconsciously over-dependent on it) – the deeper, richer and more meaningful our interactions will be.

But further conclusions are possible. One may contend that these emancipatory practices can have a normative, universalizable nature. "A threat to the culture, including the

---

[36]To avoid undifferentiated phenomenological and normative criticism, anyone undertaking analysis of the influence of the social organization on our relatedness with the non-human environment would have to assume that, faced with the same social context, the reactions of the subjects are often very diverse. Also, he/she would have to consider the fact that the importance of interaction with the non-human environment in the formation of the subject depends on its constitutive differences, beside the subjective differences: unlike Searles, it is worth stressing the possibility that interaction with a living being does not have the same value as interaction with a simple object, for example. Last but not least, we must also consider that, important as interactions with the non-human environment may be for the formation of the subject and his/her flourishing – and I attempted to argue that they are, much more than Honneth's theory of recognition is willing to acknowledge – it is interaction between human beings that remains the most essential for us.

non-human living beings, physical objects and relations which are symbolically and practically incorporated within it (but not, of course, without residue), will be, and will be experienced as, a threat to the personal integrity of the individuals who live the life rendered possible by that particular eco-socio-technological form" (Benton 1993, 184). Both Searles and Benton (1994, 42) enable us to conceive broadly of the vulnerability of the individual, which Honneth (1996, chap. 6) reduces to intersubjective recognition. Human beings need affective, sense-full interaction with the non-human environment to have a positive relationship with themselves and interact in their (social and natural) environment in a meaningful way. This introduces an important normative point of view, for what may threaten us (loss or denial of the human *and* non-human conditions for flourishing and interacting meaningfully) may also serve as a stimulus to react against that which is causing this loss or denial. The hypothesis is that people cannot stand severe restriction in their need to establish good relations with themselves and to interact freely and fully. According to Honneth (1996, chap. 6), such restriction is the reason why they struggle for recognition, but as I have argued, it is not mutual recognition alone that causes restriction.

Department of Philosophy, University of Pretoria, South Africa

References

Angella, Marco, (2014) "Les limites du concept de réification chez Axel Honneth", in V. Chanson, A. Cukier, F. Monferrand (eds.) *La réification. Histoire et actualité d'un concept critique,* Paris: La Dispute, pp. 329-354.

Angella, Marco, "Work, Recognition and Subjectivity: Relocating the Connection between Work and Social Pathologies" *European Journal of Social Theory*, 19 (3), 2016, pp. 340-354.

Adorno, Theodor W. (1991) "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda", in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, London: Routledge, pp. 132–57.

Balbuena, Francisco (2018) "Harold Searles: Lifelong work of a master clinician", *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 78/3, 287-306.

Barry, John (1999a) *Environment and Social Theory*, London-New York: Routledge.

— (1999) *Rethinking Green Politics. Nature, Virtue and Progress*, London: Sage.

Benatar, May (2008) "A reconsideration of the Clinical work of Harold Searles", *Journal of Trauma and Dissociation*, 9/4, 563-577.

Benton, Ted (1993) *Natural Relations. Ecology, Animal Rights and Social Justice*, London-New York: Verso.

— (1994) "Biology and Social Theory in the Environmental Debate", Benton T., Redclift M. (eds.*), Social Theory and the Global Environment*, London-New York: Routledge, 28-50.

Biro Andrew (2005) *Denaturalizing Ecological Politics: Alienation from Nature from Rousseau to the Frankfurt School and Beyond*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press

— (ed.) (2011) *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press

Chanson Vincent, Cukier Alexis and Monferrand Frédéric (eds.) (2014) *La réification. Histoire et actualité d'un concept critique*, Paris: La Dispute.

Cudworth, Erika (2003) *Environment and Society*, London-New York: Routledge.

Dejours, Christophe; Deranty, Jean-Philippe; Renault, Emmanuel; and Smith Nicholas H. (2018) *The return of work in critical theory: self, society, politics*, New York: Columbia.

Deranty, Jean-Philippe (2005) "The Loss of Nature in Axel Honneth's Theory of recognition. Reading Mead with Merleau- Ponty", *Critical Horizons*, 6, 153-181.

— (2007) "Repressed Materiality. Retrieving the Materialism in Axel Honneth's Theory of recognition", Deranty JP, Petherbridge D, et al. (eds.), *Recognition, Work, Politics: New Directions in French Critical Theory*, Leiden: Brill, 136-163.

— (2009) *Beyond Communication: A Critical Study of Axel Honneth's Social Philosophy*, Leiden: Brill.

Deranty, Jean-Philippe and Smith, Nicholas H. (eds.) (2011) *New Philosophies of Labour. Work and the Social Bond*, Leiden: Brill.

Dickens, Peter (1996) *Reconstructing Nature. Alienation, Emancipation and the Division of Labour*, London-New York: Routledge.

— (2004) *Society and Nature*, Cambridge: Polity.

Freud, Sigmund (1990) *The Ego and the Id*, The Standard Editions, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Goldblatt, David (1996) *Social Theory and the Environment*, Cambridge: Polity

Haber, Stéphane (2003) "Ethique de la discussion et reconciliation avec la nature" Renault, E. et Sintomer, Y. (eds.), *Où en est la théorie critique ?* Paris: La Découverte, 219-233.

Habermas, Tilmann (1996) *Geliebte Objekte. Symbole und Instrumente der identitätsbildung*, Berlin-New York: de Gruyter.

Hans, Joas and Honneth, Axel ([1980] 1989) *Social Action and Human Nature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Honneth, Axel (1996) *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Cambridge-MA: MIT.

— (1999) "Postmodern Identity and Object-Relations Theory: On the Seeming Obsolescence of Psychoanalysis", *Philosophical Explorations*, 2/3, 225-42.

— (2001) "Invisibility: On the Epistemology of 'Recognition'", *The Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Vol. 75, 111–126.

— (2008) *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea*, New York: Oxford University Press.

— (2008b) "Réification, connaissance, reconnaissance : quelques malentendus", *Esprit*, 7, 96-107.

— (2009) "Anxiety and Politics: The Strengths and Weaknesses of Franz Neumann's Diagnosis of a Social Pathology", in *Pathologies of Reason. On the Legacy of Critical Theory*, New York: Columbia, 146-156.

Horkheimer, Max and Adorno, Theodor (2002) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford University Press.

Timo Jütten (2010) "What is Reification? A Critique of Axel Honneth", *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 53/3, 235-256

Lazzeri, Christian (2011) "Réification et reconnaissance. Une discussion avec Axel Honenth" *Revue du MAUSS*, 38, 259-285.

Lukács, György (1972) *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, Cambridge-MA: MIT.

Marcuse, Herbert (1972) *Counterrevolution & Revolt*, Boston: Beacon Press.

Ogden, Thomas H. (2007) "Reading Harold Searles", International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 88, 353-69.

Payne & Winnicott (1963) Book review: *The Non-Human Environment in Normal Development and in Schizophrenia* by Harold Searles, The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, 44, 236-238.

Searles, Harold (1960) *The Non-Human Environment in Normal Development and in Schizophrenia*, New York: International Universities Press.

— (1965) *Collected Papers on Schizophrenia and Related Subjects*, New York: International University Press.

— (1965a) "Integration and differentiation in schizophrenia", ibid., 304-316

— (1965b) "Schizophrenic Communication", ibid., 381-428.

— (1965c) "The Source of Anxiety in Paranoid Schizophrenia", ibid., 465-486

— (1965d) "The Differentiation between Concrete and Metaphorical Thinking in the Recovering Schizophrenic Patient", ibid., 560-583.

— (1979) *Countertransference and Related Subjects*, New York: International University Press.

— (1979a) "Concerning Therapeutic Symbiosis", ibid., 172-191.

— (1979b) "Unconscious Processes in Relation to the Environmental Crisis", ibid., 228-242.

— (1979c) "Transitional Phenomena and Therapeutic Symbiosis", ibid., 503-576.

— ([1949] 2017) "Concerning Transference and Countertransference", *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 27/2, 192-210.

Sennett, Richard (2008) *The Craftsman*, Yale University Press.

Souffir, Victor (2005) *Harold Searles*, Paris: PUF

Spitz, René (1945) "Hospitalism. An Inquiry into the Genesis of Psychiatric Conditions in Early Childhood", *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 1, 53-74.

Strydom, Piet (2012) "Cognition and recognition. On the problem of the cognitive in Honneth" *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 38/6, 591-607.

Tertulian, Nicolas (2006) "Aliénation et désaliénation : une confrontation Lukács-Heidegger" *Actuel Marx*, 39/1, 29-53

Tilley, Christopher, Webb Keane, Susanne Küchler, Mike Rowlands, and Patricia Spyer (eds) (2006), *Handbook of material culture*, London: SAGE.

Tisseron, Serge (1999) "Nos objets quotidiens" *Hermès* 25, 57-66.

— (1999a) *Comment l'esprit vient aux objets*, Paris: Aubier

Thompson, John and Held, David (eds) (1982) *Habermas: critical debates*, Cambridge: MIT

Vogel, Steven (1996) *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory* New York: State University of New York Press

Young, Robert M. (1995) "The vicissitudes of transference and countertransference: the work of Harold Searles", *Free Associations*, 5, 171-195.

Young, Robert M. (2000) "Harold Searles", talk on the work of Harold Searles given in the series 'Psychoanalytic Pioneers', sponsored by CONFER, at the Tavistock Clinic.

Whitebook, Joel (1979) "The Problem of Nature in Habermas", *Telos*, 40.

Winer, Robert (2015) "My Searles", *Psychiatry*, 78/3, 245-250.

Winnicott, Donald (1971) *Playing and Reality*, London: Tavistock.