

## Is All Reification Forgetting?: On Connerton's Types of Forgetting

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**Abstract:** Drawing upon early the Frankfurt School tradition, I offer a qualified defence of Connerton's version of collective forgetting against recent detractors. This defence pertains strictly to the material culture aspects of collective forgetting. In this respect, the paper argues that models of individual and collective memory must attend to the historical forces that combine to (re)produce a particular environment, and further, they should consider the subsequent role the reproduction process plays on triggering moments of recollection or collective memory actions. To explicate this claim, I draw upon a Marxist inspired account of the labour process to show that variations in types of consciousness are related to particular modes of production. It is my intent to explicate Connerton's theoretical reasoning such that readers from diverse backgrounds are better informed about his underlying set of assumptions. In this respect, this paper aims to contributing notes towards a political economy of memory.

**Keywords:** Memory, Labour Process, Reification, Forgetting, Critical Theory, Paul Connerton

**Acknowledgement:** Thanks to Rick Gruneau and Jan Marontate for assistance.

The journal *Memory Studies* was established in 2008 to afford recognition to and provide a "critical forum" for the plural study of collective memory (Hoskins, et al 2008). Included in the inaugural issue was an article written by Paul Connerton, a well-known social anthropologist, which could be thought to go against the grain of the implied editorial objectives. This is because he wishes to narrow the scope of memory research. He objects to the virtue ascribed to memory such that 'to remember' has become the latest fashionable civic-duty (Klein 2000, 150 and Funkenstein 1989, 11, also see an application in Derrida 2001). Connerton writes that "[t]his implication has cast its shadow over the context of intellectual debate on memory in the shape of the view, commonly held if not universal, that remembering and commemoration is usually a virtue and that forgetting is necessarily a failing" (2000, 59).

Instead he proposes that "forgetting is not always a failure," it is not an action for which "we should feel culpable," that is to say that there is no moral imperative to remember.

To advance this argument Connerton distinguishes between more or less seven types of forgetting.<sup>1</sup> These distinctions make clear that what the collective memory literature has termed 'forgetting' is not a unitary logic. Instead there are a variety of pressures and mechanisms—some related, some not—that are at play when humans forget, and that condemning them out of hand is premature.

To date Connerton's article has provoked a number of negative responses, with perhaps the most biting coming from experimental psychologists Ineke Wessel and Michelle Moulds (2008, also Erdelyi 2008, Singer and Conway, 2008). These writers deny the functional difference in Connerton's distinctions. Further, they suggest that the model of collective memory Connerton employs—the re-constitutive model<sup>2</sup>—only holds for individual memories.

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<sup>1</sup> This is likely a play on Miller's Law, which states that the average human can remember 7 (+/- 2) items at any given time.

<sup>2</sup> Coming to prominence in the mid to late 1990s, the re-constructive model argues 1) that memory is a process by which each memory is recompiled anew in the brain such that no memory could be said to be the same, and 2) that the environment in which an individual is in triggers memory actions. The combination of points (1) and (2) have led scholars to believe memory is more of a social process than previously thought. This model of memory has been used to explain how both individual and collective memories work.

Lastly, they claim, there is little warrant to suggest that this model can be extended to groups. Yet the re-constitutive model that currently virtually dominates within Cultural Studies and the Sociology of Memory (Connerton 1989 and Zerubavel, 2003 as emblematic of each position). A legitimate inference is that these experimental psychologists are sceptical of the findings generated by the aforementioned sets of literature. But their scepticism is unsurprising. This is because they are committed to radical methodological individualism; hence their axiomatic investigative principles blind them to the politically situated nature of memory.

By way of background to this debate, presently there are three competing explanatory accounts of collective memory. For identification I shall call these positions 1) the individual re-constitutive account, which stresses the role of the individual, (Wessel and Moulds 2008, Singer and Conway, 2008, Bourchouladze, 2002, Erdelyi 2008, and Bergson 1988) 2) the collective re-constitutive account, which stresses the role of the collective (represented here by the early work of Connerton 1989, Zerubavel 2003, Campbell 2003, and Halbwachs 1992) and 3) the context-performance account, which stresses the performance of habits in context (represented here by Connerton's 2009 work and to a lesser extent that of Huyssen 1995 and Young 1993).

The tension between these three accounts can perhaps be encapsulated by Horkheimer and Adorno's comment that "[f]or cognition, the space separating us from the others would mean the same thing as the time between us and the suffering in our own past: an insurmountable barrier. But the perennial domination over nature, medical and nonmedical technology derives its strength for such blindness. Loss of memory as the transcendental condition of science. All reification is forgetting" (2002, 191).

In this passage, there are at least three inter-related charges that can be brought against the three positions. The first is that successful attempts to dominate nature have given rise to the belief that science can overcome the distance between minds thereby reducing them to the same rational logic. Second, that knowledge as experience, represented here by memory, is lost as reason becomes rationalistic and instrumental (this is a problem for the romantic elements which animate aspects of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*). Third, that as the labour process is forgotten, so too is the experience of labour which is not directed at the domination of nature.

To address these three charges, and assess their implications for collective memory scholarship, this paper evaluates three of Connerton's types of forgetting. I aim to show that Connerton's critics do not have an adequate explanation for collective forgetting, in part because they pay insufficient attention to the material aspects of memory. Accordingly, this paper will give due attention to the extent to which material culture shapes collective memory. I enrol early Western Marxists thought to assist in making this point.<sup>3</sup> Having done so, I shall reassess Horkheimer and Adorno's charges through a more extensive discussion of reification.

## 1. Connerton's Three Kinds of Forgetting

The three types of forgetting selected for explication are 1) repressive erasure, 2) forgetting as constitutive, 3) planned obsolescence. These roughly correspond to capitalist coloured political, social, and economic processes. I shall briefly discuss Connerton's thoughts on these matters, while evaluating the merit of their grounds.

### 1.1. Repressive Erasure

Repressive erasure is a deliberate act of expunging a person or an event from records. The quintessential literary example is Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*, where the protagonist, Win-

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<sup>3</sup> I understand a Marxist critique to hinge on the transcendence of alienation and the extraction of surplus value. This paper makes no such claim that collective memory directly relates to the extraction of surplus value. Thus to be clear this is not an exercise to develop a Marxist critique of collective memory, but rather to show how a Marxist informed analysis can be useful in understanding collective memory.

ston, does the exact opposite of memory work, and where “memory holes”—pipes to furnaces—are central features of buildings.

Some regimes have imposed as punishment the act of erasure, the denial of one’s existence and their influence<sup>4</sup>, or the modification of past events. Robert Fulford provides the example of Nikolai Yezhov, the Soviet Union’s People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs. Yezhov was arrested by the Soviets in 1939 and killed in 1940. Following his death there was a systematic removal of his name from various old committee minutes and his image from photographs. These actions occurred because Yezhov was deemed to be an “enemy of the state” (Fulford 2008).

Yet repressive erasure does not only occur in totalitarian regimes. Secrecy legislation in advanced democracies makes provisions for the ‘blacking out’ of certain types of information prior to it entering into official public records.

Lastly Rorty citing the French Revolution opens *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* with the observation that vocabularies “could be replaced almost overnight” (1989, 3). This is repressive insofar that new questions of concern require new vocabularies, and that old vocabularies linked to old questions being no longer of assistance, are to be discarded.

In the above examples the act of deliberate discarding is akin to repressive erasure. Of course one could argue that in the strong sense of the concept repressive erasure implies violence to ensure effective discarding: Nikolai Yezhov needs to be killed, discarded, for erasure. This speaks to the interrelation between different kinds of violence. To help explain what I mean, we can turn to Žižek’s Hegelian presentation of violence. He distinguishes between subjective and objective violence. Subjective violence is “performed by a clearly identifiable agent” (2008, 1), while objective violence, while largely invisible, “sustain[s] the very zero level-standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violence” (2008, 2).<sup>5</sup> In this framework, the death of Nikolai Yezhov is subjective, while the repressive erasure has an objective quality: Repression occurs well after the act of the erasure has taken place. Moreover, Yezhov’s erasure and repression is in service of maintain the political regime.

We can contrast this view the prevailing view in psychology. This view states that once information enters biological memory, it is available for access. The only qualification made is that information is only lost when there has been physical degeneration (Singer and Conway, 2008; Bourchouladze 2002; Edelman and Tononi 2000). In this perspective the key to information access is the right cue, either as a mnemonic, an environmental trigger, or perhaps a question. Thus Singer and Conway (2008) would perhaps argue that in the aforementioned examples, what has occurred is merely the removal of the environmental triggers that prompt collective memory.

In defence of Connerton, the principle at play is that in a society over time if there is no recall by individual members of things erased by the authorities, and if and when those memories are recalled, but they are not shared with or passed onto others, then it seems likely that over time that memory can functionally be said to no longer exist. To take the example of a photo of Yezhov, if there was no original photo showing Yezhov standing beside Stalin then it is difficult to know for certain whether, using only the doctored photo as evidence that Yezhov was once standing beside Stalin. Perhaps one could infer that the photo was doctored, and that someone was standing beside Stalin, but it would be difficult to know who that was. The key element of repressive erasure is that it removes the cues that prompt memory, and that being the case, forgetting will occur.

## 1.2. Forgetting that is Constitutive in New Identity

Connerton argues that positing forgetting in a negative light misses its utility. Through discarding memories that serve no “practicable purpose” one allows the collective the opportuni-

<sup>4</sup> See the example of the removal of Nikolai Yezhov, the former People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs from photographs in Fulford, R., (2008) ‘In the Theatre of Memory’ *Queen’s Quarterly* 115 (4)

<sup>5</sup> At stake for Žižek is “The difference between politics based on a set of universal axioms and a politics which renounces the very constitutive dimension of the political” (2008, 34).

ty to undertake new actions, have new experiences and thus create new memories, ones that have immediate relevance and application to “present projects.”

While speaking of memories and groups, the examples Connerton provides are those of individuals and their identity. For instance the memories of a previous marriage and their role in a current marriage: “[I]f attended too closely, [they] could even impair a present marriage” (Connerton 2008, 61) Following the metaphor of a family another example could be that to successfully become a married man requires that one give up the identity of a bachelor insofar that the former memories of that identity may hinder the success of the current identity. The cash value of Connerton’s argument is that for a group to become something else at times it is necessary to leave something behind. In other words at certain times to successfully transcend one aspect of ourselves we must forget some part of ourselves.

In some respects the point is well made even if at times it strikes one as a pop-therapeutic truism. However, questions remain as to the benefit this wisdom to groups, such as nations or language groups, or to what extent this can be accomplished in a state-centric international system. To elaborate, Connerton provides an example of the benefit of forgetting in cases where new migrants need to adopt an identity such that they can integrate into a new society. This, however, is a poor example as the charged political nature of the issue can cloud the distinction appealed to. And tough questions remain as to what are the responsibilities of a set of new migrants to a political system and to what degree do they have rights to continue political loyalties they had in former states, particularly when the political culture in these other states to which they have loyalty or sympathy is in conflict with the political culture the migrant has chosen to enter?<sup>6</sup> Questions also arise with regards to identities that are not exclusively state-centric.

To address these concerns let us take the examples of Isaiah Berlin and Leo Strauss. Irrespective of the content of the ideas they advanced, and irrespective of their degree of piety, it is clear that their heritage as Jews were significant productive influences in their thinking: Berlin with regards to his idea of value-pluralism and Strauss to the poles of Jerusalem and Athens in his thought. Given these two cases, it appears that individuals and groups do not have to forget aspects of their past and heritage to assume new identities and roles.

The key criticism is that Connerton treats a change in behaviour as tantamount to forgetting. Clearly it is not. Furthermore, giving up an identity means that one ceases to act in accordance with certain norms, principles and practices, not that one outright forgets. Becoming a successful married man does not mean that you have to forget your days as a bachelor, it just means that you cease living your life on those former principles.

Against Connerton, Wessel and Mould argue that they cannot see a difference between repressive erasure and the role that forgetting can play in new identities. Instead they suggest that they “appear to share the property of deliberately shaping the group’s past in order to fit its current goals” (Wessel and Moulds 2008, 291). However if we were to grant that the ends are similar, there is sufficient difference in the means such that Connerton’s distinction is still useful.

### 1.3. Forgetting as Planned Obsolescence

The third forgetting to be examined relates to the “planned obsolescence built into the capitalist system of consumption” (Connerton 2008, 66). Invoking the Marxist critique of post-industrial society and the relative durability of material goods Connerton suggests that the consumption patterns of services and the related paraphernalia have a shorter product life cycle, thus rendering most services obsolete relatively quickly. These services are forgotten when they become obsolete. However Connerton argues that this is a planned obsolescence insofar that 1) the market leverages culture to support new consumption cycles of similar goods, training consumers to desire and purchase the next generation model of items they already have or seek new services, and 2) goods and services are designed to become obsolete, they have an expected lifecycle (Huysen 1995, 26).

<sup>6</sup> For a debate on this matter in the British experience refer to the Miller-Kukathas debate in Cohen and Wellman 2005.

Singer and Conway (2008) object to this type of forgetting because it lacks a specific character. They contend that capitalism and advertising do not make people forget, merely these forces create new desires for new products. Further they press, objects are not forgotten, they are discarded. Their conception of discarding does not entail a loss of awareness about old objects. They contend that people are still able to recognise what is old and discarded, and that this in fact is not forgetting (see their objection to repressive erasure above.) Rather they insist that at the level of the system these items can never be considered as they are needed to provide a comparison and contrast to newer products, to make them more desirable.

In a different vein, Wessel and Moulds (2008) admit changes in consumer patterns, but point out that these new immaterial products do not seem to be stored sufficiently long enough to be counted as memory, and thus cannot claim to be forgotten. However, this seems akin to suggesting that the concept of short term memory is a fallacy. One could see Wessel and Moulds rebut that the differences between individual biological memory and collective memory are so great that collective memory could not be said to have a short term component. One response could be that goods are, generally speaking, purchased by individuals not groups (individuals of course having short term memory) and that the meanings of those goods are both informed by groups and individuals. Debating this point further, however, does not seem interesting.

Perhaps a more interesting response to Connerton's work than the objections levelled by the empirical psychologists would be a critique informed by comparative anthropologists. If for the sake of argument we are prepared to accept that this type of forgetting occurs, a reasonable follow up question to ask is whether this type of forgetting exists in societies that are not capitalist? Additionally would this form of forgetting occur in capitalist societies which do not stress services and leverage culture to the same degree? I think that this question is the critical issue for Connerton. While not wanting to commit him to a position, one intuitively viable response could be that much like much some modes of production have an affinity for particular modes of governance or regimes of accumulation, so to might particular collective memory practices have be affinities to particular modes of production. Hence, collective memory practices would present themselves differently depending on the mode of production. It could well be the case that in other non-capitalist modes of production this general attribute of planned obsolescence does not present itself. However the absence of particular presentation does not mean that it cannot be proverbially 'on the cards.' For instance, we would not say that the practice of fishing is alien to Afghans living in the Wakhan corridor; we would say their local condition does not provide suitable conditions for this practice to emerge.

Connerton's three types of forgetting share an historical dimension: the relationship of a specific regime to collective memory; changes in social attitudes and identities; a specific relationship to consumption. The undercurrent of Connerton's argument thus seems to be that forgetting, and thus collective memory, is informed by the historical development of a society. Moreover if we are to adopt the position that collective memory is a form of consciousness, it provides some scope to suggest a linkage between collective memory and the relations of production. To investigate this aspect further we need to give attention to another of Connerton's recent works.

## 2. The Material Basis for Connerton's Claims

In his 2009 essay, *How Modernity Forgets* Connerton makes clear that memory relies upon the "stable system of places" and the embodiment of memory actions (2009, 5). Connerton uses the terms memorial and locus—places you go to and places in which you act a certain way—as his concrete division.<sup>7</sup> Here the primary relationship is that of meaningful action to geography. And considering that that a stable system of places cannot be guaranteed, Connerton contends that this impacts the prospects for certain kinds of collective memories.

<sup>7</sup> Admittedly the two are difficult to surgically separate, hence they are mostly used as ideal types and invoked for didactic purposes.

Connerton's thesis is that "what is being forgotten in modernity is profound, the-scale-ness of life, the experience of living and working in a world of social relationships that are known" (2009, 5). "A major source of forgetting," he writes, "is associated with processes that separate social life from locality and from human dimensions." He provides the examples of "superhuman speed", "megacities" and "the short lifespans of urban architecture" (2009, 5). Each of these factors could be considered as a disembedding mechanism, the concept that Anthony Giddens introduced in *The Consequences of Modernity*. By "disembedding mechanism," Giddens means an object, practice, thought, or moment that 'lifts out' the "social relations from the local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space" (Giddens 1990, 21). In this light, Connerton argues that the disembedding mechanisms of contemporary urban life—themselves the result of modernity—reduce our prospects to remember, and hence impoverish the quality of our social relationships. Thus historical periods influence collective memory.

To use the example of the memorial, it is most certainly a product of labour, but in capitalistic societies the first thing that is forgotten is the labour process itself. As Marx points out, any form of social production requires human labour. It is the bedrock of social life as labour is the process which mediates between nature and ourselves giving rise to our *species being*. Or to use roughly equivalent, and slightly more contemporary (if equally out of fashion) term, our human nature. Thus without human labour, social life will dim, and hence human nature will suffer. In regards to collective memory then, we forget things we should remember thereby exacerbating social fractures.

For example, in a world filled with items made by significant amounts of human labour—items ranging from coats to cathedrals—one is able to detect a general human signature in the items one touches or sees. A name may not appear on the coat, nor may there be a list of the builder's names for the cathedral, but this does not matter. Nor does it matter whether you are familiar with the person who made the object. What matters is that once one perceives and interacts with the object, one is able to find clues that it was made by another human such that you are able to identify this signature and recognize the personal act of creation that brought about that objects existence.

However in an industrial or post-industrial capitalist society the majority of objects are manufactured in factories, often without significant amounts of creative labour. And even when there is significant labour in the manufacturing of the product, one must bear in mind that the labour process as a whole is bifurcated. There is a division between creativity and execution, design and construction. For example those that work on the shop floor did not have creative control over the product they are to make. Therefore these products do not have the signature of personal creation, they therefore bear no traces of human personality or creativity. These items could come from any factory from any place. Lacking this general human signature, we treat these items as if they have an objective existence, that they exist independent of us. They are also trivial because they cannot sufficiently mediate between us as humans and nature. According, people become alienated from objects. The subsequent step is when people come to worship the alienated items. While Marx called this commodity fetishism, this line of argument is also congruent with Paul's critique of idolatry found in his Epistle to the Romans, where injustice occurs when people exchange the revelation of God for the worships of things they themselves have created. The point in drawing the comparison is to show that while this critique could be couched using a political economy vocabulary informed by an early Marxist Metaphysics, the analytic point does not rest on subscribing to this framework.

One could counter by arguing that even a product made by significant amounts of labour takes on qualities of objectivity. Indeed how often do people consider the coats or cathedral as products of the labour process? This a fair point, but it neglects that the coat and the cathedral have the potential to be identified as being created by the labour process. Objective items do not have this potential. In this respect, not constantly recognising the labour process is not tantamount to forgetting as Connerton understands the term (see above) as the potential to remember remains.

If we are to understand Connerton's notion that collective memory is a set of meanings that are attached to productions, and if we recognise the capitalist environment, then it is perhaps sensible to consider the role of commodities in the memory process.

As a point of departure, Marx considers commodities as separate from humans, and that they exist to satisfy human wants. Thus they adopt the aforementioned objective character. In doing it becomes easy for an abstract value to attach itself to the commodity. This abstract value in no way relates to the qualities or the uses of the item itself, or the labour time that made the commodity. Instead the abstract value is used to equate items of different properties such that they can be exchanged and traded. In other words the value we place on an item is predicated on its potential to be exchanged. Thus the commodity is not directed at the object itself, but to the system of exchange. The same thing occurs when labour is commodified, except where once labour was able to mediate between humans and nature it is now used for the purposes of the market.

Yet because of this abstract state humans are prone to misperceive the particular items to which the commodity as an abstract entity is attached. We therefore tend to collapse the two, the abstract entity and the material item. Thus we no longer come to think of items in terms of practical use, but rather in terms of abstract exchange.

It could be argued that this is not likely to occur when we are using a particular item, or when we have an item in our possession. Here these items have separated it from the market and where we are not likely to consider it as an item for circulation. Hence they are no longer commodities, and therefore one is able to see these items as they were meant to be seen. But such a line of argument neglects that these items were once in a market, that their particular route to your hands was directed by market forces.

The general point is that a commodity, even of a product that bear a general human signature, makes us perceive the item in terms of abstract qualities that in no way relate to the item or its mode of production. The commodity obscures the potential to perceive social relations and thus degrades social life. And to the extent that we believe that the commodity system is natural and binding, this becomes commodity fetishism. In short the people, tools and techniques required to make and move item are little considered to the extent that not giving thought to this process is considered natural or perhaps even good. Indeed they are forgotten.

This is not to suggest that a capitalist system obscures all social relations. Indeed some are visible, such as the struggle over time. But as it relates to collective memory, this line of argument suggests that for the most part, the labour process as a whole is forgotten, reification has occurred, and the general consciousness of the people has been altered.

This is the general path of argumentation that Lukacs' deploys in *History and Class Consciousness*. He argues that the capitalist mode of production is predicated upon the loss of the memory of the process that produced it. Here the precise details of the process of producing commodities are forgotten. Connerton invokes this line of argument to suggest that what has developed is a general "cultural amnesia," where this process is unavailable to the consciousness (2009, 44).

However Connerton wishes to press this argument further. He ties the above line of argument together with work Raymond Williams presents in *The Country and the City*, (the generic readings of places based upon social affiliation, themselves the result of reifications) and the re-constitutive model of memory. Doing so allows him to argue that place is central to memory and the disembedding mechanisms of commodity production are as much responsible for the changes in content of collective memory as are the changes in the population that comprise that collective and their interests, desires, capacities, and habits. To complete the point, a study of collective memory cannot be based purely upon an unaspiring radical methodological individualism, but rather must avail itself to how large scale political economic relations come to condition forms of consciousness. For this reason, I now turn to a discussion of reification.

### 3. Reification and Revolution

Martin Jay introduces the publication of Axel Honneth's 2004/2005 Tanner Lectures on reification by commenting that the concept has "fallen into virtual oblivion in recent years" (Jay 2008, 3).<sup>8</sup> Initially developed by Lukacs, the concept was widely adopted by early members of the Frankfurt School and revived by Joseph Gabel, Lucien Goldman, and Karel Kosik in the 1960s. As deployed by these theorists the concept "became a powerful weapon in the struggle not only to define what capitalism did to its victims, but also to explain why they were unable to resist it successfully." (Jay 2008, 4) Jay adds that the concept functioned in such a way as to be able to describe why the working classes failed to understand and act upon its "historical mission assigned to it by [orthodox] Marxist theory." (2008, 4) Yet by Jay's telling the concept began to be abandoned in the 1960s as system theorists rejected normative critiques in favour of approaches, which emphasised objectivity and complexity-reduction (Honneth 2008, 18). In railing against system theories, post-structuralists themselves rejected any taint of Hegelism where any subject (individual or collective) could come to be absolutely de-reified. Ironically, in the subsequent theoretical encounters between differing blocs of theory, it is almost as if the concept of reification was forgotten.

Reification's etymological root in Latin, *res*, a thing, incorporated into the concept, indicates the abstract which comes to be taken as something tangible—a thing—and in so doing, introduces a forgetting of the distinction between the material and the abstract. A good example of such a forgetting is when some humans come to view other human in terms of their potential labour power as a commodity, and not as humans in their own right; there is a forgetting of the human characteristics that constitute the said subject.

Through a metaphorical comparison with early anaesthetics, Horkheimer and Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (2002) describe circumstances where the subject is so brutalised by trauma that it appears to lose sensual orientation, appearing as such to forget the pain. Yet the memory of the pain lingers in the deep psychic. They make the point that the pain itself has not disappeared, only the pain receptors momentarily deactivated. For Horkheimer and Adorno, domination acts akin to anaesthetics, a temporary deactivation of memories of fulfilment. They aphoristically assert that the "[l]oss of memory [becomes] the transcendental condition of science. All reification is forgetting" (2002, 191).

This point should be set within the principle aim of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which is that unchecked rationality is unreasonable. Here reification obliterates the distinction between the material and the conceptual. In doing so Horkheimer and Adorno draw attention to questions about power, control, and the service of memory. For Lukacs the particular answers would be: the class which could comprehend the whole. Namely the proletariat in his writings; their wider suffering through being dominated; and if one follows Horkheimer and Adorno, the proletariat forgets because the brutality of domination is so great. Consequently, a situation emerges where the proletariat forgets because of their subjugated state, for example 'the pursuit of happiness' but not 'liberation.'

As to whether it is possible to recover what was forgotten, Lukacs claims that the authentic Marxism would hold true to "the scientific conviction that dialectical materialism is the road to truth" (1971, 2). Central to the use of this method is the orientation that the ideal is possible, but that the current configuration hinders movement in that regard.<sup>9</sup> Consequently to take the "decisive step" (1971, 2), theory and practice must be united: Or as Marx formulated "reality must also strive towards thought" (Marx cited by Lukacs 1971, 2). One can add the reconciliation of ends and means, content and form; here what is reified and taken out of context must be restored to its place. Through this method, Lukacs is able to argue that it is possible to recover something that existed prior the expansion of the commodity form. He

<sup>8</sup> Jay notes that Timothy Bewes' 2002 publication of *Reification, or, The Anxiety of Late Capitalism* is an exception.

<sup>9</sup> For Lukacs, a significant component of this configuration is the existing mode of production. Of course, I would argue that Lukacs would not limit himself to merely the mode of production; as a cultural critic he would have acknowledged that there is a distinction between culture and nature, and in so doing would ascribe nature a role in configuration. Nevertheless the role of nature in delimiting production is certainly different from that of culture.

also argues that one can use this lingering memory of something other than capitalism to assist in the dismantling of the commodity fetish.

For Lukacs, the priority of appearance over reality, the part over the whole, hinders the aforementioned efforts of reconciliation: by having the false, the whole either 1) cannot be comprehended, or 2) believed to be whole but is itself only partial. Consequently reconciliation necessitates the banishment of ideology so that the proletariat could become 'both the subject and the object of knowledge' (1971, 2). Lukacs adds that it is "only when these conditions are all satisfied will the unity of theory and practice, the precondition of the revolutionary function of the theory, become possible" (1971, 3).

Lukacs argued that class consciousness was a feature in Marxist theory that had been misconstrued up until his writing. Instead of a limited Leninist position which argued for party vanguardism which would momentarily occupy the position of the universal subject—the partial standing in place of the whole—and use this position to transform the existing economic mode of production, Lukacs maintains adherence to the necessity of the whole being grasped by the universal subject and only the universal subject. In other words, if any partial group claims the whole they will fail in their task to fundamentally shift the existing mode of production.

While the above position subsequently proved personally problematic for Lukacs, what endures is a series of questions and answers regarding the mechanics of class consciousness. To return to the Hegelian-Marxist notion that the proletariat is the potential universal subject, and in which is the full potential for a radical transformation of the mode of production, Lukacs contends that the proletariat's 'self-knowledge of reality' (1971, 16) is hindered by (if one was using contemporary terms) a lack of self-recognition on the part of the proletariat. Returning to Horkheimer and Adorno's conception of brutality and subjugation, the acceptance of the world-as-it-appears-to-be is a barrier preventing this self-recognition or self-awareness by the proletariat. To rectify this false consciousness, the proletariat had to remember – they had to deploy the method endorsed by Lukacs, namely dialectical materialism. For this reason it is not surprising to note that Lukacs writes against revolutionary historical revisionism, as it too is a form of distortion which would hamper any understanding of the historical condition so necessary to provide the data for his method (1971, 4-6). It is for this reason that Andrew Feenberg argues that "there is a tension in Lukács between the model of self-consciousness as immediate self-transformation, a kind of radical idealistic constructivism, and another approach which emphasizes the unending process of mediation in which a social subject gradually pushes back specific barriers to self-recognition and self-control. According to this dialectical theory, construction is not self-creation but mediation of a pre-existing object" (Feenberg 1981, cited by Feenberg 1999, 84).

Lukacs fails to unequivocally specify whether reification is the process by which one inadvertently privileges appearance over essence (or even a total denial of essence) or is a degradation of memory.

As it stands then reification can occur through two separate processes. The first would be that the once-upon-a-time universal subject has forgotten that they have/had the potential to be the said universal subject. In other words, the universal subject was once aware of its revolutionary potential, but currently it does not remember that potential. This leads to the second point in so far that the existing potential universal subject cannot recognise its potential or destiny. In both cases, the subject is separated from its potential to become more than what it currently is.

To account for this deficiency Lukacs proposes that the scale and scope of society has a significant role in influencing the ability to comprehend something else. For this to make sense, recall that Lukacs is adamant that reification emerges out of complexity.<sup>10</sup> The following quote from *History and Class Consciousness* indicates as much: "[the] development of the commodity to the point where it becomes the dominant form in society did not take place until the advent of modern capitalism. Hence it is not to be wondered at that the personal

<sup>10</sup> While the commodity form certainly contributes significantly to reification, it itself arises out of the combination of sheer complexity and an increase in scale.

nature of economic relations was still understood clearly on occasion at the start of capitalist development, *but that as the process advanced and forms became more complex and less direct*, it became increasingly difficult and rare to find anyone penetrating the *veil of reification* [emphasis added]" (1971, 86).

Lukacs continues by positing in a Hegelian tradition that only when something begins to become a "universal category of society as a whole" does it reveal its "undistorted essence." (1971, 86) Hence only with the commodity-form coming to hegemony and its fetishism, could one grasp a degree of reification. This is not to argue that reification only exists in societies where the commodity-form is prevalent, but rather, that reification can best be recognised when a particular process is prevalent.<sup>11</sup>

However this leads to an intellectual cul-de-sac, in that only once the commodity form is total, will the full extent of reification be able to be understood. That said, should the commodity-form become total, then reification is in itself total, by which there is no way to conceive of anything other than that of the existing configuration. Similar thoughts are expressed by Lukacs when he addresses the expansive development of capitalism: "As the commodity becomes universally dominant, this situation changes radically and qualitatively. The fate of the worker becomes the fate of society as a whole; indeed, this fate must become universal as otherwise industrialisation could not develop in this direction" (Lukacs 1971, 90).

By this logic, if the expansive development of capitalism continued, ever more elaborate reifications will come into existence, and will themselves have a character that will become ever more difficult to dislodge.

In this section reification has been presented as a process which has forgetting as central to its dynamic. Here reification can be considered normatively insofar that persons forget their moral obligation to others, instead treating them as things. While Lukacs avoids overt moral considerations his work implicitly argues that reification is a deviation from a more appropriate social arrangements. As for the potential for a new form of consciousness to arise, Lukacs points out that reification creates an environment where it is extremely difficult to consider arrangements other than those directly inherited. To use the terms of Lukacs, it will become ever more difficult for subjects to have a consciousness which in any way has any vestige that is not tainted by reification. Hereby, a justification that appeals to anything other than the reified loses its power to compel actions. Just as Lukacs argues that "[r]eification requires that a society should learn to satisfy all its needs in terms of commodity exchange" (1971, 91), thereby perpetuating an existing set of justifications, so the loss of memory limits the possibility to appeal to any other form of justification. This has significant implications for the possibility of creating a consciousness free of reification. For this I shall turn to Marcuse.

In *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse reconstructs Freud along Marxist lines to suggest that remembrance of pre-capitalist social formations can recover emancipatory potential for those alienated by the day-to-day oppression of capital. These pre-capitalist social formations have a residue legacy in a community's cultural tradition, and while Marcuse certainly does not use the terms, the repurposing of the romantic impulse can provide templates for social imaginaries of human flourishing. But this is impeded, Marcuse writes, because in modernity memory is put in service of rational duties, not romantic experiences or pleasures. (Marcuse 1966, Kellner 1984, 157-164)

One possible way out is to use Freud's concept of 'phantasy'—which can imagine alternatives giving rise to new demands—to conceive of alternative purposes and gratifications of memory. Kellner describes this creating "the emancipatory contents of memory, phantasy, and the imagination through producing images of happiness and a life without anxiety." (Kellner 2001, 89)

The relationship between phantasy and memory is not straightforward either; while phantasy can help person yearn for freedom, it is in part motivated by the unconscious memory of previous freedoms. Memory of freedom is not forgotten, merely repressed. For Marcuse, this

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<sup>11</sup> One must remember that while Lukacs initially talks of reification and the commodity-form in 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', his analysis extends past that of the commodity-form and into the dominate set of social perceptions.

speaks to the importance of the 'psychoanalytical liberation of memory: "The psychoanalytic liberation of memory explodes the rationality of the repressed individual. As cognition gives way to re-cognition, the forbidden images and impulses of childhood begin to tell the truth that reason denies." (Marcuse 1966) Subsequently, for Marcuse, the untapped emancipatory power of memory requires "a total revolution in the mode of perception and feeling." The result, for Marcuse, is twofold. First is an affirmation of intersubjective harmony between nature and others. The second is one that sense and reason are reconciled for the promotion of happiness and fulfilment. This revolution requires overcoming reification. And as it applies to the case study in this paper, narrow empirical psychological which rests upon radical methodological individualism is not suitable for this task.

#### 4. An Assessment of Connerton's Thought

Connerton goals, it appears, are fourfold:

1. create a way to understand collective memory which does not rely on the ritual viewing of collective memory;<sup>12</sup>
2. suggest that production is important in the understanding of collective memory;
3. following from the previous point, challenge understandings of collective memory which are exclusively based on the analysis of representation;
4. challenge psychologists who employ the re-constitutive model of memory to give attention to how memory is informed by a historical period.

In assessment it appears that Connerton can be credited with partial success. If one accepts the re-constitutive model of collective memory then the production of the environment and in the environment plays a role in setting the parameters or for triggering certain types of collective memory actions. His work also suggests that collective memory is plastic, and if this is the case, then psychologists ought to seriously consider the extent to which the individuated biological memory process is informed by historical factors not in regards to content, but rather at the level of form.

Nevertheless despite these points, as his work stands, Connerton's argument that economic production is responsible for social forms and consciousness does strike one as being economically reductionist. Even if we are generous and grant him all the cravats and qualifications of Western Cultural Marxism—that representation is but a form of (re)production of cultural and economic forces—it does seem that his work still falls afoul of the standard criticism of Marxism: An excess concentration of the mode and relations of production neglects the roles of beliefs, attitudes, and practices, and how they too can be the kernel of a society. To rally against this criticism, it could be useful to examine how specific memories are used in capitalist ideological production.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, to displace the ritual or performative viewing of collective memory is not viable with the argument that Connerton has presented because it does not sufficiently address the understanding of collective memory practices. For example Connerton's model can account generally for the type of collective memory to be had at a war memorial, but it does not account for how this collective memory is expressed. Practices and expressions are forms of action that are influenced by structures, but are not wholly determined by them. That said, the chief weakness of the ritual model is the how it has not emphasised environmental factors to the degree that it should, or at least at the degree required if they do wish to employ the re-constitutive model of collective memory.

To conclude this paper, let us return to Horkheimer and Adorno's charges. For the individual re-constitutive account, represented here by psychologists adhering to radical methodo-

<sup>12</sup> Unless one reasons that the systematic mode of production, exchange and consumption to be a ritual.

<sup>13</sup> Acknowledging the near consensus within Anglo-American analytical philosophy of mind and action that the designation of personal identity relies upon the continuity of mental features, memories included therein, with a non-branching qualifier (see Parfit, 1984, Nozick 1981, and Nagal 1986), there seem to be good formal grounds for the conjecture that the mode of production deeply seeps into personal identity.

logical individualism, it is clear that they have misread Connerton. I have shown that the published responses to Connerton discharge more heat than light. They miss the central point of Connerton's argument, which is that 1) memory studies, collective or individual, needs to give significant consideration to the interplay of material and environmental factors, and 2) appreciate that memory is not exclusively agent-centric. The corollary from (2) is that the terrain of memory is not an area in which praise-worthiness or blame-worthiness makes much sense. This particular point is perhaps fertile ground for debate given Connerton's deployment of labour process theory, and the degree of complicity people have in forgetting; in others what are their reasons for forgetting. Accordingly the collective re-constitutive account model does not come away unscathed. With an emphasis on experience, this perspective neglects the forces that give rise to that experience.

Lastly is all reification forgetting? I would argue not. Much like I do not have any knowledge of quantum mechanics, I may not have ever had the knowledge of the labour process. To say then that I have forgotten quantum mechanics or the labour or manufacturing process seems to be an error. The argument for knowing the human labour process rests upon my ability to detect the general human signature. This seems like appealing to a metaphysical presumption or a particular cosmology to give foundation to a line of argument, much out of date. Notwithstanding this objection, I think Connerton's argumentation has merits, and can provide a valuable analysis of collective memory.

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