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MARX'S NOTES ON METHOD: A 'READING' OF THE '1857 INTRODUCTION'

Prefatory note

This is a shortened version of a paper on Marx's 1857 Introduction presented to and discussed in a series of Centre seminars. It has been somewhat revised in the light of those discussions, though I have not been able to take account of some further, more substantive criticisms generously offered by John Mepham, among others. The 1857 Introduction is Marx's most substantial text on 'method', though even here many of his formulations remain extremely condensed and provisional. Since the Introduction presents such enormous problems of interpretation, I have largely confined myself to a 'reading' of the text. The positions taken by Marx in the Introduction run counter to many received ideas as to his 'method'. Properly grasped and imaginatively applied – as they were in the larger corpus of the Grundrisse to which they constantly refer – they seem to me to offer quite striking, original and seminal points of departure for the 'problems of method' which beset our field of study, though I have not been able to establish this connection within the limits of the paper. I see the paper, however, as contributing to this on-going work of theoretical and methodological clarification, rather than as simply a piece of textual explication. I hope this conjuncture will not be lost in the detail of the exposition.

The *1857 Introduction* is one of the most pivotal of Marx's texts (1). It is also one of his most difficult, compressed and 'illegible'. In his excellent Foreword to the *Grundrisse*, Nicolaus warns that Marx's Notebooks are hazardous to quote, 'since the context, the grammar and the very vocabulary raise doubts as to what Marx "really" meant in a given passage'.

Vilar observes that the *1857 Introduction* is one of those texts 'from which everyone takes whatever suits him' (2). With the growing interest in Marx's method and epistemology, the *Introduction* occupies an increasingly central position in the study of Marx's work. I share this sense of its significance, while differing often from how many of Marx's explicators have read its meaning. My aim, then, is to inaugurate a 'reading' of this *1857* text. It is, of course, *not* a reading *tabula rasa*, not a reading 'without presuppositions'. It reflects my own problematic, inevitably. I hope it also throws some undistorted light on Marx's.

In a famous letter of January 14, 1858, Marx wrote to Engels:

I am getting some nice developments. For instance, I have thrown over the whole doctrine of profit as it has existed up to now. In the method of treatment the fact that, by mere accident, I have glanced through Hegel's *Logic* has been of great service to me – Freiligarth found some volumes of Hegel which originally belonged to Bakunin and sent them to me as a present. If there should ever be used for such work again, I should greatly like to make accessible to the ordinary human intelligence in two or three printer's sheets, what is rational in the method which Hegel discovered but at the same time enveloped in mysticism.

It was not the only time Marx made expressed [sic] that hope. In 1843, Marx made notes for a substantial critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. The *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy As A Whole*, usually printed together with the other 1844 *Manuscripts*, also aimed at an exposition and critique of Hegel's dialectic, now in relation to the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*, though, in the final event, largely confined to the former. As late as 1876, he wrote to Dietzgen:

When I have shaken off the burden of my economic labours, I shall write a dialectic. The correct laws of the dialectic are already included in Hegel, albeit in a mystical form. It is necessary to strip it of this form. (3)

These hopes were not to be fulfilled, the burden of the economics never laid aside. Thus, we do not have, from the mature Marx, either the systematic delineation of the 'rational kernel', nor the method of its transformation, nor an exposition of the results of that transformation: the Marxian dialectic. The 1857 *Introduction*, and the compressed 1859 *Preface* to the *Critique*, together with other scattered asides, have therefore to do duty for the unfulfilled parts of Marx's project. The 1857 *Introduction* in particular represents his fullest methodological and theoretical summary text. Decisive, however, as this text is, we must not handle it as if it were something other than it is. It was written as an Introduction to the Notebooks, themselves enormously comprehensive in scope, digressive and complex in structure; and quite unfinished – 'rough drafts'. Rosdolsky remarked that the *Grundrisse* 'introduces us, so to speak, into Marx's economic laboratory and lays bare all the refinements, all the bypaths of his methodology'. The *Introduction* was thus conceived as a résumé and guide, to 'problems of method' concretely and more expansively applied in the Notebooks themselves. It was not, therefore, intended to stand wholly in its own right. Moreover, the tentative character of the text was signified by Marx's decision in the end *not* to publish it. The *Introduction* was replaced by the terser *Preface*: and some of the central propositions of the *Introduction* are modified, or at least suspended, in the later *Preface*. An immediate contrast of the *Introduction*

with the *Preface* (where a classical conciseness is everywhere in play, quite different from the linguistic playfulness and conceit of the *Introduction*) reminds us that, despite its dense argumentation, the 1857 *Introduction* remains, even with respect to Marx's method, provisional.

In the *Introduction*, Marx proceeds via a critique of the ideological presupposition of political economy. The first section deals with Production. The object of the inquiry is 'material production'. Smith and Ricardo begin with 'the individual and isolated hunter or fisherman'. Marx, however, begins with 'socially determinate' individuals, and hence 'socially determined individual production'. Eighteenth-century theorists, up to and including Rousseau, find a general point of departure 'the individual' producer. Smith and Ricardo found their theories upon this ideological projection. Yet 'the individual' cannot be the point of departure, but only *the result*. Rousseau's 'natural man' appears as a stripping away of the contingent complexities of modern life, a rediscovery of the natural, universal human-individual core beneath. Actually, the whole development of 'civil society' is subsumed in this aesthetic conceit. It is not until labour has been freed of the dependent forms of feudal society, and subject to the revolutionary development it undergoes under early capitalism, that the modern concept of 'the individual' could appear at all. A whole historical and ideological development, then, is already presupposed in – but hidden within – the notion of the Natural Individual and of universal 'human nature'.

This is an absolutely characteristic movement of thought in the *Introduction*. It takes up the 'given' points of departure in Political Economy. It shows by a critique that these are not, in fact, starting points but points of arrival. In them, a whole historical development is already 'summed up'. In short: what appears [sic] as the most concrete, common-sense, simple, constituent starting-points for a theory of Political Economy, turn out, on inspection, to be the sum of many, prior, determinations.

Production outside society is as absurd as language without individuals living and talking together. It takes a gigantic social development to produce 'the isolated individual' producer as a concept: only a highly elaborated form of developed social connectedness can appear as – take the 'phenomenal form' – men pursuing their egoistic interests as 'indifferent', isolated, individuals in a 'free' market organized by an 'invisible hand'. In fact, of course, even this individualism is an 'all sided dependence' which appears as mutual indifference: 'The reciprocal and all-sided dependence of individuals who are indifferent to one another forms their social connection. The social bond is expressed in *exchange value*' (4).

This concept – that the capitalist mode of production depends on social connection assuming the 'ideological' form of an individual dis-connection – is one of the great, substantive themes of the *Grundrisse* as a whole. But its working-out also has consequences for the problems of method. For the displacement of real relations via their ideological representations requires – for

its critique, its unmasking – a method which reveals the ‘essential relations’ behind the necessary but mystifying inversions assumed by their ‘surface forms’. This method – which, later, Marx identifies as the core of what is *scientific* in his dialectic – forms the master methodological procedure, not only of the Notebooks, but of *Capital* itself. This ‘methodological’ procedure becomes, in its turn, a theoretical discovery of the utmost importance: in its expanded form (there are several provisional attempts to formulate it in the *Grundrisse*) it constitutes the basis of the pivotal section in *Capital* I, on ‘The Fetishism of Commodities’ (5).

The *Introduction*, then, opens with a methodological argument: the critique of ‘normal’ types of logical abstraction. ‘Political Economy’ operates as a theory through its categories. How are these categories formed? The normal method is to isolate and analyse a category by abstracting those elements that remain ‘common’ to it through all epochs and all types of social formation. This attempt to identify, by means of the logic of abstraction, which remains the core of a concept stable through history is really a type of ‘essentialism’. Many types of theorizing fall prey to it. Hegel, the summit of classical German philosophy, developed a mode of thought that was the very opposite of static: his grasp of movement and of contradiction is what raised his logic above all other types of logical theorizing, in Marx’s eyes. Yet, because the movement of Hegel’s dialectic was cast in an idealist form, his thought also retained the notion of an ‘essential core’ that survived all the motions of mind. It was the perpetuation of this ‘essential core’ within the concept which, Marx believed, constituted the secret guarantee within Hegel’s dialectic of the ultimate harmoniousness of existing social relations (e.g. The Prussian State). Classical Political Economy also speaks of ‘bourgeois’ production and of private property as if these were the ‘essence’ of the concepts, ‘production’ and ‘property’ and exhaust their historical content. In this way, Political Economy too presented the capitalist mode of production, not as a historical structure, but as the natural and inevitable state of things. At *this* level, even classical Political Economy retained an ideological presupposition at its ‘scientific’ heart: it reduces, by abstraction, specific historical relations to their lowest common, trans-historical essence. Its ideology is inscribed in its method.

On the contrary, Marx argues, there is no ‘production-in-general’: only distinct forms of production, specific to time and conditions. One of those distinct forms is – rather confusingly – ‘general production’: production based on a type of labour, which is not specific to a particular branch of production, but which has been ‘generalized’: ‘abstract labour’. (But we shall come to that in a moment.) Since any mode of production depends upon ‘determinate conditions’, there can be no guarantee that those conditions will always be fulfilled, or remain constant or ‘the same’ through time. For example: except in the most common-sense way, there is no scientific form in which the concept, ‘production’, referring to the capitalist mode, and entailing as one of its required

conditions, 'free labour', can be said to have an 'immediate identity' (to be 'essentially the same as') production in, say, slave, clan or communal society. (Later, in *Capital*, Marx reminds us that this transformation of feudal bondsmen into 'free labour', which is assumed here as a 'natural' precondition for capitalism, has, indeed, a specific history: 'the history of . . . expropriation . . . written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire' (6).) This is one of the key points-of-departure of historical materialism as a method of thought and practice. Nothing in what Marx subsequently wrote allows us to fall behind it. It is what Korsch called Marx's principle of 'historical specification' (7). The 'unity' which Marx's method is intended to produce is not *weak* identity achieved by abstracting away everything of any historical specificity until we are left with an essential core, without differentiation or specification.

The *Introduction* thus opens, as Nicolaus remarks, as the provisional, extended answer to an unwritten question: Political Economy is our starting point, but, however valid are some of its theories, it has not formulated scientifically the laws of the inner structure of the mode of production whose categories it expresses and theoretically reflects. It 'sticks', despite everything, inside its 'bourgeois skin' (*Capital* I, p.542). This is because, within it, historical relations have 'already acquired the stability of natural, self-understood forms of social life'. (p.75). Its categories, then, (in contrast with vulgar Political Economy) 'are forms of thought expressing with social validity the conditions and relations of a definite, historically determined mode of production' (8). But it presents these relations as 'a self-evident necessity imposed by Nature as productive labour itself'. Thus, though classical Political Economy *has* 'discovered what lies beneath these forms', it has not asked certain key questions (such as the origin of commodity-production based in labour-power: 'the form under which value becomes exchange-value') which are peculiar to specific historical conditions (the forms and conditions of commodity-production). These 'errors' are not incidental. They are already present in its presuppositions, its method, its starting points. But, if Political Economy is itself to be transcended, *how? Where to begin?*

The answer is, with 'production by social individuals', 'production at a definite stage of social development'. Political Economy tends to etherealize, universalize and de-historicize the relations of bourgeois production. But what follows if, as Marx does, we *insist* on starting with a principle of historical specification? Do we then, nevertheless, assume that there is some common, universal practice – 'production-in-general' – which has always existed, which has then been subject to an evolutionary historical development which can be steadily traced through: a practice which, therefore, we can reduce to its common-sense content and employ as the obvious, uncontested starting-point for analysis? The answer is, no. Whatever other kind of 'historicist' Marx may have been, he was definitively *not* a historical evolutionist. Every child knows, he once remarked, that production cannot cease for a moment. So, there must

be something ‘in common’, so to speak, which corresponds to the idea of ‘production-in-general’: all societies must reproduce the conditions of their own existence. This is the type of abstraction, however, which sifts out the lowest common characteristics of a concept and identifies this unproblematic core with its scientific content. It is a mode of theorizing that operates at a very low theoretical threshold indeed. It is, at best, a useful time-saver. But, to penetrate a structure as dense and overlaid with false representations as the capitalist mode of production, we need concepts more fundamentally dialectical in character. Concepts that allow us to further refine, segment, split and recombine any general category: which allow us to see those features which permitted it to play a certain role in this *epoch*, other features which were developed under the specific conditions of *that* epoch, distinctions which show why certain relations appear *only* in the most ancient and the most developed forms of society *and in none in between*, etc. Such concepts are theoretically far in advance of those which unite under one chaotic general heading the quite different things which have appeared, at one time or another, under the category, ‘production-in-general’: conceptions which *differentiate* in the very moment that they reveal hidden connections. In much the same way, Marx observes that concepts which differentiate out what makes possible the specific development of different languages are more significant than ‘abstracting’ a few, simple, basic, common ‘language universals’.

We must observe – it is a common strategy throughout the *Introduction* – that Marx establishes his difference here *both* from the method of Political Economy *and* from Hegel. The *Introduction* is thus, simultaneously, a critique of both. It is useful, in this context, to recall Marx’s earlier procedure in the famous Chapter on ‘The Metaphysics of Political Economy’, in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, where he, again, simultaneously offers a critique of ‘Hegelianised Political Economy’ via an attack on Proudhon. The terms of this critique of Proudhon are particularly germane to this argument against ‘abstraction’, for they remind us that something more than a methodological quibble is involved, namely the exaltation of mental operations over the content of real, contingent historical relations; it was not surprising that

if you let drop little by little all that constitutes the individuality of a house, leaving out first of all the materials of which it was composed, then the form that distinguishes it, you end up with nothing but a body; that if you leave out of account the limits of this body, you soon have nothing but a space – that is, finally, you leave out of account the dimensions of this space, there is absolutely nothing left but the quantity, the logical category. If we abstract thus from every subject all the alleged accidents, animate or inanimate, men or things, we are right in saying that in the final abstraction, the only substance left is the logical categories . . . If all that exists, all that lives on land and under water can be reduced by

abstraction to a logical category – if the whole world can be drowned thus in a world of abstractions, in the world of logical categories – who need be astonished at it?

Apply this method to the categories of political economy, Marx argues:

and you have the logic and metaphysics of political economy . . . the categories that everybody knows, translated into a little-known language which makes them look as if they had newly blossomed forth in an intellect of pure reason . . . Up to now we have expounded only the dialectics of Hegel. We shall see later how M. Proudhon has succeeded in reducing it to the meanest proportions. Thus for Hegel, all that has happened and is still happening is only just what is happening in his own mind . . . There is no longer a history according to the order of time', there is only the 'sequence of ideas in the understanding'. (9)

Marx had long ago noted (10) Hegel's 'outstanding achievement': his recognition that the different categories of the world – 'private right, morality, the family, civil society, the state, etc.' – had 'no validity in isolation', but 'dissolve and engender one another. They have become "moments" of the movement'. However, as we know, Marx radically criticized Hegel for conceiving this 'mobile nature' of the categories as a form of 'self-genesis': Hegel 'conceives them only in their thought form'. Thus 'The whole movement . . . ends in absolute knowledge' (11). In Hegel, the constitution of the real world becomes 'merely the appearance, the cloak, the exoteric form' of movement and contradiction, which, in the speculative conception, never really deserts the ground of thought. 'The whole history of alienation and of the retraction of alienation is therefore only the history of the production of abstract thought, i.e. of absolute, logical, speculative thought. This was certainly not the simple, trans-historical, external connections established by vulgar forms of Political Economy, but an equally unacceptable alternative: the ultimate identity of Mind with itself 'only in . . . thought form'. Marx added, 'this means that what Hegel does is to put in place of these fixed abstractions the act of abstraction which revolves in its own circle'. He put the same point even more clearly in *The Holy Family*:

The *Phenomenology* . . . ends by putting in place of all human existence 'absolute knowledge' . . . Instead of treating self-consciousness as the self-consciousness of real men, living in a real objective world and conditioned by it, Hegel transforms men into an attribute of self-consciousness. He turns the world upside down.

And in the *Poverty of Philosophy*:

He thinks he is constructing the world by the movement of thought, whereas he is merely reconstructing systematically and classifying by the absolute method the thoughts which are in the minds of all.

The core of these earlier critiques is retained by Marx here in the *1857 Introduction*. Hegel *did* understand ‘production’, he did understand ‘labour’: but ultimately, it was what Marx called, ‘labour of the mind, labour of thinking and knowing’ (12). However dialectical its movement, the historical production of the world remains, for Hegel, ‘moments’ of the realization of the Idea, the ‘external appearances’ of thought – stations of the cross in the path of Mind towards Absolute Knowledge. The method which Marx proposes in the *Introduction* is not of this kind: it is not merely a mental operation. It is to be discovered in real, concrete relations: it is a method which groups, not a simple ‘essence’ behind the different historical forms, but precisely the many determinations in which ‘essential differences’ are preserved.

Marx ends this argument with an illustration. Economists like Mill start from bourgeois relations of production, and extrapolate them as ‘inviolable natural laws’. All production, they assert, despite historic differences, can be subsumed under universal laws. Two such ‘laws’ are (a) production requires private property, (b) production requires the protection of property by the courts and police. Actually, Marx argues, private property is neither the only nor the earliest form of property: historically, it is predated by communal property. And the presence of modern, bourgeois legal relations and the police, far from indexing the universality of the system, shows how each mode of production requires, and produces, its own legal-judicial and political structures and relations. What is ‘common’ to production, then, as produced by the process of mentally abstracting its ‘common’ attributes, cannot provide a method which enables us to grasp, concretely, any single, ‘real historical stage of production’.

How then, *are* we to conceptualize the relations between the different phases of production – production, distribution, exchange, consumption? Can we conceive them ‘as organically coherent factors’? Or simply as ‘brought into haphazard relation with one another, i.e. into a simple reflex connection’? How, in short, are we to analyse the relations between the parts of a ‘complexly structured whole’? Throughout his later work, Marx insists that the superiority of the dialectical method lies in its ability to trace out the ‘inner connection’ between the different elements in a mode of production, as against their haphazard, and extrinsic ‘mere juxtaposition’. The method which merely sets opposites together in an external way, which assumes that, because things are neighbours, they must therefore be related, but which cannot move from oppositions to contradictions, is ‘dialectical’ only in its surface form. The syllogism is one of the logical forms of an argument by external juxtaposition. Political Economy ‘thinks’ production, consumption etc., in this syllogistic

form: production produces goods; distribution allocates them; exchange makes the general distribution of goods specific to particular individuals; finally, the individual consumes them. This can also be interpreted as almost a classical Hegelian syllogism (13). There are many ways in which Marx may be said to have remained a Hegelian; but the use of Hegelian triads (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) and syllogisms (general, particular, singular) is *not* one of them. The coherence such syllogisms suggest remains conceptually extremely shallow. Even the critics of this position, Marx adds, have not taken their critique far enough. The critics assume that the syllogism is wrong because it contains a logical error – a textbook mistake. For Marx, the error consists in a taking over into thought of the mystifications which exist in the real relations of bourgeois production, where production, distribution and consumption do indeed, *appear* ‘phenomenally’ as ‘independent, autonomous neighbours’, but where this appearance is false, an ideological inversion. Conceptual mistakes cannot be clarified by a theoretical practice alone, ‘wholly within thought’.

In *The Critique of Hegel's Dialectic*, Marx had remarked that, in Hegel, the supercession of one category by another *appears* to be a ‘transcending of the thought entity’. However, in Hegel, thought treats even the objectively-created moments as ‘moments’ *of itself* – ‘because the object has become for it a moment of thought, thought takes it in its reality to be a self-confirmation of itself’. Thus, ‘this superceding in thought, which leaves its object standing in the real world, believes that it has really overcome it’. There is no true ‘profane history’ here, no ‘actual realization for man of man’s essence and of his essence as something real’ (14). Thus, ‘The history of man is transformed into the history of an abstraction’ (15). The movement of thought therefore remains ultimately confined within its own circle:

Hegel has locked up all these fixed mental forms together in his *Logic* laying hold of each of them first as negation – that is, as an alienation of human thought – and then as negation of the negation – that is, as a superceding of that alienation, as a real expression of human thought. But as even this still takes place within the confines of the estrangement, this negation of the negation is in part the restoring of these fixed forms in their estrangement. (16)

Thus, ‘The act of abstraction . . . revolves within its own circle’. The language here remains headily Hegelian-Feuerbachian . . . How much cleaner the blow is in the 1857 text: ‘as if the task were the dialectical balancing of concepts, and not the grasping of real relations’. ‘As if this rupture had made its way not from reality into the textbooks, but rather from the textbooks into reality’ (17).

Thus, neither the functional disconnectedness of Political Economy nor the formal supercessions of the Hegelian Logic will serve to reveal the inner

connection between processes and relations in society, which form 'a unity' of a distinct type, but which must be grasped as real, differentiated processes in the real world, not merely the formal movement of the act of abstraction itself. It is because, in the 'real relations' of capitalist production, the different parts of the process *appear*, simply, as independent, autonomous 'neighbours' that they appear, in the textbooks, as linked by an accidental connection: not vice versa. But, how then to think the relations of identity, similarity, mediateness and difference which could produce, at the conceptual level, in thought, a 'thought-concrete' adequate in its complexity to the complexity of the 'real relations' which is its object?

The most compressed and difficult pages of the *Introduction*, which immediately follow, provide an answer to this question. This section deals with the relations between production, distribution, consumption and exchange. Start with production. In production, individuals 'consume' their abilities, they 'use up' raw materials. In this sense, there is a kind of consumption *inside* production: production and consumption *are* here 'directly coincident'. Marx seems to have thought this example of 'immediate identity' 'right enough', though – as he says earlier and later of other formulations (18) – 'trite and obvious', or 'tautologous'; true at a rather simple level, but offering only a 'chaotic conception', and thus requiring 'further determinations', greater analytical development. The general inadequacy of this type of 'immediate identity' is clearly signalled by Marx's reference here to Spinoza, who showed that an 'undifferentiated identity cannot support the introduction of more refined 'particular determinations'. However, in so far as 'immediate identities' reign, at this simple level, identical propositions can be reversed: if $A = B$, then $B = A$. Marx, then, reverses the proposition. If, there is a consumption-inside-production, there is also, 'immediately', production-inside-consumption. The consumption of food, for example, is the means whereby the individual produces, or reproduces his physical existence. Now Political Economy recognizes these distinctions but simply in order to separate out the consumptive aspects of production (e.g. the consumption of raw materials) from production proper. Production, as a distinct category, remains. The 'immediate identity' thus leaves their 'duality intact'. (This type of identity is thus open to the criticism which Marx originally delivered on Hegel in the 1844 fragment on the *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy As A Whole*: 'this superceding in thought which leaves its object standing in the real world, believes it has really overcome it'.)

Marx now adds a second type of relation: that of *mediation*: the relation of 'mutual dependence'. Production and consumption also mediate one another. By 'mediate' here, Marx means that each cannot exist, complete its passage and achieve its result, without the other. Each is the other's completion. Each provides within itself the other's object. Thus, production's product is what consumption consumes. Consumption's 'needs' are what production is aimed to satisfy. The mediation here is 'teleological'. Each process finds its end in the

other. In this mediating movement, Marx later observes (19), each side is 'indispensable' to the other; but they are *not* identical – they remain necessary but 'external to each other'.

Marx now expands on *how* this mediation works. Consumption 'produces' production in *two* ways. First, production's object – the product – is only finally 'realized' when it is consumed (20). It is in the passage of the forms, from productive activity to objectified product, that the first mediating movement between production and consumption is accomplished. Second, consumption produces production by creating the need for 'new production'. It is crucial, for the later discussion of the determinacy of production in the process as a whole, that what consumption now does, strictly speaking, is to provide the 'ideal, internally impelling cause', the 'motive', 'internal image', 'drive' 'purpose' for *re*-production. Marx stresses 'new production'; strictly speaking, and significantly, it is the need to *re*-produce for which consumption is made mediately responsible.

'Correspondingly' production 'produces' consumption. Marx notes *three* senses in which this is true. First, production furnishes consumption with its 'object'. Second, production specifies the *mode* in which that object is consumed, but, third, production produces the need which its object satisfies. This is a difficult concept to grasp, for we normally think of consumption's needs and modes as the property of the consumer (that is, belonging to 'consumption'), separate from the object which, so to speak, satisfies. But as early as 1844 Marx had pointed to the way in which needs are the product of an objective historical development, not the trans-historical subjective property of individuals:

The manner in which they (objects) become his depends on the nature of the objects and on the nature of the essential power corresponding to it: for it is precisely the determinate nature of this relationship which shapes the particular, real mode of affirmation. To the eye an object is another object than the object of the ear.

If consumption of the object produces the subjective impulse to produce anew, the production of the object creates, in the consumer, specific, historically distinct and developed modes of 'appropriation', and, simultaneously, develops the 'need' which the object satisfies. 'Music alone awakens in man the sense of music'.

Thus the 'forming of the senses' is the subjective side of an objective labour, the product of 'the entire history of the world down to the present' (21). 'The production of new needs in the first historical act', he observed in *The German Ideology*. Here, 'the object of art . . . creates a public which is sensitive to art' (22). Production, then, *forms* objectively the modes of appropriation of the consumer, just as consumption reproduces production as a subjectively experienced impulse, drive or motive. The complex shifts between objective and

subjective dimensions which are tersely accomplished in this passage seem incomprehensible without the gloss from the *1844 MSS*, even if, here, the language of ‘species being’ has altogether vanished.

The general argument is now resumed (23). There are *three* kinds of identity relation. First, *immediate* identity – where production and consumption are ‘immediately’ one another. Second, *mutual dependence* – where each is ‘indispensable’ to the other, and cannot be completed without it, but where production and consumption remain ‘external’ to one another. Thirdly, a relation, which has no precise title, but which is clearly that of an *internal connection* between two sides, linked by the passage of forms, by real processes through historical time. Here, in contrast with relation (2), production not only proceeds to its own completion, but is *itself reproduced again* through consumption. In this third type of relation, each ‘creates the other in completing itself and creates itself as the other’. Here we find not only what distinguishes the third type of relation from the second; but also, what permits Marx, on the succeeding page, to give a final determinacy to production over consumption. Production, he argues, initiates the cycle: in its ‘first act’, it forms the object, the mode and the need to consume: what consumption can then do is to ‘raise the inclination developed in the first act of production through the need for repetition to its finished form’. Production, then, requires the passage through consumption to commence its work anew; but in providing ‘the act through which the whole process again runs its course’, production retains a primary determination over the circuit as a whole. Some of Marx’s most crucial and sophisticated distinctions, developed later in *Capital* – such as those between simple and expanded reproduction – achieve a gnomic, philosophic, first-formulation in this elliptical passage. In this third relation, production and consumption are no longer external to each other: nor do they ‘immediately’ merge. Rather, they are linked by an ‘inner connection’. Yet this ‘inner connection’ is *not* a simple identity, which requires only the reversal or inversion of the terms of the syllogism into one another. The inner connection here passes through a distinct process. It requires what Marx, in his earlier critique of Hegel, called a ‘profane’ history: a process in the real world, a process through historical time, each moment of which requires its own determinate conditions, is subject to its own inner laws, and yet is incomplete without the other.

Why is relation 3 not an ‘immediate identity’ of the Hegelian type? Marx gives three reasons. First, an immediate identity would assume that production and consumption had a single subject. This identity of the ‘subject’ through all its successive ‘moments’ of realization – a pivotal aspect of Hegel’s ‘essentialism’ allowed Hegel to conceive the historical world as, ultimately, a harmonious circuit. In the real historical world, however, the ‘subject’ of production and consumption are *not* one. Capitalists produce: workers consume. The production process links them: but they are not ‘immediate’. Second, these are not Hegelian ‘moments’ of a single act, temporary realizations of the march of

World Spirit. These are the circuits of a *process*, with 'real points of departure': a process with specific forms through which value is prescribed to pass 'for its realization'. Third, whereas Hegel's identities form a self-engendering, self-sustaining circuit, in which no one moment has priority, Marx insists that the historical process through which production and consumption pass *has* its breaks, its moment of determinacy. Production, not consumption, initiates the circuit. Consumption, the necessary condition for value's 'realization', cannot destroy the 'over – determinacy' of the moment from which realization departs.

The significance of these distinctions is delivered in the closing paragraph – the distinction between a Marxian and a Hegelian analysis of the *forms* of capitalist production (24). Capitalism tends to reproduce itself in expanded form *as if* it were a self-equilibrating and self-sustaining system. The so-called 'laws of equivalence' are the necessary 'phenomenal forms' of this self-generating aspect of the system: 'this is precisely the beauty and greatness of it: this spontaneous interconnection, this material and mental metabolism which is independent of the knowing and willing of individuals' (25).

But this constant tendency to equilibrium of the various spheres of production is exercised only in the shape of a reaction against the constant upsetting of this equilibrium (26). Each 'moment' has its determinate conditions – each is subject to its own social laws: indeed, each is linked to the other in the circuit by quite distinct, determinate, forms – processes. Thus, there is no guarantee to the producer – the capitalist – that what he produces will return again to him: he cannot appropriate it 'immediately'.

The circuits of capital 'depend on his relation to other individuals'. Indeed, a whole, intermediate or 'mediating movement' now intervenes – 'steps between' – producers and products – determining, but again 'in accordance with social laws', what will return to the producer as his share in the augmented world of production. *Nothing except the maintenance of these determinate conditions can guarantee the continuity of this mode of production over time.*

Just as the exchange value of the commodity leads a double existence, as the particular commodity and as money, so does the act of exchange split into two mutually independent acts: exchange of commodities for money, exchange of money for commodities; purchase and sale. Since these have now achieved a *spatially* and *temporally* separate and *mutually indifferent* form of existence, their immediate identity ceases. They *may* correspond or not; they *may* balance or not; they *may* enter into disproportion with one another. They will, of course, always *attempt* to equalize one another; but in the place of the earlier immediate equality there now stands the constant *movement of equalization*, which evidently presupposes constant non-equivalence. It is now entirely possible that consonance may be reached only by passing through the most extreme dissonance. (27)

It is, in short, a *finite* historical system, a system capable of breaks, discontinuities, contradictions, interruptions: a system *with limits*, within historical time. It is a system indeed, which rests on the mediating movement of other processes not yet named: for example – distribution: production – (distribution) – consumption. Is distribution, then, ‘immediate with’ production and consumption? Is it inside or outside production? Is it an autonomous or a determinate sphere?

In the first section (28), Marx examined the couplet production/consumption in terms of an immediate Hegelian unity: opposites/identical. He then dismantled the production/consumption couplet – by the terms of a Marxian transformation: opposites – mediated – mutually dependent – differentiated unity (not identical). In part, this is accomplished by wresting from apparently equivalent relations a moment of determinacy: *production*. In the second section (p. 94) the second couplet production/distribution is dismantled by means of a different transformation: determined – determining – determinate.

In Political Economy, Marx wrote, everything appears twice. Capital is a factor of production: but also a form of distribution, (interest + profits). Wages are a factor of production, but also a form of distribution. Rent is a form of distribution: but also a factor of production (landed property). Each element appears as both *determining* and *determined*. What breaks this seamless circle of determinations? It can only be deciphered by reading back from the apparent identity of the categories *to their differentiated presuppositions* (determinate conditions).

Here, once again, Marx is concerned to establish the moments of *break*, of *determinacy*, in the self-sustaining circuits of capital. Vulgar Economy assumed a perfect fit between the social processes of capital. This was expressed in the Trinitarian formula. Each factor of production was returned its just rewards in distribution: Capital – profits; Land – ground rent; Labour – wages. Thus each bit ‘appeared twice’, by grace of a secret assumed ‘natural harmony’ or compact with its identical opposite. Distribution appears to be, in common sense, the prime mover of this system. Yet, Marx suggests, behind the obvious forms of distribution, (wages, rent, interest) lie, not simply economic categories, but real, historic relations, which stem from the movement and formation of capital under specific conditions. Thus, wages presuppose, not labour, but labour *in a specific form*: wage-labour (slave labour has no wages). Ground rent presupposes large-scale landed property (there is no ground rent in communal society). Interest and profit presuppose capital in its modern form. Wage-labour, landed property and capital are not independent forms of distribution but ‘moments’ of the organization of the capitalist mode of production: they *initiate* the distributive forms (wages, rent, profits), not vice versa. In this sense, distribution, which is, of course, a differentiated system, is nevertheless ‘over-determined’ by the structures of production. Before distribution by wages, rent, profits can take place a *prior* kind of ‘distribution’ must occur: the distribution of the means

of production between expropriators and expropriated, and the distribution of the members of society, the classes, into the different branches of production. *This* prior distribution – of the means and of the agents of production into the social relations of production – belongs to *production*: the distribution of its *products*, its *results*, in the form of wages or rent, *cannot* be its starting point. Once this distribution of instruments and agents has been made, they form the starting conditions for the realization of value within the mode; this realization process generates its own distributive forms. This second type of distribution, however, is clearly *subordinate* to production in this wider, mode-specific sense, and must be considered as over-determined by it.

In the third section, on exchange, the demonstration is even briefer (30). Exchange, too, is an 'aspect of production'. It mediates between production and consumption, but, again, as its presupposition, it requires determinate conditions which can only be established within production: the division of labour, production in its private exchange form, exchanges between town and country, etc. This argument leads, almost at once, to a conclusion – it is a conclusion, not simply to the section on exchange, but to the whole problem posed on p.88. Production, distribution, consumption and exchange are not adequately conceptualized as immediate identities, unfolding, within the essentialist Hegelian dialectic, to their monistic categorical resolution. Essentially, we must 'think' the relations between the different processes of material production as 'members of a totality, distinctions within a unity'. That is, as a complexly structured differentiated totality, in which distinctions are not obliterated but preserved – the unity of its 'necessary complexity' precisely *requiring* this differentiation.

Hegel, of course, knew that the two terms of a relation would not be *the same*. But he looked for the identity of opposites – for 'immediate identities' *behind* the differences. Marx does not altogether abandon the level at which, superficially, opposite things *can* appear to have an 'essential' underlying similarity. But this is not the principal form of a Marxian relation. For Marx, two different terms or relations or movements or circuits remain specific and different: yet they form a 'complex unity'. However this is always a 'unity' formed by and requiring them to preserve *their difference*: a difference which does not disappear, which cannot be abolished by a simple movement of mind or a formal twist of the dialectic, which is not subsumed into some 'higher' but more 'essential', synthesis involving the loss of concrete specificity. This latter type of 'non-immediacy' is what Marx calls a *differentiated unity*. Like the notion to which it is intimately linked – the notion of the concrete as the unity of 'many determinations and relations' – the concept of a 'differentiated unity' is a methodological and theoretical key to this text, and to Marx's method as a whole. This means that, in the examination of any phenomenon or relation, we must comprehend *both* its internal structure – what it is in its differentiatedness – as well as those other structures to which it is coupled and with which it forms

some more inclusive totality. Both the specificities and the connections – the complex unities of structures – have to be demonstrated by the concrete analysis of concrete relations and conjunctions. If relations are mutually articulated, but remain specified by their difference, this articulation, and the determinate conditions on which it rests, has to be demonstrated. It cannot be conjured out of thin air according to some essentialist dialectical law. Differentiated unities are also therefore, in the Marxian sense, *concrete*. The method thus retains the concrete empirical reference as a privileged and undissolved ‘moment’ within a theoretical analysis without thereby making it ‘empiricist’: the concrete analysis of concrete situations.

Marx gives an ‘over-determinacy’ to production. But how does production determine? Production specifies ‘the different relations *between* different moments’ (our italics). It determines the *form* of those combinations out of which complex unities are formed. It is the principle of the formal articulations of a mode. In the Althusserian sense, production not only ‘determines’ in the last instance, but determines the form of the combination of forces and relations which make a mode of production a complex structure. Formally, production specifies the system of similarities and differences, the points of conjuncture, between all the instances of the mode, including which level is, at any moment of a conjuncture, ‘in dominance’. This is the *modal* determinacy which production exercises in Marx’s overall sense. In its more narrow and limited sense – as merely one moment, forming a ‘differentiated unity’ with others – production has its own spark, its own motive, its own ‘determinateness’ derived from other moments in the circuit (in this case, from consumption). To this argument – the nature of the relations of determinacy and complementarity or conjuncture between the different relations or levels of a mode of production – Marx returned at the end of the *Introduction*. One of its results, already foreshadowed here, is the ‘law of uneven development’.

Marx now goes back to the beginning: the method of Political economy (31). In considering the political economy of a country, where do we begin? One possible starting position is with ‘the real and concrete’, a given, observable, empirical concept: e.g. population. Production is inconceivable without a population which produces. This starting point, however, would be wrong. Population, like ‘production’, is a deceptively transparent, ‘given’ category, ‘concrete’ only in a common-sense way (32). Already it presupposes the division into classes, the division of labour, and thus wage-labour, capital, etc: the categories of a specific mode of production. ‘Population’ thus gives us only ‘a chaotic conception of the whole’. Further, it triggers off a methodological procedure which moves from the blindingly obvious to ‘ever more simple concepts’, ‘ever thinner abstractions’. This was the method of abstraction of the 17th century economists. It is also the ‘metaphysical’ method of Proudhon which Marx pilloried so brilliantly and brutally in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Later economic theorists begin with simple relations and trace their way back to the

concrete. This latter path, Marx calls 'the obviously scientifically correct one'. This 'concrete' is *concrete* in a different sense from the first formulation. In the first case, 'population' is 'concrete' in a simple, unilateral, common-sense way – it manifestly exists; production cannot be conceived without it, etc. But the method which *produces* the 'complex concrete' is concrete because it is 'a rich totality of many determinations and relations'. The method then, is one which has to *reproduce in thought* (the active notion of a practice is certainly present here) the concrete-in-history. No reflexive or copy theory of truth is now adequate. The simple category, 'population', has to be reconstructed as contradictorily composed of the more concrete historical relations: slave-owner/slave, lord/serf, master/servant, capitalist/labourer. This clarification is a specific practice which theory is required to perform upon history: it constitutes the first part of theory's 'adequacy' to its object. Thought accomplishes such a clarification by decomposing simple, unified categories into the real, contradictory, antagonistic relations which compose them. It penetrates what 'is immediately present on the surface of bourgeois society', what 'appears' as 'the phenomenal form of' – the necessary form of the appearance of – 'a process which is taking place behind' (33).

Marx sums up the point. The concrete is concrete, in history, in social production, and thus in conception, not because it is simple and empirical, but because it exhibits a certain kind of necessary complexity. Marx makes a decisive distinction between the 'empirically-given', and the *concrete*. In order to 'think' this real, concrete historical complexity, we must reconstruct in the mind the determinations which constitute it. Thus, what is multiply determined, diversely unified, in history, already 'a result', appears, in thought, in theory, not as 'where we take off from' but as *that which must be produced*. Thus, 'the abstract determinations lead towards a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought'. Let us note at once, that this makes the 'way of thought' *distinct* from the logic of history as such, though it does not make thought 'absolutely distinct'. What is more, for Marx, the concrete-in-history makes its appearance once again, now as the historical substratum to thought. Though the concrete-in-history cannot be the point of departure for a theoretical demonstration, it is the absolute precondition for all theoretical construction: it *is* 'the point of departure in reality and *hence also* the point of departure for observation and conception' (our italics).

Marx's formulations here (34) are seminal; the more so since they have, in recent years, become the *locus classicus* of the whole debate concerning Marx's epistemology. The 'way of thought', Marx seems to be arguing, must 'lay hold upon historical reality' – 'appropriate the concrete' – and produce, by way of its own distinct practice, a theoretical construct adequate to its object ('reproduce it as the concrete in the mind'). It is important, however, to see that, right away, Marx addresses himself directly to the much-vexed question as to whether this 'theoretical labour' can be conceived of as a practice which 'takes

place entirely in thought', which 'is indeed its own criterion', and which 'has no need for verification from external practices to declare the knowledges they produce to be "true"' (35). Significantly, his remarks here are, once again, embedded in a critique of Hegel, a procedure which appears to warn us explicitly against any final, idealist bracketing. Because 'thought' has its own mode of appropriation, Marx argues, therefore Hegel made the error of thinking that 'the real' was the product of 'thought concentrating itself, probing its own depths, and unfolding itself out of itself'. From this, it was an easy step to thinking of thought as absolutely (not relatively) autonomous, so that 'the movement of the categories' became 'the real act of production'. Of course, he continues, thought *is* thought and not another thing; it occurs in the head; it requires the process of mental representations and operations. But it does not, for that reason, 'generate itself'. It is 'a product of thinking and comprehending', that is, a product, rather, of the working-up of observation and conception into concepts. Any theory of 'theoretical practice', such as Althusser's, which seeks to establish an 'impassable threshold' between thought and its object, has to come to terms with the concrete reference (it is not, in our view, an empiricist reduction) embodied in Marx's clear and unambiguous notion, here, that thought proceeds from the '*working-up of observation and conception*' (our italics). This product of theoretical labour, Marx observes now, is, of course, a 'totality of thoughts' *in the head*. But thought does not dissolve 'the real subject' – its object – which 'retains its autonomous existence outside the head'. Indeed, Marx caps the argument by briefly referring to the relation of thought to social being, a reference consonant with his position as previously stated in the *Theses on Feuerbach*. The object, 'the real' will *always* remain outside the head, so long as 'the head's conduct is merely speculative, merely theoretical'. That is, until the gap between thought and being is closed *in practice*. As he had argued, 'Man must prove the truth i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness, of his thinking, in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking, that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.' There is no evidence here for Marx having fundamentally broken with this notion that, though thinking 'has its own way', its truth rests in the 'this-sidedness' of thinking, *in practice*. In fact, the 1857 text makes the point explicit: 'Hence, *in the theoretical method too*, the subject, society, must always be kept in mind as the presupposition' (36). On this evidence, we must prefer Vilar's brief but succinct gloss over Althusser's complex but less satisfying ones:

I admit that one ought neither to mistake thought for reality nor reality for thought, and that thought bears to reality only a 'relationship of knowledge', for what else could it do? Also that the process of knowledge takes place entirely within thought (where else on earth could it take place?) and that there exists an order and hierarchy of 'generalities' about which Althusser has had really major things to say. But on the other hand I fail to

see what 'astounding' mistake Engels was committing when he wrote (in a letter, incidentally, as a casual image) that conceptual thought progressed 'asymptotically' towards the real.

(*New Left Review*, 80)

As Vilar remarks, 'when reading the *1857 Introduction*, if one should "hear its silence", one should also take care not to silence its words'. (*New Left Review* 80, p.74–5).

Thought, then, has its own distinct, 'relatively autonomous' mode of appropriating 'the real'. It must 'rise from the abstract to the concrete' not vice versa. This is different from 'the process by which the concrete itself comes into being'. The logic of theorizing, then, and the logic of history do *not* form an 'immediate identity': they are mutually articulated upon one another, but remain distinct within that unity. However, lest we immediately fall into the opposite error that, therefore thinking is its own thing, Marx, as we have seen, immediately turned, as if in the natural course of the argument, to the critique of Hegel, for whom of course, the march of the categories was precisely the only motor. In so doing, Marx offered a critique of every other position which would transpose the *distinctiveness* of thought from reality (in terms of the modes of their production) into an *absolute distinction*. His qualifications on this 'absolute' break are pivotal. Thought *always* has built into it the concrete substratum of the manner in which the category has been realized historically within the specific mode of production being examined. In so far as a category already exists, albeit as a relatively simple relation of production, not yet with its 'many sided connections', then that category can already appear 'in thought', because categories are 'the expression of relations'. If, then, turning to a mode in which that category appears in a more developed, many-sided form, we employ it again, but now to 'express' a more developed relation, then, in that sense, it *does* remain true that the development of the theoretical categories *directly mirror* the evolution of historic relations: the 'path of abstract thought, rising from the simple to the combined', does indeed 'correspond to the real historical process'. In this *limited case*, the logical and historical categories *are indeed parallel*. The notion that Marx has prescribed that the logical and the historical categories *never* converge is shown to be incorrect. It is a matter of cases.

In other cases, however, the two movements are *not* identical in this way. And it is these instances which concern Marx, for this was precisely Hegel's error. Marx's critique of any attempt to construct 'thinking' as wholly autonomous is that *this constitutes an idealist problematic*, which ultimately derives the world from the movement of the Idea. No formalist reduction – whether of the Hegelian, positivist, empiricist or structuralist variety – escapes this stricture. The distinctiveness of the mode of thought does not constitute it as absolutely distinct from its object, the concrete-in-history: what it does is to pose, as a problem remaining to be resolved, precisely *how* thought, which is distinct,

forms 'a unity' with its object: remains, that is to say, nevertheless determined 'in the last instance' (and, Marx adds, in the 'first instance, too, since it is from 'society' that thinking derives its 'presupposition'). The subsequent passages in the 1857 *Introduction* in fact constitute some of Marx's most cogent reflections on the dialectical relation of thought, of the 'theoretical method', to the historical object of which it produces a *knowledge*: a knowledge, moreover, which – he insists – remains 'merely speculative, merely theoretical' (there is no mistaking that 'merely') so long as practice does not, dialectically, realize it, *make it true*.

If thought is distinct in its mode and path, yet articulated upon and presupposed by society, its object, how is this 'asymptotic' articulation to be achieved? The terms are here conceived as neither identical nor merely externally juxtaposed. But what, then, is the precise nature of their unity? If the genesis of the logical categories which express historical relations differs from the real genesis of those relations, what is the relation between them? How does the mind *reproduce* the concreteness of the historical world *in thought*?

The answer has something to do with the way history, itself, so to speak, enters the 'relative autonomy' of thought: the manner in which the historical object of thought is rethought inside Marx's mature work. The relation of thought to history is definitively *not* presented in the terms of a historical evolutionism, in which historical relations are explained in terms of their genetic origins. In 'genetic historicism', an external relation of 'neighbourliness' is posited between any specific relation and its 'historical background': the 'development' of the relation is then conceived lineally, and traced through its branching variations: the categories of thought faithfully and immediately mirror this genesis and its evolutionary paths. This might sound like a caricature, until one recalls the inert juxtaposings, the faithful tracing out of quite unspecified 'links', which has often done justice for modern instances of the Marxist method. It is crucial to distinguish Marx from the evolutionism of a positivist historical method. We are dealing here neither with a disguised variant of positivism nor with a rigorous a-historicism but with that most difficult of theoretical models, especially to the modern spirit: a *historical epistemology*.

Marx now employs again the distinctions he has made between different types of 'relation': immediate, mediated, etc. Previously, these had been applied to the categories of a theoretical analysis – 'production', 'distribution', 'exchange'. These distinctions are now applied again; but this time to the different types of relations which exist between thought and history. He proceeds by example. In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel begins with the category, 'possession'. Possession is a simple relation which, however, like 'production', cannot exist without more concrete relations – i.e. historical groups with possessions. Groups can, however, 'possess' without their possessions taking the form of 'private property' in the bourgeois sense. But since the historico-judicial relation, 'possession', *does* exist, albeit in a simple form, we can think it. The simple relation is the 'concrete substratum' of our (relatively simple) concept

of it. If a concept is, historically, relatively undeveloped (*simple*) our concept (of it) will be *abstract*. At this level, a connection of a fairly reflexive kind *does* exist between the (simple) level of historical development of the relation and the relative (lack of) concreteness of the category which appropriates it.

But now Marx complicates the Theory/History couplet. Historically the development of the relation is not evolutionary. No straight, unbroken path exists from simple to more complex development, either in thought or history. It is possible for a relation to move from a dominant to a subordinate position within a mode of production as a whole. And this question of dominant/subordinate is not 'identical' with the previous question of simple/more developed, or abstract/concrete. By referring the relation to its articulation *within a mode of production*, Marx indicates the crucial shift from a progressive or sequential or evolutionary historicism to what we might call 'the history of epochs and modes': a structural history. This movement towards the concepts of *mode* and *epoch*, interrupts the linear trajectory of an evolutionary progression, and reorganizes our conception of historical time in terms of the succession of modes of production, defined by the internal relations of dominance and subordination between the different relations which constitute them. It is a crucial step. There is, of course, nothing original whatever in drawing attention to the fact that Marx divided history in terms of successive modes of production. Yet the *consequence* of this break with genetic evolutionism does not appear to have been fully registered. The concepts, 'mode of production' and 'social formation' are often employed as if they are, in fact, simply large-scale historical generalizations, within which smaller chronological sections of historical time can be neatly distributed. Yet, with the concepts of 'mode of production' and 'social formation', Marx pin-points the structural interconnections which cut into and break up the smooth march of a historical evolutionism. It represents a rupture with historicism in its simple, dominant form, though this is not, in our view, a break with *the historical* as such.

Take money. It exists before banks, before capital. If we use the term, 'money', to refer to this relatively simple relation, we use a concept which (like 'possession' above) is still abstract and simple: less concrete than the concept of 'money' under commodity production. As 'money' becomes more developed so our concept of it will tend to become more 'concrete'. However, it is possible for 'money', in its *simple* form to have a *dominant* position in a mode of production. It is also possible to conceive of 'money', in a more *developed*, many-sided form, and thus expressed by a more *concrete* category, occupying a *subordinate* position in a mode of production.

In this double-fitting procedure, the couplets simple/developed or abstract/concrete refer to what we might call the diachronic string, the developmental axis of analysis. The couplet dominant/subordinate points to the synchronic axis – the *position* in which a given category or relation stands in terms of the other relations with which it is articulated in a specific mode of

production. These latter relations are always ‘thought’ by Marx in terms of relations of dominance and subordination. The characteristic modern inflexion is to transfer our attention from the first axis to the second, thus asserting Marx’s latent structuralism. The difficulty is, however, that the latter does not bring the former movement to a halt but *delays* or (better) *displaces* it. In fact, the line of historical development is always constituted within or behind the structural articulation. The crux of this ‘practical epistemology’, then, lies precisely in the necessity to ‘think’ the simple/developed axis and the dominant/subordinate axis as dialectically related. This is indeed how Marx defined his own method, by proxy, in the second *Afterword to Capital*: ‘What else is he picturing but the dialectic method?’

Take another case. Peru was relatively developed, but had no ‘money’. In the Roman Empire, ‘money’ existed, but was ‘subordinate’ to other payment relations, such as taxes, payments-in-kind. Money only makes a historic appearance ‘in its full intensity’ in bourgeois society. There is thus no linear progression of this relation and the category which expresses it through each succeeding historical stage. Money does not ‘wade its way through each historical stage’. It *may* appear, or not appear, in different modes: be developed or simple: dominant or subordinate. What matters is not the mere appearance of the relation sequentially through time, but its *position* within the configuration of productive relations which make each mode *an ensemble*. Modes of production form the discontinuous structural sets through which history articulates itself. History moves – but only as a *delayed and displaced trajectory*, through a series of social formations or ensembles. It develops by means of a series of *breaks*, engendered by the internal contradictions specific to each mode. The theoretical method, then, to be adequate to its subject, society, must ground itself in the specific arrangement of historical relations in the successive modes of production, not takes its positions on the site of a simple, linearly constructed sequential history (37).

Now Marx defines the articulation of thought and history. The ‘most general abstraction’ – in the main sense – of general (i.e. many-sided development) appear only when there is, in society, in history, ‘the richest possible concrete development’. Once this has happened ‘in reality’, the relation ‘ceases to be thinkable in its particular (i.e. abstract) form alone’. Labour, as a loose, catch-all, concept (such as ‘all societies must labour to reproduce’) has thus been replaced by the more *concrete* category, ‘labour-in-general’ (generalized production), but only because the latter category now refers in bourgeois society to a real, concrete, more many-sided, historical appearance. The ‘general concept’ has, Marx strikingly asserts, ‘become true in practice’. It has achieved that specificity, ‘in thought’, which makes it capable of appropriating the concrete relations of labour in practice. It has ‘achieved practical truth as an abstraction only as a category of the most modern society’. Thus, ‘even the most abstract categories . . . are nevertheless . . . themselves likewise a product of historical

relations and possess their full validity only for and within these relations' (p.105).

It is for this reason especially that bourgeois society, 'the most developed and the most complex historic organization of production' allows us insights into vanished social formations: provided we do not make over-hasty 'identities' or 'smudge over all historical differences'. For, it is only in so far as older modes of production survive within, or reappear in modified form within, capitalism, that the 'anatomy' of the latter can provide 'a key' to previous social formations (38). Again, we must 'think' the relation between the categories of bourgeois social formations and those of previous, vanished formations, *not* as an 'immediate identity', but in ways which preserve their appearance in bourgeois society (that is the relations of developed/simple and of dominant/subordinate in which *new* and *previous* modes of production are *arranged* or combined within it). From this basis, Marx can make his critique of simple, historical evolutionism: 'The so-called historical presentation of development is founded, as a rule, on the fact that the latest form regards the previous ones as steps leading up to itself'.

This is to regard the matter 'one-sidedly'. This does not, however, abolish 'history' from the scheme. If thought is grounded in social being, but not in social being conceived 'evolutionarily' then it must be *present social reality* – modern bourgeois society, 'the most developed and complex historic organization of production' – which forms thought's presupposition, its 'point of departure'. The object of economic theorizing, 'modern bourgeois society', is 'always what is given in the head as well as in reality' (39). And it is *this point* – it 'holds for science as well' – which is 'decisive for the order and sequence of the categories'.

It has recently been argued that, with this observation about the distinction between the historical and the logical succession of the categories, Marx makes his final rupture with 'historicism'. It is often forgotten that the point is made by Marx in the context of a discussion about the fundamentally relativised epistemological origins of thought itself: a discussion which specifically draws attention to the dependence of the logical categories on the relations, the 'forms of being', which they 'express'. Thus, not what thought produces by its own 'mechanisms' from within itself, but what is concretely 'given in the head as well as reality' is Marx's starting-point here for his discursus on the epistemological foundations of method.

'The order and sequence of the economic categories', then, do not 'follow one another in the sequence in which they were historically decisive': not because – as was true for Hegel – the logical categories engender themselves above or outside the 'real relations', but because the epistemological reference for thought is *not the past but the present historic organization of production* (bourgeois society). This is a quite different argument. Thus, what matters is not the historical sequence of the categories but 'their order within bourgeois society'. In bourgeois society, each category does not exist as a discrete entity, whose

separate historical development can be traced, but within a 'set', a *mode*, in relations of dominance and subordination, of determination, and determinateness to other categories: *an ensemble of relations*. This notion of an ensemble does indeed interrupt – break with – any straight historical evolutionism. The argument has then, sometimes, been taken as supporting Marx's final break with 'history' as such – a break expressed in the couplet, historicism/science. Marx, in my view, is drawing a different distinction, signalling a different 'break': that between a sequential historical evolutionism determining thought/and the determinateness of thought within *the present historic organization of social formations*. The relations of production of a mode of production are articulated *as an ensemble*.

There are complex internal relations and connections between them. In each mode, moreover, there is a level of determination 'in the last instance': one specific production-relation which 'predominates over the rest . . . assigns rank and influence to the others . . . bathes all other colours and modifies their particularity' (40). Marx insists that we attend to the specificity of each ensemble, and to the relations of determination, dominance and subordination which constitutes each epoch. This points towards the Althusserian concept of a social formation as a 'complexly structured whole' 'structured in dominance' and to the complementary notions of 'over-determination' and 'conjuncture'. The full theoretical implications of this modal conception takes Marx a good deal of the way towards what we may call a 'structural historicism'. But, since thought, too, takes its origins from this 'reality', which is 'always given in the head', it too operates by way of an epistemology determined in the first-last instance by the 'present historical organization of production'.

Marx now develops this argument, again by way of examples. In bourgeois society, 'agriculture is progressively dominated by capital'. What matters for the order and sequence of categories is not the evolution of any one relation – say, feudal property – into industrial capital: though, in *Capital*, Marx does at certain points provide just such a historical sketch. It is the relational position of industrial capital and landed property, or of 'capital' and 'rent', in the capitalist mode as against their relational position in say, the feudal mode, which matters. In the latter, 'combination' provides the starting-point of all theorizing. This is 'anti-historicist' if by that term we mean that the method does not rest with the tracing of the historical development of each relation, singly and sequentially, through time. But it is profoundly *historical* once we recognize that the starting-point – bourgeois society – is not outside history, but rather 'the present historic organization of society'. Bourgeois society is what 'history' has delivered to the present as its 'result'. The bourgeois ensemble of relations is the present-as-history. History, we may say, realizes itself progressively. Theory, however, appropriates history 'regressively'. Theory, then, starts from history as a developed result, *post festum*. This is its presupposition, in the head. History, but only in its realization as a 'complexly structured totality', articulates itself *as the*

epistemological premise the starting point, of theoretical labour. This is what I want to call Marx's historical – not 'historicist' – epistemology. However undeveloped and un-theoreticised, it marks off Marx's method sharply both from a philosophically-unreflexive traditional modes[sic], including that final reference to the self-generating 'scientificity' of science which indexes the lingering positivist trace within structuralism itself. Colletti has expressed the argument succinctly when he observes that much theoretical Marxism has shown a tendency

to mistake the 'first in time' – i.e. that from which the logical process departs as a recapitulation of the historical antecedents – with the 'first in reality' or the actual foundation of the analysis. The consequence has been that whereas Marx's logico-historical reflections culminate in the formation of the crucial problem of the contemporaneity of history (as Lukács once aptly said, 'the present as history') traditional Marxism has always moved in the opposite direction of a philosophy of history which derives its explanation of the present from 'the beginning of time'. (41)

Marx's 'historical epistemology', then, maps the mutual articulation of historical movement and theoretical reflection, not as a simple identity but as differentiations within a unity. He retains – in, as it were a displaced form – the historical premise, thoroughly reconstructed, inside the epistemological procedure and method, as its final determination. This is not thought and reality on infinitely parallel lines with 'an impassable threshold' between them. It signifies a convergence – what Engels called an *asymptotic movement* – on the ground of the given: here, bourgeois society as the ground or object both of theory and practice. It remains an 'open' epistemology, not a self-generating or self-sufficient one, because its 'scientificity' is guaranteed only by that 'fit' between thought and reality – each in its own mode – which produces a knowledge which 'appropriates' reality in the only way that it can (in the head): and yet delivers a critical method capable of penetrating behind the phenomenal forms of society to the hidden movements, the deep-structure 'real relations' which lie behind them. This 'scientific' appropriation of the laws and tendencies of the structure of a social formation is, then, *also* the law and tendency of its 'passing away': the possibility, not of the proof, but of the *realization* of knowledge in practice, in its practical resolution – and thus, the self-conscious overthrow of those relations in a class struggle which moves along the axis of society's contradictory tendencies, and which is something more than 'merely speculative', more than a theoretical speculation. Here, as Colletti has remarked, we are no longer dealing with 'the relationship "thought-being" within thought, but rather with the relation *between* thought and reality' (42).

It is worth referring this methodological argument in the *Introduction* to passages in the *Grundrisse* itself where the distinctions between the 'historical origins' of the capitalist mode, and capitalism as 'the present historic

organization of production' are elaborated (43). The capitalist mode, Marx is arguing, depends on the transformation of money into capital. Thus, money constitutes one of 'the antediluvian conditions of capital, belongs to its historic presuppositions'. But once this transformation to its modern form in commodity production is accomplished – the establishment of the capitalist mode of production proper – capitalism no longer depends directly upon this recapitulation of its 'historic presupposition' for its continuation. These presuppositions are now 'past and gone' – they belong to 'the history of its formation, but in no way to its contemporary history, i.e. not to the real system of the mode of production ruled by it'. In short, the historical conditions for the appearance of a mode of production *disappear into its results*, and are reorganized by this realization: capitalism now posits 'in accordance with its immanent essence, the conditions which form its point of departure in production', 'posits the conditions for its realization', 'on the basis of its own reality'. It (capitalism) 'no longer proceeds from presuppositions in order to become, but rather it is itself presupposed, and proceeds from itself to create the conditions of its maintenance and growth'. This argument is again linked by Marx with the error of Political Economy, which mistakes the past conditions for capitalism becoming what it is, with the *present* conditions under which capitalism is organized and appropriates: an error which Marx relates to Political Economy's tendency to treat the harmonious laws of capitalism as natural and 'general'.

In the face of such evidence from the *Grundrisse*, and later from *Capital* (44), it cannot be seriously maintained for long that, with his brief remarks on the 'succession of the categories' in the 1857 *Introduction*, Marx wholly relinquishes the 'historical' method for an essentially synchronic, structuralist one (in the normal sense). Marx clearly is sometimes unrepentantly concerned, precisely, with the most delicate reconstruction of the *genesis* of certain key categories and relations of bourgeois society. We must distinguish these from the 'anatomical' analysis of the structure of the capitalist mode, where the 'present historic organization of production' is resumed, analytically and theoretically, as an on-going 'structure of production', a combination of productive modes. In the latter, 'anatomical' method, history and structure have been decisively reconstructed. The methodological requirement laid on his readers is to maintain these two modes of theoretical analysis – a view eloquently endorsed in the Afterword to *Capital* I. This injunction constitutes both the comprehensiveness, and the peculiar difficulty, of his dialectical method. But the temptation to bury one side of the method in favour of the other – whether the historical at the expense of the structural, or vice versa – is, at best, an evasion of the theoretical difficulty Marx's own work proposes: an evasion for which there is no warrant in the 1857 *Introduction*. As Hobsbawm has remarked:

a structural model envisaging only the maintenance of a system is inadequate. It is the simultaneous existence of stabilizing and disruptive

elements which such a model must reflect . . . Such a dual (dialectical) model is difficult to set up and use, for in practice the temptation is great to operate it, according to taste or occasion, either as a stable functionalism or as one of revolutionary change; whereas the interesting thing about it is, that it is both. (45)

The problem touched on here goes to the heart of the 'problem of method', not only of the 1857 *Introduction*, but of *Capital* itself: a question which the *Introduction* throws light on but does not resolve. Godelier, for example, argues for 'the priority of the study of structures over that of genesis and evolution': a claim, he suggests, inscribed in the very architecture of *Capital* itself (46). Certainly, the main emphasis in *Capital* falls on the systematic analysis of the capitalist mode of production, not on a comprehensive reconstruction of the genesis of bourgeois society as a social formation. Thus, the long section *Capital III* on 'Ground Rent' opens: 'The analysis of landed property in its various historical forms belongs outside of the limits of this work . . . We assume then that agriculture is dominated by the capitalist mode of production' (47). This does not contradict the centrality of those many passages which *are* in fact directly historical or genetic in form (including parts of this same section of *Capital III*). Indeed, there are important distinctions between different *kinds* of writing here. Much that seems 'historical' to us now was, of course, for Marx immediate and contemporary. The chapter on 'The Working Day', in *Capital I*, on the other hand, contains a graphic historical sketch, which *also* supports a theoretical argument – the analysis of the forms of industrial labour under capitalism, and the system's ability, first, to extend the working day, and then, as labour becomes organized, the movement towards its limitation ('the outcome of a protracted civil war'). Both are modally different from 'the task of tracing the genesis of the money-form . . . from its simplest . . . to dazzling money-form', announced early in the same volume (48): a genesis which Marx argues 'shall, at the same time, solve the riddle presented by money', but which in fact is not cast in the form of a 'history of money' as such, but an analysis of 'the *form* of value' (own italics), as expressed in the money-form, a quite different matter. And all of these differ again, from the substantive historical material in *Capital I*, addressed explicitly to the question of 'origins' but which Marx deliberately put after, not before, the basic theoretical exposition. None of these qualifications should be taken as modifying our appreciation of the profoundly historical imagination which informs *Capital* throughout. Decisively, the systematic form of the work never undercuts the fundamental historical premise which frames the whole exposition, and on which Marx's claim for its 'scientificity', paradoxically, rests: the historically-specific, hence transitory, nature of the capitalist epoch and the categories which express it. As early as 1846, he had said this to Annenkov, *a propos* Proudhon: 'He has not perceived that economic categories are only abstract expressions of these actual

relations and only remain true while these relations exist' (49). He never changed his mind (50).

It is certainly the case that, *in extenso*, Capital deals with the forms and relations which the capitalist system requires to reproduce itself on an expanded scale: that is, with the 'structure and its variations'. Some of the most dazzling parts of the manuscript consist, precisely, of the 'laying bare' of the forms of the circuits of capital which enable this 'metamorphosis' to take place. But Marx's method depends on identifying two dialectically related but discontinuous levels: the contradictory, antagonistic 'real relations' which sustain the reproductive processes of capitalism, and the 'phenomenal forms' in which the contradictions appear as 'equalized'. It is the latter which inform the consciousness of the 'bearers' of the system, and generate the juridical and philosophic concepts which mediate its movements. A *critical* science must unmask the inverted forms of the metamorphosis of the structure of capital, and lay bare its antagonistic 'real relations'. The difficult but magnificent opening sections on Commodity-Fetishism (which it is now sometimes fashionable to dismiss as another Hegelian trace) not only lay the base, substantially, for the rest of the exposition; they also stand as a dramatic demonstration of the logic and method by which the other discoveries of the work are produced (51). Thus, though for Marx one of the truly staggering aspects of capitalism was, exactly, its self-reproduction, his theory transcended Political Economy only in so far as he could show that the 'forms of the appearance' of this structure could be read through, read behind, read back to their presuppositions – as if one were 'deciphering the hieroglyphic to get behind the secret of our own social products'. And one of the sources of these permanent, self-reproducing 'appearances' of capitalism to which Marx drew our attention was, precisely, the 'loss' (mis-recognition) of any sense of its movements as socially-created, historically produced forms:

Man's reflections on the forms of social life, and consequently also his scientific analysis of these forms, take a course directly opposite to that of their actual historical development. He begins *post festum* with the results of the process of development already to hand. The characters that stamp products as commodities, and whose establishment is a necessary preliminary to the circulation of commodities, have already acquired the stability of natural, self-understood forms of social life before man seeks to decipher, not their historical character, for in his eyes they are immutable, but their meaning.

'So too', he added, 'the economic categories, already discussed by us, bear the stamp of history'. They are 'socially valid and, therefore, objective thought-forms which apply to the production-relations peculiar to this one historically determined mode of social production' (52). But, this decipherment (which is, in its 'practical state', *his method*: 'all science would be superfluous if the outward

appearance and the essence of things directly coincided' (53)) is not *just* a critique. It is a critique *of a certain distinctive kind* – one which *not only* lays bare the 'real relations' behind their 'phenomenal forms', but does so in a way which *also* reveals as a contradictory and antagonistic necessary content what, on the surface of the system, appears only as a 'phenomenal form', functional to its self-expansion. This is the case with each of the central categories which Marx 'deciphers': commodity, labour, wages, prices, the equivalence of exchange, the organic composition of capital, etc. In this way, Marx *combines* an analysis which strips off the 'appearances' of how capitalism works, discovers their 'hidden substratum', and is thus able to reveal how it *really* works: with an analysis which reveals why this functionalism in depth *is also* the source of its own 'negation' ('with the inexorability of a law of Nature') (54). The first leads us to the ideological level, at which the 'phenomenal forms' are taken at their justificatory face-value: they 'appear directly and spontaneously as current modes of thought' – i.e. as the prevailing forms of common-sense perceptions. The second penetrates to 'the essential relation manifested within', to 'their hidden substratum': they 'must first be discovered by science'. Classical Political Economy provides the basis – but only via a *critique* – of this second, scientific level, since it 'nearly touches the true relation of things, without however consciously formulating it' (55). Marx's critique transcends its origins in Political Economy, not only because it formulates consciously what has been left unsaid, but because it reveals the antagonistic movement concealed behind its 'automatic mode', its 'spontaneous generation' (56). The analysis of the double form of the commodity – use-value, exchange-value – with which *Capital* opens, and which appears at first as merely a formal exposition, only delivers its first substantive conclusion when, in the Chapter on 'The General Formula for Capital', the 'circuit of equivalence' (M-C-M) is redefined as a circuit of disequilibrium (M-C-M'), where 'This increment or excess over the original value I call "surplus value"'. 'It is this movement that converts it (value) into capital' (57). Thus, as Nicolaus has argued:

Exploitation proceeds behind the back of the exchange process . . . production consists of an act of exchange, and, on the other hand, it consists of an act which is the opposite of exchange . . . the exchange of equivalents is the fundamental social relation of production, yet the extraction of non-equivalents is the fundamental force of production. (58)

To present Marx as if he is the theorist, solely, of the operation of 'a structure and its variations', and not, also and simultaneously, the theorist of its limit, interruption and transcendence is to transpose a dialectical analysis into a structural-functionalist one, in the interest of an altogether abstract scientism.

Godelier is aware that an analysis of the variations of a structure must embrace the notion of contradiction. But the 'functionalist' shadow continues

to haunt his structuralist treatment of this aspect. Thus, for Godelier, there are two, fundamental contradictions in Marx's analysis of the system: that between capital and labour (a contradiction *within* the structure of the 'social relations of production') and that between the socialized nature of labour under large-scale industry and the productive forces of capital (a contradiction *between* structure). Characteristically, Godelier exalts the latter (deriving from the 'objective properties' of the system) over the former (the struggle between the classes). Characteristically, Marx intended to connect the two: to found the self-conscious practice of class struggle *in* the objective contradictory tendencies of the system (59). The neat, binary contrast offered by Godelier between a 'scientific' contradiction which is objective material and systemic, and the practice of class struggle which is epiphenomenal and teleological disappears in the face of this essential internal connectedness of theory to practice. Korsch long ago, and correctly, identified the attempt 'to degrade the opposition between the social classes to a temporary appearance of the underlying contradiction between the productive forces and production-relations' as 'Hegelian' (60). Marx ended his letter outlining the theoretical argument of volume 3 thus: 'Finally, since these three (wages, ground rent, profit) constitute the respective sources of income of the three classes . . . we have, in conclusion, the *class struggle*, into which the movement of the whole *Scheisse* is resolved' (61).

Yet, when Godelier quotes Marx's letter to Kugelmann (62) – 'I represent large-scale industry not only as the mother of antagonism, but also as the creator of the material and spiritual conditions necessary for the solution of this antagonism, – he appears unable to *hear* the second half of Marx's sentence at all. Yet, for Marx, it was exactly the interpenetration of the 'objective' contradictions of a productive mode with the politics of the class struggle which alone raised his own theory above the level of a 'Utopia' to the status of a science: just as it was the coincidence of an adequate theory with the formation of a class 'for itself' which alone guaranteed the 'complex unity' of theory and practice. The idea that the unity of theory and practice could be constituted on the ground of theory alone would not have occurred to Marx, especially after the demolition of Hegel.

There remain the extremely cryptic notes (63) which conclude the *Introduction*: notes on notes – 'to be mentioned here . . . not to be forgotten', nothing more. The points rapidly touched on in these pages are, indeed, theoretically of the highest importance: but there is scarcely enough here for anything that we could call a 'clarification'. They are at best, *traces*: what they tell us is that – significantly enough – Marx already had these questions in mind. What they hardly reveal is what he thought about them. They primarily concern the superstructural forms: 'Forms of the State and Forms of Consciousness in Relation to Relations of Production and Circulation, Legal Relations, Family Relations'. What would the modern reader give for a section at least as long as that on 'The Method of Political Economy' on *these* points. It was not to be.

We can, then, merely, *note* what the problems here seemed to him to be. They touch on the question as to how, precisely, we are to understand the key concepts: 'productive forces', 'relations of production'. Moreover, they specify these concepts at the more mediated levels: the relation of these infrastructural concepts to war and the army; to cultural history and historiography; to international relations; to art, education and law. Two conceptual formulations of the first importance are briefly enunciated. First, it is said again, that the productive-forces/relations-of-production distinction, far from constituting two disconnected structures, must be conceived dialectically. The boundaries of this dialectical relation remain to be specified in any theoretical fullness ('to be determined'): it is a dialectic which connects, but which is *not* an 'immediate identity' – it does not 'suspend the real difference' between the two terms. Second, the relation of artistic development, of education and of law to material production is specified as constituting a relation of 'uneven development'. Again, a theoretical note of immense importance.

The point about artistic development and material production is then briefly expanded. The 'unevenness' of the relation of art to production is instanced by the contrast between the flowering of great artistic work at a point of early, indeed, 'skeletal' social organization – Greek civilization. Thus the epic appears as a *developed* category in a still simple, ancient, mode of production. This instance parallels the earlier example, where 'money' makes its appearance within a still undeveloped set of productive relations. Though Marx is here opening up a problem of great complexity – the graphic demonstration of the 'law of the uneven relations of structure and superstructures' – he is less concerned with developing a specifically Marxist aesthetics, than with questions of method and conceptualization. His argument is that, like 'money' and 'labour', art does not 'wade its way' in a simple, sequential march from early to late, simple to developed, in step with its material base. We must look at it in its 'modal' connection at specific stages.

His concrete example – Greek art – is subordinated to the same theoretical preoccupation. Greek art presupposes a specific set of 'relations'. It requires the concrete organization of the productive forces of Ancient society – it is incompatible with spindles, railways, locomotives. It requires its own, specific modes of production – the oral art of the epic is incompatible with electricity and the printing press. Moreover, it requires its own forms of consciousness: mythology. Not *any* mythology – Egyptian mythology belongs to a different ideological complex, and would not do. But mythology as a form of thought (at the ideological level) survives only to the degree that the scientific mastery over and transformation of Nature is yet not fully accomplished. Mythology lasts only so long as science and technique have not overtaken magic in their social and material pacification of Nature. Thus, mythology is a form of consciousness which is only possible at a certain level of development of the productive forces – and hence, since this mythology forms the characteristic content and mode of

imagination for the epic, the epic is connected – but by a complex and uneven chain of mediations – to the productive forces and relations of Greek society. Is this historical coupling, then, not irreversible? Do not ancient society and the epic disappear together? Is the heroic form of Achilles imaginable in the epoch of modern warfare?

Marx does not end his inquiry with this demonstration of the *historical* compatibility between artistic and material forms. The *greater* theoretical difficulty, he observes, is to conceive how such apparently *ancient* forms stand in relation to the ‘*present* historic organization of production’ (emphasis added). Here, once again, Marx gives a concrete instance of the way he combines, in his method, the analysis of *concrete instances*, the epochal development of complex structures *through time*, and the structural ‘law’ of the mutual connection and interdependence of relations *within the present mode of production*. The demonstration, though brief and elliptical, is exemplary. The answer to the question as to why we still respond positively to the epic or Greek drama – in terms of the ‘charm’ for us of ‘the historic childhood of humanity’ – is, however, unsatisfactory in almost every respect: a throwaway line. The resolution to these perplexing, (and, in our time, progressively central and determining) theoretical issues is achieved stylistically, but not conceptually.

What light, if any, does the *1857 Introduction* throw on the problem of ‘theoretical breaks’ in Marx? Marx considered classical Political Economy to be the new science of the emergent bourgeoisie. In this classical form, it attempted to formulate the laws of capitalist production. Marx had no illusions that Political Economy could, untransformed, be made theoretically an adequate science for the guidance of revolutionary action: though he did, again and again, make the sharpest distinction between the ‘classical’ period which opened with Petty, Boisguillebert and Adam Smith and closed with Ricardo and Sismondi, and its ‘vulgarisers’, with whom Marx dealt dismissively, but whom he read with surprising thoroughness and debated intensively to the end of his life. Yet some of his sharpest criticism was reserved for the ‘radical’ Political Economists – the ‘left-Ricardians’, like Bray, the Owenites, Rodbertus, Lasalle and Proudhon – who thought Political Economy theoretically self-sufficient, though skewed in its political application, and proposed those changes from above which would bring social relations in line with the requirements of the theory. The socialist Ricardians argued that, since labour was the source of value, all men should become labourers exchanging equivalent amounts of labour. Marx took a harder road. The exchange of equivalents, though ‘real enough’ at one level, was deeply ‘unreal’ at another. This was just the frontier beyond which Political Economy could not pass. However, merely by knowing this to be true did not, in Marx’s sense, make it real for men in practice. These laws could only be thrown over in practice: they could not be transformed by juggling the categories. At this point, then, the critique of Political Economy, and of its radical revisionists, merged with the metacritique of Hegel and *his*

radical revisers – the left-Hegelians: for Hegel, too, ‘conceived only of abstractions which revolve in their own circle’ and ‘mistook the movement of the categories’ for the profane movement of history; and his radical disciples thought the Hegelian system complete, and only its application lacking its proper finishing touch. Certainly, when Marx said of Proudhon that he ‘conquers economic alienation only within the bounds of economic alienation’, it was a direct echo, if not a deliberate parody, of the critique he had already made of Hegel (64).

It is this point – that bourgeois relations must be overthrown in practice before they can be wholly superseded in theory – which accounts for the complex, paradoxical, relations Marx’s mature work bears to Political Economy: and thus for the extreme difficulty we have in trying to mark exactly where it is that Marxism, as a ‘science’, breaks wholly and finally with Political Economy. The difficulty is exactly that which has in recent years so preoccupied the discussion of Marx’s relation to Hegel: and it may be that we must tentatively return the same kind of answer to each form of the question.

The whole of Marx’s mature effort is, indeed, the *critique* of the categories of Political Economy. The critique of method is positively opened, though not closed, in the *1857 Introduction*. Yet Political Economy remains Marx’s only theoretical point-of-departure. Even when it has been vanquished and transformed, as in the case of the dismantling of the Ricardian theory of wages, or in the break-through with the ‘suspended’ concept of surplus value, Marx keeps returning to it, refining his differences from it, examining it, criticising it, going beyond it. Thus even when Marx’s theoretical formulations lay the foundations of a materialist science of historical formations, the ‘laws’ of Political Economy still command the field, theoretically – because they dominate social life in practice. To paraphrase Marx’s remarks on the German ‘theoretical conscience’, Political Economy cannot be realized in practice without abolishing it in theory, just as, on the other side, it cannot be abolished in practice until it has been theoretically ‘realised’.

This is in no sense to deny his ‘breakthroughs’. In a thousand other ways, *Capital*, in the doubleness of its unmasking and reformulations, its long suspensions (while Marx lays bare the circuits of capital ‘as if they were really so’, only to show, in a later section, what happens when we return this ‘pure case’ to its real connections), its transitions, lays the foundation of a ‘scientific’ critique of the laws of capitalist production. Yet it remains a *critique* to the end: indeed, the critique appears (to return to the *1857* text) as paradigmatically, *the form of the scientificity of his method*.

The nature of this ‘end’ toward which his critique pointed must be spelled out. It was not an attempt to erect a scientifically self-sufficient theory to replace the inadequate structure of Political Economy: his work is not a ‘theoreticist’ replacement of one knowledge by another. In the aftermath of the 1848 upheavals, Marx’s thought did, clearly, increasingly cast itself in the form of

theoretical work. No doubt the systematic and disciplined nature of this work imposed its own excluding and absorbing rhythms: the letters eloquently testify to that. Yet for all that, the theoretical labour of which the successive drafts and predrafts of *Capital* were the result, had, as its prospective 'end' – paradoxically – something other than the 'founding of a science'. We cannot pretend, as yet, to have mastered the extremely complex articulations which connect the scientific forms of historical materialism with the revolutionary practice of a class in struggle. But we have been right to assume that, the power, the historical significance, of Marx's theories are related, in some way we do not yet fully understand, precisely to this *double articulation* of theory and practice. We are by now familiar with a kind of 'reading' of the more polemical texts – like the *Manifesto* – where the theory is glimpsed, so to speak, refracted through a more 'immediate' political analysis and rhetoric. But we are still easily confused when, in the later texts, the movement of the classes in struggle is glimpsed, so to speak, refracted through the theoretical constructs and arguments. It is a strong temptation to believe that, in the latter, only Science holds the field.

Marx's mature method – we would argue – does not consist of an attempt to found a closed theoreticist replacement of bourgeois Political Economy. Nor does it represent an idealist replacement of alienated bourgeois relations by 'truly human' ones. Indeed, great sections of his work consist of the profoundly revolutionary, critical task of showing exactly how the laws of political economy *really worked*. They worked, in part, through their very formalism: he patiently analyses the 'phenomenal forms'. Marx's *critique*, then, takes us to the level at which the real relations of capitalism can be penetrated and revealed. In formulating the nodal points of this *critique*, Political Economy – the highest expression of these relations grasped as mental categories – provided the only possible starting point. Marx begins there. *Capital* remains 'A Critique of Political Economy': not 'Communism: An alternative to Capitalism'. The notion of a 'break' – final, thorough, complete – by Marx with Political Economy is, ultimately, an idealist notion: a notion which cannot do justice to the real complexities of theoretical labour – *Capital* and all that led up to it.

Much the same could be said of Marx's relation to Hegel, though here a substantive 'break' is easier to identify – for what it is worth, it is identified time and again for us by Marx himself. It is the relation to Hegel in terms of *method* which continues to be troubling. Early and late, Marx and Engels marked the thoroughgoing manner in which the whole idealist framework of Hegel's thought had to be abandoned. The dialectic in its idealist form, too, had to undergo a thorough transformation for its real scientific kernel to become available to historical materialism as a scientific starting-point. It has been argued that Marx and Engels cannot have meant it when they said that something rational could be rescued from Hegel's idealist husk: yet, for men who spent their lives attempting to harness thought to history in language, they appear peculiarly addicted to that troubling metaphor of 'kernel' and 'husk'. Could

something remain of Hegel's *method* which a thorough going transformation would rescue – when his *system* had to be totally abandoned as mystification and idealist rubbish? But that is like asking whether, since Ricardo marked the closure of a bourgeois science (and was a rich banker to boot) there was anything which the founder of historical materialism could learn from him. Clearly, there was: clearly he did. He never ceased to learn from Ricardo, even when in the throes of dismantling him. He never ceased to take his bearings from classical Political Economy, even when he knew it could not finally think outside its bourgeois skin. In the same way, whenever he returns to the wholly unacceptable substance of the Hegelian system, he always pinpoints, in the same moment, what it is he learned from 'that mighty thinker', what had to be turned 'right-side-up' to be of service. This did not make the mature Marx 'a Hegelian' any more than *Capital* made him a Ricardian. To think this is to misunderstand profoundly the nature of the *critique* as a form of knowledge, and the dialectical method. Certainly, as far as the *1857 Introduction* is concerned, time and again, Hegel is decisively abandoned and overthrown, almost at the very points where Marx is clearly learning – or re-learning – *something* from his dialectical method. One of the traces of light which this text captures for us is the illumination of this surprisingly late moment of supercession – of return-and-transformation.

Endnotes and references

1. I have used the translation of the *1857 Introduction* by Martin Nicolaus, in his edition of *The Grundrisse*, Pelican (1973).
2. Pierre Vilar, 'Writing Marxist History', *New Left Review* 80.
3. *Samtliche Schriften*, vol 1. Translated in Hook, *From Hegel to Marx*.
4. *Grundrisse*, pp. 156–7.
5. On the 'real relations/phenomenal form' distinction, Cf. especially, Mepham, 'the theory of Ideology in *Capital*' (below) and Geras, 'Essence + Appearance: Aspects of Fetishism in Marx's *Capital*'. *New Left Review* 65.
6. *Capital* I, p. 745.
7. Karl Korsch, *Three Essays On Marxism*, Pluto Press (1971).
8. *Capital* I, p. 76.
9. *Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 118–9, 121.
10. In the *Critique of Hegel's Dialectic*.
11. *Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts*, p. 190.
12. *ibid*, p. 44.
13. Cf: Marx's ironic use of the terms, *Grundrisse*, p. 450.
14. *Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts*, p. 186–7.
15. *The Holy Family*.
16. *Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts*, p. 190.
17. *1857 Introduction*, p. 90.
18. Cf: *Introduction*, p. 88, 100.

19. *Introduction*, p. 93.
20. Cf: Marx's more developed notion of how the 'activity' of labour appears in the product as a 'fixed quality without motion': *Capital I*, pp. 180–1.
21. *Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts*, pp. 140–1.
22. *Introduction*, p. 92.
23. *Introduction*, p. 93: the distinctions between the three types of identity-relation are not as clearly sustained as one could wish.
24. *Introduction*, p. 94.
25. *Grundrisse*, p. 161
26. *Capital I*, p. 356.
27. *Grundrisse*, p. 148: our italics.
28. *Introduction*, pp. 90–3.
29. Cf: the dismantling of the theory of wages in *Capital II* and of the 'Trinity Formula' In *Capital III*.
30. *Introduction*, p. 98.
31. *Introduction*, p. 100
32. On Hegel's and Marx's usage of 'concrete', Cf: Kline, 'Some Critical Comments on Marx's Philosophy', in *Marx & The Western World*, ed. N. Lobkowicz, Notre Dame (1967).
33. *Grundrisse*, p. 255.
34. *Introduction*, p. 101.
35. L. Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 42, 58.
36. *Introduction*, p. 102.
37. Marx's discussion of a further example – labour – has been omitted here.
38. *Introduction*, p. 105.
39. *Introduction*, p. 105–6.
40. *Introduction*, p. 107.
41. L. Colletti, *Marxism & Hegel*, pp. 130–1.
42. *ibid*, p. 134.
43. Cf: *Grundrisse*, p. 459ff.
44. Cf: *Capital I*, p. 762ff.
45. E. Hobsbawm, 'Marx's Contribution to Historiography', in *Ideology & Social Science*, ed. Blackburn.
46. Cf: Godelier, 'Structure & Contradiction in *Capital*', in Blackburn, (ed), *op cit.*: and developments of the same argument in Godelier, *Rationality & Irrationality In Economics*, NLB.
47. *Capital III*, p. 720.
48. *Capital III*, p. 48.
49. Reprinted in *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 209.
50. He quoted his reviewer in the *European Messenger* to the same effect, without demur: in the *Afterword* to the 2nd Edition of *Capital*.
51. For a recent, and striking, reassertion of the centrality of 'Fetishism' to *Capital* from an 'anti-historicist' interpreter of Marx, Cf. The 'Interview with Lucio Colletti', in *New Left Review* 86.

52. The quotes are from *Capital I*, pp. 74–5, 169, 42, Cf, also, Engels to Lange, in *M-E Correspondence*, p. 198.
53. *Capital III*, p. 797.
54. *Capital I* p. 763.
55. On this point, also, Cf: ‘Interview with L. Colletti’, *New Left Review* 86.
56. *Capital I*, p. 542.
57. *Capital I*, p. 150.
56. In Blackburn, (ed), op. cit. pp. 324–5.
59. The two strands are beautifully and inextricably combined in passages such as, e.g. *Capital I*, p. 763ff.
60. K. Korsch, *Karl Marx*, p. 201.
61. To Engels: *Correspondence*, p. 245: dated 30/4/1868.
62. Dated 11/7/1868, only three months later.
63. *Introduction*, pp. 109–11.
64. *Holy Family*, p. 213.