

A 'READING' OF MARX'S 1857 INTRODUCTION
TO THE GRUNDRISSE .

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INTRODUCTION TO
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*The text throughout is the Pelican Grundrisse, ed. & trans. by M. Nicolaus.

The 1857 Introduction to the Grundrisse is one of the most pivotal of Marx's texts. It is also one of his most difficult, compressed and 'illegible' texts. In his excellent Foreword to the Pelican edition of the Grundrisse, Nicolaus warns that, by its very nature, 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" (P25). Vilar observes that the 1857 Introduction is one of those texts "from which everyone takes whatever suits him" (NLR 80). I hope to have avoided the second of these traps, and I have certainly experienced the hazard of the first. However, the Intro remains - indeed, with the growing interest in Marx's method and epistemology, 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 the 1857 text: a reading which, because of the difficulties Nicolaus has drawn to our attention must necessarily take the form of an 'explication', laborious though that form is. It is, of course, not a reading tabula rasa, not a reading 'without presuppositions': thus, a 'reading' which, in Althusser's sense, is a 'guilty' one. It reflects my own problematic, inevitably. I hope it also throws some undistorted light on Marx's.

In a Letter of Jan 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 time 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 that hope. 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 in relation to both the Phenomenology and the Logic, but was, 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". (Samtliche Schriften, vol 1. 1922. Translated in Hook, From Hegel to Marx). (Incidentally, the references to Hegel and the Dialectic are far more frequent, in letters and asides in Marx's mature work than recent commentators would have us believe: and they almost invariably take the form of noting the 'rational' kernal within the 'mystical shell', and the need to take, by transformation, what was valid in Hegel while abandoning its mystical form. Marx may have been mistaken in thinking that he could work with-and-against Hegel in this way: but the attempts, by Althusser and others, to represent this as a casual metaphor which 'Marx did not really mean' is extremely difficult to substantiate from the evidence. Cf My fuller discussion of this in the "Settling Accounts With Althusser" paper).

The 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 kernal', nor the method of its transformation, nor an exposition of the results of that transformation: the Marxian dialectic. Not even a systematic account of how the latter would differ from the former. The 1857 Introduction, and the far more compressed 1859 Preface to the Critique, together with other scattered asides, have therefore to do duty for the unfulfilled parts of Marx's project, and the 1857 Intro in particular as representing 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 on "The Economic Categories" which now comprise the Grundrisse. These Notebooks are, themselves, enormously comprehensive in scope, digressive and complex in structure: and quite unfinished - "rough drafts". The fact that a methodological Introduction was drafted for what were essentially working notebooks is not at all surprising, for, as well as their rich theoretical content, the Grundrisse is noteworthy for allowing us "so direct an inquiry into...his method of working" (Nicolaus, P25). Rosdolsky remarked that it "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 an abstract, a resumé and guide, to the 'problems of method' concretely and more expansively applied in the analysis of the Notebooks themselves: material which, then, by revision, expansion and compression, modification and further labour, was transformed, first, into the Critique, and then into the successive versions of Capital. It was not, therefore, intended to stand wholly in its own right. The examples it treats 'on the run' are often drawn from, and can be found in a much developed form, in the Notebooks themselves. Indeed, one of the most illuminating uses of the Intro is to turn from the brief methodological resumes, to the substantive passages to which they refer, and to see how the method informs the actual working-through of a particular point in the demonstration. But it remains what it says - an 'Introduction'. Moreover, the tentative character of the text was signified by Marx's decision in the end not to publish it. The Intro was, as we know, replaced by the terser Preface: and some of the central propositions of the Intro are modified, or at least suspended, by the time they reached the Preface. Thus, "A general introduction which I had drafted is omitted, since on further consideration, it seems to me confusing to anticipate results which have still to be

substantiated, and the reader who really wishes to follow me will have to advance from the particular to the general" - an injunction which, superficially, at least, appears to reverse the proposition offered in the Intro, to advance from the general to the concrete (though, as we shall see, it is one of the temptations open to a reading of the Intro which is not sensitive to the Hegelian heritage of Marx's thought, to confuse the 'particular' with the 'concrete'). Still, an immediate contrast of the Intro with the Preface (where a classical conciseness is everywhere in play, quite different from the linguistic playfulness and conceit of the Intro) will remind us that, despite its brilliant demonstrations and its dense argumentation, the 1857 Intro remains, even with respect to Marx's method, provisional.

I

In both the opening and closing sections of the main text of the Intro (I omit, for the moment, Marx's very sketchy notes at the end), Marx's reprise of his method proceeds via a critique of the methods 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". This marks the beginning of a lightning critique of the ideological presuppositions of Political Economy. The C18 theorists, up to and including Rousseau, find a general point of departure in 'the individual' - projected as an ideal, true for all time. Smith and Ricardo take over this ideological projection and found their theories upon it. Yet 'the individual' cannot be the point of departure, but only the result. Rousseau's 'natural man' appears as a stripping away of the entanglements and complexities of modern life, the 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 and restricted forms of feudal

society, and subject to the enormous revolution it undergoes under early capitalism, that the modern concept of 'the individual' could appear at all. A whole historical and a whole 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 Intro. 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 (to anticipate): what appears 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 an absurdity: as absurd as the notion of language without individuals living and talking together. It takes, then, a gigantic social development to produce 'the isolated individual' producer as a concept: only a highly elaborated form of developed social connectedness can appear - take the 'phenomenal form' - of men pursuing their egoistic interests as 'indifferent', isolated, individuals in a 'free' market organized by an 'invisible hand'. (To be strictly accurate, Marx argues that the "all sided dependence" appears as a mutual indifference: however, since the relation must continue to be mediated, it is - by the medium of money, which thus comes not only to be a 'universal' mediator of equivalent exchanges, but as that which regulates the relations between individuals from the outside - "as something alien to them, autonomous, as a thing". In this way, the "social connection between persons is transformed into a social relation between things". Note that Marx does not say men become things, but that the relation of men/men in exchange is expressed in the form thing/thing; this displacement of form enables a relation of mutual interdependence to

assume the form, appear, as a spontaneously organized relation of 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" (Grund P156-7).

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, as we shall see later, Marx identifies as the core of what is scientific in his dialectic - forms the core methodological procedure, not only of this text and of the Notebooks, but of Capital itself. What's more, this 'methodological' procedure becomes, once more in its turn, a theoretical discovery of the utmost importance: the theoretical discovery which in its expanded form (there are several provisional attempts to formulate it in the Grund) constitutes the pivotal section, early in Capital I, on "The Fetishism Of Commodities" and is in fact the basis of what we can only call the mature theory of ideology embedded in Capital itself. (The crucial references here are Geras, "Marx & The Critique of Political Economy", in Blackburn: John Mepham, "The Theory of Ideology In Capital", Radical Philosophy. Cf. also my paper, "Structure And Forms: Marx's Mature Theory Of Ideology") (Early examples of the theme of connection/indifference and of the application of the phenomenal form/real relation distinction in method are: Grundrisse, the "Chapter on Money", P156-165, and the "Chapter on Capital", esp. P241-7).

The Introduction, then, opens with this methodological argument: the critique of certain 'normal' types of logical abstraction. The argument

is basic to any discussion of Marx's method. 'Political Economy' operates as a theory through its categories. How are these categories formed? The normal method is to try to isolate and analyse a category in terms of those elements which remain 'common' to its empirical-historical referent through all epochs and all types of social formation. This attempt to identify, by means of the logic of abstraction, as the core of a concept or category, those parts of it which remain common and stable through history is really a type of 'essentialism'. This search for the stable essence is precisely what marks out 'vulgar' Political Economy as, fundamentally, an ideology, an apologetics, founded on the cart-horse of 'common-sense'. But, in its more sophisticated forms (that is, in the forms of theorizing which, for Marx, represented the most advanced modes of thought in bourgeois society), the search for 'essences' is not absent, even though arrived at in more sophisticated ways. Hegel, the summit of classical German philosophy, developed a mode of thought which was the very opposite of static: his grasp of movement and of contradiction is what raised him above all other forms of logical theorizing available to him, in Marx's eyes. Yet, because the movement of the dialectic was cast, for Hegel, in an idealist form, his thought retained the notion of the 'essential core' which 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): a point of arrival, in Hegel, which never ceased both to alarm and confuse his 'left' disciples. Similarly, despite its significant theoretical advances, Political Economy, too, speaks of 'bourgeois' production and of private property as if these were the secret 'core' or 'essence' of the concepts 'production' and 'property': as if these latest forms exhausted the historical content of the categories. In this way, Political Economy too presented the capitalist mode of production,

not as a historical structure and creation, the work of men under certain conditions, and thus subject to the movement of historical forces, but as the natural and inevitable state of things, economically. In this way, bourgeois thought helped to 'naturalize' (i.e. to pass off a historical structure as a natural product) the form of society which gave rise to it. At this level, classical Political Economy (despite its enormous scientific advances over its 'vulgar' forms) retained an ideological presupposition at its 'scientific' heart.

In criticizing this mode of theorizing, in terms of the reduction of specific historical relations to their lowest-common, trans-historical essence, Marx begins to distinguish the method of historical materialism from the modes of theorizing from which, at another level, his own thought made its first, decisive departure. The argument here - still in a fairly simple form - fleetingly anticipates the alternative which he develops more fully in the subsequent pages. There is no 'production-in-general' (just as there is no ideology-in-general): only distinct forms of production, specific to time and conditions. (One of those distinct forms is - rather confusingly - 'general production': i.e. production based on a specific kind of labour, 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' ("socially determined individual production": Grund. P83), there can be no guarantee, outside history, outside its specific, concrete conditions, that those conditions will always be fulfilled, or remain constant through time. Except in the most common-sense way, there is no scientific sense 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' (i.e. to be 'essentially the same as') production in, say, slave,

clan or communal society. (Later, in Capital, Marx is to remind us that this transformation of feudal bondsmen into 'free labour', which appears as a 'natural' precondition for capitalism, has, indeed, a specific history: "the history of..this expropriation is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire": Cap I, P715). 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'. The 'unity' which Marx's method is intended to produce is not this 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 begins, 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" (Cap I, P542). This has to do with the fact that, within it, historical relations have "already acquired the stability of natural, self-understood forms of social life". (P75). Its categories, then, "are forms of thought expressing with social validity [note well] the conditions and relations of a definite, historically determined mode of production" (Cap I, P76). But it presents these relations as "a self-evident necessity imposed by Nature as productive labour itself" (ibid, P81). Thus, though Political Economy in its classical form (Cf: the footnote on ibid P81 distinguishing 'classical' from 'vulgar' Pol. Econ.) has "discovered what lies beneath these forms", it has not asked certain key questions (e.g. the origin of commodity-production based on 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 was (and the principle of 'historical specificity' reminds us of the fundamentally historical cast of his thought), he was definitively not a historical evolutionist. Every child knows, he once remarked, that production cannot cease for a moment (Letter to Kugelmann). So, there must be something 'in common', so to speak, which corresponds to the idea of 'production-in-general': all societies must produce the conditions of their livelihood and thus reproduce themselves one way or another. This is the type of abstraction which sifts out the lowest common characteristics of a concept and identifies this unproblematic core with its scientific content. But it is a mode of theorizing which 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 which allow us to further refine, segment, split and recombine any general category: which allows 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 enable us to understand why certain relations appear only in the most ancient and the most developed forms of society and in none in between. Such concepts are far in advance of those which unite under one chaotic general heading the quite different things which have appeared, at one time or another, appeared under the heading, 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 is more significant than 'abstracting' a few, simple, basic, common 'language universals'. We must observe - it is a common strategy throughout the Intro - that Marx establishes his difference here both from the method of Political Economy and from Hegel. The Intro 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' in his attack on Proudhon.

The terms of this later critique of Proudhon are particularly germane to this argument against 'abstraction' as a procedure, for it serves to remind us that something more than a mere logical quibble is involved: "Is it 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 is 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 if, finally, you leave out of account the dimensions of this space, there is absolutely nothing left but 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 is 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", Marx adds, "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". (Poverty of Philosophy, P118-9, 121).

Marx had long ago noted ('Critique of Hegel's Dialectic') 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". He had also grasped "the self-creation of man as process". However, as we know, Marx radically criticized Hegel for conceiving this "mobile nature" of the categories as a form of "self-genesis", as "merely formal because abstract", and thus as "stopping short at the last act". Hegel "conceives them only in their thought form". Thus "The whole movement..ends in absolute knowledge". (EPM P190, Bott 1844, P200). The apparent constitution of the real world becomes, in Hegel, "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 'immediate' identity of opposites, the ultimate identity of Mind with itself "only in..thought form". Marx himself 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 it 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". The same point is made 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". (P121). The essence of the critique is the same as Marx offers on several other occasions, including the 1857 Intro. Hegel did understand 'production', he did understand 'labour': but ultimately, it was what Marx called, "labour of the mind, labour of thinking and knowing" (EPM 44). However dialectical however supercessive 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 unity ('identity') which Marx proposes in the Intro is not of this kind: it is to be discovered in the real, concrete relations: a unity of many determinations, in which, however, "essential differences" are preserved.

Marx ends this section 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 the generalized concept of universal

human 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 lega-juridical and political structures and relations. What is common to production, then, as produced by the process of mental abstraction of its 'common' attributes, cannot enable us to grasp, concretely, any single, "real historical stage of production".

II

Next, then, how, are we to conceptualize the relation between the different phases of production - production, distribution, exchange, consumption? Can we conceive them [as the Dobb translation puts it] "as organically coherent factors", or simply as "brought into haphazard relation with one another, i.e. into a simple reflex connection"? This is no simple matter. Marx is, throughout his later work, insisting that the superiority of the dialectical method lies, in part, in its ability to trace out the 'inner connexion' 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, (where an inner connexion must be traced between things otherwise merely juxtaposed), 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 is almost a structural-functional paradigm for production. Marx, interestingly, also glosses it satirically in a Hegelian fashion, by adopting some of Hegel's categories for the syllogism from the Logic: production could be thought of as the Hegelian 'generality', or 'universality', consumption as 'particularity', exchange as 'singularity'. (Cf: Marx's use of the terms, in Grund P450, and the reference to their source in Hegel's Logic, P600, in the footnote, Grund P450). 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 may be real enough, but they remain conceptually extremely shallow. Even the critics of this position, Marx adds, have not taken their critique far enough. The critics say that the relations between these spheres have not been adequately formulated, theoretically. For Marx, however, the critique runs deeper. It refers, again, to his earlier critique of Hegel, a matter, as we have suggested, for all practical purposes, 'settled' for Marx by the 1840's. The critics assume that to syllogism is wrong because it contains a logical error - a textbook mistake. For Marx, the error is conceptual because it is 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 as "independent, autonomous neighbours", but where this appearance is false, an inversion. What Marx is criticizing the Hegelian syllogism for here is precisely that which some recent expositors of the Intro, including Althusser, believe the Intro to support: namely, the illusion that conceptual mistakes can be clarified by a theoretical practice alone, that is 'wholly within thought'.

In that difficult 1844 text The Critique of Hegel's Dialectic, to which we have already referred, 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" (P186, EPM). 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" (P187). If, for Hegel, philosophy supercedes religion, it is not "real religion, the real state, or real nature, but religion itself already as an object of knowledge". (EPM, P186). Thus, "The history of man is transformed

into the history of an abstraction" (The Holy Family). The objectivating 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 those 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". Even Nature in Hegel, Marx says, "has shown itself to be the Idea in the form of other-being". (EPM, P190, 192). Thus "The act of abstraction..revolves within its own circle". The language is, again, 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". (Intro, P90).

Thus, neither the functional disconnectedness of Political Economy nor the formal supercessions of the Hegelian Logic will serve to reveal the inner connexion between processes and relations in society, which are deeply interpenetrated, which form 'a. unity' of a distinct type, but which must be grasped as differentiated, as real 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. 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 Intro, which immediately follow, provide an answer to this question. This forms the sections of the text which deal with the relations between production, distribution, consumption and exchange. Since some of the thorniest problems of any 'reading' of this text occur here, it is worthwhile listing some of the difficulties before plunging into exposition. First, we must beware of collapsing too swiftly or blurring the distinctions between Hegelian and Marxian 'identities', and thus indistinctly placing the so-called 'break' between Hegel and Marx. This pivots on the question - secondly - as to whether or not we must read most of this section 'ironically': that is, as merely 'coquetting' with Hegelian modes of expression - to be followed (perhaps in Section 3) by Marx's own, quite distinct, and preferred method. Third, we must beware of reading this text 'progressively': that is, unwarrantably bringing back into our reading of the 1857 Intro concepts which belong to still later, and unanticipated, phases of Marx's work. Fourth, how much is Marx already thinking the problems of analysing a social formation in terms of historical process, limits, contradictions and interruptions? Fifth, how far is the question of 'determination' central to this text? Why and how, for example, can it be said - as Marx does here - that 'production ultimately determines'? And is this finding imported as a premise into the text, or argued through? The answers to these questions will not, of course, be conclusively provided by a 'reading'; but only a 'reading' which is attentive to the actual movement of the argument in the text can lend one or other way of resolving these puzzles the sort of supporting evidence they require. It is to be hoped that the rather laborious exposition which follows, and on which we attempt to found such a 'reading', will also be rewarding in this way.

The methodological issue here is, precisely, how are the 'relations' of material production to be thought? What mode of conceptualizing the relations between the different levels or 'movements' of a social formation

which is 'complexly structured' will be adequate? There are two special difficulties with the text at this point, which we must note. The first is this: On P90-92, Marx explores different types of identity-relations. These are neatly summarised, on P93, as constituting three rather distinct types. However, as the distinctions are actually made in the text, the three types are not neatly discriminated, but tend rather to unfold into one another. This is especially true of the distinction between the second and the third type of 'identity' between production and consumption. The second, related issue is this: does Marx make a clean break with some or all of the Hegelian 'identities': if so, where does the break occur? if not, what then is the nature of the critique which he offers on P94, with the pivotal sentence beginning, "The important thing to emphasize here is only that.."

We can now look more closely at the text. 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 notes, however, that Political Economy was already well aware of this consumption-inside-production, and allowed for it in the concept, "productive consumption". Marx does not directly say whether or not he regards this 'direct identity' as correct or not. Clearly, he believes it to be inadequate. My own understanding is that he thought it 'right enough', though - as he says earlier (P88) and later (P100) of other formulations - "trite and obvious", or "tautologous" or 'true at a rather simple level', but still offering only a 'chaotic conception', and thus requiring "further determinations", greater analytical development: but I cannot substantiate that reading from the text itself. The inadequacy of this type of 'immediate identity', however, is clearly signalled in Marx's reference to Spinoza. Spinoza's 'identity', as the footnote reminds us, is one where an "undifferentiated identity" cannot support the introduction of more refined "particular determinations".

However, in so far as 'immediate identities' reign, identical propositions can be reversed. If $A = B$, then $B = A$. Marx, then, reverses the proposition. Thus, 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. If 'productive consumption', then also 'consumptive production'. Now Political Economy employs these distinctions 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". It is precisely 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, however, now reiterates (P91) - I think we must read the passage as if delivered in his own voice: "Production then is also immediately consumption" and vice versa. But now he adds a second type of relation: that of mediation: the relation of "mutual dependence". Production and consumption also mediate one another. It is important to understand precisely what Marx means by 'mediate' here. He means that each cannot exist or complete its passage and achieve its result without the other. Each is the other's completion. This is achieved by each providing 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 finds its end in the other. In this mediating movement, Marx later observes (P93), each side is "indispensible" to the other; but they are not identical - they remain "external to each other".

Marx now dives in to say precisely how each produces the other. It is here that the distinctions begun to slide towards one another. In analysing how consumption completes production (second type of relation), and vice versa, Marx also covers ground which he is later to resume as belonging to the third type of identity: that in which "each creates the other in completing itself and creates itself as the other". The text tends to slide between these two senses. Consumption produces production in two ways. First, (P93) because production's object - the product - is only finally 'realized' when it is consumed. Here Marx makes use of a distinction, which is more fully developed in Capital I (P180-1). Production is something 'in itself' - "objectified activity", but it is also, in another form, something for the next part of the process, consumption: it is a finished object - an object "for consumption's active subject." In Capital, Marx noted that in production, "The process disappears in the product." "Labour has incorporated itself with its subject: the former is materialized, the latter transformed. That which in the labourer appeared as movement, now appears in the product as fixed quality without motion. The blacksmith forges and the product is a forging". It is in the passage of the forms, from productive activity to objectified product, that the mediating movement between production and consumption is accomplished.

But, secondly, consumption produces production by creating the need for "new production". I believe 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": and it is, strictly speaking, and significantly, the need to reproduce for which consumption is made mediately responsible.

In "correspondingly" the same way, production produces consumption. Marx notes three senses in which this is true. First, production furnishes

consumption with its 'object'. Second, production also 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 (i.e. belonging to 'consumption'), existing in their own right, separate from the object which, so to speak, satisfies. But, as early as the 1844 Mss, especially in the section on "Private Property And Communism", Marx, in speaking of man's subjective powers as 'objective', had pointed to the way in which needs are the product of an historical development, not the trans-historical subjective property of individuals, developing in and through a constant reciprocal appropriation of the objective world subjectively. "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" (1844 Mss, P140). In short, 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 apprehension - "perception" - and, simultaneously, develops the 'need' which the object satisfies. "Music alone awakens in man the sense of music", he said in 1844. 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." (EPM P141). "The production of new needs in the first historical act", he observed in the GI. Here, "the object of art...creates a public which is sensitive to art". (Intro P92) Production, then, forms objectively the subjective needs and modes of the consumer, just as consumption reproduces production as a subjectively-experienced impulse, drive or motive. The complex shifts between objective subjective dimensions which are tersely accomplished in this passage seem to be incomprehensible without the gloss I have offered from the 1844 Mss,

even if, here, the language of 'species being' has altogether vanished.

The argument is now resumed (Intro., P 93). 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. This is the condition of reciprocally sustaining but different, a relation which is necessary but which does not abolish distinctions. Thirdly - a relation, which has no precise title, but which is clearly that of an internal connexion between two sides which are, crucially, linked by the passage of forms, by real processes through historical time: and where, as compared with relation (2), production not only proceeds to its completion in production, but is itself reproduced again through consumption. I think this reading is justified by Marx's observation that, in this third type of relation, each "creates the other in completing itself and creates itself as the other". I think it is also justified by Marx's insistence that "in the first act of production", an "inclination" is raised which, then, produces "the need for repetition". Thus, the 'first act' of production has a determining power to form, subjectively, a need, impulse, motive, and that this need then has the power to set or spark the circuit into motion once again. Here we find not only what distinguishes the third type of relation from the second; but also, what permits Marx, on the succeeding page (P 94), 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. My own view is that some of Marx's most crucial and sophisticated

the 'immediate identity' of the Rational with the Real, and thus the harmony between the exalted movements of Objective Mind and the sordid particularities of the Prussian state. In the real historical world, however, the 'subject' of production and consumption are not one. Capitalists produce: workers consume. The process links them: but their intents are not immediate.

Second, these are not Hegelian 'moments' of a single act, which are only the fleeting and temporary realizations of the march of objective Mind or the World Spirit. These are the circuits of a process, an historical process with "real points of departure": a process through time, where "the whole process again runs its course": a process with specific forms through which value is prescribed to pass "for its [realization]".

Third, whereas Hegel's identities form a self-regulating self-sustaining circuit, in which no one moment has priority, Marx insists that the historical process through which production and consumption "create the other in completing itself" has its breaks, its determinations, its moment of determinacy. Production, not consumption, initiates the circuit. Consumption is then required if the cycle of production/consumption is to be renewed. But this 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 (P 94), which also opens into the new, third, section. It relates to an earlier argument. Marx knows that 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 surface forms of this self-generation of the system. On P 161 of the Grund he remarks that "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 and which presupposes their reciprocal independence and indifference". But it is absolutely crucial - the pivot of the difference both between himself and Hegel and himself and the Political Economists -

that this equilibrating movement has no eternal, no ethereal guarantees.

"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". (Cap I, P 356). Each 'moment' - apparently so perfectly linked to the next - retains the essential difference between the various social subjects: each has its social conditions - each is subject to its own social laws: indeed, each is linked to the other in the circuit by other, quite distinct, though determinate, 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 "in accordance with social laws", what will return to the producer as his share in the augmented world of products which his production has sent on their passage towards their 'realization' in consumption. Nothing except the maintenance of these determinate conditions, nothing but the operation of these 'social laws' can guarantee the continuity of the 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." (Grund. P 148)

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 which rests on the mediating movement of other processes not yet named: for example - distribution. 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, Marx establishes the couplet - production-consumption - in terms of an immediate Hegelian unity: opposites/identical. He then dismantles 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.

Marx notes that, in Political Economy, everything appears twice. Capital is a factor of production: but also a form of distribution, in the shape of interest + profits. Wages are a factor of production but also a form of distribution. Rent is a form of distribution: but also - in its landed property form - a factor of production. Each element, then, appears as both determining and determined. What breaks this seamless circle of determinations? This can only be done by reading back from the apparent identity of the categories to their differentiated pre-suppositions. (This 'reading back' to the historical presuppositions of categories takes us back to the very beginning of the Intro - to P 84,85 in particular.)

Here, once again, Marx is concerned to establish the moments of break, of determinacy, in the self-sustaining circuits of capital. Two of the finest glosses on this passage are to be found in the dismantling of the theory of wages in Capital II, in the unpacking of the Trinity Formula in Capital III. 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. We cannot follow in full the say in which this Formula is dismantled in Capital. Cf: Capital III P 963-7. The procedure in the Intro is briefer. Distribution appears to be, in common sense, the prime mover of the system. It casts the agents of production into their income classes, assigns each individual to his position. It is distribution which appears 'determining'. Yet, Marx suggests, behind the obvious forms of distribution, (wages, rent, interest) lie, not simply economic categories, but real, historic relations: 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, however, 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. What is more, before distribution can take place in the form of wages, rent and profits, a prior kind of 'distribution' must take place: the distribution of the means of production between expropriators and expropriated, and the distinction 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. This is the most extensive

passage in which the prior determination of production over distribution is established in the 1857 manuscript.

The sense in which production, finally, determines, as the 'real point of departure' is, however, itself subject to important qualification (P 97). For production to take place, the instruments of production must be distributed; and men distributed as between the classes of production ("subsumed under specific conditions of production"). This is a kind of distribution: one which, fundamentally, Marx subsumes under production. At this level, production requires its own sort of distribution.

Production, however, does not appear utterly without its own 'determinations'. Once this distribution of instruments & agents has been made, they form the starting conditions for the realization of value within the mode. Only then can distribution in its more normal sense - distribution of the products, whether in the form of wages, rent or profit - take place. This second type of distribution, however, is clearly subordinate to production in this wider, mode-specific sense, and must be considered as determinate to it.

When we come to the third section, (P 98) Exchange, then, the demonstration is even briefer, more abrupt. 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, the development and structure of production in the form, say, of exchanges between town and country. And 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. This eternally monistic circularity is, if not broken and buried, then suspended. 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 differentiation. Here again, as we noted earlier, one of the central distinctions between a Hegelian and a Marxism method is pinpointed.

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. When the identity of opposites is combined with the other Hegelian principle of logic, the 'negation of the negation', we find the process of dialectical movement restoring an identity between things which appear different. 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, with some equally distinct other term, relation, movement etc 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. It is difficult to spell out in the abstract how such a procedure works in its specific application, though the Intro does begin to lay this out for us. It 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 larger, more inclusive structure. 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 abstract, essentialist dialectical law. Differentiated unities are also therefore concrete: the concept retains the empirical moment as a privileged and undissolved 'moment' within a theoretical analysis without thereby making 'empiricist': the concrete analysis of concrete situations. Moreover, these relations are always determinate. Only 'under specific conditions', only 'in determinate conditions', can such unities be formed: each term of a relation depends on the fulfilment of 'certain conditions' for the unity to be sustained and to operate.

In the case before us, this determinacy Marx gives to production. But why does production determine? There are several reasons particular to this case, but, for his final vindication of this part of the argument, he returns to the point which is fundamental to the whole exposition, and which he has used to differentiate his own type of complex unity from the 'immediacy' of Hegelian essentialism: the possibility of break, of interruption, of the suspension of conditions which ruptures the unities: above all, to the fact that the processes take place irrevocably in historical time and under historical conditions. "The process always returns to production to begin anew". Further, determination by production is exercised, not only as the determinacy of production over all other moments of the process, separately, but in production's role as specifying "the different relations between different moments" (our italics). In short, in production's role in 'determining' the form of those combinations out of which complex unities are formed. This role of production as the principle of the formal articulations of a mode is crucial. 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 and the points of conjuncture between all the other 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: to the method of Political economy.

(P.100) In considering the political-economy of a country, where do we begin? One possible starting position is with "the real and concrete" given, observable, empirical concept, such as population. For production is inconceivable without a population which produces. This starting point, however, would be wrong. Population, like "production" before is a deceptively transparent, natural, 'given' category, 'concrete' only in a common sense way. 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 C17 economists. It is also the "metaphysical" method of Proudhon which Marx pilloried so brilliantly and brutally in the Poverty of Philosophy P. 118. 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". It is crucial to note, however, that 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. etc. But the method which produces the 'complex concrete' is concrete in something closer to Hegel's sense: that is, it reveals or produces the concrete, not as a simple category, but as '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 men
reflexive or copy theory of truth is now adequate. For example, such a method reconstructs the apparently general and simple category, 'population', as in fact contradictorily composed of the more concrete historical relations: slave-owner/slave, lord/serf, master/servant, capitalist/labourer. What is achieved by this method, is, therefore, a theoretical clarification

of the categories: this clarification is a specific practice which theory is required to perform upon history, it constitutes the first part of theory "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 b. society", what "appears" as "the phenomenal form" - the necessary form of the appearance of "a process which is taking place behind" (p.255).

Marx sums up the point. The concrete is concrete, in history, in social production, and thus in conception, not because it is simple and straightforward, but because it exhibits a certain kind of necessary complexity. As with Hegel, Marx makes a decisive distinction between the particular and the concrete: the notion that what is immediately given (particular) to our apprehension is also concrete, as against theory, which is abstract, may be true - and is currently living through a long revival: but it is not Marx. Thus, 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 given concrete in history makes its appearance once again, now as the historical substratum to thought; for, he asserts, 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 (NOTE) the point of departure for observation and conception".

Marx's formulations here (Pl01) are really quite seminal; the more

so since they have, in recent years, become the focus, 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", (For Marx, p.42), 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'." (FM P 58). For 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 but an easy step to thinking of thought as absolutely (not relatively) autonomous, so that the movement of thought - "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 - and here we find Marx's most direct formulation of a 'theoretical practice' - "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, necessarily an empiricist reduction) which is 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 it does not encompass or dissolve "the real subject" - its object - which "retains its autonomous existence outside the head". Indeed, Marx now caps the argument by briefly referring to the relation of thought to social being, a reference fully 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 said, vis-a-vis Feuerbach, "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." (Theses) there is no evidence for Marx having fundamentally broken with this notion that, though thinking "has its own way", its "truth" - its verification - can only rest 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" (P102). On this question, then, bearing in mind the evidence of this passage, 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..." (NLR 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" (NLR 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, wholly outside or beyond social being, 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 main, 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 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: for him, Marx says, thinking "became the real being":

in which therefore "the conceptual world as such is thus the only reality". In short, 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 stricture which Althusser has finally been obliged to acknowledge as 'theoreticist' - empiricism's mirror-image. 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 Intro. 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.

What are the consequences, for method, of this remarks that the subject, 'society' remains the presupposition of thought? 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? Thought and its subject, society, 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 differ from the real genesis of those relations, what is the relation between them? How can the former be said, not merely reflect, express or approximate to the latter, but (more actively) to appropriate them? How does the mind reproduce the concreteness of the historical world in thought?

The answer to these questions has something to do with the way history, itself, so to speak, enters the 'relative autonomy' of thought: the manner in which the historical subject 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, an external relation of 'neighbourliness' is posited between any specific relation and its 'historical background': the 'development' of the relation is then conceived linearly, and traced through its branching variations: and the categories of thought faithfully and immediately mirror this genesis and its evolutionary paths. This might sound like a caricature, until one recalls not only the evolutionary ways in which Marx's method have frequently been absorbed and subsumed within positivist historiography, but even the inert juxtaposing of like with like, and the faithful tracing out of quite unspecified 'links' which has often done justice for modern instances of the Marxist method. It is therefore as important to distinguish Marx from the evolutionism of a positivist historical method as it is, on the other side, to insist that he did not, either, conceive thought in terms of an absolute theoretical anti-historicism, in which thought produces itself by what Althusser calls its own "knowledge-effects", its own "mechanisms", with no empirical or determinate reference whatsoever, and with an "absolute barrier" between the concept and the reality it represents and appropriates. We are dealing here, I believe, 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 distinct and quite specific historical epistemology.

In the course of what follows Marx employs the distinctions he has previously established between different types of 'relation': immediate, mediated, etc. Previously, these had been applied to the content of a theoretical analysis - to 'production', 'distribution', 'exchange'. These distinctions are now applied again, this time at a meta-level: they now refer 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 possess. Groups can, however, 'possess' without their possessions being 'private property' in the modern 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. Marx seems to argue here that if a concept is, historically, relatively undeveloped (simple) our concept (of it) will be rather abstract. At this level, a connection of a fairly reflexive kind does exist between the level of historical development of the relation and the relative concreteness of the category which expresses or 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 in terms of simple/more developed, or abstract/concrete. By referring the relation to its articulation with a mode of production (which necessarily consists of different relations and levels), 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 concept of mode and epoch, which interrupts the linear movement 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 which exists between the different relations which constitute a mode, 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: "every child knows.." Yet the consequences of this break with evolutionism for Marx's epistemology and method 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 redistributed. In the same way, the notion of breaks and transitions between modes, or the notion of the ancient modes which survive, in transformed ways, within modes of production which succeed them, has been, if not repressed, then smoothed out in the course of what often takes the form of a false empirical thoroughness. Yet, clearly, with the concepts of 'mode of production' and 'social formation', Marx draws our attention to 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 it 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. The couplet dominant/subordinate point 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 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 our ability to think of 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 2nd 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, e.g. 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 thus form the discontinuous structural sets through which history articulates itself. History moves - but only as a delayed movement, through a series of social formations or ensembles: 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 position on the site of a simple, linearly-constructed sequential history.

One more example: Labour. (P103-5). Labour is a simple and ancient category. It has been subject to a distinct theoretical evolution, from

the Physiocras, who identified one kind of labour - agriculture - as the source of wealth, to Adam Smith, who identified labour-in-general as the source of wealth. Was this development the product of a theoretical practice only, "wholly within thought?" Only in the limited sense that we cannot think with coins, only with the mental representation of the money-relation. Adam Smith says 'labour-in-general'. Since this is, in common-sense terms, more 'generalised' a concept, than labour-as-agriculture, is it also therefore more abstract? Paradoxically, not at all. 'Labour-in-general' expresses a much more concrete set of historical relations than the apparently concrete Physiocratic notion of 'agricultural labour'. For what makes labour under bourgeois society the extraordinarily productive power it is, is the fact that labour has been generalized, not in the head but in fact historically. "Individuals can with ease transfer from one labour to another" - 'indifferently'. "Not only the category, labour, but labour in reality has here become the means of creating wealth in general and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form". (P104). It is indeed money and the dominant wages-form which has 'mediated' the passage of labour under and into this domain of general equivalence. Marx regards this as one of the essential determinant conditions for bourgeois society - the appearance of 'free labour' in the market, and the mediation of money as the 'generalizer', the form of equivalence, between different types of labour. (As Lenin succinctly paraphrased it, "the production of commodities is a system of social relationships in which different producers produce various products (the social division of labour), and in which all these products are balanced off against one another in exchange. Consequently, the element common to all the commodities is not concrete labour in a definite branch of production, but abstract human labour - human labour in general".

From "Marxism" in Karl Marx, Man, Thinker and Revolutionist, ed. D. Ryazanoff Martin Laurence, 1927. Now Marx delivers the articulation of thought and history as he conceives it. The "most general abstractions" - in the real sense of 'general' (i.e. many-sided developed) - 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, indicating something as weak a concept as 'all societies must labour to reproduce' has thus been replaced by the category, 'labour-in-general', which is a more concrete category; but only because the latter category now refers to a real, concrete, more many-sided, historical appearance. The 'general concept' has, Marx now staggeringly 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, he says, "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". (Pl05)

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". The argument here is a sophisticated one. For, in so far as older modes of production survive within, or reappear in modified form within, capitalism, the "anatomy" of the latter can provide "a key" to the anatomy of previous social formations. Contrary to some interpretations, however, this part of the argument asserts, not contradicts, the centrality of the diachronic, historical, developmental aspect. For, Marx adds, not in a simple, linear sense, smudging over all historical differences: nor ideologically, as is true of the Political Economists, who read bourgeois relations backwards as the only, natural, pre-given end of all historical development. In short, we must 'think' the relation between the categories of bourgeois social formations and those of previous, vanished formations, not as an 'immediate identity' ("But one must not identify them"): one must think that relation in ways which preserve what is specific - and contradictory - to bourgeois society (i.e the relations of

developed/simple or of dominant/subordinate in which new and previous modes of production are arranged or combined within bourgeois society). 'For production to go on at all they (the factors of production) must unite. The specific manner in which this union is accomplished distinguishes the different epochs of the structure of society from one another.' (CapII p.36-7) One must therefore think 'a relation' in ways which preserve differences, distinctions, specificities - that is, "always with an essential difference". 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, 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'. That is, the object of economic theorizing, "modern bourgeois society", is "always what is given in the head as well as in reality": the succession of the economic categories in any "historical, social science" thus "express the forms of being, the characteristics of existence, and often only individual sides of this specific society, this subject". And it is this point - which "holds for science as well" - which is "decisive for the order and sequence of the categories". I have gone through this argument in what may seem wearisome detail, because it has recently been argued - by the Althusserians especially - that, with this observation about the distinction between the historical and the logical succession of the theoretical categories, Marx makes his final rupture with historicism. It is usually forgotten that this 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 method.

"The order and sequence of the economic categories", then, do not "follow one another in the sequence in which they were historically decisive": but 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. This is a quite different argument. Thus, what matters for Marx is not the historical sequence of the categories but "their order within bourgeois society". What is more within bourgeois society, each category does not exist as a discrete entity, whose separate historical development can be traced, but within a 'set', a mode - arranged in relations of dominance and subordination, of determination, and determinateness to other categories: an ensemble of relation. This notion of what, in structuralist language, is sometimes called a 'combination', or a combinatoire, 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, and providing the basis of a fully theoretical, or the potential for a 'fully theoreticised' a-historicism. 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. All the relations of production of a social formation appear in it articulated as an ensemble: this is what constitutes it as a mode. There are complex internal relations and connexions 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." Marx's method insists that we attend to the specificity of each ensemble, and to the relations of determination, dominance and subordination which each epoch establishes

between its relations. 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".

This is the argument which Marx now develops, 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. Still, what matters 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. In Marx's view, it is the latter which 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, realises itself progressively. Theory, however, appropriates history 'regressively'. (We must add that for Marx, this regressive, retrospective grasp by theory of practice can itself only be provisional, since the 'knowledge' of objective social tendencies which theory so 'reproduces' is not complete until it forms the basis of a conscious class practice which 'produces' the future in historical action). Theory, then, starts from history as a developed

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result. This is its presupposition, in the head. In short, history, not in a simple sequential treaty, but in its realization as a 'complexly structured totality', a mode of production, articulates itself also as the epistemological premise, the starting point, of a theoretical labour.

And this is what I want to call Marx's historical - not 'historicist' - epistemology: one which, however, undeveloped and un-theoreticised, marks off Marx's method sharply both from a philosophically unreflexive empiricism, and from the whole 'philosophy of science' in its traditional modes, including that final reference to the self-generating 'scientificity' of science which sometimes marks the lingering positivist trace within structuralism itself. Colletti (from whom, in other respects I differ) 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 Lukacs 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'." (Marxism and Hegel, P130-1).

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. But 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 - as Engels said, an asymptotic movement - on the ground of the given: here bourgeois society as the ground or object both of theory and practice. And 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 core, the "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". (M&H, 134).

I believe the 1857 Introduction has forced upon us a quite new and radical notion of 'the historical', especially in its relation to Marx's theory and method. The reconceptualization thus put in train has consequences, not only for Marx's 'epistemology' but for his theory of historical formations itself historical materialism. This is a complex question which we can only lightly pencil in here. But it is worth while briefly referring this methodological argument in the Intro to a passage such as that which begins on P459 of the Grundrisse itself (Notebook IV), where the same considerations are applied, now to the distinctions between the 'historical origins' of the capitalist mode, and capitalism as 'the present historic organization of production' - a distinction which points back to what I have called Marx's 'structural historicism.' The capitalist mode, Marx is arguing, depends on the transformation of money into capital. Thus, money constitutes one of "the antideluvian conditions of capital, belongs to its historic presuppositions". But once this transformation to its modern form in commodity production is accomplished - we may call it the establishment of the capitalists 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". (Quotes, P459) 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" (P460). This argument is then 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 the 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".

Passages like these in the Grundrisse are by no means the only place in Marx's mature work where this distinction between the historic pre-conditions for capitalism, and the fully constituted capitalist mode is drawn. This theme forms a major part of the first volume of Capital, especially the sections devoted to "The General Law Of Capitalist Accumulation". Here, Marx distinguishes the processes of "primitive accumulation" (severance of the worker from the means of production, driving of peasants off the land, enclosure, the system of colonies and national debt. etc.) from the more advanced and developed forms of capitalist accumulation (centralization of capital, "purposive application of science" to the improvement of technique, socialized forms of labour, changes in the organic composition of capital, leading to monopoly, a falling rate of profit and crises, etc). (Cf: the magnificently sustained argument on these points in the 25th Chapter of Capital 1). Marx himself

summed it up: "As soon as this process of transformation has sufficiently disintegrated the old society, has decomposed it through and through... then the further socialization of labour and the further transformation of land and of the other means of production...takes on a new form." (Capital I P762). In the face of the evidence from Capital itself, it surely cannot be seriously maintained for long that, with his brief remarks on the "succession of the categories" in the 1857 Intro., Marx wholly relinquishes forever the 'historical' method for the essentially synchronic, structuralist one. What seems more accurate is to say that, in his method, Marx clearly distinguishes the diachronic, developmental axis of his analysis (marked especially in those extensive parts of Capital where he is unrepentantly concerned, precisely, with the most delicate reconstruction of the genesis of certain key categories and relations of bourgeois society) from the 'anatomical' analysis of the structure of the capitalist mode (where the "present historic organization of production" is treated, analytically and theoretically, as exhibiting its own laws, tendencies and forms, that is, as an on-going 'structure of production', or as a combination of productive modes.) The distinction between these two, different, but inter-related modes of analysing capitalism (in terms of its genesis, and of what that Genesis has delivered to us as a 'complexly-structured' result), is crucial. The requirement laid on his readers is to maintain these two modes of theoretical analysis at once - a view eloquently expressed in the Afterword to Capital I. "This injunction constitutes both the comprehensiveness, and the 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, either in this part of the 1857 Intro., or in the four volumes of Capital (which clearly employ both modes selectively) or in the substantive evidence provided by looking at Marx's mature work, with its relative weights and apportionment of methods, as "an artistic whole". ("Then there is still the fourth book to write - the historico-literary one.

This is relatively the easiest for me as all the problems are solved in the first three books and thus this last one is more of a repetitive in historical form. But I cannot make up my mind to send anything off until I have the whole thing in front of me. Whatever shortcomings they may have, my writings do have this advantage that they are an artistic whole and that is only attainable through my habit of not letting them be printed until they lie before me complete". M to Engels, July 1865. Q in McLellan P338, MEW XXXI P132). 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". (E.Hobsbawm, "K.Marx's Contribution to Historiography", in Ideology In Soc. Science, ed. R. Blackburn, P280.)

IV

The problem touched on here goes to the heart of the 'problem of method', not only of the 1857 Intro, but of Capital itself: a question which the Intro throws light on but does not resolve, and which we can pursue only a little way further at this stage in the argument.

In his persuasive attempt to present Marx as a structuralist in the Levi-Strauss sense, Godelier, for example, points to "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. ("Structure & Contradiction In Capital", in Blackburns Ideology in Social Science: more fully developed in Rationality & Irrationality in Economics, NLB.)

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: an 'anatomical' study, made via the sustained critique of the categories of Political Economy not a reconstructed history: thus, the long section on 'Ground Rent', which forms Part IV of Capital III, opens with the remark: "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 ..." (Cap III P.720). 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 'historical' writing here: much that seems 'historical' to us now was, of course, for Marx immediate and contemporary - quotations from Parliamentary speeches, Factory Inspector's Reports, from the Economist: 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 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 (P.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 in any connected, sequential way, but an analysis of "the form of value" as expressed in the money-form (our italics), a quite different matter. (Godelier rightly calls this last example "the ideal genesis of economic categories". (Capital 47-8: Godelier 348 in Blackburn). And all of these differ again, from the substantial historical material in Parts VII and VIII of Capital I, which is 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 (especially volume 2), 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 written 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. He therefore falls into the error of the bourgeois economists, who regard these economic categories as eternal and not as historical laws which are only laws for a particular historical development, for a definite development of the productive forces". (Pov of Phil, volume, P 209). He never changed his mind. (Thus, when in 1873, his reviewer in The European Messenger precised him to this effect, he quoted him without dissent: "On the contrary, in his [Marx's] opinion every historical period has laws of its own .. As soon as society has outlived a given period of development, and is passing over from one given stage to another, it begins to be

subject also to other laws." Afterword to 2nd German Edition of Capital, Capital I, P 18). Thus, even if we allow Godelier's observation - "the genesis of a structure can only be studied under the 'guidance' of a pre-existing knowledge of that structure" - as a provisional formulation which squares with that taken by Marx in the 1857 Intro, the matter cannot rest there. It is certainly the case that, in extenso, the volumes of Capital deal with the forms and relations which the capitalist system requires to reproduce itself on an expanded scale: that is, it deals with the 'structure and its variations', including its reproduction of the principal condition of its own continuing functioning: the recreation of the basic elements, 'capital' and 'labour'. 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 it would be drastically to simplify Marx's method in Capital to treat his analysis as consisting, essentially, of a structural-functionalist exposition of capitalism. There are already two, discontinuous levels already at work here: the 'real relations' which sustain the reproductive processes of capitalism, and the 'phenomenal forms' in which they appear, in the consciousness of the 'bearers' of the system, in the juridical and philosophic concepts which mediate its movements, and even, sometimes, in the so-called theory (vulgar Political Economy). Already, then, a critical science was required to unmask the inverted forms of the metamorphosis of capital, and lay bare its real relations. The difficult opening sections on Commodity-Fetishism not only lay the base, substantially, in nucleus, for the rest of the exposition; they also stand as a dramatic demonstration of this method. Thus, though for Marx one of the truly staggering aspects of capitalism was, exactly, its capacity to appear as a self-sustaining, self-producing, self-regulating system, he still required that this mediation via the "forms of the appearance" of its operation had to be read - that is, read through, read behind, read back to their presuppositions - as if one were "decyphering the hieroglyphic,

to get behind the secret of our own social products". And one of the sources of the permanent, self-producing quality of capitalism to which Marx drew our attention in this particular respect was, precisely, the 'loss' (mis-recognition) of any sense of them 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". (Capital I, P 74-5). "So too", he added, "the economic categories, already discussed by us, bear the stamp of history" (Cap. I, P 169). 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" (Cap I, P 42) (Cf: also Engels' letter to Lange, 29.3.65 in Correspondence, P 198). But, this decyphering - which is, in its "practical state", his method ("all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided": Capital III, P 797) - is not just a critique: it is a critique of a certain distinctive kind - that which not only lays bare the 'real relations' behind their 'phenomenal forms', but does so in a way which also reveals as contradictory and antagonistic what, on the surface of the system, appears only as functional to its self-expansion. This is the case with each of the central categories with which Marx deals: 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, at

the same time, reveals why this functionalism in depth is also the source of its own "negation" ("with the inexorability of a law of Nature": Capital I, P 763). The first level is 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". 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 by a critique - of this second, scientific level, since it "nearly touches the true relation of things, without however consciously formulating it". Marx's critique, however, transcends its origins in Political Economy, not because it formulates consciously what has been left unsaid, but because it reveals the antagonistic movement concealed behind its "automatic mode", its "spontaneous generation" (Capital I, P 542). 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 exploitation (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" (P 150). He concluded the following chapter on "Contradictions in the Formula of Capital", thus: "Our friend, Moneybags... must buy his commodities at their value, and yet at the end of the process must withdraw more value from circulation than he threw into it at starting. His development into a full-grown capitalist must take place both within the sphere of circulation and without it. These are the conditions of the problem." (P 166). 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" (Blackburn 324-5). 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-functional one, in the interest of an altogether abstract scientism.

Marx's most mature reflection on his own method comes to us, unfortunately, largely by way of a quotation from someone else (we have already quoted his Russian reviewer in the long extract and translation Marx included in his 2nd Afterword): it is a defence he accepted without reservation. Certainly, the fundamentally structuralist cast of his imagination - all that is summed up in Marx's use of the terms forms, functions, circuits, epochs, modes, etc. - is not to be doubted in this passage: but neither is the reconstitution of the diachronic through the analysis of synchronic variation: "The one thing which is of moment to Marx is to find the law of the phenomena .. in so far as they have a definite form and mutual connexion within a given historical period. Of still greater moment to him is the law of their variation, of their development. i.e. of their transition from one form into another, from one series of connexions into a different one... The scientific value of such an inquiry lies in the disclosing of the special laws which regulate the origin, existence, development, death of a given social organism and its replacement by another and higher one." (Cap I, P 18-19).

Godelier is aware that an analysis of the variations of a structure which are compatible with the reproduction of its constant functions is not a theory of change: and hence that Marx's 'structure' must embrace the notion of contradiction. But the functionalist shadow continues to haunt his 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 structures). Characteristically, Godelier exalts the latter (deriving from the "objective properties" of the system) over the former (the struggle

between the classes). Characteristically, (as the argument of, say, the Chapter on "The Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation" in Capital I makes clear), Marx intended to connect the two: to found the self-conscious practice of class struggle in the objective contradictory tendencies of the system. The two strands are indeed beautifully and inextricably connected in passages such as the following (Capital I P 763): the establishment of the capitalist mode "on its own feet"; "then the further socialization of labour"; the centralization of capital, combined with the development of the "cooperative form of the labour process", the "conscious technical application of science" and "the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world market"; finally, "the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital" and "a class always increasing in number, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself ...The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production... they become incompatible with their capitalist integument...Their integument is burst asunder.." The neat, binary contrast 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'. (Karl Marx, P 201). We must suppose Marx knew what he was doing when, in his letter outlining the argument of volume 3, he ended: "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." (To Engels, 30.4.68. In Correspondence, P 245). Yet, when Godelier quotes Marx's letter (11.7.68, only 2½ months later) to Kugelmann - "I represent large-scale industry not only as the mother of the antagonism, but also as the

creator of the material and spiritual conditions necessary for the solution of this antagonism", - he appears literally unable to hear the second half of Marx's sentence at all. It seems to be impossible, within the transformatory logic of the fully-blown structuralist enterprise, for a writer as sophisticated as Godelier to conceive of the material conditions and 'unconscious' effects of a system requiring the self-conscious practice of a class to realize its inner contradictions. Yet, for Marx, clearly, it was exactly the interpenetration of the 'objective' contradictions of a productive mode with the 'subjective' 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: even when - as in the middle of the most technical sections of Capital volume 2 - what seems most to be preoccupying him is "the beauty and greatness of it: this spontaneous interconnection, this material and mental metabolism which is independent of the knowing and willing of individual and which presupposes their reciprocal independence and indifference" (Grund P 161). (Korsch's attempt to relate this more 'scientific' phase - post 1848 - of Marx's work to the different tempo of the European class struggle is of considerable interest. Cf: Part II of Karl Marx and Marxism and Philosophy, P 92ff.). Marx knew that this "exchange of equivalents" was "only the surface layer": that "This system rests on capital as its foundation, and, when it is regarded in isolation from capital, as it appears on the surface, as an independent system, then it is a mere illusion, but a necessary illusion". (Grund P 509) (his italics).

There remains only the extremely cryptic Notes (Intro, P 109-111) at the end of the Intro: notes on notes - "to be mentioned here".. "not to be forgotten", nothing more. The points rapidly touched on in these pages

are, indeed, extremely interesting and theoretically of the highest importance. They index, in an extremely truncated manner, complex questions which lie at the outer perimeter of Marx's reflections on method. There is scarcely enough here for anything that we could call a 'clarification' of these traces. 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. Characteristically, 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 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, merely, note what the problems here seemed to him to be, since they constitute some significant part of the uncompleted project - and thus the work of theoretical completion - which Marx bequeathed. They touch, centrally, on the question as to how, precisely, we are to understand and work with the key concepts: 'productive forces', 'Relations of production'. Moreover, they specify these at the more mediated levels: the relation of these primary, 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, with respect to the productive force/relation of production distinction, that (far from constituting two disconnected structures, between which an 'objective' contradiction arises) they must be conceived dialectically. It is a dialectic which, as we know from Capital, is itself subject to the delayed historical movement: thus, with large-scale industry, even the practical application of science to material production can become a "productive force". The boundaries of this dialectical relation, however, 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 development of art to production is instanced by the contrast between the flowering of artistic work at a point of early, indeed, "skeletal" social organization. Thus a great art form - e.g. the epic - appears as a developed category in a still simple stage of the ancient code of production. This is an instance which points back to the earlier example in the main text of the Intro, where 'money', as a relatively developed category makes its appearance within a still undeveloped set of productive relations. In short, 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 Marxist aesthetics at this point, than he is with his previous concerns: his argument is that, like 'money' and 'labour' and 'production' itself, art does not 'wade its way' in a simple, sequential march from early to late, simple to develop, keeping in step with its material base. We must look at it in its 'modal' connexion and relatedness with other 'relations' at specific stages. Here, too, Marx suggests, the more concrete our investigation, the more "specified" the interconnections, the more quickly the operation of that 'abstract' law of "uneven development" can be clarified.

His concrete example - Greek art - is subordinated to the same theoretical preoccupation. Greek art presupposes a quite specific set of relations with other '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 - it 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 complex, and would not do. But, nor is mythology to be understood as a matter of religious consciousness or popular imagination exclusively. For mythology survives only to the degree that the scientific mastery over Nature is not yet fully accomplished. The domination of the forces of Nature by imagination (mythology) lasts only so long as science and technique has not overtaken magic in its pacification of Nature. Thus, mythology is a form of consciousness which is only possible at a certain stage or level of development of the productive forces - and hence, since this mythology is the characteristic material 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. Do not, then, certain developments in the productive forces and relations render certain art forms unthinkable? Is the heroic form of Achilles imaginable in terms of modern warfare?

It is important, however, that Marx does not end with this question of the historical compatibility between artistic and material forms. Difficult though it is to specify, concretely, the precise ways in which the development of artistic forms are bound up with social development, the greater theoretical difficulty is to conceive how such apparently ancient forms stand in relation to the "present historic organization of production". "The point", he had already said, "is not the historic position of the economic relations in the succession of different forms of society ... rather, their order within bourgeois society". 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 'law' of the mutual connection and interdependence of relations within the present mode of production. The demonstration, then, though alarmingly brief and elliptical, is exemplary. The answer to the question - in terms of the "charm" for us of "the historic childhood of humanity" - is, unfortunately, unsatisfactory in almost every

respect. The resolution to these perplexing, (and, in our times, progressively central and determining) theoretical issues is achieved stylistically, but not conceptually.

Let us in conclusion, consider what light, if any, the 1857 Intro throws 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, Boisgilbert and Adam Smith and closed with Ricardo and Sismondi, and the '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 would not or could not pass. However, merely by knowing this to be true did not, in Marx's sense, make it real for men in practice. He would have agreed with Engels when he remarked that, in so far as bourgeois laws of production did still operate, "the larger part of the product does not belong to the workers who have produced it" but to capital. (Preface to Pov. of Phil). 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 meta-critique of Hegel and the left-Hegelians: for Hegel, too, conceived "only of abstractions which revolve in its 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. Korsch is persuasive when he suggests that, from a very early period in his life, it was this "natural scientist whom he had discovered beneath the mystifying disguise of the philosophical explorer of the human mind" which really attracted Marx to Hegel, and that he abandoned the Hegelian route once "he felt able to represent in a direct and rational way those material connections between men and things and between men and men which formed the real contents hidden under an apparent speculative connection of ideas" (Karl Marx, P179-80). Certainly, when Marx said of Proudhon that he "conquers economic alienation only within the bounds of economic alienation" (Holy Family, P213), it was a direct echo, if not a deliberate parody, of the critique he had already made of Hegel.

It is this point - that bourgeois relations must be overthrown in practice before they can be wholly superceded 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 self-sufficient 'science', breaks wholly and finally with Political Economy. The form of the question is, of course, exactly that which has in recent years so preoccupied Marxist theoretical discussion vis-a-vis Hegel: and it may be that we must tentatively return the same kind of answer to each form of the question. (Cf: the more extended treatment of the Marx/Hegel relation in my Settling Accounts With Althusser paper).

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 famous 1857 Intro. 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 never seems free of it: he 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. Thus, to paraphrase Marx's remarks on the German "theoretical conscience", he reminds us that 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'. (Critique of Hegel's Phil. of Right, P48-9)

This is in no sense to deny his 'breakthroughs'. The three cardinal points of his transformation of Pol. Econ. which he identified to Engels in a letter - on surplus value, labour-power and the real relations behind the wages-form - constitute a small part only of the transformations of the Ricardian system which he accomplished. 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), and 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 the form of the scientificity of his method.

The nature of this 'end' must be spelled out. It was not an attempt to erect a scientifically self-sufficient theory to replace the inadequate structure of Pol. Econ: his work is not a theoreticist replacement of one knowledge by another. Formed as it was, principally, in the aftermath of the 1848 upheavals, Marx's thought did, clearly, increasingly cast itself in the form of theoretical work, though this was - contrary to some impressions - by no means all that he was doing in the period between 1850 and his death. No doubt the complexity of the work imposed its own rhythms. Yet for all that, the theoretical labour of which the successive drafts and pre-drafts of Capital were the result had, as its prospective

'end' - paradoxically - something other than the 'founding of a science'. That is why historical materialism, though 'scientific', is not a science like others which have contended with it for supremacy in this field. We cannot pretend, as yet, to have mastered in any way the extremely complex articulations which connect the scientific forms of historical materialism with the revolutionary practice of a class in practice. But I think we have been right to assume that, the power, the historical significance and the grip of Marx's theories are related, in some way we do not yet fully understand, precisely to this double articulation of theory and practice. (One of the fascinations of the 1857 Intro is that it makes this question - admittedly, in a theoretical form - the self-conscious centre of the inquiry, in a way which is more thoroughly disguised in the substantive analyses of Capital.) 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 the political analysis and rhetoric. But we are still easily confused when, in the later texts, the movement of the classes in struggle are 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. At the same time, we must register our dissatisfaction with the manner in which this dialectical difficulty at the heart of Marx's enterprise has been resolved, as it were, 'from the other side'. If the 1857 Intro shows, conclusively, that Marx's method is not the method of positivist science, it also demonstrates that there is no simple theory of praxis to be won from his mature work either.

Marx's mature method, then, does not consist - we would argue - 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. For great sections his work consists 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 and

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unpacks the 'phenomenal forms'. They worked by representing themselves, in theory and consciousness, in a mystified and inverted form, as something other than they really were. Thus, in everyday consciousness, wages appear as a proper and equivalent return to labour for its part in production. Only if labour is seen as a commodity which is also not a commodity, a power, a source not only of 'value' but of surplus-value, can it be shown that wages are, indeed, a mystified though necessary 'form' with another, deeper, contradictory relation hidden within it. 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 then 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, even when the 'break' is marked in the name of dividing science from ideology: a notion which does not and cannot do justice to the real complexities of the relations between revolutionary practice and a theoretical labour - Capital and all that led up to it - which could both strip bourgeois relations to their foundations, but which could not replace the laws of those relations, as expressed in Pol.Econ., in theory because it has not yet replaced them in practice.

Much the same seems to be true of Marx's relation to Hegel, though here a substantive 'break' is easier to identify - and, for what it is worth, 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 thorough-going 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 Engel 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 Marx 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 suprisingly late moment of supercession - of return-and-transformation.

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