

drink water from the Vlatava." Moreover, Karl Marx's much more gloomy vision was fulfilled: that if Europe itself would not carry out the socialist revolution, this revolution would have to be achieved with the injection of Kalmuch's blood. Under the conditions of a totalitarian dictatorship and a police regime, every opposition, if it does not want to be destroyed, must be prepared for a revolution, and must carry it out and defend it with arms. There is no other alternative. Socialist democracy in Czechoslovakia may be brought about only by the democratic, socialist revolution, by the politically anti-totalitarian and anti-colonial revolution, by the mass movement for structural reforms which must involve all of Eastern Europe. Such a revolution must be fought by the entire nation as a manifestation of the nation's will. The Czechs cannot get their freedom from anybody because nobody can grant their freedom from the top. The crisis ensuing from the occupation can only be resolved by the socialist, democratic revolution. There is no other way out.

On Nicolaus "Introduction" to the *Grundrisse*

by Moishe Postone and Helmut Reinicke

By translating the extremely difficult text of the *Grundrisse*,¹ Martin Nicolaus has made an important political contribution. His lengthy introduction to it is an attempt to generate a more thorough immanent analysis of the corpus of Marx's critique of political economy. In this respect, the *Grundrisse* is of central importance for the reconstruction of Marxian thought. It lacks the tight logical structure of *Capital* but has a broader explicit scope which adds depth and richness to an understanding of the categorical unfolding of the critique of political economy. While it clearly puts to rest any theory of a rupture between Marx's early and later works, the *Grundrisse* also presents developments in his thought which render untenable an unmediated identification of the categories of the works of 1844-46 (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, the "Theses on Feuerbach," *The German Ideology*) with those of *Capital*; that is, an interpretation of the categories of the early works as the "philosophical underpinnings" of the later "economic" categories. It was with the *Grundrisse* that Marx first developed the categories of his critique so that they imply a critical epistemology—a historical determination of the dialectic. The categories of the critique of political economy are self-reflexive forms within which the early categories are taken up and find their adequate determination.

This understanding of dialectic will serve as the basis for the critique of Nicolaus' concept of labor and proletariat. In the *Grundrisse*, the concrete overcoming of

1. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundation of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, translated by Martin Nicolaus (London, 1973). Numbers between parentheses refer to the introduction to this work.

proletarian labor as a result of the increasing contradiction between objectified and living labor is presented as *the* essential moment in the overcoming of capitalism. This illuminates Marx's use of value as a critical category (value as a socially specific form of wealth under commodity production) and condemns any interpretation which freezes the categories on the logical level of commodity circulation. This not only undermines any view of the abolition of capitalism which posits a socialism based upon proletarian labor, but also refutes those Marx interpretations which present a concept of labor relegated only to the realization moments of the totality. The *Grundrisse* implies a much more historically dynamic analysis of the proletariat in its objective and subjective moments.

The major part of Nicolaus' exposition deals with Marx's critique of Hegel. The reconsideration of this problematic has been made inescapable by the *Grundrisse*, whose reception has undercut earlier interpretations by Della Volpe and Althusser in their opposition of a "scientific" mature Marx to an idealist Hegel—an opposition made, not surprisingly, during the period of postwar capitalist restoration, expansion, and stability. The *Grundrisse* has become known as this period has come to an end—but also when the revolt of the 1960s has largely subsided and when increasing numbers of young leftists turn to a traditional Marxist theory and practice whose inadequacies had already been practically demonstrated by the newer forms of struggle. Nicolaus' discussion of Marx's critique of Hegel unfortunately assumes its own epistemology—one which is contradicted by the Marxian critique itself.

Nicolaus begins with a characterization of Hegel's philosophy as simultaneously "dialectical, subversive as was Socrates' and idealist, mystical like a priest's" (p. 27). This separation and opposition of idealism and dialectic in Hegel—the former as irrational, 'mystical' and reactionary; the latter as rational and progressive—is false and has important theoretical and political implications. It should, however, be clear that Nicolaus is neither characterizing Hegel *in toto* as irrationalist nor attempting to develop an 'anti-Hegelian' Marxism. The point then is not to 'save' Hegel nor can a critique of Nicolaus be neatly packaged as the defense of a 'Hegelian' vs. an 'anti-Hegelian' Marxism, for Nicolaus does present a 'Hegelian' Marxism. The question is—of what sort?²

Nicolaus' understanding of Hegel is derived from the philosophical notebooks of Lenin. However, it is one thing to appropriate Hegel out of concrete political considerations, in Switzerland and Petrograd, during the first World War. It is something quite different to interpret Hegel from the standpoint of Lenin—abstracted from all later discussion—fifty years later, within a very different constellation of the class struggle. Nicolaus does the same thing in taking up Brecht's comparison of Hegel to Socrates and his emphasis on Hegel's accommodation to the political status quo—for Brecht's understanding of Hegel, until the later influence of Korsch, was indebted to the official debates of the Communist parties. It came out of a period in which Debordin transformed Hegel into a dialectician of Being and Stalin finalized that as catechism. However, Nicolaus goes still further: it would never have occurred to Brecht to call Hegel's philosophy "idealist, mystical like a

2. That there are significant differences among 'Hegelian' Marxisms is obvious and can, for example, be seen in the differences between Lukacs and Debordin and Bukharin. Cf. N. Bukharin and A. Debordin, *Kontroversen über dialektischen und mechanistischen Materialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1974).

priest's." Our analysis of Nicolaus' Marxism, then, will begin with an examination of his characterization of idealism.

Idealism is described by Nicolaus as follows: Hegel denied the reality of sense perceptions, which led him to the incorrect conclusion that only the logical concepts worked up by the mind have any reality. Wishing to provide objective validity to his personal concepts, Hegel evicted them from his own mind and attributed them to the 'Mind.' "It was only a natural step from there to the thesis that this 'objective' but immaterial 'Subject' governed the development of the world. . . and that it was pleased thus to unfold and reveal itself over the course of the centuries. From this to God was no step at all; it left Hegel towards the end a philosopher-pope bestowing benedictions. . . on the temporal emperor" (p. 27).

Nicolaus treats idealism as a rather stupid, 'mystical,' reactionary form of thought.³ He neither takes it seriously—no mention is made of problems of consciousness and reality, of subject and object—nor does he attempt to analyze Hegel's philosophy with reference to its historical and social context. Such a shallow approach makes a materialist interpretation of Hegel's thought impossible. It would be pointless to refute the stale old allegations which Nicolaus repeats against idealism—for example, the denial of sensual reality. As stated, this indicates a naïve lack of knowledge of the history of philosophy. Hegel, of course, was quite aware of the discussions of the Eleatics and Sophists. He also knew that you hurt yourself when you knock your foot against a rock.

As to Hegel's immediate political views—they were by no means as reactionary as Nicolaus would have it.⁴ Contrary to Kant's securing of the (bourgeois) world of appearance, Hegel insisted upon the cognitive necessity that the world not be dissolved into its sensual manifoldness but rather that the "particular object," as Marx later said (in the *Vorarbeiten* for his Dissertation), exhibits a "particular logic" which must be grasped in order to understand the concrete manifoldness. It is precisely this moment of abstraction which is integrally necessary to the constitution of the concept of totality in Hegel and Marx. It enters the Marxian theory as social concept. This should be understood historically. Kant, as *Bürger* in the period of manufacture, could not get beyond the world as given, as it was assured by Newtonian physics. Hegel, faced with early industrialization, could think from the standpoint of production, which in his thought is encoded in the labor of the

3. As an aside, it should be noted that Nicolaus' notion of mysticism is itself rather limited and, at best, could be applied to the later Schelling who was brought to Berlin in order to counter the "dragonseed of Hegelian philosophy." To equate idealism with such a murky form of mysticism indicates, among other things, complete ignorance of the emancipatory forms of plebeian mysticism, in which tradition Hegel's philosophy understood itself. As Ernst Bloch (in *Thomas Münzer and Atheismus im Christentum*) and Hermay Ley (in *Zur Geschichte der Aufklärung und des Atheismus*) have shown, plebeian mysticism was, in spite of its reactionary misuse, a forerunner of the proletarian movement. It expressed the emancipatory movement of the lower classes at the time of the early development of the capitalist relations and the liberation struggles against the nobility. The primitive communistic thought of mysticism, from Paracelsus, Jakob Böhme and Thomas Münzer, entered into the beginnings of the proletarian movement in many ways. Hegel's thought, as mediated through Swabian Pietism, stands in this emancipatory tradition.

4. Cf. the newly published edition of the original version of Hegel's *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie* (Stuttgart, 1973), written before the reactionary Karlsbad decrees of 1819. Also, cf. J. D'Hondt, *Hegel Secret*, and *Hegel en son temps*, among others.

Concept. Behind this lies the bourgeois concept of labor—a transhistorical category underlying concrete social appearance. In spite of the ridicule which Nicolaus heaps on the 'objective' but immaterial 'Subject' it is, therefore, no stupidity when Hegel considers the reality of the world as abstract and thus presents this abstractness by means of categories which appear to have their own life.

This "abstractness" is rooted in the material world. Engels, upon whose understanding of dialectic Nicolaus bases himself, knew that Hegel's thought was more concretely rooted than that of many later Left-Hegelians, and warned against any easy interpretation of idealism as the drowning of everything concrete: "Anyone who is only somewhat familiar with Hegel should know that he knowingly presented hundreds of points from nature and history as the most striking instances of dialectical laws."⁵ That Nicolaus presents such a shallow interpretation of Hegel's idealism which has little in common with the Marxian project, reflects back on his interpretation of Marx.

According to Nicolaus, Marx's critique of Hegel had two major logical phases (p. 33). He associates the first, which occurred in the early 1840s, with Feuerbach's method of inverting Hegel's subject and object and locating the subject in the social interactions of people. Nicolaus does not adequately deal with Marx's first critique of Hegel insofar as he does not sufficiently distinguish Marx's historical materialism from Feuerbach's anthropological materialism. Whereas in the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843), Marx still proceeds in the Feuerbachian manner of inverting subject and object, in the *Paris Manuscripts* of 1844 one already finds a historical materialist interpretation of Hegel. Marx shows that the movement of the Concept in Hegel is due to the progress of humanity as a result of labor. The history-making activity of people makes history. Hegel metaphysicized the concept of labor as the labor of the Concept alone: its labor, that of the *Weltgeist*, gives rise to history.

Marx's interpretation indicates the degree to which Hegel was already in the position to reproduce the movement of history; as he noted, Hegel was located on the heights of classical economy. However, this analysis by Marx—that Hegel attempted to describe the totality of bourgeois society by means of labor—does not suffice to fully criticize Hegel's method and system. It remains historically indeterminate and does not fully explain why it was that Hegel metaphysicized labor. The fully adequate critique of Hegel was first achieved—implicitly—in *Capital*. It is there that Hegel's concepts are exhibited in their development—not because Hegel proceeded in this way but, rather, because the course of the bourgeois development of society by means of commodities, abstract labor, surplus value, etc., gives rise to this form: the representation of abstractions. The categories of the critique of political economy, the progression of the categories in *Capital*, present the subsumption of the concrete under the abstract, the relations of people with one another and with nature under commodity and capital.

In the *Logic*, Hegel presented the relation of essence and appearance which Marx concretized as the relation of production and circulation and as the result of abstract labor: circulation as "the phenomenon of a process taking place behind it." This is the materialist ground which makes it possible for Nicolaus to write that "the whole of the *Grundrisse* testifies to their [the 'services' rendered by Hegel's *Logic*] presence"

5. Friedrich Engels, *Dialektik der Natur* (Berlin, 1957), p. 54.

(p. 26). The substance underlying the Hegelian concepts was materialistically explained by Marx in the *Paris Manuscripts* as the result of social development through labor. Capital development entered the early phases of real subsumption of labor; the proletariat began to arise, organize, and make knowable which class executes this labor—still, to be sure, as object of domination and exploitation. History proceeds not yet freely made but rather blindly, nature-like. This side lies behind Hegel's dialectical progress of the Concept. The “stripping off [of] the mystical shell from the rational core” (p. 34) could only have been carried out because Hegel's thought possessed a rational core—as idealist dialectic, and not simply as dialectic wrapped in ‘idealist mysticism.’

In addition to the first stage of Marx's critique of Hegel—“the shift from the independent objective mind . . . and returning to it its native residence in the mortal human body”—Nicolaus distinguishes a second stage which he locates in the *Grundrisse*. In so doing, he draws attention to an extremely important development in Marx's thought—which, however, contradicts Nicolaus' own assumptions. He argues that Marx's Introduction to the *Grundrisse* was a false start; that the categories used were no more than immediate translations of Hegelian categories into materialist terms. For example, where Hegel begins his *Logic* with pure, indeterminate *being*, which then immediately calls forth its opposite, *nothing*, Marx begins his Introduction with *material production* (in general) which then calls forth its opposite, *consumption*. In the course of the Introduction Marx indicates his dissatisfaction with this starting point. However, it is only after having written the manuscript itself that Marx, in the section entitled “Value,” begins anew with a different point of departure—that which is retained in *Towards a Critique of Political Economy* and *Capital*: the commodity (pp. 35-37).

Nicolaus points out this parallel, which indicated how Marx step-wise overcame the presentation of reality by Ricardo and Hegel until he finally worked behind the overreaching abstraction of the concept of money and discovered its underlying social form, the commodity. In the course of writing the *Grundrisse*, Marx finally discovered that structuring element with which *Capital*, and so the dialectical unfolding of the categories of the bourgeois system, should begin. From a trans-historical starting point, Marx moved to a historically determinate social form which expresses the key identity of identity and non-identity, use-value and exchange-value—a historically specific contradiction whose development involves all other contradictions of the capitalist mode of production.

Thus, Marx did not simply “materialistically” invert Hegel's dialectic. It is not that he merely swept away the heavens and posited materialism in its place, as Lenin lazily stated in his notes. Nicolaus himself says that the “mere substitution of a ‘materialist’ category (i.e., material production) for an idealist one (i.e., pure, indeterminate Being) leaves Marx still dissatisfied” (p. 35). As Nicolaus quotes him from the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*, Marx characterizes this inversion as the practice of ‘socialist belletrists.’ This characterizes ‘prosaic economists,’ but it is not the Marxian approach. The object of the Marxian analysis is bourgeois society, structured by wage-labor and capital and dominated by a determination of the mode of existence (*Existenzbestimmung*) whose dialectical unfolding—mediated by class struggle—presents this history in its purest, most classical form. This determination of existence is the commodity. With Marx, bourgeois society is for the first time

posited *consciously*, and therefore critically, as Subject, in whose totality the categories move.

By choosing the commodity as the point of departure, Marx not only locates the proper object of the dialectic in the historically specific social form of commodity production, but also historically locates the dialectic itself. This self-reflection is a necessary consequence of the notion of adequacy of the concept to its object which is at the basis of both Hegel's and Marx's dialectics. What is rejected in starting with the commodity is a notion of dialectic as universally applicable method—or, in other words, as the adequate expression of an indeterminate reality whose essential nature is contradictory. Instead, dialectic is grasped as a critical concept which must now be seen as having arisen with the appearance of the commodity form and as being the only method adequate to a social form determined as a totality by commodity production (i.e., capitalist society) with its historically specific contradictions.

The Marxian dialectic, with its starting point in the commodity form, is therefore not only *expressive* of capitalist relations but, as opposed to Hegel's, *expresses* them self-consciously—as reflection on the social totality from the level of the becoming Subject; as a stage of a world becoming conscious through and for the Subject. The concept is made adequate to the thing by consciously reflecting it. But, in so doing, the 'method' necessarily renounces any pretensions to transhistorical validity. The adequacy of the concept to its object must imply, along with the historicity of the object—capitalist society—the historicity of the concept, the 'method,' itself. It is therefore in a double sense that Marx's dialectic must be understood as critique: rather than an opposition of true and false, which implies a static truth and a conceptual position outside of the thing, there is a critically immanent analysis of bourgeois society as social development, contradiction, negation—as time, as the history of capital development and class struggle. This is simultaneously the critique of social form and corresponding forms of thought. The Marxian dialectic presents a critical epistemology in which forms of thought are understood historically rather than as resulting from the interactions of indeterminate subjects and indeterminate objects outside of society and history. On the other hand, the Marxian critical epistemology cannot be reduced simply to interest, which derives action and thought from social position and does not examine the determinations of that 'social' within which the positions are located. In the critique of political economy, the various fetish forms define the social frame as it determines thought, within which further, more concrete, and class specific form differentiations can be made as the categories are logically unfolded. This moving immanence—the development of commodity, value, abstract labor, class struggle—is the source of the judgment that what is 'false' is the temporarily valid which considers itself permanent. The critique emerges from the thing itself, from the contradictions and limits which unfold from its motion—the presentation itself becomes critique and points to the negation of capitalist society. The dialectic is negative insofar as it theoretically negates the capitalist social form by a logically and historically immanent critique of that form.

But the critique has a second moment. Because the Marxian theory analyzes its own social context and history, whose specific contradictions give rise to the dialectic and whose presentation renders the dialectic materialist, the real negation by the proletariat of capitalist society must mean the negation of the dialectic itself. This is epistemologically self-consistent. One of the most powerful aspects of the critique of

political economy is that it understands itself as historically determinate and can account for its existence as critique in the process of analyzing and criticizing bourgeois forms. Any attempt to transform it into a positive science falls into inconsistencies—for it is then posited as the historically unique exception, standing above the interaction of form and content, social forms and forms of consciousness, which it postulates as its own basis. As such, it would no longer be capable of understanding itself.

This is the case with every form of transhistorical dialectic, whether inclusive of nature (Engels) or not (Lukacs). In either case dialectic must be grounded ontologically—the one in Being in general, the other in social Being. However, that reality and/or social relations in general are essentially contradictory, can only be assumed, not explained. Dialectic as transhistorical totalizing category can only be dogmatically posited—at the cost of its own self-reflexive understanding.

The case is very different with the historically specific Marxian dialectic which is self-consciously rooted in the double character of social labor. Dialectic, as a central category of revolutionary Marxism, is itself a historical category which is not simply a mode of thought but rather grasps within itself a particular object: commodity producing society. It reflects the course of the contradictory epoch which rests upon the class antagonisms of wage-labor and capital and indicates the contradictory unfolding of this specific pre-history as it presents itself logically and historically. As a concept of the critique of political economy, dialectic denounces that blind movement associated with the concepts of commodity and capital. It is, above all, a critical category which understands and grasps its object from the aspect of the changeability of class relationships and points towards the end of the domination by commodity and capital and their human character masks. This historical determination of the dialectic does not imply a complete relativism such that the pre-capitalist past is unknowable. It does, however, undercut any teleological theory—whether in its deterministic or in its subjectivistic variant—and overcomes the antinomy of historical contingency and teleology.

The mature Marxian dialectic critically grasps and expresses developed bourgeois society as the first real social totality: one whose entire determinate reality can be unfolded logically from a single abstract structuring form—the commodity in its double character as total system. Because that dual character gives rise to contradictions which tend to unfold the form beyond itself—to money and then capital—as a constant dynamic in time, this first real social totality is the first historically dynamic form: as a *totality* it unfolds with time. This time, however, is not an empty Newtonian frame. Through the various determinations of time (labor time, circulation time, etc.) which Marx presents in *Capital*, he indicates that history is not constituted by an abstract time but rather is time made insofar as it is objectified. By preserving past knowledge and labor in objectified form and constantly moving beyond itself, capitalism constitutes time as historically concrete and made by people. History becomes more dense. The full awareness of this can lead to consciously made history. Finally, as a dynamic totality of a mediational character that gives rise to necessary forms of appearance which emerge, are abstracted from, and veil its essence, capitalist society presents its history as logic.

Earlier social formations are neither totalized nor historical in this sense. They possess dynamic elements and point beyond themselves only to the degree that their

forms of surplus production possess elements of the commodity form. However, the commodity becomes a totalizing social form, a determination of the mode of existence, only with capitalist society. From the standpoint of capital-determined society, the logical development, commodity-money-capital, can be understood as historical. That is, for Marx the present is determined such that past development (given commodity development) can be understood as *logically* necessary—but only when viewed from this vantage point, retrospectively. The process of historical transformation from one social mode to another is to be seen as a progressively less random development with the rise and full development of the commodity form. Not, however, as the unfolding of an immanently necessary principle of motion. *Only capitalism—not the history of humanity—reveals a totalizing logic.* It is because this present is logically determined as a totality of a contradictory essence that it logically points beyond itself to the possibility of a future form, whose realization depends upon class struggle. The choice becomes socialism or barbarism—and this depends upon revolutionary practice.

The possibilities which increasingly emerge as immanent in the present are a function of that present, whose rise was by no means *a priori* necessary; they are not to be read back teleologically into the entire course of history. This is how the categories of the *Paris Manuscripts*, for example, should be read in light of Marx's later works. The historical determination of the dialectic points to a notion of history as the movement *from contingency to a necessity* which, in its increasing self-contradictions, allows for the possibility of freedom. The dialectic is not coextensive with the course of history but allows for its retrospective understanding. Any attempt to transhistoricize the dialectic, as was the case in the dominant tendencies within the Second and Third Internationals, falls behind this historical self-understanding and projects a determinate form of bourgeois society backwards and forwards in time. Because this form of transhistorical dialectic presents history as the result of quasi-natural causal laws, the subjective moment of the dialectic must drop out and the old contradiction of pre-Marxian materialism between an epistemology which views people as determined (causally) by their environment and a theory whose carriers are somehow above this condition is reintroduced.

However, the attacks on Diamat which attempt to save subjectivity by a one-sided emphasis on praxis are equally transhistorical and therefore inadequate. All too frequently Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" have been used to construct an historically abstract epistemology based upon praxis—sensuous human activity as the appropriation of reality. This abstract epistemology can understand praxis only as fully conscious. It, therefore, tends to be teleological, is socially indeterminate and allows for no theory of historical *forms*, no social theory.

What is forgotten by the praxis orientation is that pre-capitalist social modes were not dynamic totalities and that history is not simply the passage of abstract time. Praxis is tied to objectification, but the dynamic historical principle—the commodity form—is alienated objectification. It is only in capitalist society that alienated objectification becomes totalized as a dynamic entity (capital as alienated Subject). Thus, people have made history—but *not* self-consciously. However, the contradictions of the totality give rise, in their unfolding, to the possibility of a newer form of consciousness which, on the basis of a history which people have made behind their own backs, *allows* for conscious historical praxis. To transhistoricize this

possibility is to abandon the moment of alienation, of the logic; to anthropologize a historical condition and to remain bound to the other pole of a transhistorical antinomy of freedom and necessity. The commodity as point of departure allows for the overcoming of the problem of freedom and necessity, of subjectivism and determinism, as a dialectic of subject and object, as historical time—as the history of the rise, development and possible overcoming of the commodity and capital-determined social form.

In light of the above it is possible to begin to understand the connection of dialectic and idealism in Hegel and to adequately criticize Nicolaus' dismissal of idealism and his understanding of dialectic. A necessary mediation is Marx's concept of the fetish, which emerges from the category of abstract labor. On the one hand, in dealing with commodity-producing society, we are dealing with a contradictory and moving social reality. On the other hand, such a society is of a mediational form such that social labor exists in the double form of concrete and abstract labor and social relations are necessarily expressed in the relations among 'things.' They acquire a quasi-natural, objective form of appearance with its own 'laws.' On the level of capital, fetish reification becomes a moment of a process; it is set in motion according to the historical stage of capital development. Historical process does appear, but disguised in the phenomenal form of 'natural' process. As a result, that which is historically determinate takes on a 'natural' form, i.e., appears as historically indeterminate. As a characteristic of the form in which social objectivity appears, the fetish is simultaneously a determinant of social consciousness. The hallmark of bourgeois forms of thought (that is, those bound within the immediacy of the forms of appearance of the bourgeois mode of production) is that determinate capitalist forms are considered eternal or, at the very least, natural. All other forms are seen as unnatural or artificial: "...forms of social production that precede the bourgeois form are treated by the bourgeoisie in much the same way as the Fathers of the Church treated pre-Christian religions."⁶

In this light Hegel's thought can be viewed as two-sided. With its notion of contradiction, it is expressive of the capitalist reality. Moreover, the concomitant notion of the moving interaction of subject and object as well as that of form and content in history—which implies the historicity of forms—has a critical edge, the "*taupe sous la terre*" (Marx): the overcoming of the standpoint of eternity which bourgeois concepts attempt to express. As such, it forms the springboard for the Marxian critique of bourgeois society. On the other hand, it remains within the bounds of bourgeois modes of thought, as analyzed by Marx, insofar as it does not self-consciously, from the standpoint of a historically-becoming revolutionary subject, consider its own relation to its historical context. Hegel's dialectic grasps, but does not get behind, the abstractions which are the necessary, real phenomenal forms of commodity- and capital-determined society. As a result, capital as subject of an alienated mode of production, which underlies Hegel's transhistorical Subject, is not grasped as such, and the historically specific *motion* of the forms, driven forward by their particular immanent contradictions, is posited transhistorically. That is, the *Weltgeist* is posited as Subject and the dialectic as the universal law of motion: History as the product of the labor of the Concept. The relationship of idealism and dialectic in Hegel should therefore be seen not as an accidental

6. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I (Moscow, 1962), p. 81.

opposition but as expressive of the same thing: a dialectically grasped reality which presents itself as abstract because it is achieved as a result of abstract labor—of abstract bourgeois concepts. Hegel's dialectical idealism as Onto-Logic of bourgeois relations is therefore no "mere reflection" (p. 33), but rather, as Marx said, a determination of the mode of existence, just as are Ricardo's categories. However, they are bourgeois, immanent and not yet critical.

To accuse Hegel of mysticism in relation to Marx would be similar to blaming Socrates for not having been familiar with Hegel. Nicolaus tidies up history and orders theory neatly: Hegel had sent the independent objective Mind "floating into the heavens." Marx simply reverses things—a simple matter of method, solely of better thinking—and returns the Mind to its mortal human body (as if bourgeois society and its abstractions, its fetishes, its reified relations, could be so nominalistically dissolved), thereby simply placing the subject and object "right side up again" (p. 33). The materialist stringency of Hegel, to have seen the Mind, namely bourgeois commodity society, as an abstraction, as in fact the Subject—escapes Nicolaus. But the greatness of Hegelian philosophy is that it represented bourgeois society in its existing abstractness; that Hegel was able to develop the "expressions adequate to understanding," the "rational categories" (Marx). The 'Mind' of Hegel is not, as Nicolaus naïvely and in a Feuerbachian manner states, "a product of the human head," but rather is a product of the determinate *bourgeois* mode of production. Nicolaus confuses Marx with the Feuerbach of the *Essence of Christianity* in which the superterrestrial sphere is seen as the product of the human head and is placed on its feet. Although Nicolaus locates the core of idealism in the material world, he—like Feuerbach—does not get beyond the anthropological level. He does not undertake the Marxian task of examining bourgeois concepts, as they were expressed by Smith and Ricardo or Kant and Hegel, according to the relation of their social origin and social validity—that is, to critically derive them from the economy.

Nicolaus presents the history of knowledge as abstract and contingent: "Among the early Greek scientists were some whose special interest was in the phenomenon of change, motion, process" (p. 28). Why these phenomena suddenly acquired meaning—that here early forms of bourgeois society were developing, that perhaps they were connected with budding forms of commodity circulation, whose historical sphere of validity was the Polis—remains outside of Nicolaus' concern. He does not ask at all why it was that people at that time were able to think 'dialectically' just as he fails to examine why Hegel could have grasped bourgeois society metahistorically and dialectically as Logic. Nicolaus does not concern himself with questions of the historical origins of questions of validity and their social scope. He is thus able, in an undifferentiated way, to say of Hegel that he reviewed and gathered together all previous forms of "dialectics," from Asia to the Middle East as well as Greece and Europe. Hegel, however, was a better materialist than that. As opposed to Nicolaus who poses contradiction as universal and eternal, Hegel does not let dialectic appear in the Manichaeic form of simple polar opposition. For Hegel, dialectic begins with the Eleatic school, with Zeno; that is to say, in the Polis.

Nicolaus' failure to grasp Hegel's thought adequately and his abstract and contingent history of knowledge are closely related to his understanding of dialectic as transhistorical. In Nicolaus' introduction to the *Grundrisse*, dialectic appears in a bourgeois manner, as a transhistorical manner of thinking, as the idealist Subject,

"the dialectic," which Hegel merely "raised to a new higher level" (p. 28). Instead of determining dialectic as the existent category of determinate economic relations, of the bourgeois and capitalistic course of commodity and capital as did Marx, Nicolaus abstracts it. For him the dialectical "difficulty" is "not confined to a special separate branch of philosophy. . . The whole is in motion, the totality develops, it all had a beginning and implies an end" (p. 29). Such insights were not new with Hegel; they were not unfamiliar to Heraclitus, Avveroes, Siger von Brabant or Jakob Böhme. The Marxian critique becomes lost behind such commonplaces.

This transhistorical interpretation of dialectic leads Nicolaus to repeat the old mistake of separating method from content which entered into the labor movement with Bernstein. For Nicolaus, the *Grundrisse* is "the first known attempt. . . to apply the method. . . to major problems of theory" (p. 43). Marx would have been a bad historical materialist as well as a bad Hegelian had he maintained such a separation of method from its content. The dialectic is a specific method of a specific content. It is not method in the bourgeois sense in which, as Engels criticized, everything is subsumed under a general principle. Rather, it is the form of the movement of the concept, because this follows the movement of the object—a society dominated by commodities. In opposition to Hegel, Marx developed the categories in a critical economic direction, and, in so doing, denounced the transhistorical appearance, the quasi-natural quality of this society.

Within the post-Marxian tradition, the concept of the dialectic has been handled primarily as a category of History at best; as a category of Nature and Being at worst. Although after Hegel the concept of dialectic found, in Marx's critique of political economy, its existent determination as the categorical determination of bourgeois conditions and of capitalist class antagonisms, as a concept of struggle which is presented by the existing relations themselves, it later degenerated to a social democratic category of nature and history. With Stalin it became completely mystified as a category of Being. Nicolaus deals with the concept on this level.

Not only does Nicolaus transform Marx's method into a positive science; he presents it as the "natural" thought form which, to be sure, required a long pre-history as condition for its constitution. This eternalization of the dialectic reveals an ideological attitude further expressed in Nicolaus' treatment of Hegel's idealism. Instead of attempting to critically analyze it immanently and within its context, he treats it exactly as "the Church fathers treated pre-Christian religions"—as a superstition or a consciously concocted mystification. These two elements of Nicolaus' position—the transformation of Marx's critique into positive science and the consequent blindness to earlier forms—are due to his eternalization of the dialectic. What has emerged are exactly those attributes of bourgeois modes of thought analyzed by Marx. The social roots of this particular mode can be located in a third element of Nicolaus' position: his eternalization of a social form—proletarian labor.

The question of proletarian labor emerges in the course of Nicolaus' consideration of the relationship of money and capital. He discusses how, to Marx, money and capital are not simply economic categories, but rather come to signify two entire systems of social relationships "based on certain rules and laws, and involving a certain type of politics, culture, even personality" (p. 14). These two systems, while inherently related, exist as distinct and contradictory moments of a totality. The logical sphere of money—or simple commodity circulation—is one in which relations

among individuals take on the form of equality and liberty. "Equality, because . . . the products exchanged are the embodiments of equal amounts of labour time. Liberty, because the partners in exchange presume and recognize each other as proprietors . . ." pp. 17-18). By proceeding to indicate that this sphere exists only as a logical and historical abstraction of one moment of the capitalist totality and has had no concrete reality as a whole, Marx lays the ground for a critique of bourgeois democratic ideology which equates this moment with the totality and seeks to make bourgeois liberty and equality more perfect by abolishing the very conditions (money and the market place) which form their foundation (p. 19). Emerging from, and yet contradicting this sphere is the other major moment of the capitalist totality—the sphere of capital, which has as its basis the exchange of labor power and the creation of surplus value. This process leads to the ever increasing growth of objectified labor, in the form of capital, as a hostile force over and against the worker. Nicolaus describes it as "the process of exploitation, or the extraction of surplus product from the workers' labour time. This process is the source of capitalist accumulation" (p. 20).

Nicolaus' description of capital accumulation is very ambiguous. It reveals a misunderstanding of the category of value, and therefore of proletarian labor as a capital form-determination—a social form particular to, and essential, for capitalism. The existence of a surplus product—more than is required to directly reproduce the producers—is characteristic of all historical societies. What characterizes capitalism is not a surplus product as such, but a particular *form* of the surplus which is tied to a particular form of the organization of production. The capital-specific form is surplus *value*—which is inseparable from a value-determined organization of production. The capital-specific form is surplus *value*—which is inseparable from a value-determined organization of production, i.e., (on the most abstract level) one based upon direct human labor as the only source of appropriable wealth, without reference to its qualitative dimension, and measured by time. Yet, in Nicolaus' description, the category "workers' labor time" is left unexamined. It is as if it is only "the extraction of surplus product" which defines capital accumulation, and not that the form of the surplus is determined by a social organization of production defined by the category "workers' labor time." What is determining is not that the surplus objectifications of laborers are appropriated by capitalists, but rather the form, concrete and material, of social labor under a capitalist-determined society.

This organization of labor is already implicitly present in the logical sphere of money, in the category of value itself. Although Nicolaus states that in the sphere of money products exchanged are embodiments of equal amounts of labor time, he does not follow through its implications for labor. Marx states that, "as in the theory, the concept of value precedes that of capital, but requires for its pure development a mode of production founded on capital."⁷ This means that although money and capital do constitute distinguishable logical spheres, the development of the one out of the other must be dealt with. Particularly in this case, the category of abstract labor, the categorical substance of value, must be analyzed as it arises in simple commodity circulation and as it develops in production.

Nicolaus distinguishes money from capital in a manner such that money is not

7. *Grundrisse, op.cit.*, p. 251.

understood as commodity and value form. This is incorrect. Particularly in the *Grundrisse*, this form of separation between money and capital does not exist. The social antagonisms, which totally unfold in capitalism, can only be understood when the dialectic of the value-form is grasped; when, therefore, the twofoldness of the commodity, the polarity of its form, as was analyzed by Marx in the first chapters of *Capital*, is understood. It is for this reason, as Marx repeatedly points out in the *Grundrisse*, that the origins and grounds of class relationships are to be searched for in the germ-form of the commodity, which arises initially as potential but which then develops into capitalist reality. Because of this, the value form, dialectic can also be read historically. That it can be presented logically is itself an expression of history which moves abstractly, not directly controlled by the practice of people. In a possible future society social labor will be so organized that there will be no fetishized relations. History consciously made means the end of an objectivistic logic of history.

Because Nicolaus fails to consider the dialectic of the value form he does not analyze the structure of value-creating labor. This emerges in his discussion of the importance of Marx's substitution of the category "labor power" for "labor" in the *Grundrisse* (pp. 44-47). His point of departure is Marx's statement that the labor theory of value, the idea that "all kinds of labor are equal and equivalent, because and so far as they are human labor in general, cannot be deciphered until the notion of human equality has already acquired the fixity of a popular prejudice." The historical condition for the emergence of this principle as popular prejudice is, according to Marx, "a society in which the great mass of the produce of labor takes the form of commodities, in which, consequently, the dominant relation between man and man is that of owners of commodities."⁸

It is important to note that Nicolaus quotes only the first half of this passage and calls this popular notion of human equality "the bourgeois revolutionary principle that all persons are created equal." However, he omits the second half, which ties this principle to the commodity form itself. This omission is significant. It implies the degree to which Nicolaus' notion of socialism is defined in terms of bourgeois-immanent categories. This direction in Nicolaus is buttressed by a false separation he makes between the specific commodity, labor power, and the commodity form itself—which falls out of his analysis. He mentions that it was a mistake of classical political economy to equate commodities with things, but fails to indicate in what way a commodity is more than a thing, what the contradictory identity of use-value and value means. Instead he simply and inadequately states, "This is a serviceable assumption for many applications, but when applied to the commodity 'labor,' it only reveals the capitalist prejudice that workers are so many objects to be used, manipulated and thrown away when worn out" (p. 45).

The implications of Nicolaus' misunderstanding of value become explicit in his discussion of how the concept "labor power" solved the problem posed falsely by classical economy as—what is the value of labor?—and in so doing made possible a theory of surplus value and capital accumulation: "Marx's thinking preserves the revolutionary foundation *implicit* in the labor theory of value, namely the principle of general human equality, and shows that in its bourgeois form this principle amounts for the workers to be the very opposite of human liberty. With the conception of 'labor power,' Marx resolves the inherent contradiction of the

8. *Capital*, Vol. I, *op.cit.*, p. 60.

classical theory of value; he preserves what is sound in it, namely the determination of value by working time. . . . By thus preserving what was sound and revolutionary in the theory, and bursting through the limitations contained in it, Marx turned the old theory into its opposite; from a legitimation of bourgeois rule into the theory of communist parties [!] explaining how the capitalist class grows wealthy from the workers' labour. . ." (p. 46). Before further probing the implications of this quote, a brief excursus on Marx is necessary. Marx took the categories of classical political economy and uncovered their social basis. He did not, as Nicolaus would have it, simply preserve the determination of value by labor time, but uncovered the nature of that "labor" which constitutes value. Value-creating labor is *not* labor in the sense of an intentional activity which changes the form of matter in a determinate way in the creation of a particular product, and which simultaneously is reflexive as a constituting element of the producers (what Marx calls concrete labor). Rather, value is the objectified measure of *abstract* labor. This category is not simply a conceptual abstraction of "real" labor, but is a social category—one which expresses the nature of social labor in a society determined as a whole by commodity production as the mediational moment between private and social, and simultaneously incorporates that as a moment of social historical becoming. In other words, the category provides the key to an understanding of capitalist social relations and their direction of development. However, this social category constituting value finds expression only in the material form of the use-value dimension, that of concrete labor, and yet gives the latter determinate social form.

The capitalist form of production is logically determined by the category of value —which should not be considered as simply a market category. The measure of wealth is the mass of direct labor time objectified—regardless of the mass and number of products produced. It is abstracted from the qualitative nature of the labor used in the production process. This production process is geared to the production of surplus value and, because only abstract *human* labor is value creating, necessarily rests on direct human labor—proletarian labor—as *the* source of appropriable wealth. The logic of the form of production is such that direct labor becomes increasingly subdivided into a complex of *one-dimensional* activities and the externalization of human productive abilities is cumulatively objectified into material forces of production which stand over and against living labor, rather than directly reflecting back as constitutive of the human capacities of the individual worker. For Marx, this process of alienation is necessary (viewed world-historically), and yet time-bound. It made possible a huge leap in social productive power and knowledge, even though this was at the cost of emptying and narrowing the individual workers. Yet, it is precisely this leap that increasingly comes into conflict with its presupposition: the material forces of production developed under capitalism increasingly contradict their value basis; their wealth-producing capacity is out of all proportion to that measured by the input of direct labor time.

This contradiction is often misunderstood as meaning that the difference between socialism and capitalism is only one of greater output of products. This misunderstanding forgets that overcoming has a moment of practical self-reflection, of *reversal*. In this case, the moment of self-reflection involves the structure of labor itself. The forces of production developed in the course of capitalism can, when the capital-determined form with its need for direct human labor is overcome, react back on social labor and change it such that the specific qualities of labor done

under capitalism will be abolished.

The logical possibility of this reversal is grounded in Marx's dialectic of value and use-value, of form-determined and non-form-determined—not simply as it arises on the level of commodities, but as it develops in the unfolding of capital. Consider Marx's treatment of the machine: The machine is capitalist form-determined as constant capital. This does not mean that the machine is neutral, that under capitalism it is employed to the end of capital realization, and that it is simply this purpose which must be changed. Such a view remains bound within the bourgeois concept of instrumental reason. That machinery is form-determined means that the form of the machine itself is determined—not simply the purpose for which it is used. However, the machine, to Marx, is not totally subsumed under its form determination. The use-value dimension expresses a non-identical moment whose potential becomes increasingly explicit with the course of capital development—comes increasingly in real contradiction with its capital form-determination. But this remains a contradiction. There is no smooth linear progression to a new form. The course of capital-determined society drives forward technical development, whose concrete form remains an instrument of domination—yet whose concrete potential allows for a transformation of society, of the social division of labor such that not only will the goal of machine production be different, but the machines themselves as well.

Of course, the machine is immediately related to labor itself, in its identical and non-identical dimensions. Those writers who set labor as such identical with instrumental activity are, in effect, taking only one side of the Marxian theory, that of capital realization, and positing it as the totality—transhistorically! Instrumental activity is not to be equated with purposive activity in general. It should be seen as a description of activity whose goal is defined by an external objectivity (the "second nature" of capitalism, which increasingly supplants the compulsion of immediate material need)—which then determines the means. When thus grasped transhistorically and as totality, it is bound within the capital fetish. The overcoming involves the transformation, not simply of the goal, but of the form of labor and the form of the machine. The *mode* of production can be changed.

The socialist transformation of society, then, is not simply the abolition of private ownership of the means of production, but also involves the transformation of capital-determined organization of production so that direct, value-positing labor time no longer constitutes the form and measure of wealth. This means the material abolition of proletarian labor by the proletariat. The proletariat (as 'class' in general) is a historically specific category of alienation and should not be grasped as the Subject, but as *the not-yet-Subject*—that which constitutes the alienated Subject (Capital) and which becomes Subject by overthrowing capital and in the process abolishing that labor, essential to capital, which defines the proletariat itself. The relation people will have to the direct labor process will change such that labor will be constitutive of, and constituted by, the full social individual rather than, as under capitalism, by the "mere worker."⁹ This is the *material* presupposition for the individual reincorporation of that social knowledge which was, under capitalism, first developed and expressed in society in general, i.e., the material, historical overcoming of alienation. The historicity of capitalism then, is identical with the

9. *Grundrisse, op.cit.*, p. 708.

historicity of proletarian labor as source of social wealth, of value as social form of wealth, and with value-determined, proletarian-based production as social form of production.

In this light, one can more critically examine the category of general human equality to which Nicolaus refers. It is a category *of*, not outside, the bourgeois form of production. We are not speaking of an Idea of equality, but of equality which is based upon commodity production and exchange. It is common to refer to bourgeois equality as "abstract" and "formal." Marx specifies this further: it is an attribute of commodities which, in a society in which commodities are the dominant form taken by labor products, is reflected back on its source—persons. It is, in other words, a category of thing-mediated interaction and therefore has built into it the attribute of objects—"objectivity." 'Abstractness' is an integral aspect of this category. The practical equation of different sorts of products in exchange means the *de facto abstraction* and *reduction* of the various concrete labors they embody to abstract human labor. In this context, that category has two moments: the reduction of all actual labors to their common character as human labor; and the abstraction from all concrete forms and useful properties of the various labors. The latter, as process of alienation, is the capitalist complement of the former. "General human equality" first appears historically with general commodity production—as a category of alienation. *Both* aspects underly capitalism. From its initial logical determination in simple commodity circulation, it has already built into it that aspect which Marx further developed in his analysis of capital-determined production process: it is the equality of parts which together constitute a whole. Far from being only a market category, it expresses the actual structure of wage-labor—a productive relation such that workers plug onto the system as cogs of a meta-machine. The socialist transformation of society implies the overcoming, not the realization of "general human equality."

Marx must be understood as representing a break with that earlier (and later Marxist) socialist tradition which considered a socialist revolution the realization of the ideals of the French Revolution which had been warped by the domination of the bourgeoisie. In the *Grundrisse* and particularly in *Capital*, Marx shows the ideals themselves, in their positive revolt-inducing, as well as in their negative stabilizing moments as arising out of the commodity form—not universal Ideas sullied by a particularistic ruling class.

At this point we can return to the Nicolaus passage cited above. He misunderstands the negative nature of the critique: the immanent exposition of the categories which constitute the critique; that the categories of political economy are "critical" categories which denounce and point to the negation of a society built upon exploitation and oppression. Instead, he opposes the "sound and revolutionary" conception of the determination of value by labor time along with its concomitant principle of general human equality, to its bourgeois form. But it is clear that this opposition of content and form (as good and evil) is impossible, for the determination of value by labor time is inseparable from capitalism. It is precisely this which defines a condition of compulsion—one which constitutes and is constituted by value and which will be dissolved in a free society. The abolition of value as the dominant abstraction of bourgeois relations is a condition of freedom. Value is *the* defining category of capital-determined society, not the standard against

which it is judged. Yet Nicolaus fails to develop the capitalist form of production as a logically necessary consequence of the category of value, which in its material form tends to increasingly threaten its social form (its value basis). This has its roots in Nicolaus' failure to examine the category of value itself. He sees only that its presupposition is the equality of human labor. By leaving unexamined the nature of that labor and the sort of equality with which it is bound, Nicolaus fails to come to an understanding of the value-determined structure of the capitalist mode of production. His analysis implies retention and realization, rather than the overcoming, of that equality implicit in that mode of production. This can only mean a concept of socialism which retains the mode of production based upon proletarian labor.

This same problem emerges when Nicolaus defines alienation as "fundamentally a particular relation of *property*, namely involuntary sale (surrender of ownership) to a hostile Other" (p. 50). In the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* Marx derives classes and hence property from the nature of abstract labor as already developed on the logical level of commodities. (This is the materialist concretization of alienation.) To reverse this, as Nicolaus does, is a far-reaching distortion of Marx which allows for an analysis of capitalism and socialism solely in terms of property. By omission, Nicolaus implicitly separates property relations from the sort of labor the worker does; that is, from the relationship of living labor to objectified labor. In so doing, Nicolaus blurs that central point, already mentioned, and indicated by Marx in the *Grundrisse* itself: that the overthrow of capitalism involves the self-abolition of the proletariat as a class—not simply in its existence defined *vis-à-vis* a capitalist class, but also in the material relation workers have to their labor and to the means of production, i.e., in the existence of wage-labor *vis-à-vis* capital.

Nicolaus writes a great deal about the proletariat, but he abstracts the theory away from the proletariat. His 'dialectic' is completely independent of wage-labor and capital. This is also expressed indirectly when he says that the fact that Marx "was able more than a century ago to grasp" the outlines of recent developments, "is a tribute not to his 'genius' . . . but to his method of work" (p. 63). However, Marx's theory cannot be simply reduced to method or genius. It is rather inseparably interwoven with bourgeois society and—this is particularly constitutive for the dialectic which becomes self-conscious with Marx—the revolutionary appearance of the negation of the negation: the struggling and self-organizing proletariat. Without class-struggle the cognitive conditions for the revolutionary theory of Marx would have been lacking.

The theory of "Dialectical Materialism" has often been criticized for its objectivism, the abolition of the subjective dimension of the theory of class struggle, which leads to the old bourgeois antinomy of social thought and action as either determined causally by social objectivity or mysteriously independent of it (the Party). This should be understood as the expression of a theory of a socialism which remains within the bounds of capital-determined production whose essence—value—as form-determination of social labor is retained and even glorified rather than overcome.

Despite Nicolaus' interpretation, Marx never meant that the "study and development of revolutionary theory" should have been the primary task of the League of Communists in 1850 (p. 8). Theory was not to have been the abstract

creation of “the” League of Communists. Rather, the material ground of an adequate theory was, in spite of setbacks, provided at the time by the activity of the organized proletariat as well as by the increased development and spread of industrialization. The course of historical development began to drive in the direction of the realization of revolutionary theory which had arisen on its basis. Nicolaus misses this connection and therefore treats theory as abstracted from society and from practice. But Marx’s theoretical work is not abstract ‘theory;’ it is, rather, the result and the anticipation of a proletariat which is organizing itself on a worldwide scale. It would never have occurred to Marx that the primary task of the revolutionary proletariat was the mere study of revolutionary theory. Even during this period of the reconstituting class struggle, Marx and Engels never withdrew from everyday political battles. In spite of Marx’s activity in the British Museum, both remained involved in the labor of their party.

One does not have to mechanically proceed by reading all of the *Grundrisse* and Hegel’s *Logic* before beginning *Capital*, and that “Wage, Price and Profit” is a useful introduction to Marx’s work. Nevertheless, by ironically suggesting that the study of these three works is “a project for a long term in prison” (p. 61), Nicolaus implicitly makes an unacceptable separation between practical political work and theoretical political work. Apparently, one can only study the major theoretical works when not actively politically engaged. One wonders why Nicolaus took the time to translate the *Grundrisse*! “Meanwhile much can be gained from *Wage, Price and Profit* and ‘On Contradiction’ ” (p. 61). The crucial import of “On Contradiction” for those not lucky enough to have a long term in prison is, in the American context, far from obvious. Moreover, which revolutionary actions in the United States constitute this ‘meanwhile’ that Marxist education has to limit itself to these two pamphlets? If, in fact, there is only sufficient time to study these two pamphlets, the revolution must be waiting impatiently by the door.

Marx bound his critique as method, and the existence of the proletariat as class, to capital-determined society. The transcendence of the latter, which implies the disappearance of Marx’s critical dialectic, can only occur through the self-abolition of the proletariat. Nicolaus’ position only *appears* to unravel this complex. Instead, it transforms all of its elements positively: a positive science of materialist dialectics presupposes the further existence of proletarian labor, which implies the retention of a capital-determined social organization. All of these elements can already be located in the orthodox Social Democracy of the Second International at that point at which, lip service to revolution to the contrary, that movement had adjusted itself to the capitalist order. It also appears, however—and this is more to the point—in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. The contradiction between the actual social transformation required—which was analogous to, but necessarily in a different form than, that accomplished under capitalism in the West—and its presentation as socialism, was veiled by a transformation of Marxism from critical to positive science. The transhistoricity with which Nicolaus seeks to overlay Marx’s “method” is derived from the legitimation theory of building socialism in one country, in which the attempt was made to guarantee the revolution by inscribing it in nature and history. From this point of view Stalin’s well-known catechism, “Dialectical and Historical Materialism,” becomes “a useful first introduction particularly for pedagogic purposes” (p. 43). Standing in this tradition, Nicolaus falls back at least upon Hegel, although the latter would never have attempted to exhaust the totality

of the world by means of a few laws. Stalin's dry laws, four in number, abstract the commonplaces of a Heraclitean *Weltanschauung* out of Engels. Which specific social relations in the Soviet Union allowed themselves to be presented in universal law-like form is another question, not to be dealt with here. For Mao Tse-tung, as well, the Marxian theory—primarily one derived from Stalin's interpretation—was abstracted from its object and utilized to explain the phenomena of an agricultural country in the revolution. Particularly in China this was, in fact, successfully translated into practice. However, because these small writings of Stalin and Mao present the Marxian theory as universal and eternal, they can hardly be acclaimed as "the classical exposition of materialist dialectics as a whole" (p. 43). They were conceptualized on the basis of precapitalized lands, but with the claim of universality—which was to have served world revolutionary politics and did serve as legitimation for a particular mode of social construction. This transformation of Marxism into an "ideology of legitimation" (Negt) meant that the concept of the liberation of the proletariat became separated from its material meaning—the abolition of proletarian labor. This necessarily meant that the dialectic became separated from its historicity. It reappears as transhistorical: a bourgeois form of thought in a critical materialist cloak—a "theory of communist parties" (p. 46).

On Conceptual Archaeology: A Reply to Postone and Reinicke

by John Keane and Brian Singer

By any measure, the revival of North American interest in Marxism and the attempt to reconstitute it, is now as pronounced as it was during the 1930s. The translation of the *Grundrisse* has certainly fueled this reawakening. Indeed, in an early essay, Nicolaus located that translation as a "missing link" which could be expected to eradicate the pessimism of such Marxists as Baran and Sweezy, and recharge flagging revolutionary hopes in advanced capitalist societies.¹ Postone and Reinicke (following Semprun's and McLellan's early comments against the Althusserians)² point correctly to the continuity between the early writings and the *Grundrisse* and to the latter's implicit development of a self-reflexive *Erkenntniskritik*.

1. Martin Nicolaus, "The Unknown Marx," in *New Left Review*, 48 (March-April, 1968), pp. 41-62, reprinted in Robin Blackburn, ed., *Ideology in Social Science* (London, 1972).

2. David McLellan, "Introduction" to *Marx's Grundrisse* (London, 1971); Jacques Semprun, "Economie, Politique et Philosophie dans les *Grundrisse* de Marx," *L'Homme et la Société*, 7 (1968), pp. 59-68. Semprun points to the peculiar Althusserian deformation of the French translation, and notes that "Marx's manuscripts of 1857-58—and no one can invoke the plea of ignorance any longer since they are accessible in French—render precarious, if not the project, at least the essentials produced by the research of Althusser and his friends" (61). For a nonsensical Althusserian rendition of the *Grundrisse* as a "transitional and incomplete work," see Keith Tribe's "Remarks on the Theoretical Significance of Marx's *Grundrisse*," *Economy and Society*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (May, 1974), pp. 180-210, and his "Critique of the *Grundrisse*," *Intervention* (Melbourne), no. 4 (May, 1974), pp. 41-65. For a qualitatively different analysis of Nicolaus' distortions see Paul Piccone, "Reading the *Grundrisse*," published (in Japanese) in *Gendai no Riron*, no. 132 (December, 1974).