Concrete Historicism as a Research Paradigm

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Abstract: An approach to the analysis of a social formation will be outlined which utilizes the concepts of ‘concrete historicism’ and ‘germ cell’ for a logical-historical analysis informed by Hegel’s Logic and Marx’s Capital.

It has long been widely accepted among Marxists that Marx’s theoretical legacy is essentially that embodied in Capital. Marx never got around to writing his theory of the state, which he had foreshadowed in 1844, let alone his own Logic, and his voluminous writings on historical subjects were never worked up into a systematic text like Capital. Although anticipated more than a century ago by Lenin, it has been mainly during the last 25 years that a body of literature has developed around the relationship between Marx’s Capital and Hegel’s Logic, and this author (2016a, 2018) is among those who see this relationship as key. However, it remains the case that for all the ink expended examining the affinity between these two texts, hardly a word has been written which goes beyond describing this relationship to applying what has been learnt to an analysis of the development of the world capitalist economy in the 180 years since Marx died, let alone to the analysis of social formations other than political economy. One exception to this is the work of this author (2016) devoted to political life, but the connection of the method used in this analysis with Capital and the Logic were not made explicit and it is the aim of this paper to justify the method which, following Evald Ilyenkov, shall be called ‘concrete historicism’. The aim is to lay the basis for the use of the approach for the analysis of the contemporary socio-political situation in a specific state.

Structuralism and Abstract Historicism

When Ferdinand de Saussure (1910) turned from ‘evolutionary linguistics’ to ‘synchronic linguistics’, he claimed that its “general principles provide the basis for a productive approach to the details of a static state or the law of static states,” and a tradition of structuralist analysis, chiefly based on logical analysis of binary distinctions, unfolded throughout the twentieth century, shedding light on how social formations of all kinds sustained and reproduced themselves. Indeed, apart from the professional work of the historian, the object of analysis for social theorists is the social formation before us, and history is useful only to the extent that it can help us understand the existing situation. Logical analysis, i.e., structuralism, has the primary place in the analysis of any social formation. One of the aims of such analysis, however, is to disclose unstable categories and contradictions, because these contradictions point to likely change and render the formation as something which is in motion.

An existing social situation is always like the situation following the making of a peace treaty in the aftermath of a war – you cannot make sense of certain aspects of the constitution or customs of the people other than by reference to history. For example, the Second Amendment to the US Constitution says: “...the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed,” and it is necessary to understand the context in which that line was written to understand what it means. But for example, the marriage ceremony may have
originated as a form of the transfer of property, but it is not that now. The force of a law or custom is what it is irrespective of its origin, and outmoded or anomalous laws and customs have to be changed.

Abstract historicism is untenable; it’s what I call “Just So” stories. An intelligible narrative about how a given social formation came to be does not tell us the nature of that new social formation. A history of the the 1930s and Word War Two does not tell us the nature of the post-war world, even if, it could be argued, it provides some kind of an explanation of it.

So the question is: what is the proper relation between logical and historical analysis in the analysis of an existing social formation.

Logic and History in Hegel

It may come as a surprise that Hegel was, in this sense, a structuralist. Both in his Philosophy of History and in the only instance where he applied his Logic to explicitly to social formations, the Philosophy of Right (PR), Hegel was clear:

“The historical origin of the judge and his court may have had the form of a patriarch’s gift to his people or of force or free choice; but this makes no difference to the concept of the thing.” (PR §219 n.)

and

“But if we ask what is or has been the historical origin of the state ... all these questions are no concern of the Idea of the State.” (PR §258n.)

So it is the logical relations between the various components of Right which determine their sequence in the Philosophy of Right, not their historical sequence and these are two different sequences. And Marx agrees:

“But do not these simpler categories also have an independent historical or natural existence preceding that of the more concrete ones? Ça dépend. Hegel, for example, correctly takes possession, the simplest legal relation of the subject, as the point of departure of the philosophy of right. No possession exists, however, before the family or the relation of lord and servant, which are far more concrete relations. It would, on the other hand, be correct to say that families and entire tribes exist which have as yet only possession and no property.” (1858, p.59)

Self-evidently, rights cannot exist in any real sense in the absence of a state, and yet Property is the category with which Hegel begins, and the State is the category with which he concludes. The point is that the emergence of the state effects a transformation of what were really only distorted ‘premonitions’ of what would be organs of the state. In Hegel’s words:

“The state is an organism, i.e. the development of the Idea to the articulation of its differences. Thus these different sides of the state are its various powers with their functions and spheres of action, by means of which the universal continually engenders itself in a necessary way; in this process it maintains its identity since it is presupposed even in its own production. This organism is the constitution of the state; it is produced perpetually by the state, while it is through that the state maintains itself.” (PR §269ad.)
That is, the various organs of the state are its presuppositions, but once in place, the State transforms them into subordinate organs of itself and reproduces them as such. It may well appear that with the emergence rights, moral subjects, corporations and courts, that State is already in existence, but this would be a mistake. Only with the specific historical acts which transform these various formations into organs of the state does the state truly exist.

Further, Hegel does not see the succession of states and their constitutions as a logical sequence such as the sequence of categories in the Logic is taken to be. Hegel explains this in his Philosophy of History:

“The Constitutions under which World-Historical peoples have reached their culmination, are peculiar to them; and therefore do not present a generally applicable political basis. ... From the comparison therefore of the political institutions of the ancient World-Historical peoples, it so happens, that for the most recent principle of a Constitution – for the principle of our own times – nothing (so to speak) can be learned.

“In science and art it is quite otherwise; e. g., the ancient philosophy is so decidedly the basis of the modern, that it is inevitably contained in the latter, and constitutes its basis.”

(Philosophy of History §§48-49)

Note well these last words: the anti-historicism which applies to the unique and concrete universal formations of social life does not apply to religion, science, art and philosophy, the phases of what Hegel calls “absolute spirit.” This contrary, and probably more familiar moment in Hegel’s idea is captured in his description of the Encyclopaedia as a “circle of circles”:

“Each of the parts of philosophy is a philosophical whole, a circle rounded and complete in itself. In each of these parts, however, the philosophical Idea is found in a particular specificality or medium. The single circle, because it is a real totality, bursts through the limits imposed by its special medium, and gives rise to a wider circle. The whole of philosophy in this way resembles a circle of circles. The Idea appears in each single circle, but, at the same time, the whole Idea is constituted by the system of these peculiar phases, and each is a necessary member of the organisation.”

(Enc. Logic §15)

and this idea is reflected in the history of philosophy:

“We find the various stages of the logical idea in the history of philosophy, in the shape of philosophical systems that have successively emerged, each of which has a particular definition of the absolute as its foundation. ... The relationship of the earlier to the later philosophical systems is, generally speaking, the same as the relationship of the earlier to the later stages of the logical idea and, to be sure, in such a way that the later ones contain within them the earlier ones as sublated.”

(Enc. Logic §§6n2)

Recall Hegel’s famous antinmetabole in the Preface to the Philosophy of Right: “What is rational is real; And what is real is rational.” History is intelligible; laws and customs, and specific institutions which are irrational ultimately fall. If the “robe of many colous around which wraps its kernel round” is subject to
critique, then the various principles will develop in a ‘logical’ way, in just the way which is captured in Hegel’s *Logic*. But this kind of logic is exhibited in the unfolding of principles, specific forms of activity captured in concepts, rather than in entire, concrete social formations. Nonetheless, states and other institutions (Gestalt des Bewusstseins) stand or fall by such principles. Not every institution in a social formation is essential but amongst them all there will be one on which the entire social formation may fall.

How do we reconcile these seemingly contradictory claims by Hegel? Each of the ‘circles’ within Hegel’s ‘circle of circles’ is drawn by means of systematic dialectical logic, but the starting point of each circle depends on what Hegel calls ‘natural cognition’, that is to say, a unique insight into the real unfolding of human activity and experience.

I will return to this below in outlining the concept of ‘concrete historicism’ but let it be noted at this point that while history is intelligible (rational), the kind of dialectical-logical critique which Hegel exhibited in the *Encyclopaedia* cannot be applied to entire, concrete social formations, such as states, but retains its relevance to the analysis of the *principles* and finite institutions which underpin such formations, and their development from abstract concepts to concrete, self-conscious, mature systems of human activity.

**Logic and History for Marx**

Marx was clear enough that the starting point of analysis is the immediate state of affairs in all its chaotic complexity. But as he explained in the famous passage ‘Method of Political Economy’ (1858), the analyst’s task is a *logical reconstruction* of the present social formation beginning from the single abstract relation which constitutes the concept of the formation at an integral totality. However, this concept is not given in the immediate situation; it is a product of the history of the self-consciousness of the formation, that is, of the history of bourgeois political economy, and has to be abstracted from that history before the logical reconstruction can begin.

This reconstruction is comparable to the reconstruction of the various sciences which Hegel exhibits in the *Encyclopaedia*, and is referred to as ‘systematic dialectic’ (Arthur 2011). The only historical investigations which we find in Marx’s researches in political economy are firstly, the schematic outline of the development of commodity relations in §3, Ch 1 of volume I of *Capital* and secondly, his exhaustive immanent critique of theories in the history of political economy. *Capital* is distinguished among structural analyses in that it places contradictions at its centre, and thereby grasps the formation as in movement, rather than simply in terms of its tendency to reproduce itself.

Chris Arthur (2011) has argued persuasively that while Marx began *Capital* with an analysis of the commodity relation, this does not imply that Marx believed that ‘simple commodity production’ is a social formation which ever existed let alone constituted an historical precursor to modern bourgeois society. The commodity relation, the practice of exchanging products of labor, is the logical starting point of *Capital*, but in no sense is exchange of commodities an historical precursor of capitalism. Such contradictions include the contradiction between use-value and exchange value, a contradiction overlooked by the political economists, and the contradiction between the rate of profit and the
rate of surplus value. These contradictions, though belonging to a structural analysis of capital, point to the movement and change inherent in the structure. Marx makes clear that the beginning is made from the present – the real object of analysis, which can be known in detail and in which the relevant social formation is at its most mature. But the task in making that beginning is not straight forward as the writer confronted with an infinite mass of data.

In 1859, Marx reflected on how as a radical young graduate in Philosophy, concerned with issues like censorship and the mistreatment of the peasants, became aware of his own ‘dilettantism’ and return to his study of Hegel. He came to the conclusion that political life had its roots in the conditions of civil society, the anatomy of which was to be found in political economy and thereafter turned his attention to the critique of political economy rather than what appeared to be the political issues of the day. It is far from immediately obvious where the key to the dynamics of a social formation is to be found.

As Marx explains in the famous passage in the Grundrisse (1858 p. 37), beginning the dialectical reconstruction of the formation requires the identification of that single relation which is the product of the history of the theory of the social formation of which the theory is a part. The historical part of Marx’s analysis is the critical examination of its self-concept along with the broad outlines of the social formation as it develops. “It is not necessary to write the real history of the relations of production” (1858, p. 388), he wrote. The aim is to determine the concept which is to form the starting point of analysis, the germ cell, unit or prius, which provides the key to the understanding of the present, mature formation as a whole. The concept does not however come ready-made from the history of the science, but has to be critically reconstructed, and this Marx does in the first chapter of Capital. (Incidentally, it is the same with Hegel – the concept of Being with which Hegel begins Philosophy did indeed mark the beginning of Philosophy properly so-called, excluding the naturalistic speculations of Thales, but Hegel gave it a rigorous meaning which it had lacked in Parmenides).

The present formation is not sui generis but is an instance of such formations which also form part of the object of analysis. One of the problems which arises here is where to begin historically. Bourgeois writers believe that capitalism arose in the ancient world. But according to Marx:

“... important for us is that our method indicates the points where historical investigation must enter in, or where bourgeois economy as a merely historical form of the production process points beyond itself to earlier historical modes of production. In order to develop the laws of bourgeois economy, therefore, it is not necessary to write the real history of the relations of production. ... Just as, on one side the pre-bourgeois phases appear as merely historical, i.e. suspended presuppositions, so do the contemporary conditions of production likewise appear as engaged in suspending themselves and hence in positing the historic presuppositions for a new state of society.” (Grundrisse, p.388–389)

Note that Marx sees that the insight into the present which indicates where the historical analysis begins, also foreshadows the future. Also, Marx agrees exactly
with Hegel about the logical and historical relations between the ‘organs’ of a complex social formation:

“where agriculture predominates, as in antiquity and the feudal period, even industry, its organisation and the forms of property corresponding thereto, have more or less the character of landed property. ...

“The reverse is the case in bourgeois society. Agriculture to an increasing extent becomes merely a branch of industry and is completely dominated by capital. ... Capital is the economic power that dominates everything in bourgeois society. It must form both the point of departure and the conclusion and must be analysed before landed property. After each has been considered separately, their interconnection must be examined. ...” (1858, p. 44)

Thus the logical order of the categories is the reverse of their sequence in history:

“It would therefore be inexpedient and wrong to present the economic categories successively in the order in which they played the determining role in history. Their order of succession is determined rather by their mutual relation in modern bourgeois society, and this is quite the reverse of what appears to be their natural relation or corresponds to the sequence of historical development. The point at issue is not the place the economic relations took relative to each other in the succession of various forms of society in the course of history; even less is it their sequence ‘in the Idea’ ..., but their position within modern bourgeois society. (MECW v. 28, p. 44)

Both Marx and Hegel recognized that the ‘real subject’ outside the head of the theorist produces the material in which the theorist aims to determine what is rational, that is to say, necessary. Marx differed from Hegel, however, in strictly adhering to Hegel’s advice that the “Owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering,” whereas Hegel systematically overestimated the capacity of dialectical logic to trace the progression of the rational in advance of the social process itself. Marx consistently maintained an empirical moment in his dialectical analysis and reconstruction.

Logic and Development for Vygotsky

Another thinker who applied these principles for the combination of logical and temporal development is Lev Vygotsky (1934). Vygotsky’s most well-known work is his study of the intellect. He took intellect to be the capacity for ‘symbolic thinking’, or typically ‘thinking in word-meanings’, and as a psychologist he had the benefit that, unlike the social theorist, he could study the development of the intellect over a relatively short span of time in children. Analyzing the development of speech and thinking in young children:

“1. As we found in our analysis of the phylogenetic development of thinking and speech, we find that these two processes have different roots in ontogenesis.

“2. Just as we can identify a ‘pre-speech’ stage in the development of the child’s thinking, we can identify a ‘pre-intellectual stage’ in the development
of his speech.

“3. Up to a certain point, speech and thinking develop along different lines and independently of one another.

“4. At a certain point, the two lines cross: thinking becomes verbal and speech intellectual.” (p. 112)

and subsequently speech becomes silent and is transformed and internalized in the form of the mature intellect. However, for Vygotsky, the true intellect emerges along with the true concept only with the meaningful word, that is, when the two lines of development intersect, not before.

Consequently, Vygotsky chose as his “unit of analysis” for the study of the intellect the meaningful word, despite the fact that both thinking and speech pre-dated the formation of the first meaningful word. This is the same insight that we referred to in connection with Hegel on the State and Marx on capital.’

Vygotsky (1932, p. 42-43) also advocated for the study of his subject matter ‘historically’, that is in the development of the person from infancy to old age:

“... historical study simply means applying categories of development to the study of phenomena. To study something historically means to study it in motion. Precisely this is the basic requirement of the dialectical method. To encompass in research the process of development of some thing in all its phases and changes – from the moment of its appearance to its death – means to reveal its nature, to know its essence, for only in movement does the body exhibit that it is. Thus, historical study of behavior is not supplementary or auxiliary to theoretical study, but is a basis of the latter.”

The ‘history’ of the psyche in the sense of the ontogenesis of the individual person, is of course, available to the researcher in a way that the history of a social formation is not. History as such is available only through the texts left by the participants.

Logic and History for Foucault

Outside of the Marxist and Hegelian tradition there is another critic of structuralism who aimed to combine logical and historical critique in his analysis of social formations, and that is Michel Foucault. Specifically, I have in mind Foucault’s concept of ‘genealogy’ as exhibited in his well-known works such as *Discipline and Punish* (1975). Foucault viewed the world he found around him as an impersonal omnipresent apparatus of social control, seeing every aspect of society as oriented to the monitoring and control of individuals.

To theorize this claim, Foucault looked back to the mid-18th century founding of the prison system and professional soldiering as a systematic enterprise of social control and rehabilitation and aimed to demonstrate that this system had engulfed the entirety of social life. Self-evidently, this analysis led Foucault to radically different conclusions than those of Marx. Marx saw a society which “presents itself as ‘an immense accumulation of commodities’,” Foucault saw a immense apparatus of social control. On what basis can it be argued that Marx was right and Foucault was wrong? Is it merely a question of different analytical lenses? In what sense have Marx or Foucault *proved* their claim?
Or it is about an insight into the essential nature of the present reality and the identification of the starting point in history from where this essential relation can first truly be identified. My claim is that Foucault’s starting point was selected subjectively and arbitrarily. It is implausible that modern society grew out of the prison system and is typified by it. Marx on the other hand correctly implemented the approach of ‘concrete historicism’ which I shall now outline.

Concrete Historicism

‘Concrete historicism’ is a term coined by the Soviet Marxist-Hegelian, Evald Ilyenkov, for a paradigm of social analysis which uses a particular combination of logical and historical analysis. It involves a movement back and forth between a detailed analysis of the existing social formation which is the object of study and an historical search conducted in the light of what is evident in the present situation, on the hypothesis that various aspects found in the past may be embryonic forms of what is manifested in mature form in the current formation. But it is vital to recognize that this is not the case in every instance of a form of practice found in past formations. But where this proves to be the case, a great deal of light is shed upon the existing formation by tracing those specific forms of practice through time, having particular regard to their place in the wider social formation, up to the present. That is, to make a logical-historical reconstruction of the specific practice.

In analyzing the present situation one has the advantage of personal experience of both events and sources, but it is inescapable that overwhelmingly knowledge of the state of the world is possible only through the critical assimilation of information from sources, information which is not simply ‘data’ but is saturated with theory, theory which reflects the forms of practice dominant at the time, theory through which data is processed and conceptualized. Given that the object is a form of human practice rather than simply a natural phenomenon, the lens is as much part of the object as the data itself. The object of interest is forms of human practice and such forms are implicated in the concepts by means of which the practices are organized and described. This is crucial for historical investigations in which the object itself is accessible only through the reports of contemporary participants and their theoretical reflections. One must study the records of the past not only critically in their capacity as reports, but particularly as a part of the object itself. The theoretical lenses through which the data of the past is transmitted is not a barrier standing between subject and object, but rather the form of appearance of the data itself.

The object of this historical research is to determine the historically earliest form of the logically simplest but true form of a social practice, particularly those which are key to understanding the present configuration. The recognition of this prior is complicated by the fact that it must be distinguished from its precursors by its place within the whole social formation of the time. I will briefly cite four examples: commodity exchange, the capitalist firm, the meaningful word and the collective decision.

Value

Marx (1867) traced the concept of value from ancient times up his own time and in particular subjected to critique the political economists as the theoretical
expression of bourgeois society. He identified the commodity as the simplest social form of value (1989/1881, p. 544) and *schematically* traced the form of value from ancient times, predating even money, up to modern capitalism, showing that it was only with modern capitalism that commodity production became the predominant and characteristic form of social interaction. He went on to trace the history of *capital* in the same way, its simplest social form being a *firm* which purchases products of labor to sell for a profit, but again showed that this form of social practice was marginal until modern times when it became the dominant form of association.

**Intellect**

Vygotsky (1934) traced the origin of meaningful speech in ontogenesis, and found that speech predated intelligent speech and intelligence predated speech, but intellect had its beginning only when the two lines of development intersected in the use of word meanings. Further development of the intellect entailed internalization of the use of meaningful words and other cultural artifacts.

**Political Life**

This author’s (2016) historical study of collective decision making was based on the thesis that the simplest unit of politics was a group of people making a collective decision. It was found that the earliest forms of collective decision making, Counsel, predated voting and was a specific form of decision making still found within families and other hierarchical institutions. Majority voting only emerged with the formation of voluntary associations with an ethos of equality. Consensus voting in its modern form in the 1960s when an ethos of inclusion and individual autonomy arose alongside the notions of equality and solidarity which had underpinned decision-making by majority voting.

**Units of analysis**

It was Lev Vygotsky (1934) who introduced the concept of ‘unit of analysis’ for this germ cell which is the embryonic form of a social practice. The unit is the same as the germ cell, but the concept of ‘unit’ indicates that the whole, the whole social formation which is characterized by the germ cell or unit, is just an aggregate of so many such units. Bourgeois society is just a mass of commodity exchanges, a market in other words; the intellect is the capacity to think in words and symbols. Politics is people getting together to make collective decisions, of one form or another.

The importance of identifying the unit, as the simplest social form of practice of which a whole formation is composed is three-fold. Firstly, it allows both writer and reader to understand the concept *viscerally*, connecting it with their personal experience and grasping the concept as something concrete and meaningful. Secondly, it marks the point in the history of the social formation at which it truly exists, marking it off from its precursors. Thirdly, it allows the thinker to distinguish between what is essential in the social formation which constitute it as an integral whole and what is transitory and contingent.

I will now look more closely at what Hegel, Marx and Vygotsky have told us about how to identify this germ cell or unit of analysis.
The Germ Cell

I have outlined elsewhere (2018) the origins of the idea of ‘germ cell’ in Goethe’s idea of Urphänomen and its reflection in Hegel’s idea of the abstract concept. I will confine myself here to what Hegel has to tell us about das Erste or ‘prium’, the ‘germ cell’ which is the beginning point for the dialectical reconstruction of a whole. This is found in a rather little-known passage in the Science of Logic:

“... the beginning [must] be made with the subject matter in the form of a universal (Allgemeinen). ... it is the concrete individuality (die konkrete Einzelheit) that is given to subjective, natural cognition as the prius (das Erste); but in cognition that is a comprehension, at least to the extent that it has the form of the Concept for basis, the prius must be on the contrary something simple (das Einfache), something abstracted from the concrete, because in this form alone has the subject-matter the form of the self-related universal or of an immediate based on the Concept.”

(Hegel 1816/1969, p. 801, S 779)

Hegel illustrated this method throughout the Encyclopaedia, but offers little clue about how the prius which makes the beginning of each ‘circle’ is to be identified other than that it arises outside the specific science of which it is the beginning and “is given to subjective, natural cognition.” The Encyclopaedia gives the impression of a logical derivation of the entire circle of circles, but in fact Hegel has to agree with Marx that the source of these aperçus (to use Goethe’s word) lies outside the head:

“The totality as a conceptual totality seen by the mind is a product of a thinking mind, which assimilates the world in the only way open to it, ... The real subject remains outside the mind and independent of it ... Hence the subject, society, must always be envisaged as the premise of conception.” (Marx 1858, p. 38-39)

The starting point for each circle of dialectical reconstruction comes not from subjective reflection but is generated by the social process itself and is acquired by the theorist by means of critical examination of, and insight into the conceptual material produced by the social process itself, a ‘thinking over’ (Nachdenken) of the thought of the times.

According to Ilyenkov:

“The difficulty lies in singling out from the empirically given picture of the total historical process the cardinal points of the development of this particular concrete object, of the given, concrete system of interaction. Logical development coinciding with the historical process of the formation of a concrete whole should rigorously establish its historical beginning, its birth, and later trace its evolution as a sequence of necessary and law-governed moments. That is the whole difficulty.” (1960, p. 216)

In the Preface to the first edition of Capital Marx referred to the prius of his analysis of capital as the “economic germ-cell” of bourgeois society and Vygotsky identified “units of analysis” in four different fields of Psychology (See Blunden 2017), and in my work on politics I determined the germ cell or unit as a group of people making a collective decision, whether in the King’s Counsel, a company board or the steering committee of a social movement.
Students of Soviet Psychology have struggled to more clearly describe how the germ cell or unit of a process is determined, but lacking the depth of Ilyenkov’s Hegel scholarship there has been a lot of confusion. In this current, however, the idea has been creatively extended to the determination of a germ cell as the starting point of an intervention. There is no formula for determining this ‘something simple’, that discrete social act which is at the same time universal. What is clear though is that the researcher sees in the prius a simple expression of what is universal in the mature formation with which they are acquainted first hand. So this cognitive act requires a movement back and forth between analysis of the present attempting to characterize the formation as a whole, and searching the historical record for the emergence of this simple relation which expresses the universal in a nutshell, and tracing it forward as it changes in interaction with the larger social formation.

Conclusion
I have outlined above an approach to the analysis of social formations, such as specific states, institutions or movements which investigate both the inner structure or logic of the social formation, and the history from which it inherits its various customs and laws. It entails a movement back and forth between reflection on the existing state or affairs and the past history of the situation. The aim is to be able to characterize the social formation as a whole by means of a simple praxis or relation such that an organism is seen as an aggregate of its cells and organs. Discovery of this cell involves an historical investigation, especially the history of the self-expression of the social formation itself which expresses not just facts, but the concepts through which these facts were grasped, the same concepts by means of which the participants had explained to themselves why they did what they did.
If carried out successfully, such an analysis should be able to identify the contradiction which lies at the heart of the germ cell or unit, the contradiction which has driven the development of the practice and which, if correctly identified may bring about the fall (or rise in the case of intervention research) of the regime in question.

References


