

## Manuscript of 1857-58 (*Grundrisse*)

### 1 The *Grundrisse*: An introductory note

The Manuscript of 1857-58—known as the *Grundrisse* (literally ‘floor plans’, i.e. ‘outlines’, but this title was not Marx’s) consists of those texts Marx wrote from the summer of 1857 to the summer or 1858, namely the text ‘Bastiat and Carey’; the ‘*Enleitung*’ (‘Introduction’); the two longer ‘chapters’, ‘Chapter on Money’ and ‘Chapter on Capital’; and the fragment ‘Value’ (even though the first two of these texts—‘Bastiat and Carey’ and the ‘Introduction’—do not really form an integral whole with the other three). The Manuscript, not intended by Marx for publication, and unknown at the time of his death, represents the first attempt by Marx to put his mature economic theories (developed in London over the course of the 1850s) into written form.

Marx had begun his enquiry into political economy in the summer of 1844. The previous year, the radical-democratic *Rheinische Zeitung*, of which he had been managing editor, had been suppressed; looking back on this period of his life some fifteen years later he noted that with this circumstance he had been given

the opportunity to withdraw from the public stage to my study. [...] My inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life, the totality of which Hegel, following the example of English and French thinkers of the eighteenth century, embraces within the term ‘civil society’; that the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy.<sup>1</sup>

Over 1842 and 1843, his engagement with Feuerbach had led him to focus his attention on what he saw in Hegel and Hegelianism as the *mystification* of human (social) relations. ‘In order to secure remission of its sins,’ he had written to Arnold Ruge, ‘mankind has only to declare them for what they actually are.’<sup>2</sup> On this was based his concept of ‘alienation’, the estrangement (*Entfremdung*) of human beings from their true nature. This, he came to see, lay grounded on the architecture of a *social* alienation, which, through the ‘cash nexus’, embodied itself in and through private property. And to the extent that the political economy of the time posited private property as *immutable* to the human condition then political economy itself stood as an expression of the interests of private property. Thus began Marx’s *critique* of political economy.<sup>3</sup> From this point onwards, when circumstances permitted (which often they did not), he wrote and researched with the intention of publishing an ‘Economics’ (which is how he would habitually refer to the project in his correspondence).

After the continental revolutionary turmoil of 1848-49, during which he played an active part as editor of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx, having been successively expelled from Brussels, Paris and Prussia, was forced to settle in London; he was thirty-one years old and believed at first that his stay in Britain

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx Engels Collected Works* (hereafter *MECW*) vol. 29, pp. 261-2; Marx’s account is from the 1859 ‘Preface’ to his *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*.

<sup>2</sup> *MECW* vol. 3, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> Also of critical importance in Marx’s intellectual trajectory at this stage of his life was his engagement with the communist and socialist milieu in Paris, and his reading (in 1844) of Engels’ ‘Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy’, which, even in 1859, Marx would refer to as a ‘brilliant essay’ (*MECW* vol. 29, p. 264), and which he would cite a number of times in the first volume of *Capital*.

would be temporary; the moment was to mark the beginning of the most creative period of writing and research of his life. In June 1850 he obtained his reader's ticket for the library of the British Museum, and resumed his political economic critique. 'The enormous amount of material relating to the history of political economy assembled in the British Museum, [and] the fact that London is a convenient vantage point for the observation of bourgeois society [...] induced me to start again from the very beginning and to work carefully through the new material.'<sup>4</sup>

Marx's research in this period is recorded in the *Londoner Hefte* ('London Notebooks'), twenty-four in number, which Marx assembled from September 1850 to August 1853,<sup>5</sup> and in his journalism (although he would routinely complain in his correspondence about the interruption that it amounted to with regard to the rest of his work<sup>6</sup>), especially that for the *New York Daily Tribune*, much of which dealt with economic matters.<sup>7</sup>

It was the impeding financial crash of 1857 that seems to have spurred Marx into writing up his investigations. His new mental focus can be seen in the abortive critique of the ideas of the French economist Frédéric Bastiat and the American Henry Charles Carey that he wrote in June 1857. It appears that Marx's initial intention had been a detailed critique of the former's *Harmonies Économiques*, although after several manuscript pages he abandoned the text. Then, at the end of August, he wrote the text known as the 'Introduction' (*Enleitung*): this is the text that in the preface to the *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* of 1859 Marx referred to as the 'general introduction' which he had chosen not to include in the *Contribution* since it had appeared 'confusing to anticipate results which still have to be substantiated, and the reader who really wishes to follow me will have to decide to advance from the particular to the general.'<sup>8</sup>

Then from October 1857 to May 1858 he constructed the actual Manuscript of 1857-58. This text is where we find Marx's first written draft of his mature economic theories.<sup>9</sup> The text was written in seven manuscript notebooks, which have been dated (approximately) as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> *MECW* vol. 29, pp. 264-5; this observation is also taken from Marx's account of his intellectual itinerary he set out in the 1859 'Preface'.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout his adult life Marx maintained the study habit that he described in a letter to his father while still a university student, 'of making extracts from all the books I read [...] and incidentally scribb[ing] down my reflections.' (*MECW* vol. 1, p. 21) The *Londoner Hefte* are an example of such *Exerptheften*, and are in the process of being published for the first time as part of the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtsgaube* (in which they will compose volumes 7 to 10 of the fourth *Abteilung*); for an overview in English, see Lucia Pradella, *Globalization and the Critique of Political Economy: New Insights from Marx's Writings* (Abingdon, 2015), especially pp. 94-119.

<sup>6</sup> As he wrote to Adolph Cluss in 1853: 'I find perpetual hackwork for the newspapers tiresome. It is time-consuming, distracting and, in the end, amounts to very little. However independent one may think oneself, one is tied to the newspaper and its readers, especially when, like myself, one is paid in cash. Purely learned work is something totally different [...]' *MECW* vol. 39, p. 367.

<sup>7</sup> 'His studies in London initiated a qualitatively new phase of his research, laying the premises for the formulation of the theory of surplus value.' (Pradella, *Globalization and the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 93)

<sup>8</sup> *MECW* vol 29, p. 261. It is important to grasp that the 'Introduction', although 'introductory', is in intention an introduction *not* to the Manuscript of 1857-58 but to the 1859 *Contribution*.

<sup>9</sup> Concurrently with the *Grundrisse* Marx also wrote three *Exerptheften*, the so-called 'books of crisis', published in *Band 14* of the fourth *Abteilung* of the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtsgaube* (see the overview in Michael R Krätke, 'Marx's 'Books of Crisis' of 1857-8', in Marcello Musto, *Karl Marx's Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy 150 Years Later* (Abingdon, 2008) pp. 169-75).

- Notebook I: October 1857
- II: November 1857
- III: from November 29 to mid December 1857
- IV: from mid December 1857 to February 1858
- V: From January 1858 to around the beginning of February 1858
- VI: February 1858
- VII: from the end of February/beginning of March 1858 to the end of May/beginning of June 1858<sup>10</sup>

This part of the Manuscript contains two main chapters: ‘The Chapter on Money’ (Notebooks I and II), and ‘The Chapter on Capital’ (Notebooks III to VII). After their writing, Marx subsequently labelled these two chapters ‘II’ and ‘III’ respectively; right at the end to the last notebook there is a fragment of a single manuscript page, entitled ‘1) Value’, which begins ‘This section to be inserted earlier’;<sup>11</sup> this last text was evidently intended to be the ‘first’ chapter of the text.<sup>12</sup>

It is customary to regard the *Grundrisse* as ‘the first draft of *Capital*’, but I think that this is misleading: the first draft of *Capital* is in fact *Capital* itself. The *Grundrisse* is certainly the first draft—or perhaps more fittingly ‘iteration’—of Marx’s ‘Economics’ (the other two being the *Contribution* and *Capital*) but there was no *inevitability* of the emergence of *Capital* from the *Grundrisse*; neither is it helpful to my mind to contrast the two works by denoting the latter as ‘early’ and the former as ‘mature’. The *Grundrisse* was once described as Marx’s ‘laboratory’, and the metaphor may be apt,<sup>13</sup> but this does not mean that either the *Contribution* or *Capital* itself are any less ‘laboratories’ in this same sense. And while it is certainly true that an understanding of the *Grundrisse* enhances the understanding of *Capital* (and *vice versa*) we should at the same time be able to apprehend each of these works *independently of the other*, i.e. without collapsing into theoretical teleology.

When Marx died (in 1883, at the ridiculously early age of 64), he left no clear written instructions as to what was to happen to his literary estate; despite the fact that both his surviving daughters—Laura (Lafargue), who was living in Paris, and Eleanor (Aveling), in London—believed that his *Nachlass* was to go to them,<sup>14</sup> it was soon clear to all concerned that the only person who could really make sense of

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<sup>10</sup> Dates according to Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, trans. Harry Cleaver, Michael Ryan, Maurizio Viano; ed. Jim Fleming (Brooklyn, 1991), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *MECW* vol. 29, p. 252.

<sup>12</sup> The first sentence of this part of the text reads: ‘The first category in which bourgeois wealth makes its appearance is that of the *commodity*.’ The first sentence of volume one of *Capital* reads: ‘The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an ‘immense collection of commodities’; the individual commodity appears as its elementary form.’ (Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (vol. 1), trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth, 1976), p. 125)

<sup>13</sup> In, for example, the title of Riccardo Bellofiore, Guido Starosta, and Peter D. Thomas (eds.), *In Marx’s Laboratory: Critical Interpretations of the Grundrisse* (Leiden and Boston, 2013). the metaphor may be traced back to a comment in Marx’s preface to the first edition of *Capital* volume one. ‘[I]n the analysis of economic forms neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of assistance. The power of abstraction must replace both.’ (Karl Marx, *Capital* (vol. 1), p. 90)

<sup>14</sup> The difficulty and the sensitivity of the situation with respect to what was to happen to Marx’s papers is clear from the apologetically diplomatic tone of Engels’ letter of 24 June 1883 to Laura. (*MECW* vol. 47, pp. 39-41)

what Marx had left was Engels. Curiously, and despite this, although Engels eventually managed to put together volumes two and three of *Capital*, and planned to put together the *Theories of Surplus-Value* (although this task would eventually be completed, at least in its first iteration, by Karl Kautsky), he seemed completely unaware of the existence of the Manuscript of 1857-58: he never once mentioned it, for example, in his correspondence, nor in the various prefaces he wrote to those of Marx's unfinished writings he did manage to publish.

On Engels' death, the bulk of his and Marx's papers went to the German SPD, where they were effectively left in a basement of the party's headquarters in Berlin to rot. Although the 'Introduction' (along with the 'Bastiat and Carey' text) were indeed published in the SPD's *Die Neue Zeit* over 1902 to 1904, it would not be until 1923, when it was discovered by David Riazanov, director of the Moscow-based Marx-Engels Institute (MEI) and effective editor-in-chief of the first iteration of the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, that the Manuscript of 1857-58 proper would come to light.<sup>15</sup> The Manuscript was then photographed, so that it could be deciphered and transcribed (in Moscow). Various extracts of the manuscript were published (in Russian and in German) in the USSR from 1932 onwards; the whole text (i.e. the 'Introduction', 'Chapter on Money' and 'Chapter on Capital') was eventually published (in the original German) in 1939. It was from this point that the name '*Grundrisse*' came to be associated with the Manuscript, the full title of this edition being *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie (Robentwurf)* (*Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*). In 1941—literally one week after Hitler had invaded the Soviet Union—this published version of the Manuscript was followed by a second volume, containing, among other material, 'Bastiat and Carey', and the fragment of the first draft of the *Contribution* known as the *Urtex*.<sup>16</sup> Although originally the leadership of the MEI had intended to add the Manuscript of 1857-58 to the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, both this, and its inclusion in the *Sochineniya*, the Russian language edition of Marx and Engels' collected works, were precluded by a combination of the circumstances of the war, the purging of the leadership of the Marx-Engels-Institute,<sup>17</sup> and Stalin's opposition to publishing economic texts of Marx's prior to *Capital*.<sup>18</sup>

In 1952 a short excerpt of the text was published under the title *Formen die der kapitalistischen Produktion vorhergehen* (*Forms that Precede Capitalist Production*) in East Germany, and then the whole *Grundrisse*—in the same editorial form as the 1939/1941 edition—was reprinted here in 1953. In 1976 and 1981 the full (re-edited) text appeared as the first two volumes of the second *Abteilung* of the second iteration of the

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<sup>15</sup> 'I found among Marx's papers another eight notebooks of economic studies,' an evidently excited Riazanov reported back to the Socialist Academy in Moscow. 'The manuscript can be dated to the middle of the 1850s and contains the first draft of Marx's work, whose title he had not yet fixed at the time; it represents the first version of his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.' (Cited in Marcello Musto (ed.), *Karl Marx's Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy 150 Years Later* (London and New York, 2008), p. 180)

<sup>16</sup> This edition—of 1939/1941—was where the copy that came into the possession of Roman Rosdolsky in 1948 and led him to write his groundbreaking *The Making of Marx's 'Capital'* seems to have come from (Roman Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's 'Capital'*, trans. Pete Burgess (London, 1977), p. xi).

<sup>17</sup> Riazanov was purged from the leadership of the MEI in 1931; at the beginning of 1938 he was shot. Among the crimes of Stalin and stalinism, the liquidation of that talented generation of scholars that emerged in the Soviet Union and its orbit in the first half of the twentieth century, of which David Riazanov was a distinguished member, is not the least of them.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Marcello Musto, 'Dissemination and Reception of the *Grundrisse* in the World', in Musto, *Karl Marx's Grundrisse*, pp. 180ff.

*Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*.<sup>19</sup> This edition was in turn used as the basis of the Manuscript's publication in the *Marx-Engels-Werke*<sup>20</sup> as a 'supplementary' volume (volume 39).<sup>21</sup>

In English, the full text of the 1857-8 manuscript (including the 'Introduction' and 'Bastiat and Carey') was published in English for the first time, translated by Martin Nicolaus and published by Penguin Books, in 1973.<sup>22</sup> Then In 1986 and 1987 the full text appeared again (in a different translation, and evidently based on the *MEGA*<sup>2</sup> text rather than the Soviet 1939/1941 one) as volumes 28 and 29 of the *Marx-Engels Collected Works*.<sup>23</sup> (The 'Introduction' had previously been included as an appendix to a 1904 translation of the *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* published in the United States; partially republished in 1968 in a collection of essays on Marx edited by David Horowitz and published by *Monthly Review*; and then again in full in 1971 in a volume of selections from the 1857-8 Manuscript edited by David McClellan. Prior to this, East German *Formen die der kapitalistischen Produktion vorbergeben* text had been published in English in 1964 as *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, introduced by Eric Hobsbawm.<sup>24</sup>)

Of the two extant English translations there are good reasons to prefer the *MECW* version over the Nicolaus one,<sup>25</sup> so this is the text my reading notes will be based on (although I will also have the latter at hand in case of inevitable difficulties, as well as the two German editions—the *MECW* text and the *MEGA*<sup>2</sup> one).

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<sup>19</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin, 1975-), hereafter *MEGA*<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke* (Berlin, 1981-).

<sup>21</sup> The significant differences between this text and the *MEGA*<sup>2</sup> version derive from the fact that the latter preserves Marx's habit of writing in a cacophony of languages; in the latter, by contrast, the whole text is 'translated' into modern German.

<sup>22</sup> Karl Marx (1973) *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth, 1973).

<sup>23</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1857–58 (First Version of Capital)*, trans. Ernst Wangermann and Victor Schnittke, in Karl *MECW* vols. 28 and 29.

<sup>24</sup> For the bibliographical details see Christopher J Arthur, 'USA, Britain, Australia and Canada', in Musto, *Karl Marx's Grundrisse*, pp. 250-56

<sup>25</sup> As set out in Christopher J Arthur, 'A Guide to Marx's *Grundrisse* in English', <https://chrisarthur.net/a-guide-to-marxs-grundrisse-in-english-2008-christopher-j-arthur/>.