

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

## The *Grundrisse*: An introductory note

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The 1857-58 Manuscript—known as the *Grundrisse* (literally “floor plans”, i.e. “outlines”, but this title was not Marx’s)—consists of a set of texts that Marx wrote from the summer of 1857 to the summer or 1858: namely the text “Bastiat and Carey”; the “*Enleitung*” (“Introduction”); two longer “chapters”: “Chapter on Money” and “Chapter on Capital”; and a 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 over its course his first attempt to put his mature economic theories (developed in London over the course of the 1850s) into written form.

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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 in effect the 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. (Marx 1987, pp. 261-2)

Over 1842 and 1843, his intellectual engagement with Ludwig 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.” (Marx 1975a, 145) 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,

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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>1</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 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.” (Marx 1987, pp. 264-5)

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>2</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>3</sup>), especially that for the *New York Daily Tribune*, much of which dealt with economic matters.<sup>4</sup>

It was the impending 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>5</sup> (Marx 1987, p. 261)

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<sup>1</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, along with 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” (Marx 1987, p. 264), and which he would cite a number of times in the first volume of *Capital*.

<sup>2</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.” (Marx 1975b 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 compose volumes 7 to 10 of the fourth *Abteilung*); for an overview in English, see Pradella 2015, especially pp. 94-119.

<sup>3</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 [...]” Marx 1987, p. 367.

<sup>4</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 2015, p. 93)

<sup>5</sup> It is important to grasp therefore that the “Introduction”, although indeed “introductory”, is in intention an

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Then from October 1857 to May 1858 he constructed the actual 1857-58 Manuscript proper. This text is where we find Marx's first written draft of his mature economic theories.<sup>6</sup>

The text was written in seven manuscript notebooks, which have been dated as follows:<sup>7</sup>

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

This, the main 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).<sup>8</sup> After their writing, Marx subsequently labelled these two chapters ‘II’ and ‘III’ respectively; right at the end of the last notebook there is a fragment of a single manuscript page, entitled “1) Value”, which begins with the words “This section to be inserted earlier”; this last part of the text was evidently intended to be the opening part of a putative first chapter of the text.<sup>9</sup>

It is customary to regard the *Grundrisse* as “the first draft of *Capital*”; I think that this view is misleading. The first draft of *Capital* is *Capital* itself. The *Grundrisse* is certainly the first draft—or perhaps more fittingly “iteration”—(of a total of three) of Marx’s “Economics” (the other two being the *Contribution*—and its continuation into the 1861-63 Manuscript—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”,<sup>10</sup> and the metaphor

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introduction not to the 1857-58 Manuscript but to the 1859 *Contribution*.

<sup>6</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-Gesamtausgabe* (see the overview in Krätke 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Dates according to Negri 1991, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> However, the editors of the volume of the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* in which the 1857-58 Manuscript appears note the following. “The manuscript is poorly structured. It was not written according to a predetermined outline; rather, its structure gradually emerged during the writing process. At various points [...], Marx reflects on the organisation of his work. He added the heading ‘The Chapter on Money’ later, at the latest when transitioning to notebook II, since on the first page the title ‘The Chapter on Money. (Continued)’ already appears. Marx initially calls the chapter on capital ‘The Chapter on Money as Capital’; when it continues in notebook III, he then writes ‘The Chapter on Capital. (Continued.) (from notebook II)’. Up to and including notebook VII, Marx had not yet numbered the individual chapters.” (MEGA 2006, p. 776, my translation)

<sup>9</sup> The first sentence proper of this part of the text reads: “The first category in which bourgeois wealth makes its appearance is that of the commodity.” The resonance with the first sentence of volume one of *Capital* is unmistakable: “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 1976, p. 125)

<sup>10</sup> In, for example, the title of Bellofiore, Starosta and Thomas, 2013. The metaphor may be traced back to a comment in Marx’s preface to the first edition of *Capital* I. “[I]n the analysis of economic forms neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of assistance. The power of abstraction must replace both.” (Marx 1976, p. 90)

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may be apt, 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.

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When Marx died (in 1883, at the very young 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), who was living in London—believed that his *Nachlass* was to go to them, it was soon clear to all concerned that the only person who could really make sense of what Marx had left was Engels. Curiously, and despite this, although Engels eventually managed to put together the second and third volumes 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 1857-58 Manuscript: 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 1857-58 Manuscript proper would come to light.<sup>11</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 (Rohentwurf)* (*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 *Urtext*.<sup>12</sup> Although originally the leadership of the MEI had intended to add the 1857-58 Manuscript 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>13</sup> and Stalin’s opposition to publishing

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<sup>11</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 Musto 2008, p. 180)

<sup>12</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”* came from. (Rosdolsky, p. xi)

<sup>13</sup>Riazanov was purged from the leadership of the MEI in 1931; at the beginning of 1938 he was shot. Among the many crimes of Stalin and stalinism, the liquidation of that uniquely talented generation of scholars that

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economic texts of Marx's written prior to *Capital*.<sup>14</sup>

In 1952 a short excerpt from 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 (and current) iteration of the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (and republished as a single volume in 2006). This edition was in turn used as the basis of the Manuscript's publication in 1983 as *Band 42* of the *Marx-Engels-Werke*.<sup>15</sup>

The first English version of the “Introduction” appeared as an appendix to a 1904 translation of the *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* published in the United States; it was then 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. Meanwhile, the East German *Formen* text of 1952 was published in English in 1964 by International Publishers/Lawrence and Wishart under the title of *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, introduced by Eric Hobsbawm.<sup>16</sup>

The full text of the 1857-8 Manuscript, translated by Martin Nicolaus, and including the “Introduction” and “Bastiat and Carey”, was first published in English by Penguin Books in 1973.<sup>17</sup> Then in 1986 and 1987 the full text appeared again (in a different translation) in volumes 28 and 29 of the *Marx-Engels Collected Works*. Even though of these two translations, which at the time of writing remain the only two full English-language translations of the Manuscript, there are good reasons to prefer the *Collected Works* version over the Nicolaus one,<sup>18</sup> given that the latter text is so much better-known, and, in physical form, more accessible, my reading notes will be based on this, the Penguin edition (although I will also have the *Collected Works* text and the *MEGA*<sup>2</sup> “original” at hand as well as I progress).

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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>14</sup>Cf Musto 2008, pp. 180ff.

<sup>15</sup>The significant divergences between this last 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 former, by contrast, the whole text is “translated” into modern German.

<sup>16</sup>For further bibliographical details for this paragraph, see Arthur, 2008b.

<sup>17</sup>Nicolaus, who appears to be a remarkable character, has written about the circumstances of the commission and confection of the translation on his website (Nicolaus n.d.).

<sup>18</sup>As set out in Arthur 2008a.

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