

Introduction: In Marx's Laboratory

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The initial idea for this book dates back to the *Reading the Grundrisse* conference which took place at the University of Bergamo (Italy) on 15–18 July 2008.¹ This initiative was a part of the activities of the 'International Symposium on Marxian Economic Theory' (ISMT) and aimed at an in-depth critical reconsideration of Marx's 1857–8 manuscripts in the context of their 150th anniversary. The conference highlighted a variety of important issues and themes for future research, some of which were not directly addressed in the twelve papers originally presented at the event. In light of the scholarly importance of that early version of the Marxian critique of political economy and the various controversies to which it gave rise, we came to the conclusion that a wider volume, which expanded the scope of the themes covered at the conference, would be a very valuable addition to contemporary Marx studies. We thus decided to invite more contributions from diverse perspectives, intellectual traditions and 'geographies', which either engage with some of the fundamental issues that were not covered extensively by the papers originally presented at the conference, or provide a different view of the topics that have generated such heated debates among Marx scholars (particularly, for example, the connection between abstract labour and

1. The conference was organised under the direction of Riccardo Bellofiore in the Dipartimento di Scienze Economiche 'Hyman P. Minsky'. It was part of the Bergamo Unit activities for the Inter-University Research Program *Issues of German Classical Philosophy: Edition of Text and Critical Studies* 2006 PRIN (funded by The Italian Ministry of Universities), of which Mario Cingoli was the National Coordinator and Riccardo Bellofiore was the Local Coordinator in Bergamo.

value, or the so-called 'Fragment on machines'). Despite the great variety of approaches included in the volume, they all share a common ground in representing methodologically-minded readings of Marx's critique of political economy, understood as a critical investigation of the historically-specific reified forms of social mediation of capitalist society. Such perspectives coincide with the 'spirit' that motivated the initial constitution and subsequent development of the ISMT. A few more words on this long-standing intellectual forum and its scholarly purpose are in order, therefore.

The ISMT is an original forum gathering together philosophers and economists in the Marxian tradition. It was constituted in 1991 thanks to the efforts of Fred Moseley. The members have changed over the years. Along with Moseley, since the beginning there were Chris Arthur, Martha Campbell, Patrick Murray, Geert Reuten and Tony Smith; the group now also includes Riccardo Bellofiore, Andrew Brown, Roberto Fineschi and Guido Starosta. Over the years, Guglielmo Carchedi and Paul Mattick Jr. (both part of the original group) and Nicola Taylor have also been members. A distinctive feature of the ISMT is that the debating scholars are united by shared problems, rather than by common answers. The problematics that particularly interest the participants are the Hegelian roots of Marx's method and the close interaction between value and money, conceived not as separated topics, but as integrated ones. Members treat these themes in very different ways, sometimes radically so. In preparing this volume, we intended to stay true to, and further enrich, this non-dogmatic, pluralist spirit of critical research in Marxist theory which has defined the ISMT since its inception more than twenty years ago.

The ISMT organises regular conferences and has produced many edited collections, in addition to the individual scholars' monographs and articles.² A prominent place in these publications has been occupied by the reappraisal of Marx's main economic works. Hence, three conferences and edited volumes were devoted to careful inquiry into the three volumes of Marx's *Capital*.³ A natural development was another conference, involving many other participants, in Bergamo in 2006, dedicated to re-reading Marx after the critical edition.⁴ This conference included the participation of MEGA² editors (Rolf Hecker for Volume II and Regina Roth for Volume III), and other German and Italian scholars (Michael Heinrich, Roberto Finelli and Massimiliano Tomba). Against this background, it

2. A full list of the ISMT meetings and their proceedings can be found at <<http://chrisarthur.net/ismt>>.

3. See Bellofiore and Taylor 2004 on Volume I; Arthur and Reuten 1998 on Volume II; and Campbell and Reuten 2002 on Volume III.

4. The proceedings from this conference were published as Bellofiore and Fineschi 2009.

seemed obvious that a critical inquiry into such a crucial work as the *Grundrisse* was in order. The 150th anniversary of their composition was the perfect occasion for such an engagement.

However, there were many other important reasons for editing a book on the 1857–8 manuscripts. The *Grundrisse* are a founding text, the first that really gives evidence in a written form of the writing of *Capital*. At the same time, it is a text of transition, in the long journey that begins with the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. The enormous manuscript should be taken for what it is: a frenetic, and genial, intellectual note-taking. Marx tried, in these pages, to 'fix' some problems and some categories. He did this, for the first time, in an embryonically systematic and dialectical presentation of the theory of value and of capital. It is in this movement that he clarifies for himself the terms of his own problematic. In this sense, the *Grundrisse* can be seen as a veritable 'laboratory' in which we can observe Marx in the very process of unfolding his dialectical investigation of the movement of capitalist social and economic forms. It is thus an ideal text for stimulating a discussion about the articulation and development of the Marxian critique of political economy. Nevertheless, one could argue that the fate of that book in the English-speaking world in particular has so far been quite disappointing in comparison to its many potential riches.

The *Grundrisse* were made widely available in the West only in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁵ While it was extensively discussed not only in Germany (editions were published in 1953 in the East and 1967 in the West), but also in France and Italy as early as 1967–8, during a period when Marxian theory was on the rise and often very militant, it was only fully translated into English in 1973. It was, of course, absorbed into wider debates much later, in years when Marxism began to undergo a series of crises, frequently becoming, in the process, somewhat academic and specialist (a similar if not worse fate plagued the reception of the 'Results of the Direct Production Process').⁶ This fact may, indeed, explain why the secondary literature in English is not comparable to that available in many other languages.

This volume aims to contribute to redressing this unsatisfactory situation, through an extensive and in-depth critical engagement with the *Grundrisse* from a variety of different perspectives. It aims to assess both the achievements and limitations of this preliminary version of the Marxian critique of political economy. Moreover, many of the chapters in this volume attempt to do this by

5. For accounts of the international dissemination and reception of the 1857–8 manuscripts, see the third part of Musto 2008.

6. The publication of a translation of Rosdolsky's *The Making of Marx's Capital* in 1977 played a crucial role in the dissemination of the *Grundrisse* in the Anglophone world.

means of a shared 'retrospective' reading strategy. They seek, that is, to throw light on the different dimensions of the 1857–8 manuscripts from the perspective of the most developed version of Marx's dialectical presentation of capitalist forms contained in *Capital*.

Re-reading the *Grundrisse* after *Capital* in this way is a worthwhile effort. On the one hand, we may find in the earlier work suggestions for unexpected tentative solutions to many problematic points in the later work. On the other hand, obscure formulations in the younger work may be enlightened, and thus at the same time revealed as hidden treasures, when read from the perspective of Marx's 'mature' work. Indeed, the *Grundrisse* can and must be valorised – without giving rise to unacceptable drifts towards objectivist or subjectivist readings, fundamentally not very faithful not only to the letter but also, and above all, to the spirit of Marx's theory – to the extent to which they are read against the background of *Capital*.

Some preliminary examples can illustrate the fertility of this approach, which is extensively demonstrated in the chapters of this volume. In the section on the pre-capitalist forms of production, the divide between the 'natural' and the 'historical' gives us a bridge between the 1844 *Manuscripts* and *Capital*: the 'universality' of labour is recognised as a peculiarly historical and contradictory potentiality that begins with capitalist production, a theme which will be deepened in *Capital* Volume I's inquiry into cooperation, the division of labour and machines. In another way, the uncertainties in the 1857–8 manuscripts about money open the way to a 'symbolic' view, which does not quite easily fit with the understanding of the genesis of the money-form later developed in *Capital*, where the latter is unambiguously posited as a commodity. Something similar can be said about the deduction of 'abstract labour', whose meaning in the *Grundrisse* remains less unequivocal than in 1867. While some scholars actually welcome those tensions in Marx's early arguments on abstract labour (since they contain some insightful formulations that were abandoned in later drafts, for instance, regarding the explicit connection between abstract labour and capitalist exploitation), others see them as a sign of the preliminary status of Marx's investigation, which would undergo further necessary 'improvements', or at least, developments.

The text is also intriguing in terms of aspects of its 'crisis-theory': in 1857–8, in the section on 'circulation', Marx links absolute and relative surplus-value extraction, disproportionalities, credit, and overproduction of commodities. This organic unity is either absent or implicit in later works. At the same time, for the Marx of the *Grundrisse*, capitalist development and crises lead secularly to a tendential fall in the rate of profit which looks rather mechanical, in opposition to what we can now understand from the original development of the argument in the manuscripts for *Capital* Volume III, in a certain sense distorted by Engels's

editing work. Again, however, the *Grundrisse* help us to understand the later Marxian logic. The so-called 'Fragment on machines' is a particularly controversial section, especially in terms of its interpretation by the Italian workerist and post-workerist traditions,⁷ and a section that should, similarly, be interpreted against this background.

These were some of the questions that motivated the gathering in Bergamo in 2008 and the subsequent commissioning of additional papers to compose the present volume. The book is organised into six broad thematic sections, each of which aims to explore the development of central perspectives and concepts of the Marxian critique of political economy in and beyond the *Grundrisse*. The first section, 'Achievements and Limits of the *Grundrisse*', opens with Riccardo Bellofiore's attempt to re-read Marx 'backwards'; namely, the attempt to read the *Grundrisse* after *Capital*, which, in turn, allows us to see a continuity of themes from the 1844 *Manuscripts* onwards. The *Grundrisse* are argued to represent a watershed in Marx's thought because of the divide between 'natural' and 'historical' situations as defined in the 'precapitalist forms of production'. At the same time, it is in the *Grundrisse* that the 'universality' of labour is recognised as a peculiar potentiality starting with capitalist production. At this stage, Marx uses the term 'labour' ambiguously: it is used both for 'labour-capacity' (labour-power) and also 'living labour', as well as the bearers of labour-power, that is, workers. These ambiguities are argued to disappear in *Capital*. Another rich and ambiguous theme stressed by Bellofiore is 'money': here, Marx begins with a symbolic view, stressing money as 'command'; a second deduction is convergent to subsequent Marxian deductions of money as a commodity, leading to the first section of *Capital* Volume I. Bellofiore argues that these ambiguities have allowed for serious interpretative distortions, which have, however, also been instrumental in revealing new aspects of Marx's argument in *Capital*. Two intriguing arguments of the *Grundrisse* are the presentation of 'abstract labour' (this time linked to the capitalist social situation as well as generalised commodity-exchange) and 'crisis-theory'. Another positive ambiguity is that the *Grundrisse* are open to a quite different accent on struggles over living labour as the source of new value. Bellofiore concludes by arguing for an 'actualisation' of the conceptual acquisitions present in the *Grundrisse*, in part achieved by reading the *Grundrisse* not 'against', but 'together' with, *Capital*.

7. Although workerist interest in the 'Fragment on Machines' can be traced back to its publication in Italian in the fourth issue of *Quaderni Rossi* in 1964 and Panzieri's early studies, it was undoubtedly Negri's *Marx Beyond Marx* (Negri 1991), published in French and Italian in 1979, that has constituted the most influential view of those controversial passages of the *Grundrisse* coming from that tradition, particularly in light of the international reception of Negri's work.

Juan Iñigo Carrera's chapter, 'Method: from the *Grundrisse* to *Capital*', explores the development of Marx's method, from the 1840s onwards. Iñigo Carrera argues that the *Grundrisse* constitute a step in the development of an original method: the reproduction of the concrete by means of thought, as opposed to its representation – a method which, however, is only fully discovered and developed in the writing of *Capital*. Thus, an engagement with the latter text can help us to throw light upon both the methodological innovations and limitations of the former. From this perspective, we can see that the discovery of the determinations of value in the *Grundrisse* still follows an essentially analytic course. *Capital*, on the other hand, overcomes these limitations in the flow of synthetic reproduction from its point of departure, allowing Marx to develop the substance of value into its necessary concrete forms. Iñigo Carrera thus argues that the transition from the *Grundrisse* to *Capital* involves not simply a change in the method of presentation, but also in the method of inquiry itself.

Roberto Fineschi's chapter, 'The Four Levels of Abstraction of Marx's Concept of "Capital". Or, Can We Consider the *Grundrisse* the Most Advanced Version of Marx's Concept of Capital?', analyses Marx's different plans for his critique of political economy. Fineschi argues that Marx successfully improved his theory after the *Grundrisse*, in the subsequent drafts leading to *Capital*, in order to overcome some difficulties that arose from the insufficient dialectical development of categories in his project in 1857–8. Engaging with both the German debate (the so-called *neue Lektüre*) and Italian workerist perspectives, and drawing upon new philological findings of the MEGA,² Fineschi argues that Marx's initial attempt to derive a conceptual structure for *Capital* from Hegel was later replaced by the project of developing a theory of capital by following its own inner dialectical logic. The concept of capital is divided into four levels of abstraction: a sort of level zero of 'simple circulation'; a first level, called 'generality'; a second level, or 'particularity'; and a final level of abstraction, or 'singularity'. The progressive transformation of the outline of the *Grundrisse*, however, does not imply any rupture or radical discontinuity. Rather, Marx further developed a general outline in order to arrive at a more consistent dialectical presentation of categories.

The second section, 'Abstract Labour, Value and Money', opens with Chris Arthur's chapter on 'The Practical Truth of Abstract Labour'. Arthur argues that there are two important determinations of abstract labour in the *Grundrisse* that are absent from *Capital*: first, the 'practical truth' of abstract labour is a feature only of the most modern society (industrial capitalism); and second, this form of labour is thematised in the framework of the capital-relation (not of simple commodity-circulation). The chapter argues that the latter determination, in particular, can be read in the light of the proposition that the form-determinations of labour should be thematised only subsequent to the derivation of the general

formula for capital. Moreover, this implies a 'negative labour theory of value' in which productive labour is cognised in value only in sublated form. Immediately value positing is a function of 'the time of capital'; nonetheless, because this pure motion in time is borne by labour, socially-necessary labour-time is, in a sense, a determinant of its magnitude.

Patrick Murray's chapter, 'Unavoidable Crises: Reflections on Backhaus and the Development of Marx's Value-Form Theory in the *Grundrisse*', re-examines Marx's criticisms of the banking reforms proposed by the Proudhonist Alfred Darimon, which were intended to ward off financial crises. Prodded by the first world economic crisis, which started in the autumn of 1857, Marx began the *Grundrisse* with a critique of Darimon. Marx discovered the root of economic crisis in the value-form, that is, in the need for value to appear as money. This necessity meant that the difference between value and price is not a nominal one, which confutes Say's Law, discloses the role of supply and demand in Marx's value theory, reveals the illusion of the 'labour-money' or 'time-chit' proposals of the Proudhonists, and opens the door to crises. Crises come with the commodity-form. Murray argues that, by exposing the inner connection between value and money, Marx moves beyond classical political economy. The *Grundrisse*'s critique of Darimon brings out a fundamental feature of his later analysis of the value-form, namely, the *polarity* of the value-form: the commodity form (the relative value-form) and the money form (the equivalent value-form) are opposed yet inseparable. In assessing the place of the *Grundrisse* in the development of Marx's account of the value-form, Murray turns to consider the proposals of those recent currents in Marxian theory and the interpretation of Marx that have been labelled 'the new dialectics' and 'value-form theory', particularly Hans-Georg Backhaus's 1969 essay 'On the Dialectics of the Value-Form [*Zur Dialektik der Wertform*]'. Considering the extent to which Marx's exploration of the value-form in the *Grundrisse* counts as an early version of the dialectic of the value-form, the chapter offers a reassessment of key claims in Backhaus's influential study.

In the third section, 'The Concept of Capital', Martha Campbell's chapter, 'The Transformation of Money into Capital', compares the transition from simple circulation to capital in the *Grundrisse* to the two other versions in the *Original Text* of the *Contribution* and *Capital* Volume I. Campbell argues that the comparison of the three texts clarifies Marx's terminology. In particular, in the transition section of the two earlier texts, Marx uses the term 'value' to refer to capital. Drawing on this textual evidence, the chapter posits that the basis for the transition between simple circulation and capital is logical in all three versions. That is, Marx turns from simple circulation to capital, on the grounds that commodity-exchange cannot exist as an ongoing and continuous or established

process except as one phase of the circulation of capital. In other words, according to Campbell's reading, simple circulation necessarily presupposes capital. A first implication of this is that simple circulation was conceived by Marx as an abstract aspect of the capitalist mode of production and unique to it. This conclusion challenges those readings that see Part One of *Capital* as referring either to simple commodity-production, conceived as an historical antecedent of capitalism; or to 'the commodity form of production in general', conceived as an abstract moment of capitalism, 'at which all that exists are individuals who are taken to be producers for exchange', but which is, nonetheless, not specific to capitalism. A further implication of Campbell's argument is that capital is implicit in, and so derived from, results established in Part One. In this sense, there is no break between the introduction of capital in Part Two and what has come before.

Howard Engelskirchen, in the chapter 'The Concept of Capital in the *Grundrisse*', argues that Marx's efforts to develop the concept of capital, on the basis of his life-long study of Aristotle, are similar to what contemporary philosophers of science call the 'real definition' of a natural or social kind. Marx's analyses can thus be seen as contributing significantly to efforts to extend thinking about natural kinds from natural to social science. He used the concept of capital in order to identify decisive causal structures of social life, and to specify those few properties of capital that are constitutive of it. Building upon Charles Bettelheim's work, Engelskirchen explores the double separation that is the central characteristic of the capitalist mode of production: the separation of enterprises from one another and the separation of direct producers from their conditions of production. This double separation, Engelskirchen argues, aptly captures the *Grundrisse*'s concept of 'capital in general', in the movement from circulation to production and valorisation, and to the unity of production and circulation. However, the real definition of the resulting structure consists not only in labour's separation from the means of production, but also in its subordination to these as values; its fundamental determination is argued to consist in the appropriation of living labour by objectified labour for the sake of increasing objectified labour. Thus, clarity on this dimension points towards capital's transformation: to associated labour's self-determined unfolding of human needs and abilities.

The fourth section, 'Technology, Domination, Emancipation', considers themes related in particular to the so-called 'Fragment on machines' and the concept of 'General Intellect', which have been widely debated so-called years. Michael Heinrich's chapter, 'The "Fragment on Machines": a Marxian Misconception in the *Grundrisse* and its Overcoming in *Capital*', begins by noting that some authors have conceived the so-called 'Fragment on machines' as a central document for

a Marxian 'break-down theory' of capitalism, or at least as a description of a process in which capitalism clashes with a new mode of production inaugurated by capitalism itself. In such considerations, the results of the 'Fragment' are taken for granted. Heinrich argues that these results derive, on the one hand, from a one-sided conception of crisis in Marx's thinking since the early 1850s; and, on the other hand, from some shortcomings in the conception of basic categories in the *Grundrisse*. In the years after *Grundrisse*, Marx overcame both misconceptions. The chapter concludes by suggesting that *Capital* Volume I, particularly in the sections dealing with the production of relative surplus-value, contains an implicit critique of the 'Fragment on machines' – a critique that is often neglected by interpreters who want to rely on this early text for a reformulation of the critique of political economy.

In 'The General Intellect in Marx's *Grundrisse* and Beyond', Tony Smith engages with recent debates regarding the role of the 'General Intellect', a term that is used only in the *Grundrisse*. In particular, Smith questions the extent to which this text from the *Grundrisse* presents an account of capitalist development that diverges in significant respects from the views Marx presented elsewhere. Engaging with studies by Paolo Virno and Carlo Vercellone, Smith questions the claims as to the unprecedented role the diffusion of the General Intellect plays in contemporary capitalism. According to Virno, the flourishing of the General Intellect, which Marx thought could only take place in communism, characterises post-Fordist capitalism. Vercellone adds that Marx's account of the real subsumption of living labour under capital is obsolete in contemporary cognitive capitalism. Against these arguments that Marx's value theory has been historically superannuated, Smith argues that these views rest on a confusion of value and wealth, a neglect of Marx's account of the role of 'free gifts' to capital, an underestimation of the role of the General Intellect in the period prior to the rise of post-Fordism/cognitive capitalism, and an underestimation of the restrictions on the diffusion of the General Intellect in contemporary capitalism.

Guido Starosta's chapter, 'The System of Machinery and Determinations of Revolutionary Subjectivity in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*', argues that Marx's exposition of the forms of the real subsumption of labour to capital – in particular, the system of machinery of large-scale industry – constitutes the dialectical presentation of the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity. Starosta argues that the development of the emancipatory subject is, for Marx, the immanent result of the unfolding of the reified forms of social mediation of capitalist society. More specifically, it is the outcome of transformations of the materiality of human productive subjectivity that they bring about. The essence of this capitalist transformation of the production process of human life lies in the mutation of the productive attributes of the collective labourer according to a determinate

tendency: the individual organs of the latter eventually become universal productive subjects. This is the inner material content underlying the political revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat. However, Starosta argues that Marx's dialectical exposition of those transformations in *Capital* is truncated and does not unfold the plenitude of the material determinations underlying the revolutionary being of the working class, which is presented as no more than an abstract possibility. A gap thus remains between the 'dialectic of human labour' unfolded in the chapters on relative surplus-value in *Capital*, and the revolutionary conclusions at the end of Volume I in the chapter on 'The Historical Tendency of Capital Accumulation'. Starosta argues that it is possible to find the elements for the completion of the systematic exposition of determinations of revolutionary subjectivity on the basis of a careful reading of the relevant passages of the so-called 'Fragment on machines' from the *Grundrisse*.

In 'From the *Grundrisse* to *Capital* and Beyond: Then and Now', George Caffentzis explores the relationship between the two main revolution-producing 'tendencies' or 'laws' in the development of capitalism that Marx identifies in the *Grundrisse*: namely, the falling rate of profit and the 'breakdown' of the creation and measurement of wealth by labour and labour-time. Caffentzis argues that the increasing incommensurability of wealth and labour-time, initially in tension with the thesis of the falling rate of profit, was transformed in Marx's work following the *Grundrisse* into an essential preliminary for the 'law' of the rate of profit to fall. Caffentzis further traces the impact of the reading of the *Grundrisse* on the project of the journal *Zerowork I*, and the reconceptualisation of the workday initiated by socialist feminists, particularly in the Wages for Housework campaign, revealing the manifold forms of work in capitalist society. His chapter concludes by tracing some politically significant parallels in Marx's thought between 1857 and 1882 and the succession of some themes in the anti-capitalist movement between the 1960s and the present. He compares the increasing 'techno-scepticism' of the anti-capitalist movements over the last forty years to a similar development in Marx's thought, which shifted from an emphasis on the superhuman machines of the *Grundrisse* and the General Intellect to the political forms of the Paris Commune and the Russian *obshchina*.

The fifth section, 'Competition, Cycles and Crisis', opens with Fred Moseley's chapter, 'The Whole and the Parts. The Beginning of Marx's Theory of the Distribution of Surplus-Value in the *Grundrisse*'. Moseley argues that the *Grundrisse* are mainly about the production of surplus-value, that is, the determination of the total surplus-value produced in the sphere of production in the capitalist economy as a whole. However, he notes that Marx makes several brief comments on the distribution of surplus-value, that is, the division of the total surplus-value into individual parts, especially the equalisation of rates of profit

across industries. This chapter reviews the initial discussions of Marx's theory of the distribution of surplus-value in the *Grundrisse*, arguing that in this early work, Marx clearly stated the key logical premise of his theory that the total surplus-value is determined prior to its distribution, and that this total amount is not affected by the distribution of surplus-value. Moseley further argues that this relation between the production of surplus-value and the distribution of surplus-value is the quantitative dimension Marx's logical structure of capital in general and many capitals (or competition).

Jan Toporowski's chapter, 'Marx's *Grundrisse* and the Monetary Business-Cycle', argues that, although Marx explicitly rejected the monetary business-cycle in the *Grundrisse*, he 'smuggled' it back again into his theory of crisis in *Capital* Volume III, where crises arise because 'interest-bearing capital' circulates in production (and exchange) and therefore is not available for the repayment of financial liabilities on demand (an element at the core of Minsky's theory of financial crisis). Toporowski argues that Marx's initial rejection of a monetary business-cycle, and the reappearance of that cycle in his later crisis theory, reflects Marx's dialectical approach to finance. More specifically, the financing needs of capitalist production induce financial innovation ('interest-bearing capital'), which comes to have a dominant, rather than a subordinate, role in relation to production. According to Toporowski, it follows from this that the dominance of finance allows credit-cycles to determine the nature and dynamics of capitalism. In other words, having emerged to serve industrial capitalism, financial markets can become a much more liquid source of profit; they can depress capital accumulation or stimulate it with credit-cycles. These arguments lead Toporowski to reject functionalist readings of the role of finance in the capitalist mode of production.

The chapter by Geert Reuten and Peter D. Thomas, 'Crisis and the Rate of Profit in Marx's Laboratory', examines the role of 'the tendency of the rate of profit to fall' in Marx's successive drafts of the critique of political economy. On the basis of a philological analysis of the *Grundrisse* and the drafts for *Capital* Volume III, they argue that Marx's views on the 'law' or 'tendency' of the rate of profit to fall developed from a law about the historical destination of the capitalist system as tending towards breakdown, to a theory about the functioning of the capitalist mode of production as a (potentially) reproductive system. They argue that Marx's analysis of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall in the *Grundrisse*, as in his earlier economic writings from the 1840s, remains indebted, in many key respects, to the conceptual matrix in which this theme had been previously developed in classical political economy, particularly in Smith and Ricardo. As his research-project develops, Marx's texts begin to display a development away from a notion of an 'empirical' trend for the rate of profit to fall,

and towards a notion of tendency as operative power, which results in a notion of the cyclical variation of the rate of profit. On the basis of this textual analysis, Reuten and Thomas attempt to indicate some of the theoretical and political reasons that may have encouraged Marx to undertake this development. In conclusion, they outline some themes for future research that arise from this understanding of Marx's intellectual development, including a reassessment of the relative weight of Marx's debts to classical political economy, on the one hand, and Hegel's thought, on the other; the relationship between politics and economics in Marx's mature critique of political economy; and the implications of this analysis for contemporary debates regarding both the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and the status of Marxian research as social theory.

The sixth section, 'Society and History in the *Grundrisse*', confronts the problem of social theory in Marx's work from the late 1850s to the successive drafts of *Capital*. Luca Basso's chapter, 'Between Pre-Capitalist Forms and Capitalism: The Problem of Society in the *Grundrisse* (*Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy*)', focuses on the concept of society in the *Grundrisse*, and particularly its distinction between the various modes of production. However, Basso argues that, rather than writing a general history of humanity, Marx wanted to analyse the distinctive signs of capitalism. The pre-capitalist forms were characterised by the unity of man with the land and the community to which he belonged. The capitalist system broke down these communities [*Gemeinwesen*], which had been based on traditional hierarchical structures, thus representing a 'new beginning', a radical change from the past. Only with the birth of capitalism did it become possible to truly speak of the individual as such, autonomous but also subjected to the objective power of money, and of society, paradoxically isolating individuals from each other but also characterised by subjective insurgences, which constantly threaten its to rupture its totality.

Amy Wendling's chapter, 'Second Nature: Gender in Marx's *Grundrisse*', analyses the role of gender in the 1857–8 manuscripts, in a 'deliberately anachronistic' reading. Noting the relative absence of reflections on gender-related themes in the *Grundrisse*, particularly in relation to their presence in Marx's early works and the return to the topic in *Capital* and other later works, Wendling reconstructs Marx's continuing research on these themes in the 1850s, drawing in particular on one of Marx's excerpt-notebooks from 1852, soon to be made available in the MEGA². Wendling argues that Marx's inquiries into what is today called gender are the product of the intersection, and then the supersession, of both the *querelle des femmes* and the political economy of Marx's time. Without downplaying the obvious limitations of Marx's treatment of gender in the *Grundrisse*, the chapter argues that it provides some powerful conceptual tools for working on the issue of gender. This is especially true of Marx's critical revival

and reworking of the Aristotelian idea of a 'second nature' produced via social and historical shaping. Marx's ultimate conception of gender as an enormously complex, socially imbedded, yet transhistorical political structure, exceeds the discourses that Marx inherited. The *Grundrisse* are thus depicted as a developmental stage in Marx's thinking. Wendling argues that the treatment of gender in Marx foreshadows twentieth-century debates in Marxist feminism and in feminist theory more generally, particularly regarding debates about labour, technology, and class-divisions among gendered subjects.

Joel Wainwright, in the chapter 'Uneven Developments: from the *Grundrisse* to *Capital*', compares the way in which the two texts frame the problematic of uneven development, that is, the way that capitalism's inherently uneven development is thematised as a problem for explanation. In the *Grundrisse*, the uneven nature of capitalism as development is examined principally through the emergence of capitalism from precapitalist relations. While this analysis is not entirely absent from *Capital* (for example, the discussion of primitive accumulation), precapitalist formations are not treated as systematically in *Capital*. By contrast, Wainwright argues, uneven development enters *Capital* in the final section, particularly where Marx criticises Wakefield. Reading these texts together, he argues that the problematic of uneven development shifts from the *Grundrisse* to *Capital* in a way that underscores Marx's growing stress on capital's imperialist character. This shift is argued to have its roots in political events of the period when Marx developed the research of the *Grundrisse* into the drafts of *Capital*.

The final chapter in the volume, Massimiliano Tomba's 'Pre-Capitalistic Forms of Production and Primitive Accumulation. Marx's Historiography from the *Grundrisse* to *Capital*', focuses on the pre-capitalist forms of production in the *Grundrisse*. Tomba argues that in these notebooks, Marx studied the precapitalist forms through a twofold interpretive schema: he joined a kind of evolutionary history to a repetitive history, a history of invariants. He did this in order to understand the nature of the historical break that the capitalist mode of production represents, the new form of social relation and the anthropological transformation of the human being, producing in this way a novel historical and historiographical perspective. However, Tomba argues that Marx's attempt to sketch the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production through the scheme of genesis, development, and crisis also resulted in a typical sequence of a philosophy of history. Only in his late works, in his rethinking of 'primitive accumulation', did Marx think the historical contemporaneity of different forms of productions, and the synchronism of different historical temporalities.

We hope that the chapters published in this volume provide a sense of the diversity of contemporary approaches to critical Marxist research generally, and

to the reading of the *Grundrisse* in particular. They attest to a common intent to examine critically the foundations and development of Marx's thought. Albeit in different ways and with different emphases, each chapter proposes to re-read Marx's project today both in the light of recent philological advances and also in terms of the capacity of such a philologically-informed reading to contribute to our understanding of the contemporary capitalist mode of production. Taken in their totality, these contributions will help us to re-read the 1857–8 manuscripts as an intense 'laboratory', in which we can observe a crucial stage in the development of Marx's critique of political economy.