

Dissemination and Reception of the *Grundrisse* in the World. Introduction

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I. 1858-1953: One hundred years of solitude

Having abandoned the *Grundrisse* in May 1858 to make room for work on the *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx used parts of it in composing this latter text but then almost never drew on it again. In fact, although it was his habit to invoke his own previous studies, even to transcribe whole passages from them, none of the preparatory manuscripts for *Capital*, with the exception of those of 1861-3, contains any reference to the *Grundrisse*. It lay among all the other drafts that he had no intention of bringing into service as he became absorbed in solving more specific problems than they had addressed.

There can be no certainty about the matter, but it is likely that not even Friedrich Engels read the *Grundrisse*. As is well known, Marx managed to complete only the first volume of *Capital* by the time of his death, and the unfinished manuscripts for the second and third volumes were selected and put together for publication by Engels. In the course of this activity, he must have examined dozens of notebooks containing preliminary drafts of *Capital*, and it is plausible to assume that, when he was putting some order into the mountain of papers, he leafed through the *Grundrisse* and concluded that it was a

premature version of his friend's work – prior even to the *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* of 1859 – and that it could therefore not be used for his purposes.

Besides, Engels never mentioned the *Grundrisse*, either in his prefaces to the two volumes of *Capital* that he saw into print or in any of his own vast collection of letters.

After Engels's death, a large part of Marx's original texts were deposited in the archive of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) in Berlin, where they were treated with the utmost neglect. Political conflicts within the Party hindered publication of the numerous important materials that Marx had left behind; indeed, they led to dispersal of the manuscripts and for a long time made it impossible to bring out a complete edition of his works. Nor did anyone take responsibility for an inventory of Marx's intellectual bequest, with the result that the *Grundrisse* remained buried alongside his other papers.

The only part of it that came to light during this period was the 'Introduction', which Karl Kautsky published in 1903 in *Die Neue Zeit* (The New Times), together with a brief note that presented it as a 'fragmentary draft' dated 23 August 1857. Arguing that it was the introduction to Marx's magnum opus, Kautsky gave it the title *Einleitung zu einer Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy) and maintained that 'despite its fragmentary character' it 'offered a large number of new viewpoints' (Marx 1903: 710, n. 1). Considerable interest was indeed shown in the text: the first versions in other languages were in French (1903) and in English (1904), and it soon became more widely noticed after Kautsky published it in 1907 as an appendix to the *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. More and more translations followed – including into Russian (1922), Japanese (1926), Greek

(1927), and Chinese (1930) – until it became one of the works most commented upon in the whole of Marx’s theoretical production.

While fortune smiled on the ‘Introduction’, however, the *Grundrisse* remained unknown for a long time. It is difficult to believe that Kautsky did not discover the whole manuscript along with the ‘Introduction’, but he never made any mention of it. And a little later, when he decided to publish some previously unknown writings of Marx between 1905 and 1910, he concentrated on a collection of material from 1861-3, to which he gave the title *Theories of Surplus-Value*.

The discovery of the *Grundrisse* came in 1923, thanks to David Ryazanov, director of the Marx-Engels Institute (MEI) in Moscow and organizer of the *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA), the complete works of Marx and Engels. After examining the *Nachlass* in Berlin, he revealed the existence of the *Grundrisse* in a report to the Socialist Academy in Moscow on the literary estate of Marx and Engels:

I found among Marx’s papers another eight notebooks of economic studies. ...

The manuscript can be dated to the middle of the 1850s and contains the first draft of Marx’s work [*Das Kapital*], whose title he had not yet fixed at the time; it [also] represents the first version of his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.¹

(Ryazanov 1925: 393-4).

‘In one of these notebooks,’ Ryazanov continues, ‘Kautsky found the ‘Introduction’ to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*’ – and he considers the preparatory

manuscripts for *Capital* to be of ‘extraordinary interest for what they tell us about the history of Marx’s intellectual development and his characteristic method of work and research’ (Ryazanov 1925: 394).

Under an agreement for publication of the MEGA among the MEI, the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (which still had custody of the Marx-Engels *Nachlass*), the *Grundrisse* was photographed together with many other unpublished writings and began to be studied by specialists in Moscow. Between 1925 and 1927 Pavel Veller from the MEI catalogued all the preparatory materials for *Capital*, the first of which was the *Grundrisse* itself. By 1931 it had been completely deciphered and typed out, and in 1933 one part was published in Russian as the ‘Chapter on Money’, followed two years later by an edition in German. Finally, in 1936, the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute (MELI, successor to the MEI) acquired six of the eight notebooks of the *Grundrisse*, which made it possible to solve the remaining editorial problems.

In 1939, then, Marx’s last important manuscript – an extensive work from one of the most fertile periods of his life – appeared in Moscow under the title given it by Veller: *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie (Rohentwurf) 1857–1858*. Two years later there followed an appendix (*Anhang*) comprising Marx’s comments of 1850-1 on Ricardo’s *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, his notes on Bastiat and Carey, his own table of contents for the *Grundrisse*, and the preparatory material (*Urtext*) for the 1859 *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. The MELI’s preface to the edition of 1939 highlighted its exceptional value: ‘the manuscript of 1857-1858,

published in full for the first time in this volume, marked a decisive stage in Marx's economic work' (Marx-Engels-Lenin-Institut 1939: VII).

Although the editorial guidelines and the form of publication were similar, the *Grundrisse* was not included in the volumes of the MEGA but appeared in a separate edition. Furthermore, the proximity of the Second World War meant that the work remained virtually unknown: the three thousand copies soon became very rare, and only a few managed to cross the Soviet frontiers. The *Grundrisse* did not feature in the *Sochinenya* of 1928-1947, the first Russian edition of the works of Marx and Engels, and its first republication in German had to wait until 1953. While it is astonishing that a text such as the *Grundrisse* was published at all during the Stalin period, heretical as it surely was with regard to the then indisputable canons of *diamat*, Soviet-style 'dialectical materialism', we should also bear in mind that it was then the most important of Marx's writings not to be circulating in Germany. Its eventual publication in East Berlin in 30,000 copies was part of the celebrations marking *Karl Marx Jahr*, the seventieth anniversary of its author's death and the hundred and fiftieth of his birth.

Written in 1857-8, the *Grundrisse* was only available to be read throughout the world from 1953 after a hundred years of solitude.

II. Five hundred thousand copies circulating in the world

Despite the resonance of this major new manuscript prior to *Capital*, and despite the theoretical value attributed to it, editions in other languages were slow to appear.

Another extract, after the ‘Introduction’, was the first to generate interest: the ‘Forms which Precede Capitalist Production’. It was translated into Russian in 1939, and then from Russian into Japanese in 1947-8. Subsequently, the separate German edition of this section and a translation into English helped to ensure a wide readership: the former, which appeared in 1952 as part of the *Kleine Bücherei des Marxismus-Leninismus* (Small Library of Marxism-Leninism), was the basis for Hungarian and Italian versions (1953 and 1954 respectively); while the latter, published in 1964, helped to spread it in Anglophone countries and, via translations in Argentina (1966) and Spain (1967), into the Spanish-speaking world. The editor of this English edition, Eric Hobsbawm, added a preface that helped to underline its importance: *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, he wrote, was Marx’s ‘most systematic attempt to grapple with the problem of historical evolution’, and ‘it can be said without hesitation that any Marxist historical discussion which does not take [it] into account ... must be reconsidered in its light’ (Hobsbawm 1964: 10). More and more scholars around the world did indeed begin to concern themselves with this text, which appeared in many other countries and everywhere prompted major historical and theoretical discussions.

Translations of the *Grundrisse* as a whole began in the late 1950s; its dissemination was a slow yet inexorable process, which eventually permitted a more thorough, and in some respects different, appreciation of Marx’s oeuvre. The best interpreters of the *Grundrisse* tackled it in the original, but its wider study – both among scholars unable to read German and, above all, among political militants and university students – occurred only after its publication in various national languages.

The first to appear were in the East: in Japan (1958--65) and China (1962--78). A Russian edition came out in the Soviet Union only in 1968--9, as a supplement to the second, enlarged edition of the *Sochineniya* (1955--66). Its previous exclusion from this was all the more serious because it had resulted in a similar absence from the *Marx-Engels Werke* (MEW) of 1956--68, which reproduced the Soviet selection of texts. The MEW – the most widely used edition of the works of Marx and Engels, as well as the source for translations into most other languages – was thus deprived of the *Grundrisse* until its eventual publication as a supplement in 1983.

The *Grundrisse* also began to circulate in Western Europe in the late 1960s. The first translation appeared in France (1967-8), but it was of inferior quality and had to be replaced by a more faithful one in 1980. An Italian version followed between 1968 and 1970, the initiative significantly coming, as in France, from a publishing house independent of the Communist Party.

The text was published in Spanish in the 1970s. If one excludes the version of 1970-1 published in Cuba, which was of little value as it was done from the French version, and whose circulation remained confined within the limits of that country, the first proper Spanish translation was accomplished in Argentina between 1971 and 1976. There followed another three done conjointly in Spain, Argentina and Mexico, making Spanish the language with the largest number of translations of the *Grundrisse*.

The English translation was preceded in 1971 by a selection of extracts, whose editor, David McLellan, raised readers' expectations of the text: 'The *Grundrisse* is much more than a rough draft of *Capital*' (McLellan 1971: 2); indeed, more than any other work, it 'contains a synthesis of the various strands of Marx's thought. ... In a sense, none

of Marx's works is complete, but the completest of them is the *Grundrisse*' (McLellan 1971: 14-15). The complete translation finally arrived in 1973, a full twenty years after the original edition in German. Its translator, Martin Nicolaus, wrote in a foreword: 'Besides their great biographical and historical value, they [the *Grundrisse*] add much new material, and stand as the only outline of Marx's full political-economic project. ... The *Grundrisse* challenges and puts to the test every serious interpretation of Marx yet conceived' (Nicolaus 1973: 7).

The 1970s were also the crucial decade for translations in Eastern Europe. For, once the green light had been given in the Soviet Union, there was no longer any obstacle to its appearance in the 'satellite' countries: Hungary (1972), Czechoslovakia (1971-7 in Czech, 1974-5 in Slovak) and Romania (1972-4), as well as in Yugoslavia (1979). During the same period, two contrasting Danish editions were put on sale more or less simultaneously: one by the publishing house linked to the Communist Party (1974-8), the other by a publisher close to the New Left (1975-7).

In the 1980s the *Grundrisse* was also translated in Iran (1985-7), where it constituted the first rigorous edition in Persian of any of Marx's works, and in a number of further European countries. The Slovenian edition dates from 1985, and the Polish and Finnish from 1986 (the latter with Soviet support).

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of what was known as 'actually existing socialism', which in reality had been a blatant negation of Marx's thought, there was a lull in the publication of Marx's writings. Nevertheless, even in the years when the silence surrounding its author was broken only by people consigning it with absolute certainty to oblivion, the *Grundrisse* continued to be translated into other

languages. Editions in Greece (1989-92), Turkey (1999-2003), South Korea (2000) and Brazil (scheduled for 2008) make it Marx's work with the largest number of new translations in the last two decades.

All in all, the *Grundrisse* has been translated in its entirety into 22 languages,² in a total of 32 different versions. Not including partial editions, it has been printed in more than 500,000 copies³ – a figure that would greatly surprise the man who wrote it only to summarize, with the greatest of haste, the economic studies he had undertaken up to that point.

III. Readers and interpreters

The history of the reception of the *Grundrisse*, as well as of its dissemination, is marked by quite a late start. The decisive reason for this, apart from the twists and turns associated with its rediscovery, is certainly the complexity of the fragmentary and roughly sketched manuscript itself, so difficult to interpret and to render in other languages. In this connection, the authoritative scholar Roman Rosdolsky has noted:

In 1948, when I first had the good fortune to see one of the then very rare copies ..., it was clear from the outset that this was a work which was of fundamental importance for Marxist theory. However, its unusual form and to some extent obscure manner of expression made it far from suitable for reaching a wide circle of readers.

(Rosdolsky 1977: xi)

These considerations led Rosdolsky to attempt a clear exposition and critical examination of the text: the result, his *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Marxschen 'Kapital'. Der Rohentwurf des 'Kapital' 1857-58* (The Making of Marx's 'Capital'), which appeared in German in 1968, is the first and still the principal monograph devoted to the *Grundrisse*. Translated into many languages, it encouraged the publication and circulation of Marx's work and has had a considerable influence on all its subsequent interpreters.

Nineteen sixty-eight was a significant year for the *Grundrisse*. In addition to Rosdolsky's book, the first essay on it in English appeared in the March-April issue of *New Left Review*: Martin Nicolaus's 'The Unknown Marx', which had the merit of making the *Grundrisse* more widely known and underlining the need for a full translation. Meanwhile, in Germany and Italy, the *Grundrisse* won over some of the leading actors in the student revolt, who were excited by the radical and explosive content as they worked their way through its pages. The fascination was irresistible especially among those in the New Left who were committed to overturn the interpretation of Marx provided by Marxism-Leninism.

On the other hand, the times were changing in the East too. After an initial period in which the *Grundrisse* was almost completely ignored, or regarded with diffidence, Vitali Vygotski's introductory study – *Istoriya odnogo velikogo otkrytiya Karla Marksa* (The Story of a Great Discovery: How Marx Wrote 'Capital'), published in Russia in 1965 and the German Democratic Republic in 1967 – took a sharply different tack. He defined it as a 'work of genius', which 'takes us into Marx's "creative laboratory" and

enables us to follow step by step the process in which Marx worked out his economic theory', and to which it was therefore necessary to give due heed (Vygodski 1974: 44).

In the space of just a few years the *Grundrisse* became a key text for many influential Marxists. Apart from those already mentioned, the scholars who especially concerned themselves with it were: Walter Tuchscheerer in the German Democratic Republic, Alfred Schmidt in the Federal Republic of Germany, members of the Budapest School in Hungary, Lucien Sève in France, Kiyooki Hirata in Japan, Gajo Petrović in Yugoslavia, Antonio Negri in Italy, Adam Schaff in Poland and Allen Oakley in Australia. In general, it became a work with which any serious student of Marx had to come to grips. With various nuances, the interpreters of the *Grundrisse* divided between those who considered it an autonomous work conceptually complete in itself and those who saw it as an early manuscript that merely paved the way for *Capital*. The ideological background to discussions of the *Grundrisse* - the core of the dispute was the legitimacy or illegitimacy of approaches to Marx, with their huge political repercussions – favoured the development of inadequate and what seem today ludicrous interpretations. For some of the most zealous commentators on the *Grundrisse* even argued that it was theoretically superior to *Capital*, despite the additional ten years of intense research that went into the composition of the latter. Similarly, among the main detractors of the *Grundrisse*, there were some who claimed that, despite the important sections for our understanding of Marx's relationship with Hegel and despite the significant passages on alienation, it did not add anything to what was already known about Marx.

Not only were there opposing readings of the *Grundrisse*, there were also non-readings of it – the most striking and representative example being that of Louis

Althusser. Even as he attempted to make Marx's supposed silences speak and to read *Capital* in such a way as to 'make visible whatever invisible survivals there are in it' (Althusser and Balibar 1979: 32), he permitted himself to overlook the conspicuous mass of hundreds of written pages of the *Grundrisse* and to effect a (later hotly debated) division of Marx's thought into the works of his youth and the works of his maturity, without taking cognizance of the content and significance of the manuscripts of 1857-8.⁴

From the mid-1970s on, however, the *Grundrisse* won an ever larger number of readers and interpreters. Two extensive commentaries appeared, one in Japanese in 1974 (Morita, Kiriro and Toshio Yamada 1974), the other in German in 1978 (Projektgruppe Entwicklung des Marxschen Systems 1978), but many other authors also wrote about it. A number of scholars saw it as a text of special importance for one of the most widely debated issues concerning Marx's thought: his intellectual debt to Hegel. Others were fascinated by the almost prophetic statements in the fragments on machinery and automation, and in Japan too the *Grundrisse* was read as a highly topical text for our understanding of modernity. In the 1980s the first detailed studies began to appear in China, where the work was used to throw light on the genesis of *Capital*, while in the Soviet Union a collective volume was published entirely on the *Grundrisse* (Vv. Aa. 1987).

In recent years, the enduring capacity of Marx's works to explain (while also criticizing) the capitalist mode of production has prompted a revival of interest on the part of many international scholars (see Musto 2007). If this revival lasts and if it is accompanied by a new demand for Marx in the field of politics, the *Grundrisse* will certainly once more prove to be one of his writings capable of attracting major attention.

Meanwhile, in the hope that ‘Marx’s theory will be a living source of knowledge and the political practice which this knowledge directs’ (Rosdolsky 1977: xiv), the story presented here of the global dissemination and reception of the *Grundrisse* is intended as a modest recognition of its author and as an attempt to reconstruct a still unwritten chapter in the history of Marxism.

Appendix I: Chronological table of translations of the *Grundrisse*

1939-41	First German edition
1953	Second German edition
1958-65	Japanese translation
1962-78	Chinese translation
1967-8	French translation
1968-9	Russian translation
1968-70	Italian translation
1970-1	Spanish translation
1971-7	Czech translation
1972	Hungarian translation
1972-4	Romanian translation
1973	English translation
1974-5	Slovak translation

1974-8	Danish translation
1979	Serbian/Serbo--Croatian translation
1985	Slovenian translation
1985-7	Persian translation
1986	Polish translation
1986	Finnish translation
1989-92	Greek translation
1999-2003	Turkish translation
2000	Korean translation
2008	Portuguese translation

Appendix II: A few points on the content and structure of Part Three

The research on the *Grundrisse* collected in the following pages was undertaken in all the countries where the work has been translated in full. Countries sharing a common language (Germany, Austria and Switzerland for German; Cuba, Argentina, Spain and Mexico for Spanish; the USA, Britain, Australia and Canada for English; Brazil and Portugal for Portuguese), where the dissemination of the *Grundrisse* took place more or less in parallel, have been dealt with in as many common chapters. Similarly, chapters referring to countries where the *Grundrisse* was translated into more than one language (Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia) include the dissemination history for all the languages concerned. Moreover, since those two countries no longer exist as such, the chapter

headings bear the names that they had at the time when the *Grundrisse* was published there.

The sequence of chapters follows the chronological order of publication of the *Grundrisse*. The only exception is the chapter on ‘Russia/Soviet Union’, which is placed immediately after ‘Germany, Austria, Switzerland’ because of the close links between the two, and because the first publication of the *Grundrisse* in German happened in the Soviet Union.

Each chapter contains a detailed bibliography, which is subdivided in such a way as to highlight: 1) the complete editions of the *Grundrisse*; 2) the partial editions; 3) the critical literature on the *Grundrisse*; and 4), where necessary, other bibliographical references. In the first of these divisions, editorial information has sometimes been added on the translation and dissemination of the various texts.

Since the research uncovered several hundred books or articles dealing with the *Grundrisse*, considerations of space meant that it was possible to include in the bibliography only the principal ones by a particular author (or the ones mentioned in the main body of the text).

All the titles of non-English books and articles appear first in the original language (transliterated in the cases of Japanese, Chinese, Persian, Greek and Korean) and then in an English translation. In general, the translation of titles has been given in the text, but, if the chapter in question cites a book or article in accordance with the Harvard reference system (that is, with only the name of the author and the year of publication), the translation may be found in the bibliography. Finally, in the case of

books and articles already translated into English, they have always been cited under the title of that translation, even if it differs from a literal one.

[Translated from the Italian by Patrick Camiller]

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Tunbridge Wells: Abacus Press.

¹ The Russian version of this report was published in 1923.

² See the chronological table of translations in Appendix 1. To the full translations mentioned above should be added the selections in Swedish (Karl Marx, *Grunddragen i kritiken av den politiska ekonomin*, Stockholm: Zenit/R&S, 1971) and Macedonian (Karl Marx, *Osnovi na kritikata na političkata ekonomija (grub nafrlok): 1857-1858*, Skopje: Komunist, 1989), as well as the translations of the *Introduction* and *The Forms which precede Capitalist Production* into a large number of languages, from Vietnamese to Norwegian, Arabic to Dutch, Hebrew to Bulgarian.

³ The total has been calculated by adding together the print-runs ascertained during research in the countries in question.

⁴ See Lucien Sève, *Penser avec Marx aujourd'hui*, Paris: La Dispute, 2004, who recalls how 'with the exception of texts such as the *Introduction* [...] Althusser never read the *Grundrisse*, in the real sense of the word reading' (p. 29). Adapting Gaston Bachelard's term 'epistemological break' (*coupure épistémologique*), which Althusser had himself borrowed and used, Sève speaks of an 'artificial bibliographical break (*coupure bibliographique*) that led to the most mistaken views of its genesis and thus of its consistency with Marx's mature thought' (p. 30).