

Foreword

The odyssey of the publication of the *Grundrisse*

The place of the *Grundrisse* in Karl Marx's oeuvre and its fortunes are in many respects peculiar. First, they are the only example of a major set of Marx's mature writings which, for practical purposes, were entirely unknown to Marxists for more than half a century after Marx's death; and indeed almost completely unavailable until almost a century after the composition of the manuscripts which have been brought together under this name. Whatever the debates about their significance, the writings of 1857–8, clearly part of the intellectual effort that was to produce *Capital*, represent Marx in his maturity, not least as an economist. This distinguishes the *Grundrisse* from the other earlier posthumous addition to the Marxian corpus, the 1932 *Frühschriften* (early works). The exact place of these writings of the early 1840s in Marx's theoretical development has been much debated, rightly or wrongly, but there can be no such disagreement about the maturity of the writings of 1857–8.

Second, and somewhat surprisingly, the entire publication of the *Grundrisse* took place under what may safely be regarded as the least favourable conditions for any original development of Marx studies and Marxist thinking, namely in the USSR and the German Democratic Republic, at the height of the era of Stalin. The publication of texts by Marx and Engels remained a matter subject to the imprimatur of political authority even later, as editors engaged in foreign editions of their works have had reason to discover. It is still not clear how the obstacles to publication were overcome, including the purging of the Marx–Engels Institute and the elimination and eventual murder of its founder and director David Ryazanov, or how Paul Weller, who was in charge of work on the manuscript from 1925 to 1939, survived the terror of 1936–8 to do so. It may have helped that the authorities did not quite know what to make of this large and difficult text. However, they plainly had their doubts about its precise status, not least because J.V. Stalin's view was that draft manuscripts were of less importance than the three volumes of *Capital* which reflected Marx's mature position and views. The *Grundrisse* were not in fact fully published in a Russian translation until 1968–9, and neither the original German edition of 1939–41 (published in Moscow) nor its 1953 (Berlin) reprint were published as

parts of MEGA (but only ‘in the format of MEGA’) or as part of the Marx–Engels *Werke* [Works] (MEW). However, unlike the *Frühschriften* of 1844, which disappeared from the official Marx corpus after their original appearance in MEGA (1932), they actually were published even at the peak of the Stalin era.

The third peculiarity is the long-lasting uncertainty about the status of the 1857–8 manuscripts which is reflected in the fluctuating name of the papers in the Marx–Engels–Lenin Institute of the 1930s until they acquired their title *Grundrisse* shortly before going into print. Indeed, the exact nature of their relation to the three volumes of *Capital*, as published by Marx and reconstructed by Friedrich Engels and from the notes of 1861–3 by Kautsky as a sort of volume 4 (*Theories on Surplus Value*), remains a matter of debate. Kautsky, who went through them, does not seem to have known what to do about them. He published two extracts from them in his review *Die Neue Zeit*, but no more. They were the brief *Bastiat and Carey* (1904), which made little impact, and the so-called *Introduction* to the *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* (1903), never completed and therefore not published with the book of the same name in 1859, which was to become an early text for those wishing to extend Marxist interpretation beyond prevailing orthodoxies, notably the Austro-Marxists. To date it is probably the most widely discussed part of the *Grundrisse*, although a few commentators cited in the book question whether they form part of it. The rest of the manuscripts remained unpublished, and indeed unknown to commentators, until Ryazanov and his collaborators in Moscow acquired photocopies of them in 1923, put them in order and planned to publish them in the MEGA. It is interesting to speculate what impact they might have had if they had been published in 1931, as originally planned. The date of their actual publication – at the end of 1939 and a week after Hitler’s invasion of the USSR in 1941 – meant that they remained almost totally unknown in the West until the 1953 reprint in East Berlin, although rare copies reached the USA and from 1948 on the work was analysed by the great pioneer explicator of the *Grundrisse*, Roman Rosdolsky, recently arrived in the USA via Auschwitz and various other concentration camps (Rosdolsky 1977). It is difficult to believe that the bulk of the original German edition, ‘sent . . . to the war front as material for agitation against German soldiers and later to camps as study materials for prisoners of war’ (p. 204) achieved their theoretical or practical objectives.

The full reprint of 1939–41, which became the *editio princeps* for the international reception of the *Grundrisse*, was republished in East Germany in 1953, some years before the publication of the MEW, but deliberately unconnected with these. With one exception, the work did not begin to make a serious mark on Marx studies until the 1960s. That exception is the section on ‘Forms which Precede Capitalist Production’, which was first published separately in Russian in 1939 (as, somewhat earlier, was the ‘Chapter on Money’) translated into Japanese in 1947–8, reprinted in German in 1952, and then translated into Hungarian (1953) and Italian (1954), and certainly discussed among Marxist historians in the English-speaking world. The English translation (Marx 1964), with

an explicatory introduction, was soon published in Spanish versions in Argentina (1966) and Franco's Spain (1967). Presumably its special interest for Marxist historians and social anthropologists helps to explain the wide distribution of this text, well before the availability of the full *Grundrisse*, and also its specific relevance to the much-disputed Marxist analysis of Third World societies. It threw light on the 'Asiatic mode of production' debate, controversially revived in the West by works like Karl August Wittfogel's *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (Wittfogel 1957).

On the history of the reception of the *Grundrisse*

The history of the reception of the 1857–8 manuscripts really begins with the major effort, following the crisis of 1956, to free Marxism from the straitjacket of Soviet orthodoxy, both within and outside the no longer monolithic Communist parties. Since they did not belong to the canonical corpus of 'the classics' but were unquestionably by Marx, both the 1844 writings and the 1857–8 manuscripts could, as several chapters of the third part of this collection show, be regarded inside Communist parties as the basis for a legitimate opening of hitherto closed positions. The almost simultaneous international discovery of Antonio Gramsci's writings – the first publication of his writings in the USSR was in 1957–9 – had the same function. The belief that the *Grundrisse* had the potential for heterodoxy is shown by the appearance of unofficial freelance translations such as those of the reformists of the French Editions Anthropos (1967–8) and, under the auspices of the *New Left Review*, Martin Nicolaus (Marx 1973). Outside the Communist parties the *Grundrisse* had the function of justifying a non-Communist, but unquestionable Marxism, but this did not become politically significant until the era of student rebellions in the 1960s, although their significance had already been recognized in the 1950s by scholarly Germans close to the Frankfurt tradition, but not in the milieu of political activism, like George Lichtheim and the young Jürgen Habermas. Student radicalization in rapidly expanding universities also provided a larger body of readers than could have been expected in the past for extremely difficult texts such as this. But for this commercial publishers like Penguin Books would surely not have been prepared to publish the *Grundrisse*, even as part of a 'Pelican Marx Library'. In the meantime the text had been, more or less reluctantly, accepted as an integral part of the corpus of Marx's writings in the USSR, being added to the previous edition of the Marx–Engels works in 1968–9, though in a smaller edition than *Capital*. Publication in Hungary and Czechoslovakia soon followed.

It is thus not easy to separate the debates on the *Grundrisse* from the political setting in which they took place, and which stimulated them. In the 1970s, when they were at their most intense, they also suffered from a generational or cultural handicap, namely the loss of most of the (mainly central and east European) pioneer generation of Marxian textual scholars of monumental devotion and learning, of men like Ryazanov and Rosdolsky. Some serious efforts were

indeed made by younger Trotskyist intellectuals to build on the earlier analyses of the place of the 1857–8 manuscripts in the development of Marx's thought, and more specifically on their place in the general plan of what became the torso of *Capital*. However, prominent Marxist theoretical polemics might be launched by writers like Louis Althusser in France and Antonio Negri in Italy with a frankly insufficient formation in Marxian literature and received by young men and women who themselves might well as yet lack much knowledge of the texts, or ability to judge the past controversies about them, if only for linguistic reasons. Small wonder that what is said in the chapter on Italy, that the 'reception of the *Grundrisse* had a rather peculiar character' is true of more than one country.

Overview

The present collective volume appears at a time when Marxist parties and movements are only rarely significant actors on the global scene and when debates about their doctrines, strategies, methods and objectives are no longer the inevitable framework of debates about the writings of Marx, Engels and their followers. And yet it also appears at a time when the world appears to demonstrate the perspicacity of Marx's insight into the economic modus operandi of the capitalist system. Perhaps this is the right moment to return to a study of the *Grundrisse* less constricted by the temporary considerations of leftwing politics between Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin and the fall of Mikhail Gorbachev. It is an enormously difficult text in every respect, but also an enormously rewarding one, if only because it provides the only guide to the full range of the treatise of which *Capital* is only a fraction, and a unique introduction to the methodology of the mature Marx. It contains analyses and insights, for instance about technology, that take Marx's treatment of capitalism far beyond the nineteenth century, into the era of a society where production no longer requires mass labour, of automation, the potential of leisure, and the transformations of alienation in such circumstances. It is the only text that goes some way beyond Marx's own hints of the communist future in the *German Ideology*. In a few words, it has been rightly described as Marx's thought at its richest.

This collection is divided into three parts. The first is made up of eight chapters which interpret the main themes (method, value, alienation, surplus value, historical materialism, ecological contradictions, socialism, and a comparison between the *Grundrisse* and the *Capital*) coming from reading the *Grundrisse*. The second reconstructs the intellectual biography of its author between 1857 and 1858. The third, finally, presents a complete and rigorous account of the dissemination and the reception of this Marx's work throughout the world.

In short, this volume makes a successful attempt both to display some of the riches of *Grundrisse* and to place its origin fortunes in their international setting.

References

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