

Introduction to 'The Change in the Original Plan for Marx's *Capital* and Its Causes'

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Abstract

In his essay, Henryk Grossman made a powerful case for the continued relevance of Marxist economics. He argued that *Capital* is a fundamentally coherent whole, structured by Marx's method of moving systematically from more abstract to more concrete levels of analysis. Despite considerable subsequent debate and research, Grossman's account remains the outstanding contribution to our understanding of this aspect of Marx's principal work.

Keywords

breakdown theory, capitalism, economic crisis, Henryk Grossman, Henryk Grossmann, Karl Marx, Marxism, method

Is Marx's economic theory complete in the sense that it is a coherent and systematic analysis which can be used to identify the most important aspects of contemporary capitalism? Consequently, can it be a guide for political practice? The issue is not whether Marx's every utterance is correct but whether his approach is valid, without the need for major revisions. The answers to these questions were and are crucial in many debates over Marxism. Alan Freeman's identification of 'the central contradiction of Marxist theory in the second half of the twentieth century, namely, its dogged rejection of the most central feature of this theory – Marx's economics'¹ still applies today. The contradiction is, in fact, over a century old. Implicitly or explicitly, prominent Marxist figures before and after World War I rejected core features of Marx's economic theory and argued that his work was seriously flawed

* This Introduction benefitted a great deal from Fred Moseley's comments on a previous draft, although points of disagreement remain.

¹ Freeman 2008, p. 123. Also see Freeman 2010.

and/or fundamentally incomplete. Contemporary Marxists who embrace the methodology of neoclassical economics and/or the underconsumptionist arguments of Keynesian economists had predecessors in Social-Democratic 'neo-harmonists' such as Rudolf Hilferding and Otto Bauer, and in the radical underconsumptionism of Rosa Luxemburg.

Henryk Grossman's essay 'The Change in the Original Plan for Marx's *Capital* and Its Causes' dealt with these questions.² He sought to demonstrate the methodological coherence of Marx's principal economic work and refute theoretical and textual arguments, made by Luxemburg and others, that the unfinished state of *Capital* when Marx died meant that it was unsatisfactory as a guide to understanding the logic of capitalism. The essay offers a striking exposition and restatement of the method which underpinned *Capital's* structure and analysis of capitalism. Here and elsewhere, at greater length, Grossman also contended that Marx's theory of economic crisis, in terms of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, was correct and had been neglected by the neoharmonists and Luxemburg. In other works, he showed that Marx's treatments of the transformation of values into prices and the place of money in his reproduction schema had suffered a similar fate.³

There was an intimate connection between Grossman's economic writings and his continuing commitment to effective, revolutionary, working-class politics.⁴ When he wrote about Marx's plan for *Capital* in 1929, he was a salaried researcher at the Institute for Social Research and an academic at the University of Frankfurt, but he had previously gained years of experience as a revolutionary activist, in the Jewish Social-Democratic Party of Galicia and the Communist Workers' Party of Poland. After moving to the Institute in Germany in 1925, Grossman was a fellow-traveller of the German Communist Party. He was critical of Social Democracy and, from the late 1920s, counterposed his own understanding of Marx to Stalinist economic orthodoxies. For several years, in the mid 1930s, he also rejected the Stalinist political perspectives of the international communist movement.⁵

Grossman shared Luxemburg's commitment to revolutionary politics. Although she had been murdered in 1919, her claim that an important aspect of Marx's economic analysis was flawed still had influence on the revolutionary left during the 1920s and early 1930s. She maintained that the treatment of capitalist reproduction, crises and expansion in *Capital* had to be supplemented and modified in major ways. Her political perspectives were, nevertheless,

2 Grossmann 1929, pp. 305–38.

3 See Grossmann 1928; Grossmann 1992; Grossmann 1932a; Grossmann 1932b.

4 Kuhn 2009, pp. 3–34.

5 See Kuhn 2007.

grounded in the conviction that capitalism was inherently and necessarily prone to economic breakdown. Consequently, while Grossman had a great deal of respect for Luxemburg as a Marxist theorist, he devoted a considerable effort to vindicating Marx's explanation, as opposed to her account, of capitalism's tendency to break down.⁶ The discussion below, very briefly, summarises the arguments in Grossman's essay, including his critique of Luxemburg and then outlines specific controversies over the completeness, the logic and the reasons for changes in the planned, overall structure of *Capital*. It compares and assesses the conclusions of Grossman and later participants in the debate.

Grossman's argument

'The Change in the Original Plan for Marx's *Capital* and Its Causes' examines *Capital's* 'form, the history of its genesis and logic of its structure'. In several publications, including his first substantial work on Marxist economic theory, the summary of a lecture delivered in 1919, Grossman had referred to Marx's method of abstraction and/or the issue of the completeness of *Capital*.⁷ His 1929 essay on the plan for *Capital* expanded on these earlier observations. Before this study, there had been discussions of Marx's plans for *Capital*. Karl Kautsky, the preeminent intellectual of Germany Social Democracy before World War I, noted the difference in the plan set out in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*,⁸ published in 1859, and that of the volumes of *Capital* which Marx published or drafted. For Kautsky, however, *Capital* was essentially an historical work. Robert Wilbrandt, a Social-Democratic professor and advocate

6 See Grossmann 1992, p. 41. In a letter to Paul Mattick (Grossman 1931), he wrote:

Rosa Luxemburg and Sternberg, in his book *Imperialism ...* drew the conclusion that under capitalism this unsalable remainder can only be disposed of in 'non-capitalist areas', i.e. that capitalism cannot exist at all *without* non-capitalist colonies! Marx had not seen any of this, so there was an important gap in his system. Indeed he had failed to say the *most important thing* and Rosa Luxemburg was the first to fill this dangerous gap!

I regard refuting this dangerous distortion of Marx's teachings by Rosa Luxemburg and her supporters and repeatedly showing, from different sides, that it is untenable as one of my most important tasks. In my big book and my critique of Sternberg ('A New Theory') as well as in my work on 'The Change in the Original Plan for Marx's *Capital*', I illuminate this theory from different sides.

Translation by Tom O'Lincoln. The references are to Grossmann 1992 and Grossmann 1928.

7 Grossman 2000, p. 171; Grossman 1924; Grossmann 1928, pp. 183–4; Grossmann 1992, pp. 29–31. In a letter to Paul Mattick, Grossman drew attention to some of these earlier works that dealt with Marx's 'procedure of successive approximation' (cf. Grossman 1933).

8 Marx 1987.

of cooperatives, later insisted that Marx had stuck to his original approach and just did not get around to writing all the books foreshadowed in 1859.⁹

Grossman pointed out that the eventual publication of all of Marx's writings would change the scope for scientific research on Marx. But it was worth drawing conclusions about the plans for *Capital* on the basis of Marx's work currently available. Earlier plans envisaged six volumes on

1. capital
2. landed property
3. wage-labour
4. the state
5. foreign trade
6. the world market

Later plans provided for four volumes:

1. the process of production of capital
2. the process of circulation of capital
3. the structure of the process as a whole
4. the history of the theory

Although in places incomplete and unpolished, *Capital* as published by Marx and, on the basis of his manuscripts, by Engels and Kautsky, matched Marx's mature plan and constituted a whole work. Grossman did not comment on shifts in the structure of Marx's volume(s) on capital but argued that the change to the four-volume plan took place in August 1863, because the earlier conception proved to be unworkable. In the real world, the circuits of different capitals intersect, as they borrow from and lend to each other. So it was not possible to measure the surplus value a capital produced by examining its empirical forms, as the original plan envisaged. That conceptual framework, based on the separate examination of capital, land and labour inherited from classical political economy, was therefore abandoned. Instead, through a process of abstraction, Marx first identified and measured surplus value, the 'source, *before* its division into its component forms' of industrial profit, commercial profit, interest and rent.

There was an intimate relationship, Grossman argued, between Marx's work on his reproduction schema and the change in the plan for his major work.

⁹ Kautsky 1897, p. v. The translator of the first English edition, based on Kautsky's 1897 German edition, which does not include the Foreword, made the same point: cf. Stone 1904, p. 3; Wilbrandt 1920, p. 97.

In his most abstract account of capitalism, Marx reduced the complexity of real capitalist processes to the 'fundamental capital relation', expressed in the formula $c + v + s = C$ (where c is constant capital, v variable capital, s surplus value and C the total value of commodities produced), and 'commodity exchange between the two spheres of production' of means of production and means of consumption. To identify the relationships between surplus values and the capitals which produced them, the reproduction schema abstracted from different forms of capital and also from the effects of the sphere of circulation, deviations of prices from values, credit and foreign trade, changes in the value of money and non-capitalist production. Grossman pointed out that '[t]he construction of all three volumes of *Capital* was carried out methodologically on the basis of the meticulously thought-out and actually implemented procedure of successive approximation [*Annäherungsverfahren*], which, logically, is inseparably connected to the reproduction schema. Each provisional simplification correlates with a later, corresponding concretisation.' The initial abstract treatment of capitalism is made progressively more concrete.¹⁰

The focus on aggregate surplus value, no longer obscured by movements in its concrete forms, made it possible to clearly specify and explain the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, for the first time in the history of political economy. The tendency was a logical consequence of the labour theory of value and a rising organic composition of capital.

On the basis of his account of the method in *Capital*, Grossman refuted Rosa Luxemburg's critique of Marx. She was wrong to assert that Marx's analysis was incomplete and that he had left out a fundamental precondition of capitalist production: the existence of non-capitalist markets for the products of capitalism. Nor, as Grossman demonstrated in his account of the transformation of values into prices of production, was Marx's analysis inconsistent without the modifications proposed by Luxemburg.¹¹

Subsequent evidence and debates

Since Grossman's pioneering work, more of Marx's manuscripts for *Capital*, starting with the *Grundrisse*, have become available and have fuelled debate over the meaning, relevance and value of Marx's economic work.¹² There have

10 For the place of abstraction in Marx's dialectical method, see Ollman 2003, pp. 59–112.

11 Grossmann 1932b.

12 Known as the *Grundrisse*, Marx's first draft of *Capital*, *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy* was written between late 1857 and May 1858. It was initially published in 1939 and only

been debates over three major issues that Grossman's essay addressed, not only the completeness of *Capital*, but also the logic of the work's structure, and the reasons for changes in that structure.

Completeness

A decade before the appearance of Grossman's essay, Wilbrandt had argued that the first volume of *Capital* when it first appeared was 'in a double sense a torso' of the work that Marx still intended to write along the lines of his early six-volume plan. It was only part of the volume on capital, as originally envisaged, which was itself only part of the whole project.¹³ The Japanese Marxist academic Samezo Kuruma, in 1930, gave greater substance to Wilbrandt's assertion by referring to texts Marx wrote between his six-volume plans and the appearance of *Capital*. In doing so, Kuruma criticised Grossman's essay on Marx's plan, which otherwise attracted very little attention during the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁴ For Kuruma, Volume 1 of *Capital* was in a *triple* sense a torso: it was the first instalment of a four-part work (if *Theories of Surplus Value* are included), which was only the first part, on 'capital in general', of the planned study of capital, which in turn was only one of the six volumes projected. Grossman's textual evidence for a major change in plan was rejected by Kuruma on dubious grounds. Marx's comment that he had to 'to demolish everything' ostensibly referred to the whole of classical political economy rather than Marx's own work. When Marx wrote to Kugelmann in 1866 that his 'whole work' would appear in four books, the 'whole work' was just part of the study of capital. Most importantly, Kuruma asserted that *Capital* did not deal with competition and credit, which were destined for a later book that was to be another component of the volume on capital according to the original plan which Marx still held to. In fact, these topics are dealt with at length in Volume 3.¹⁵ To this case, Kuruma added Marx's references in *Capital* to future

became widely accessible in German in 1953. The first complete English translation appeared in 1973. The translation used here is Marx 1986b. The second draft of *Capital*, written in 1861–3, was first published from 1976, and in English in 1988. Other later manuscripts, many of them very substantial, intended for all three volumes of *Capital* have also been published. See Jan Hoff's survey of the Marx-commentary literature, from the perspective of the *neue Marx-Lektüre* (Hoff 2009). In 1992, Kenneth Lapidés published a valuable article on the completeness of *Capital* that surveyed the literature. It drew attention to and included translations of sections of Grossman's study (Lapidés 1992).¹³ Wilbrandt 1920, p. 97.

¹⁴ Kuruma 2007. Another exception to the neglect of Grossman's essay from its publication until the 1950s was Paul Mattick's favourable review and summary (Mattick 1931).

¹⁵ Amongst other treatments of competition in *Capital* is the discussion of its relationship to economic crises in Marx 1981, pp. 360–72; Chapters 23 to 35 deal with credit.

studies of wage labour and landed property, which may or may not refer to work Marx intended to include in his own project or even to write himself.

Roman Rosdolsky confirmed the validity of several of Grossman's arguments in a systematic analysis of the relationship between the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. A leader of the exile organisation of the Communist movement in Poland's Ukrainian territories and active in the Austrian Communist Party during the 1920s, Rosdolsky also undertook research on the treatment of the national question in Eastern Europe by Marx and Engels. Between 1934 and 1939 he was a leader of the Trotskyist organisation in Lwów in Poland (now L'viv in Ukraine) and researched the dissolution of serfdom in eastern Galicia. Rosdolsky survived Nazi concentration camps and lived in Austria after World War II until, in 1947, he emigrated to the United States where he continued his Marxist research. In *The Making of Marx's 'Capital'*, published in 1968, he commented favourably on Grossman's accounts of competition, use value and the tendency for the rate of profit to fall in Marx's theory, as well as his critique of Luxemburg.¹⁶ Rosdolsky also agreed that *Capital* was essentially a complete work. Marx had subsumed the material initially projected for the books on landed property and wage labour into the book on capital, although he hoped to deal separately with subject matter planned for the other three projected books.¹⁷ But Rosdolsky asserted that Grossman was mistaken about both the timing of and reasons for the major change in Marx's plan for *Capital*.¹⁸

Rosdolsky differed in his interpretation of a letter of 15 August 1863, from Marx to Engels, which Grossman had asserted signalled the change in plan for *Capital*, and believed that Marx did not adopt the radically different plan until 1864, at the earliest.¹⁹ On the basis of a greater corpus of Marx's writings than had ever been available for analysis before, the editors of the collected works of Marx and Engels in 2004 concluded that the plan for *Capital* changed in August 1863, when Marx began the first draft, available to neither Grossman nor Rosdolsky, of what eventually became the published version of *Capital*. Rosdolsky's later date is now untenable.²⁰

Although Marx did not mention the six-volume plan after 1859, Maximilien Rubel, a council communist, argued in the late 1960s and early 1970s that 'we must acknowledge the fragmentary state of the "Economics"', i.e. that *Capital* was a small part of the incomplete six-volume project.²¹ Rubel's assertion that

16 Rosdolsky 1980, pp. 43, 73, 87–8; Rosdolsky 1989, pp. 492, 503. Also see Rosdolsky 1957.

17 Rosdolsky 1980, pp. 11, 23.

18 Rosdolsky 1980, p. 53.

19 Rosdolsky 1980, pp. 22–3.

20 Roth, Kopf, Vollgraf and Hubmann 2004, p. 1000.

21 Rubel 1981c, p. 181.

'[n]either before nor after the publication of the 1859 Preface did Marx ever betray even the slightest intention of changing the plan of the "Economics"' was, like Kuruma's conclusions, based on questionable readings of phrases in Marx's correspondence and works. These included observations in *Capital* that '[a]n exposition of all these forms belongs to the special study of wage-labour, and not, therefore, to this work' and similarly '[t]he analysis of landed property in its various historical forms lies outside the scope of the present work'.²²

Wilbrandt's conclusion about the incompleteness of *Capital*, endorsed by Kuruma and Rubel, has been reproduced by other, later commentators. Only a couple of the most influential will be mentioned here.²³ In his book on the *Grundrisse*, Antonio Negri argued that Marx's first draft was 'the summit of Marx's revolutionary thought' and superior to *Capital*. In effect Negri held that Marx's priorities were wrong: instead of developing his discussions of revolutionary working-class struggle and subjectivity in the *Grundrisse* into the planned book on wage labour, he became caught up in the objective analysis of *Capital*.²⁴ Negri maintained that Marx's logic pointed beyond what he actually wrote to the book on wage labour and to (voluntarist) politics.²⁵ His insistence on the 'theory of the subjectivity of the working class', as opposed to that of capital, expressed in *Capital*, led Negri to reject Marx's explanation of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall in terms of a rising organic composition of capital and discussion of counter-tendencies, which provided a flexible tool for the analysis of crises. Instead, Negri highlighted 'the class struggle as a fundamental and rigid variable', in a voluntarist spirit. Paradoxically, the result was an utterly mechanical theory of crisis as the consequence of the 'irreversible' expansion of the value of necessary labour, i.e. wages, at the expense of surplus value.²⁶

Negri pointed out that a commitment to the class struggle pervaded all of Marx's work. This is quite true. But it does not validate the assertion that a discussion of the class struggle and the working class, of the subjective side to supplement the objective account of capital, should have been incorporated into *Capital*. Negri's own attempt to undertake such an analysis at a level of abstraction comparable with *Capital* resulted in a misleading generalisation of conditions that (he thought) were typical of the 1970s to the whole history

22 Marx 1976, p. 683; Marx 1981, p. 751; Rubel 1981c, p. 193.

23 For a discussion of a more extensive list of participants in the debate, see Hoff 2009, pp. 255–66.

24 Negri 1991, pp. 5, 8–12, 18, 129–37. Mario Tronti points out that Negri's arguments reflected widespread positions current in Italian *operaismo* during the 1970s (cf. Tronti 2008, pp. 231–3).

25 Negri 1991, pp. 19, 94,

26 Negri 1991, pp. 93–4, 101–3, 131–3, 136.

of capitalism. As Negri was writing, the early stage of the neoliberal counter-offensive against labour was already undermining those conditions. Systematic discussions of class struggles and working-class action, while certainly essential, are studies of specific historical developments, that can now use the framework provided by *Capital*. They cannot be conducted at a level of analysis even approaching the abstraction of *Capital's* third, most concrete volume. Marx himself completed exemplary studies of precisely this kind before and during his work on *Capital*.²⁷

While Negri did not insist that Marx had stuck with his original plan, Michael Lebowitz explicitly endorsed Rubel's position on this issue. In the English-speaking world, Lebowitz was, for a period, the most prominent proponent of the notion that *Capital* was fundamentally incomplete. He recapitulated some of Negri's key voluntarist arguments, insisting that *Capital* and those who regard it 'as providing "a fully elaborated system"' are one-sided. Marx's book on wage labour would have dealt with workers' struggles over their needs and consequent changes in wages, dispensing with the assumption in *Capital* that wages are at the necessary minimum. To his analytical case for the incompleteness of *Capital*, Lebowitz added Rubel's textual evidence and other, equally unpersuasive quotes from Marx.²⁸

Although he was less interested in the issue of whether or not Marx abandoned his early intention to write further volumes on wage labour and landed property, Chris Arthur also asserted the inadequacy of *Capital* and the need for such additional works. From the perspective of 'value-form theory', Arthur found Marx's characterisation of labour power and land as commodities inadequate. Marx did not go into sufficient detail about their peculiarities, to the extent that 'wage-labour cannot plausibly be represented as a purchase of a commodity. Just like land, labour-power is not produced by capital; it is an external condition of capitalist production'. To overcome this and other problems in *Capital*, Arthur contended that 'we need an account of how wage-labour reproduces itself and embarks on a self-transcending trajectory of contestation and overthrow of capital'.²⁹ But the requirement that it is only things produced in factories (or otherwise immediately 'produced by capital' itself) that deserve the label 'commodity' is arbitrary.

Wolfgang Jahn was convinced that Marx never abandoned his plan for *all six* volumes although he eventually recognised that he would only be able to realise a small portion of it himself. Jahn was a senior academic

27 Notably Marx 1978, 1979 and 1986c.

28 Lebowitz 2003, pp. 29, 46–7, 51 *et seq.*, 137.

29 Arthur 2006, pp. 88–92, 96–8, 109–10. For a persuasive critique of Arthur's broader framework, see Carchedi 2009, pp. 145–69.

at the East German University of Halle, who led the editorial teams for several volumes of the new *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA²).³⁰ In the 1970s, he and his circle initiated the massive undertaking of reconstructing Marx's project. Jahn's main argument was that Marx's six-book plan was scientific. To this he added the observation that Marx continued to collect material relevant to all six volumes and trivial textual evidence from Marx's work, like that offered by Kuruma and Rubel. After the unification of Germany in 1990 and the disappearance of the constraints imposed by Stalinism on intellectual labour and honesty, Jahn reversed his publicly stated position to assert, in Wilbrandt's terminology, that *Capital* was 'a torso' after all. His revised assessment suggested that the reconstruction effort was all the more important. But the East German state that had financed it had disappeared and the project rapidly collapsed.³¹

While rejecting the argument that *Capital* is incomplete because Marx never gave up on his plan for six books, in the 1990s Michael Heinrich offered a different account of the inadequacy of *Capital*. Heinrich contested the coherence and validity of Marx's analysis more directly. Having immersed himself in the wealth of Marx's writings that have become accessible through MEGA², Heinrich stressed the fragmentary, inconsistent and flawed nature of the work and maintained that, late in his life, Marx 'clearly recognised' the need for 'a fundamental revision of the hitherto existing manuscripts'. The evidence for such recognition is as thin as the case for Marx's continued adherence to the six-book plan.³²

30 The project of publishing the collected works of Marx and Engels, underway in Russia between 1927 and 1941, was revived in East Germany and Russia in the 1960s. It continued from the early 1990s under the auspices of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences.

31 Jahn 1992/3, pp. 129, 134, 137; cf. Jahn 1986, p. 7. Also see Hoff 2009, pp. 259–62, and Heinrich 2002, pp. 92–101.

32 Heinrich 2006, pp. 191–2; Heinrich 2009, pp. 74, 84–5; Heinrich 2013, pp. 28–31. Heinrich's assertion that Marx thought that his previous manuscripts, which included the drafts that Engels published as Volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital*, were *fundamentally* unsatisfactory was based on the following tangential facts. Marx worked out the range of relationships between the rate of surplus value and the rate of profit that were *mathematically* possible and wrote a cryptic marginal note about the rate of profit and value composition of capital in his copy of the second edition of *Capital* Volume 1. He investigated developments in the United States and Russia, credit and the industrial crisis of 1879 in Britain, which he wanted to appreciate '*theoretically*', before the publication of the second volume of *Capital*. He redrafted his account of the law of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall several times. He wanted to 'change' the first volume of *Capital* for a fourth edition to an extent that went beyond the 'fewest possible alterations and additions' he envisaged for the third edition (cf. Marx 1981, p. 161). A further crucial ingredient in Heinrich's case was his own conviction that there is no tendency for the rate of profit to fall and that Marx was wrong to try to explain crises before his discussion of credit in Volume 3 of *Capital*.

In the tradition of the *neue Marx-Lektüre* [new reading of Marx]³³ and its hostility to ‘empirical’ science, Heinrich rejected notions that Marx’s theory of value, which he claimed was not – in its most developed form – a labour theory of value, can be used for the purposes of practical quantitative analysis. Such ideas, Heinrich contended, were typical not only of classical political economy and ‘traditional Marxism’ but were present in the ‘ambivalences’ of Marx’s own work; ‘they already infect [its] fundamental categories and generate specific problems.’ Because, according to Heinrich, the transformation problem cannot be solved, there are no systematic relationships between values, derived from the abstract labour embodied in commodities, and prices. Heinrich argued that the reasoning behind the law of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall was likewise false.³⁴ By way of contrast, Isaac Ilych Rubin and, in other essays, Grossman identified Marx’s supersession of concepts employed by classical political economy, without abandoning an Enlightenment concern with empirical explanation.³⁵

Amongst others, Rubel and Heinrich complained about Engels’s editorial efforts on Volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital*, primarily on the grounds that he did not live up to contemporary academic standards for the publication of historical manuscripts, casting a further shadow of doubt over the coherence of *Capital*.³⁶ There is certainly some value in consulting the raw materials that Marx left for Engels, now published in MEGA². But Engels’s concern was not to provide academics with texts that were exact reproductions of the manuscripts and

33 A current of Marx interpretation that emerged in West German academia during the 1960s, the *neue Marx-Lektüre* is a lineal descendent of the Frankfurt School initiated by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in the 1940s. See Ingo Elbe’s house history of the current (Elbe 2010). For an entertaining and insightful critique of Elbe’s position, see Henning 2008, pp. 149–58.

34 Heinrich 2012, pp. 50, 63–4, 148, 153; Heinrich 2006, pp. 12, 17, 269–84, 328–41; Heinrich 2007; Heinrich 2002. For a critique of Heinrich’s ‘break with Marx’ over the treatment of money, see Henning 2005, pp. 170–2. Heinrich’s objections to Marx’s conception of the transformation of values into prices and account of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall were not original. Proponents of the ‘temporal single system interpretation’, in particular, have provided persuasive defences of Marx’s approach to both questions; see especially Kliman 2007. For a critique of Heinrich’s account of Marx’s labour theory of value, see Carchedi 2009, pp. 156–8.

35 As Mario Montano put it in a different context, ‘In order to discriminate Marx from Ricardo, it is necessary to move from the analysis of logical forms and sequences to the analysis of the different abstractions in relation to the object (cf. Montano 1971, p. 49). This Grossman and Rubin did, decades before. See Rubin 1979; Grossman 1943a and 1943b; Grossmann 1977a and 1977b.

36 Rubel 1981a, pp. 177–81; Rubel 1981b; Heinrich 1996; Heinrich 2009, p. 88; Carl-Erich Vollgraf and Jürgen Jungnickel 2002. For a critique of such assessments see Vygodskii 2002; Kliman, Freeman, Nick Potts, Gusev and Cooney 2013, which also included quotations from Marx’s correspondence between 1865 and 1877 indicating that he regarded the three volumes of *Capital* as, in substance, complete; and Guglielmo Carchedi and Robert McKee forthcoming a and forthcoming b. For refutations of the broader Marx versus Engels argument, see Hunley 1991 and Rees 1994.

notes. His task was to present Marx's analysis in 'a readable book'³⁷ that he believed to be faithful to Marx's political commitments and intentions. In doing so, he had huge advantages over recent editors of the MEGA²: decades not only of intellectual and political collaboration with Marx including extensive discussions, many of which are unlikely to have taken the form of the written correspondence we can read today.

Logic of Capital's structure

Until the 1920s, Kautsky's interpretation had been the dominant account of the structure of *Capital*. In his refutation of Eugen Böhm-Bawerk's complaint that there was a contradiction between the theory of value in Volume 1 and the account of prices of production in Volume 3 of *Capital*, Rudolf Hilferding, for example, had held that in Marx's 'dialectic[al] method, conceptual evolution runs parallel throughout with historical evolution'.³⁸ In contrast, Grossman identified Marx's method of advancing from the abstract to the concrete in *Capital* as a 'procedure of successive approximation' of reality which structured the whole work. Marx made initial 'fictitious' and 'simplifying assumptions', 'that enable us to gain an understanding of the inner structure of the object under investigation'.³⁹ In the subsequent analysis assumptions were dispensed with. Marx had himself outlined his method of abstraction in an 'Introduction', written in 1857 before the *Grundrisse*⁴⁰ and first published in *Neue Zeit* in 1903, to which Grossman referred.

This account of the structure of *Capital* has been widely accepted, including by Stalinist academics. Professor Fritz Behrens sought to strengthen the new Social Science Faculty at the University of Leipzig and particularly its capacity to undertake Marxist research and teaching by recruiting 'a troop of Jewish emigrants from America'. He negotiated Grossman's appointment in 1949. But Behrens soon engaged in a 'self-criticism' and undertook to learn Russian, in order to ward off the accusation that he was a 'Trotskyist', as the Stalinist authorities eliminated space in universities for open or critical discussion of sensitive theoretical or social issues. He was suspect, not least, because he was associated with the unorthodox Marxist academics he had encouraged to come to his university.⁴¹ Two years after Grossman's death in 1950, Behrens demonstrated his soundness in this regard by denouncing Grossman, as a

37 Roth 2009, p. 42.

38 Böhm-Bawerk 1949, p. 30; Hilferding 1949, pp. 170, 195.

39 Grossmann 1992, p. 30.

40 Marx 1986a, pp. 37–48.

41 See Kuhn 2007, pp. 210–11.

'mechanical crisis theorist', and his explanation of Marx's method in *Capital*, in similar terms to those employed by Stalin's lieutenant in economics Jenö Varga in 1930. Behrens acknowledged that Grossman had been the first to ask why Marx's plan for *Capital* had changed. But in rejecting Grossman's explanation of Marx's method, Behrens in practice restated it by reverting to Marx's Hegelian terminology of 'abstract' and 'concrete'.⁴²

Like Grossman, Rosdolsky recognised that *Capital* was structured by the passage from the abstract to the concrete.⁴³ Lebowitz appealed to this structure in order to justify his claim that the 'missing' book on wage labour would have progressively dispensed with Marx's assumption in *Capital* that wages are determined by a constant quantity of means of subsistence.⁴⁴

David Harvey provided an insightful introduction to *Capital*, including Marx's method,⁴⁵ but subsequently complained about the work's structure. He noted Marx's criticism of classical political economy's distinctions amongst the general, particular and individual as 'superficial', and approved of Marx's dialectical approach, which involved understanding capitalism as a totality. Later, however, Harvey objected that, instead of using his 'dialectical and organic formulation to construct his alternative theory', Marx 'sticks to the framework given by classical political economy even as he uses organic thinking and dialectical relational analysis to build his critique and explore alternatives'. Harvey regarded this as a frustrating inconsistency, bemoaning Marx's focus on matters appropriate to the level of abstraction he was operating on at each particular point: 'Exclusions are almost always justified on the grounds that they do not lie within the field of generality with which Marx is exclusively concerned. This practice is found right throughout *Capital*.' When Marx's analysis rises to a more concrete level in Volume 3, Harvey concluded that Marx's 'framework cracks'.⁴⁶ This was at odds with Harvey's earlier, superior exposition of the argument in the 1857 'Introduction', which is ostensibly the basis of his later account of Marx's method.

42 Behrens 1952, p. 46; Varga 1930a and 1930b.

43 Rosdolsky 1980, p. 27.

44 Lebowitz 2003, pp. 45–9.

45 Harvey 2010, pp. 7–9.

46 Harvey 2012, pp. 9–11, 31–2; Marx 1986a, p. 27. Harvey quoted from the 1973 Penguin edition of the *Grundrisse*, while the quotations used here are from Marx 1986b. Harvey's critique was self-contradictory in other respects. He claimed that 'Marx established his new political-economic science through a critique of classical political economy rather than through direct historical, anthropological and empirical enquiry and induction.' In fact Marx undertook both extensive theoretical *and empirical research*, the results of which informed his critique of classical political economy and found their way into *Capital*. Harvey acknowledged this when he referred to Marx's use of the factory inspectors' 'blue books' and 'reference to events and conditions occurring around him' (Harvey 2012, pp. 7–8).

Marx did label as 'superficial' the classical political economists' identification of the general, particular and individual with production, distribution and exchange, and consumption. But he also endorsed their method of rising from the abstract to the concrete as 'obviously the correct scientific method'. The distinction between his own, evolving approach and those of classical political economists lay in the nature of the abstractions they made: they misidentified the fundamental features of capitalism. Thus

Capital is the economic power that dominates everything in bourgeois society. It must form both the point of departure and the conclusion and must be analysed before landed property. After each has been considered separately, their interconnection must be examined.⁴⁷

In the *Grundrisse*, this method helped Marx specify the relationships amongst capital, surplus value and labour power as the core of capitalism. Grossman pointed out, in criticising Lukács's view that *Capital* was essentially incomplete, how Marx's method of successive approximation, advancing from the abstract to the concrete, is precisely the method he employed in order to grasp the 'rich totality of many determinations and relations', the 'living whole'.⁴⁸ Marx eventually went beyond his early plans because he recognised that a more radical abstraction was necessary. He therefore changed the structure of *Capital*, because landed property (and wage labour) under capitalism could not be understood *separately* but only in the context of the analysis of capital.

There is, Harvey accurately observed, 'work left for us to do when we seek to move from the realm of Marx's political economy into a world of historical analysis'.⁴⁹ There would, however, be no such work if Marx had not provided us with an account of the fundamental logic/laws of motion of capitalism and had instead dissipated his efforts by trying to capture the totality of capitalism without employing 'the method of advancing from the abstract to the concrete [which] is simply the way in which thinking assimilates the concrete and reproduces it as a mental concrete.'⁵⁰

Why the change?

According to Rosdolsky, 'once Marx had accomplished the most fundamental part of his task – the analysis of industrial capital – the former structure of the

47 Marx 1986a, pp. 38, 44.

48 Grossmann 1929, p. 336, quoting Marx 1986a, p. 44.

49 Harvey 2012, p. 18.

50 Marx 1986a, p. 38.

work, which had served as a means of self-clarification, became superfluous'.⁵¹ Grossman's account of the method of abstraction and his broader point that *Capital* takes that method further than the perspective expressed in Marx's early plans is compatible with Rosdolsky's very general conclusion.

On the other hand, Rosdolsky, summarily dismissed Grossman's claim that the change in Marx's plan was associated with the development of his reproduction schemas. Rosdolsky asserted that Marx had already addressed the issue of reproduction in the *Grundrisse*, which also presented the essence of the critique in *Capital* of the empirical categories used by Smith and Ricardo.⁵² The *Grundrisse* also included a sketch of a five-department reproduction schema.⁵³ But Grossman had suggested that the change in plan was prompted by Marx's work on a schema to replace Quesnay's *tableau économique*. Quesnay is not mentioned at all in the *Grundrisse* and Marx's two-department schema of 1863, which he wrote 'figures in one of the last chapters of my work [that is, the 1861–3 manuscript] by way of recapitulation', was new and essentially that presented in Volume 2 of *Capital*.⁵⁴ While Grossman's dating of the formulation of Marx's mature reproduction schema was accurate, there is nothing in the manuscript of 1861–3 or the surviving manuscripts of 1863–7 to indicate that this particular breakthrough was the immediate cause of Marx's change in plan. Nor, on abandoning his previous overall plan, did Marx immediately throw himself into elaborating his reproduction schema. He worked on Volume 1 of *Capital*, then on what became Volume 3 for a while, before breaking off to write a draft of Volume 2 which featured the reproduction schema.

Grossman provided a convincing account of the compatibility between Marx's reproduction schema, that traces the relationship between surplus values and the capitals which create them, and Marx's analysis at a high level of abstraction. It was, however, a mistake to argue that before 1863 Marx's work 'is organised according to the empirical material'. The organising principle of moving from the abstract (capital in general) to the concrete (competition/many capitals) was already in place in the *Grundrisse*.⁵⁵ At most, the mature reproduction schema of July 1863 contributed to a more radical application of the method of abstraction and successive approximation of the concrete.

51 Rosdolsky 1980, p. 53.

52 Rosdolsky 1980, p. 25.

53 The preliminary nature of the treatment is indicated by the comment that '[t]his example may or may not be developed later. Does not really belong here.' (Marx 1986b, p. 371.)

54 Marx 1985. Moseley 1998 demonstrates that the schema originated in Marx's critique of Adam Smith's theory of price.

55 See Moseley 1995.

Marx had been employing that methodology for at least five years and it was a necessary *precondition* for the schema.

Although unaware of both the *Grundrisse* and the economic manuscript of 1861–3, apart from those elements published as *Theories of Surplus Value* by Kautsky, Grossman did have access to several plans that Marx wrote in 1857, early 1858 and 1861–2. The *contents* of the earliest and sketchiest of them do not prove that the material would be organised according to the methodology Marx had already outlined in his ‘Introduction’ of 1857. A plan of 2 April 1858 indicated that the first volume on capital, of the six books then envisaged, would deal with ‘capital in general’ and ‘many capitals’. The meaning of these terms was not yet clear, as the outline did not go much beyond the contents of *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, published in 1859, which dealt with the nature of the commodity, basic elements of a labour theory of value and money. But a plan for what became Volume 3 of *Capital*, written in December 1861 or January 1862, provided clear evidence, including treatment of rent, that Marx had already modified his plan for the application of his method of abstraction and successive approximation.⁵⁶

Grossman, Behrens and Jahn maintained that Marx modified the content of the plan for his project in connection with his development of the concept of surplus value. Unlike Behrens,⁵⁷ Jahn insisted that the overall plan for six books did not change, while recognising that Marx’s conception was not static and that the first volume on capital came to incorporate elements of material originally envisaged for later volumes. Marx had first elaborated his theory of surplus value and the closely related distinction between labour and labour power in the *Grundrisse*.⁵⁸ Grossman argued that the formulation of the reproduction schema, which necessarily *excluded* the concrete forms of surplus value, allowed Marx to demonstrate *quantitatively* the process of surplus-value creation. The schema became a crucial element in the argument of *Capital* Volume 2. For Jahn, Marx’s exploration of earlier theories of surplus value led him to change his plan by *including* a preliminary discussion of the concrete forms of surplus value, in Volume 3 of *Capital*.⁵⁹ Grossman’s, Behrens’s and Jahn’s accounts are, to an extent, compatible. They all regarded the conceptual framework of *Capital* as a more radical application of the method of advancing from the abstract to the concrete, already outlined in 1857 before Marx wrote the *Grundrisse*, than the one employed in that first or the second draft

56 Marx 1986a, p. 45; Marx 1983a; Marx 1983b; Marx 1987; Moseley 2009, p. 142, has drawn attention to the plan for Volume 3 in Marx 1991, pp. 346–7.

57 Behrens 1952, pp. 43–4.

58 Marx 1986b, notably pp. 246–50.

59 Jahn 1992/3, pp. 130–1.

of 1861–3. They associated the change in Marx's plan for his work on capital with his development of the theory of surplus value. Successive modifications in his plan for the first volume of the six-volume project suggest that the decision to recast the whole was the result of a reassessment based on accumulated insights rather than a single conceptual breakthrough.

Jahn and Heinrich argued that Marx abandoned the concept of 'capital in general' and Heinrich regarded this as pivotal in the change in the plan for *Capital*. Burkett's and Moseley's theoretical, methodological and textual arguments have thoroughly refuted the notion that Marx dropped the concept.⁶⁰

Grossman and his critics

The publication of more of the manuscripts which Marx wrote in the course of his efforts to understand the anatomy of capitalism has undermined some of Grossman's secondary conclusions, about the evolution of Marx's ideas. Grossman's principal argument, about *Capital's* underlying structure and completeness – that the work, despite its lacunae, was coherent – stands up well against objections that it was incoherent, profoundly incomplete and/or flawed in at least some of its fundamental features. *Capital* does not say everything there is to be said about the anatomy and logic of the capitalist mode of production, let alone the totality of capitalism; Marx was still revising Volume 1 for new editions when he died and was a long way from having made the other volumes ready for publication. If we like, we can all, therefore, play the pointless game of 'wouldn't it have been nice if in *Capital* Marx had dealt with issues alpha and omega, x, y and z, or if someone else did so in his spirit (only better)?' But that achieves nothing. *Capital* has provided and still provides a methodology, an integrated set of concepts and conclusions that are a vital basis for both further theoretical investigations and analyses of concrete issues that the working class faces. In this sense, as Grossman argued, '*Capital ... is essentially complete*'.

60 Jahn 1986, pp. 25–6; Jahn 1992/3, pp. 130–1; Heinrich 1989, pp. 63–70; Heinrich 2006, pp. 185–9; Heinrich 2009, p. 81; Rosdolsky 1980, pp. 41–51; Burkett 1991; Moseley 1995. For a survey of the wider debate, see Hoff 2009, pp. 266–75.

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