## Contents

Introduction: In Marx’s Laboratory .......................................................... 1  
*Riccardo Bellofiore, Guido Starosta and Peter D. Thomas*

### Part One: Achievements and Limits of the *Grundrisse*

The *Grundrisse* after *Capital*, or How to Re-read Marx Backwards ........ 17  
*Riccardo Bellofiore*

Method: From the *Grundrisse* to *Capital* .................................................. 43  
*Juan Iñigo Carrera*

The Four Levels of Abstraction of Marx’s Concept of ‘Capital’.  
Or, Can We Consider the *Grundrisse* the Most Advanced Version  
of Marx’s Theory of Capital? ................................................................. 71  
*Roberto Fineschi*

### Part Two: Abstract Labour, Value and Money

The Practical Truth of Abstract Labour ...................................................... 101  
*Christopher J. Arthur*

Unavoidable Crises: Reflections on Backhaus and the Development of  
Marx’s Value-Form Theory in the *Grundrisse* ......................................... 121  
*Patrick Murray*

### Part Three: The Concept of Capital

The Transformation of Money into Capital ................................................. 149  
*Martha Campbell*

The Concept of Capital in the *Grundrisse* ............................................... 177  
*Howard Engelskirchen*
# Contents

## Part Four: Technology, Domination, Emancipation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The 'Fragment on Machines': A Marxian Misconception in the</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Grundrisse</em> and its Overcoming in <em>Capital</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Michael Heinrich</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 'General Intellect' in the <em>Grundrisse</em> and Beyond</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tony Smith</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The System of Machinery and Determinations of Revolutionary</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjectivity in the <em>Grundrisse</em> and <em>Capital</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Guido Starosta</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the <em>Grundrisse</em> to <em>Capital</em> and Beyond: Then and Now</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>George Caffentzis</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Part Five: Competition, Cycles and Crisis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Whole and the Parts: The Early Development of Marx's Theory of</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Distribution of Surplus-Value in the <em>Grundrisse</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fred Moseley</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marx's <em>Grundrisse</em> and the Monetary Business-Cycle</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Jan Toporowski</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis and the Rate of Profit in Marx's Laboratory</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Peter D. Thomas and Geert Reuten</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Part Six: Society and History in the *Grundrisse*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Pre-Capitalist Forms and Capitalism: The Problem of Society</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the <em>Grundrisse</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Luca Basso</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Nature: Gender in Marx's <em>Grundrisse</em></td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Amy E. Wendling</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uneven Developments: From the <em>Grundrisse</em> to <em>Capital</em></td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Joel Wainwright</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Capitalistic Forms of Production and Primitive Accumulation.</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marx's Historiography from the <em>Grundrisse</em> to <em>Capital</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Massimilano Tomba</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of Names</td>
<td>429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of Subjects</td>
<td>432</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thus, while capital must on one side strive to tear down every spatial barrier to intercourse, i.e., to exchange, and conquer the whole earth for its market, it strives on the other side to annihilate this space with time, i.e. to reduce to a minimum the time spent in motion from one place to another. The more developed the capital, therefore, the more extensive the market over which it circulates, which forms the spatial orbit of its circulation, the more does it strive simultaneously for an even greater extension of the market and for greater annihilation of space by time.1

I

Perhaps no Marxist concept is more central to the discipline of geography than ‘uneven development’. Although the social relations in question are rarely defined in narrow economic terms, geographers generally recognise that the spatially uneven nature of capitalism is the result of its innate drive that brings an ever greater ‘annihilation of space by time’.2

2. This has been best demonstrated by David Harvey, who contends that ‘the theory of uneven geographical development needs further development’ (Harvey 2006, p. 71). Although my analysis in this chapter takes inspiration from Harvey’s work, I do not use his expression ‘uneven geographical development’ because I find it to be redundant (unevenness implies geography). Harvey is perhaps justified in insisting on the geographical accent, because discussions of uneven development in the Marxist tradition emphasise time over space (see Harvey 1981).
It may come then as something of a surprise that uneven development is not a concept of Marx’s. It is certainly a Marxist concept, meaning that it cannot be understood apart from the intellectual tradition inspired by Marx’s analysis of capitalism. And to be sure, the unevenness of capitalist socio-spatial relations is a central problem of analysis in Marx’s mature economic writings. Yet ‘uneven development’ is not a concept elaborated by Marx. This chapter addresses this gap – between the present-day centrality of ‘uneven development’ and its absence as such in Marx – by grappling with Marx’s attempts to explain what we today refer to as ‘uneven development’. To do so, I compare the way that the problematic of uneven development is framed in two of Marx’s greatest texts: Grundrisse and Capital. That is, I examine the way that these texts situate uneven development relative to their common, central task: analysing value to unravel capitalist social relations.

The importance of uneven development as a vernacular concept is enormous. Its gravity derives from the massively uneven dispensations of power and wealth in the world. ‘Uneven development’ has proven to be the paradigmatic description of the geographical nature of this injustice. And in the wake of the ‘fall of communism’, Marxist thought today is largely defined by its criticisms of the unequal provision of the fruits of ‘capitalist development’.

Thanks to the work of David Harvey especially, many Marxists are familiar with the ways that Marx’s analysis of capitalism in Capital opens a radical reinterpretation of the world’s geographies. It often reads like an analysis of industrial, urban capitalism such as could only have been found in London at the time of its writing; Volume I makes reference to its workshops and state, labour-laws, the social history of the British enclosures, and in the last chapter, British colonialism (more on this below). Of course, Capital is about capitalism, not British capitalism. Nevertheless, few readers could mistake the book’s setting, and I am

---

3. The key issue, here, for Marxism is that the facts of global inequality have become the starting point for most Marxist studies, and these criticisms have come to shape how Marxism is understood. I place ‘capitalist development’ in scare-quotes because this concept must be destroyed – and replaced with ‘capitalism qua development’ (Wainwright 2008b).

4. The following two paragraphs are taken from an essay co-authored with Geoff Mann (Mann and Wainwright 2008).
perhaps not the only Marxist who has difficulty imagining what Capital might look like had it been written in, say, Paris, or, for that matter, Beijing.

Like Capital, the Grundrisse was written in Victorian London and traces of that imperial, urban environment appear in the text. Yet there is an important distance. Here the difference with Capital in the feel of this setting is stark and fruitful. Indeed, the ‘setting’ is so undefined that it can only be called unsettled; the Grundrisse produces a palpable sense of indefinite, even volcanic, geography: the Grundrisse describes capitalism and the world, in its world-becoming and its becoming-worldly. Its concepts emerge in a world of contradictory and still-unfolding spaces. Whereas a reader may read Capital as a book about Britain’s capitalist society and its eventual overthrow by the British proletariat, there can be no mistaking the Grundrisse as anything other than a text of geography without salvation, set in a world without guarantees.

Part of what distinguishes the Grundrisse both from Marx’s earlier works as well as the three later drafts of Capital is the way that four threads are woven together: the emergence of capitalism, value, contradictions of capitalism, and capital’s expansionary tendency. Although these threads reappear in Capital, the resulting tapestry is not the same. In neither Capital nor Grundrisse does Marx offer a definitive explanation of uneven development. However, each text offers distinct and useful, but limited, thoughts towards an explanation. Marx provides us with the elements of a theory that sees uneven development as an effect of four related processes: capitalism’s original and primitive accumulation of its own ‘exterior’ in slavery, the formal subsumption of labour, the displacement of diverse precapitalist formations, and colonialism. Taken together, we may call these processes imperialism. I use this term decidedly to underscore the main argument: the difference in Marx’s treatment of the problematic of uneven development in these two texts results from his growing recognition during the 1850s of the interconnections between Britain’s imperial brutality and the expansionary nature of capital. Although Marx himself did not use these terms, we may speak of Marx’s ‘discovery of uneven development and imperialism’.

The work of Marxist geographers to elaborate a theory of uneven development should, therefore, be seen as attempts to elaborate upon Marx’s discovery of 150 years ago. For those geographers, uneven development is the spatial outcome of the general law of capitalist accumulation. This interpretation of

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5. Marx wrote two extensive drafts of Capital after the Grundrisse. Enrique Dussel’s Towards an Unknown Marx (Dussel 2001) is the best commentary I know on the manuscripts of 1861–3, the ‘second draft’. Unfortunately for English readers, Dussel’s commentary on the Grundrisse (1985) has not been translated.

6. Walker 1978; Harvey 1982; Smith 1984. In a concise formulation, Neil Smith contends that ‘uneven development derives specifically from the opposed tendencies, inherent in capital, toward the differentiation but simultaneous equalization of the levels and
uneven development was principally inspired by Marx's analysis of the emergence and extension of capitalist relations, but it was Trotsky who introduced the term ‘uneven and combined development’ into the Marxist vernacular. Trotsky's *The History of the Russian Revolution*\(^7\) is framed by the concept of ‘uneven and combined development’: ‘The development of historically backward nations leads necessarily to a peculiar combination of different stages in the historic process. Their development as a whole acquires a planless, complex, combined character.’\(^8\) In Trotsky's texts, these developments are principally historical-political, but today the emphasis is mainly on economic-geographical factors.

There is much that could be said about the varied uses of the concept, but my aim in this chapter is limited to examining the problematic of uneven development in Marx's later texts.\(^9\) This is not to render Marx's economic *oeuvre* whole or settled – rather the opposite. My goal is emphatically not to make Marx consistent with himself in order to convince somebody to be consistent with Marx. It is rather to trace part of the itinerary of what has become a key concept for many Marxists.

II

[T]he really difficult point to be discussed . . . is how the relations of production as legal relations enter into uneven development.\(^10\)

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8. Trotsky 1959, p. 3.
9. Since Althusser, ‘uneven development’ has also been used by some Marxists to speak of unevenness in changes in social-political formations. In his glossary of Althusserian terms, Brewster provides us with the following definition of uneven development (*développement inégal*): ‘A concept of Lenin and Mao Tse-tung: the overdetermination of all the contradictions in a social formation means that none can develop simply; the different overdeterminations in different times and places result in quite different patterns of social development’ (Brewster 1997, p. 312). Note that Brewster does not credit Trotsky: a mark of Stalinism?
10. Marx 1986, p. 46. This is the Wangermann translation. Compare the Nicolaus translation: ‘But the really difficult point to discuss here is how relations of production develop unevenly as legal relations’ (Marx 1973, p. 109). Note that in Wangermann's translation of this passage (again, the only appearance of 'uneven development' in the *Grundrisse*) the word 'development' is not used as a verb but as a noun. In this translation, 'uneven development' is a *condition* that multiple social relations 'enter into'; different *relations enter into relation* with one another more or less evenly. The opposite is true of the Nicolaus translation: development is the verb ('relations of production
To my knowledge, Marx only uses the expression ‘uneven development’ once in the *Grundrisse*, and only in passing. Discussing the primacy of material production for historical and social change, Marx comments on the ‘uneven development of material production relative to, e.g., artistic development’ and the unevenness of the relations of production and legal relations. A difficult point indeed, not least because Marx’s comments are preliminary and never elaborated upon. Yet two lessons may be gleaned from this reference (which appears in the ‘Introduction’). First, Marx emphasises that capitalist relations of production, understood as *social relations*, develop unevenly relative to other sorts of social relations that a Marxist would expect to shift along with capitalism. So the fact that art and law – two crucial elements of the social relations for any society – do not grow and change in lock-step with the relations of production is, in Marx’s words, a ‘really difficult point to be discussed’. Second, Marx indicates that any use of the concept of ‘development’ would require the destruction of the ‘usual abstractness’ of ‘the concept of progress’. Nothing would have been less in keeping with his method than the simple notion of progress. Development must be conceived dialectically – not teleologically.

So much for ‘uneven development’ in the *Grundrisse*. It is introduced, noted to be ‘really difficult’, and left behind. Yet even if this *expression* disappears, Marx continues to analyse the uneven development of relations of production *vis-à-vis* social relations.

Let us briefly turn to one well-known section of the *Grundrisse*: the ‘Forms which precede capitalist production’, with the parenthetical subtitle: ‘Concerning the process which precedes the formation of the capital relation or of original accumulation’. Here Marx confronts the task of defining capitalism by its...
origin and by its difference with all that came earlier. In this analysis, we find Marx’s earliest attempt to explain the uneven nature of capitalism’s development as an effect of the very emergence of capitalism from within precapitalist Europe. The Grundrisse begins with methodological discussions and an analysis of production and consumption. Then comes the chapter on money, where Marx distinguishes value from money, followed by the chapter on capital, where Marx explains how money is transformed into capital and how labor produces surplus-value. This culminates in a discussion of the circulation and accumulation of capital, again with an emphasis on surplus-value. So far, so good. The narrative does not begin with the commodity, as in Capital, but it traces a similar arc: it follows the dynamic movement of value: from production, via the application of labour purchased with money, to the conversion of surplus-value into capital, and so forth.

At this point the narrative breaks into a new direction, what appears to be an historical digression, to explain how capitalist social relations came into existence in Europe. This section begins with the following remark, which hangs like a frame over what follows:

One of the prerequisites of wage labour and one of the historic conditions for capital is free labour and the exchange of free labour for money, in order to reproduce money and to valorise it […] Another prerequisite is the separation of free labour from the objective conditions of its realization – from the means and material of labour. This means above all that the workers must be separated from the land, which functions as his natural workshop.

Marx thus posits two necessary conditions for the emergence of capitalist social relations: first, the exchange of ‘free’ labour (neither slave nor serf) for money, and second, the emergence of a necessary labour-capital relation by separating workers from the means of production, particularly the land.

In this way, Marx links uneven development to the emergence of these two conditions from, and subsequent extension through, precapitalist social relations. Marx sketches three distinct forms that are historically-geographically differentiated. The first, the so-called ‘Asiatic’ or ‘oriental’ form, is said to be ‘natural and spontaneous’; the second, the Roman form, is expressed by commune-towns; the third, the Germanic, is grounded upon the household as an economic totality. I think Gayatri Spivak is right when she characterises (one part of) this analysis as ‘not an explanation but an attempt to fit historical presuppositions into a

14. Bond 1999 similarly argues that Marx’s earliest thoughts on uneven development can be traced to the Grundrisse, ‘where unevenness represents the condition for a transition from one declining mode of production to another rising, more progressive mode’.
logical mould’. And it is not difficult to pair this business of ‘fitting’ presuppositions into logical moulds with Marx’s infamous question from his essay on ‘The British rule in India’: ‘can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia?’ The link between ‘mankind fulfill[ing] its destiny in…Asia’ and the Asiatic mode of pre-capitalist production is suggested by Marx’s very ontogenetic division of the world into ideal forms.

If there is a dialectical quality to Marx’s analysis here it may be found where the ‘fitting’ exceeds the mould, in Marx’s very attempt to ground his analysis of capitalism in historical categories in a fashion that is itself neither empiricist nor historicist. This reading applies particularly to the question of the origin of labour-sale. Consider where Marx writes that ‘the positing of the individual as a worker, who is stripped of all qualities except this one, is itself a historical product’. The worker is a historical product but not the result of historical laws, nor ‘a product of history’ that simply is there because ‘history’ made it that way. The existence of each labourer defies the notion of history because nothing that comes before can explain what makes the fundamental leap to proletarianisation happen. And this leap is not made once. And it changes history each time. In this view, Marx’s sketch of precapitalist formations is less an essay on ‘what came earlier’ in a temporal sense as it is an analysis of the conditions of possibility for a twisting of property and power needed for capitalist social relations to come to be – not temporally, but ontologically.

In the emergence of capitalism, two fundamental changes occur in social relations: the crystallisation of property-relations and the emerging centrality of labour-capital relations. Marx elaborates by identifying the conditions needed to free the worker as ‘objectless, purely subjective labour capacity confronting the objective conditions of production as his not-property’, i.e., a person with nothing to sell but her labour, her own life. Marx summarises the emergence of capitalist social relations as a set of presuppositions and dissolutions:

\[
\text{[A] process of history which dissolves the various forms in which the worker is a proprietor [...]. Dissolution of the relation to the earth – land and soil – as natural condition of production – to which he relates as his own inorganic being [...]. Dissolution of the relations in which he appears as proprietor of}
\]

17. Spivak 1999, p. 81. See also Spivak 1999, Chapter One; and Spivak 1994, p. 56. Spivak calls the Asiatic Mode and Primitive Communism ‘names that inhabit the pre-historical or para-geographical space/time that mark the outside of the feudalism/capitalism circuit’ (Spivak 1999, p. 83).
21. It could, therefore, be an illustration of what Geoff Mann (Mann 2008, pp. 925–9) calls ‘the Grundrisse’s geography of necessity’.
the instrument. Just as the above landed property presupposes a real community, so does this property of the worker in the instrument presuppose a particular form of the development of manufactures, namely craft, artisan work [. . .]. Dissolution [. . .] at the same time of the relations in which the workers themselves, the living labour capacities themselves, still belong directly among the objective conditions of production, and are appropriated as such – i.e., are slaves or serfs.22

Capitalist social relations emerge not as a pre-formed, external totality but come into existence through – Marx italicises the word thrice – the dissolution of older social relations. Capitalist social relations emerge therefore in a way that is both complete – since the essence of capitalism is the hiring of labour as a commodity, which happens at the ‘beginning’ of capitalism – but also profoundly incomplete, since capitalist social relations must reproduce themselves elsewhere and beyond an initial purchase of labour. It takes time for everything to dissolve, so to speak. Earlier in the Grundrisse, still within the chapter on capital, Marx insists that capitalist relations of production ‘do not develop out of nothing’, nor do they emerge ‘from the womb of the Idea positing itself’ as for Hegel. No, capitalist social relations emerge:

within and in contradiction to the existing development of production and the inherited, traditional property relations. If in the fully developed bourgeois system each economic relationship presupposes the other in a bourgeois-economic form, and everything posited is thus also a premise, that is the case with every organic system. This organic system itself has its premises as a totality, and its development into a totality consists precisely in subordinating all elements of society to itself, or in creating out of it the organs it still lacks. This is historically how it becomes a totality. Its becoming this totality constitutes a moment of its process, of its development.23

We should read this in light of Marx’s warning that any use of the concept of ‘development’ would require the destruction of the usual abstractness of the concept of progress. The emergence of capitalist social relations – not all at once, but by positing relations that are then taken as premises for advance – is the counterpart to capitalism becoming totality, a process that is never complete. The process is characterised by the tendency to subordinate ‘all elements of society’ so that it may create ‘the organs it still lacks’ – for instance, the elements

22. Marx 1973, pp. 497–8. Elsewhere in the Grundrisse, Marx explains that the fundamental quality of capitalism as a social relation lies in the exchange of living labour for objectified labour – i.e., the positing of social labor in the form of the contradiction of capital and wage labour – is the ultimate development of the value relation and of production resting on value’ (Marx 1973, p. 704).
and organs of law. In the Grundrisse there is nothing that resembles what most contemporary scholars of development-studies problematically call ‘capitalist development’. There is only the becoming-capital of capital as such, and alongside this genesis, the development of capitalist social relations.

Marx takes pains in his notes to describe this emergence spatially. In the paragraph immediately following the passage I just cited – a hinge-point that is, for me, an illustration of Marx’s dialectical procedure at work in the notebooks – Marx turns his attention to the moment when capitalist social relations encounter non-capitalist relations through geographical diffusion: ‘[I]f, within a society, the modern relations of production, i.e., capital, are developed in their totality, and this society now takes possession of a new terrain, as e.g. the colonies, it finds, more especially its representative the capitalist finds, that his capital ceases to be capital without wage labour, and that one of the premises of wage labour is not only landed property in general but modern landed property; landed property which, as capitalised rent, is expensive and as such excludes the direct use of the soil by individuals. Therefore, Wakefield’s theory of colonization [...] is immensely important for a correct understanding of modern landed property’.24

In the space of two paragraphs Marx joins the emergence of capitalist social relations with territorial power. Capitalism emerges through the dissolution of precapitalist social relations in Europe, but more, it flows – a dynamic solvent for transforming precapitalist relations elsewhere.

This remark about the spread of capitalism outward from Europe manifests what can be regarded as Marx’s eurocentrism. In the Grundrisse Marx asserts that in Europe the relations of production under capitalism are not only the most complex of any society but also hold the key to understanding everything else. In the ‘Introduction’ to the Grundrisse, Marx writes: ‘bourgeois society is the most developed and many-faceted historical organization of production’.25 His point is not only that capitalist Europe is more complex but also that it contains the key to the past, everywhere: ‘the anatomy of man is a key to the anatomy of the ape…. Bourgeois economy thus provides a key to that of antiquity…’.26 Arguably, this style of argument opened the way toward the Eurocentric stageism later enshrined as dialectical materialism and, in a different frame, as modernisation.27

Which is perhaps why Marx decided to leave it out of Capital.

24. Marx 1973, p. 278. I believe this is the first reference to Wakefield in Marx’s mature economic writings. I discuss his ‘immensely important’ theory below.
26. Ibid.
27. Later interpretations drew especially from Marx’s 1859 ‘Preface’ to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (Marx 1975–2005h): ‘Mankind thus inevitably sets
III

The practice of colonization has in a great measure peopled the earth: it has founded nations: it has re-acted with momentous consequences on old countries, by creating and supplying new objects of desire, by stimulating industry and skill, by promoting manufactures and commerce, by greatly augmenting the wealth and population of the world: it has [...] been, indirectly, a main cause of the political changes and tendencies which now agitate Europe. Yet so lately as twenty years ago, no theory of colonization had set forth what should be the objects of the process, still less what are the best means of accomplishing them. There were long experience without a system, immense results without a plan, vast doings but no principles.28

In an insightful essay on Marx’s discussion of ‘forms which precede capitalism’, Wood notes that, notwithstanding references to ‘primitive accumulation’, in the Grundrisse Marx did not seek to explain the transition from feudalism to capitalism as such: ‘His objective is rather to highlight the specificity of capitalism in contrast to earlier forms of property and labour’.29 Wood elaborates on an apparent shift in this regard between Grundrisse and Capital:

[I]t is striking that in Capital he begins to offer a rather different account. In [Grundrisse], he has not yet entirely broken with the most common question-begging accounts of how capitalism originated. [...] [In Grundrisse, t]he origin of capitalism is [in a more strictly Hegelian fashion] largely a matter of allowing itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation. In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress in the economic development of society. The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production [...] but the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation’. In his 1965 essay on Marx’s treatment of precapitalist formations, Hobsbawm notes that the ‘classical formulation of these epochs of human progress’ is to be found in the Grundrisse. Perhaps. As Hobsbawm argues, it is in this particular section of the Grundrisse that Marx sought ‘to formulate the content of history in its most general form’, albeit not in a simple chronological sense (Hobsbawm 1965, pp. 12–14). Although today we would be less inclined to relate the Grundrisse with ‘epochs marking progress’, Hobsbawm’s essay shows how Marx attempts to write a history of capital lacking the teleology typically ascribed to it. Yet Hobsbawm does not ask about the conditions of possibility of knowing any other history, nor whether Marx’s approach to capitalism’s history may be eurocentric. For a reading of ‘forms which precede capitalist production’ as an anti-teleological text, see Wood 2008.

28. Wakefield 2001, letter IX.
29. Wood 2008, p. 84.
its already existing elements to grow. When he developed his ideas in *Capital*,
he was already hinting at a very different explanation, which did indeed begin
to seek the source of the transition not in the ‘interstices’ of feudalism but
rather in its own internal dynamics, in its own constitutive property relations,
which gave rise to an authentic social transformation.\(^{30}\)

As Marx already knew at the time he wrote the *Grundrisse*, these constitutive
property-relations required the separation of living labour from the means of
production. The shift Wood identifies emerges when Marx changes the way the
separation of labour from the means of production is framed in relation to capi-
tal. Thus, the shift Wood identifies in Marx’s explanation of the emergence of
capitalism is tightly related to primitive accumulation and what we call today
‘uneven development’.

The question of precapitalist formations returns in *Capital* in two ways,
neither as extensive or speculative as in the *Grundrisse*. In Part five of *Capital
Volume III*, best known for its analysis of the role of finance in the production-
process, we find a chapter on ‘pre-capitalist relations’\(^{31}\) where Marx argues that
the transition from pre-capitalist relations into capitalism was made possible
by two ‘antediluvian forms of capital’ that long predate the emergence of capi-
talism *in toto*: usurer’s capital and merchant’s capital.\(^{32}\) Yet credit cannot take
credit for creating capitalism, since ‘usury, like trade, exploits a given mode of
production but [can]not create it; both relate to the mode of production from
outside’.\(^{33}\) This suits Marx’s argument that capitalism emerges through the dia-
lectical unfolding of itself. But we should not be distracted by these remarks on
credit, for they take us no further in understanding the origins of capitalism or
its uneven development.

Marx returns to these problems more substantively in Part Eight of *Capital
Volume I*, on primitive accumulation. Here Marx reveals the tendency of capital-
ist accumulation – the secret of capital’s emergence red in tooth and claw – and
then concludes with this description of the end of capitalism:

>This expropriation is accomplished by the action of the immanent laws of
capitalistic production itself…leading to] the entanglement of all peoples
in the net of the world-market […]. Along with the constantly diminishing

\(^{30}\) Wood 2008, p. 85.


\(^{32}\) In Marx’s discussion, credit appears as both the earliest and the highest stages
of capitalism. On credit as a reagent in the emergence of capitalism and the dominant
expression of its ‘highest stages’, see also Lenin’s *Development of Capitalism in Russia*
(Lenin 2000, Chapter VI, Section VI: ‘Merchant’s and industrial capital in manufacture’)
and his study of *Imperialism* (Lenin 1939.).

number of the magnates of capital… grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working-class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralization of the means of production and socialization of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.34

Note that Marx’s analysis of the impending end of capitalism is linked directly to what we call today uneven development. What was supposed to bring about the end of capitalism is here characterised as the increasing divisions between classes and societies as a consequence of ‘the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world-market’. These divisions are themselves brought about by capital’s expanding contradictions. The knell of capitalist private property is sounded, albeit slowly, by the uneven development of capitalism on a planetary scale, with the centralisation of the means of production and the socialisation of labour reaching a point of fundamental contradiction.

Then Marx does something strange. Volume I does not end at its natural conclusion – the destruction of capitalism. Why did Marx, who arranged Capital so delicately and dialectically, opt against concluding with this majestic Aufhebung? Instead this conclusion is followed by a brief and breezy discussion of Wakefield’s theory of colonialism. Noting that this final chapter’s placement is ‘somewhat odd’,35 David Harvey asks: ‘why open up such questions at the end of a work that appeared to reach its natural culmination in the preceding chapter?’ Harvey’s (admittedly speculative) reply is to suggest that Marx is drawing a shrewd parallel with the conclusion of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, where Hegel ‘proposes … colonial solutions’ to the problems facing bourgeois civil society by demonstrating that ‘there is no outer resolution to the internal contradictions of capitalism’.36 Harvey may be onto something – Marx knew his Hegel – but there is a more immediate and I think stronger explanation to this riddle, stronger because it is borne out by clues from Marx’s notes, letters, and previous drafts, including the Grundrisse.

34. Marx 1967, p. 763.
35. Harvey 1982, p. 413.
Except for two brief passages, Marx does not address colonialism in the *Grundrisse*; nor, again, in *Capital*, until the final chapter – ostensibly a minor digression on Wakefield’s theory of colonialism. This is the same Wakefield we saw cited in the *Grundrisse* on the origins of capitalism: Edward Gibbon Wakefield (1796–1862), a British political economist obscured by history but important in his time.\(^{37}\) Wakefield married into wealth, and when his first wife died, he abducted another wealthy woman into forced marriage – but was caught and sent to Newgate prison for three years. Not unlike Gramsci, while in prison he filled notebooks with reflections on political economy – albeit toward an entirely different effect. Wakefield emerged from prison a strenuous advocate for colonialism as a solution to all Britain’s problems. No armchair-theorist, Wakefield went on to play an important role in the British colonisation of southern Australia, New Zealand, and Canada in 1830s and 1840s.

Marx’s criticisms are directed principally at Wakefield’s 1834 book, *England and America*, the fruit of his ruminations in prison. Before turning to Marx’s reading of Wakefield, a few words on Wakefield’s text are due. Despite the fact that Wakefield openly advocates colonialism, he was no idiot. His texts offer defences and analyses of colonialism; they contribute novel arguments and anticipate much of the content, if little of the tone, of twentieth-century Marxist theories of imperialism. Wakefield later published an extended correspondence in his 1849 *View of the Art of Colonization*.\(^{38}\) Published only a year after Marx and Engels’s *Communist Manifesto*, Wakefield’s *Art of Colonization* could be read as a reply: one that attempts to dispel the ghost haunting Europe, so to speak, to the colonies. Noting, in *England and America*, that the advance of capitalist social relations within England has created circumstances that are unfavourable to continued growth, Wakefield argues that colonialism will bring an ‘Extension of Markets,’ ‘Enlarge [the] field for Capital,’ and assuage the problem of ‘Excessive Numbers’ – of unruly underemployed workers. It would be hard to find a more concise statement of the gains of colonialism to capitalists.

Like Marx, Wakefield emphasised the essential novelty of the British situation – unprecedented industrialisation and proletarianisation – and speculated that the intense competition among labourers had reduced their quality of life. He worries that many labourers lack ‘the means of a comfortable subsistence according to the respectful standards of living’. At the same time, Wakefield explains, in

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37. In a review of the literature in Marxist geography, I found no discussion of Marx and Wakefield, except Harvey 2010, pp. 301–2. Here I rely principally on Wakefield and Marx’s primary texts, but have benefitted from Pappe 1951 and Semmel 1961.

38. Wakefield 1849.
England there is generally a surplus of capital: ‘capital sometimes accumulates so far beyond the room for productive investment, that a great mass of capital is wasted, both at home and abroad, in all sorts of unproductive enterprises’. Wakefield felt that such overaccumulation could be solved by exporting capital to colonies that would in turn create new markets for British industry.

To appreciate the novelty of what Marx calls ‘Wakefield’s colonization theory’, one further point is needed. Wakefield recognised that new colonies are not automatically effective in their role as receptacles of surplus-capital from the core, because, unlike the core, they lack fully developed capitalist social relations. The art of colonialism lies in bringing about these relations – by separating labour from the means of production – in such a way that generates patterns of production and consumption that benefit the core. To this task, Wakefield recognised the fundamental role of the colonial state, and more specifically through the lever of acquiring and selling land: ‘in the business of settling a new country, the mode in which waste or public land is disposed of by the government, must necessarily exercise an all-important influence’. Wakefield’s critique is that the Colonial Office lacks a theoretically-informed (‘principled’) land-policy. He condemned the practice of granting lands, calling instead for the Colonial Office to treat land as a commodity to be sold at a carefully calibrated price: one that attracts settlers while remaining sufficiently high to prevent the colonists from becoming a stagnant, landed class; they should be compelled to sell their labour – that is, to become proletarians.

And, we should add, to become consumers. Wakefield saw that markets for colonial products like tea and sugar were created in the core to facilitate profitable production in the colonies: ‘It is not because an English washerwoman cannot sit down to breakfast without tea and sugar, that the world has been circumnavigated; but it is because the world has been circumnavigated that an English washerwoman requires tea and sugar for breakfast’. Thus capitalism requires the satisfaction of desires bound up with new forms of subjectivity.

39. Wakefield 1849, p. 64.
41. Wakefield 2001, letter IX.
42. Wakefield 1849.
44. Wakefield also anticipated that the differential patterns of consumption in the core and the colonies would facilitate the stabilisation of capital-accumulation in the core. He attributes this condition to inherently different factors of production rather than capital’s uneven geographical dynamic. In one of his letters on colonialism, Wakefield writes: ‘In consequence of the cheapness of land in colonies, the great majority of the people are owners or occupiers of land; and their industry is necessarily in a great measure confined to the producing of what comes immediately from the soil; viz., food, and the raw materials of manufacture. In old countries, on the other hand, where the soil
Wakefield, like Marx, places capital’s world-embrace (circumnavigation) at the heart of this transformation. What does he describe here if not what Marx describes in *Grundrisse* as the expanding ‘spatial orbit of [capital’s] circulation’, all to bring about ‘an even greater extension of the market and for greater annihilation of space by time’?45

Politically, Wakefield sought to counter threats to capitalism with principled colonialism. He was an organic intellectual of the British colonial-capitalist class, yearning to suture colonial practices to the limitations of capital. We have seen how he advocated the expansion of colonial markets and investment of surplus-capital in the colonies to address the problem of periodic low profit-rates in Britain. Similarly, he confronted the problem of low profit-rates in the colonies in a fashion that anticipates the twinning of state-power (‘good governance’) with capitalism *qua* development:

Security of property is the indispensable foundation of wealth, let all other circumstances be what they may. Security of property depends wholly on government. In order, therefore, that profits and wages should be constantly high in a colony, it is essential that the colony should be tolerably well governed; well enough, that is, to hold out a fair prospect that enterprise and industry will enjoy their proper fruits. In all the cases that I can call to mind, of low profits and low wages in a colony […] the cause has been a stagnation of enterprise and industry, arising from insecurity of property; and the insecurity of property arose from defective or vicious government. I lay it down as an axiom therefore, that tolerably good colonial government is an essential condition of that state of continual high profits and high wages, which moderately well-governed colonies exhibit.46

With this appeal for good governance and property-rights, Wakefield anticipates much of the tone of contemporary liberal developmentalism: a useful reminder of the colonial roots of this discourse.

Wakefield receives only modest attention in the *Grundrisse* and the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (of 1861–3). Yet Wakefield is cited more than a dozen times in *Capital* Volume I, where Marx refers to him as ‘the most

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46. Wakefield 2001, letter XIV.

notable political economist’ of England in the 1830s.47 True, in comparison to the rich and extending commentaries we find on Marx’s main interlocutors regarding value – Smith, Ricardo, Malthus, and Bailey – the passages on Wakefield amount to little. So it is odd that Marx gave Wakefield pride of place in the final chapter of Capital. All Marx’s references to Wakefield in his mature economic writings are eclipsed by the final chapter of Capital, where Marx credits Wakefield’s theory of colonialism with inadvertently exposing something essential about the nature of capitalism. Remember that Wakefield was concerned with the fact that colonialism was hampered by the lack of fully-formed capitalist social relations. Marx writes: ‘At earlier stages of production… an earlier working class may be present sporadically, not however as a universal prerequisite of production. The case of colonies (see Wakefield […] shows how this relation is itself a product of capitalist production’.48 The existence of the capital-labour relation is ‘initially sporadic’, but capitalism posits it increasingly: not only in theory, but also concretely, as is demonstrated by colonialism. Marx returns to this ‘immensely important’ line of thinking later in his notebooks. Here is, I think, the key passage on Wakefield in Marx’s economic writings before the final chapter of Capital:

The merit of Wakefield’s new system of colonization is not that he discovered or promoted the art of colonization, nor that he made any fresh discoveries whatsoever in the field of political economy, but that he naively laid bare the narrow-mindedness of political economy without being clear himself as to the importance of these discoveries[…]. The point is that in the colonies, particularly in the earliest stages of development, bourgeois relations are not yet fully formed; not yet presupposed, as they are in old established countries. They are in the process of becoming. The conditions of their origin therefore emerge more clearly. It appears that these economic relations are neither present by nature, nor are they things, which is the way the political economists are rather inclined to view capital.49

For Marx, Wakefield demonstrates two intertwined truths: capitalism is not a system of markets or capital, but an ensemble of social relations; and the ‘becoming’ (not to say ‘origin’) of capitalist relations can be found in the colonies. Indeed,

47. Marx 1967, p. 657. In the 1967 International English edition of Capital, Wakefield is cited at p. 269, p. 326, p. 536, p. 582, and p. 675, in addition to the discussion in the concluding chapter. Of these citations – on population, cooperation, wages, the Corn-Laws, and so on – only the first is ironical. Marx studied Wakefield as carefully as he did other political economists and treated his texts in his usual fashion, drawing support from them as needed and applying his critique at the decisive point.
Marx’s clearest statement in *Capital* Volume I to the effect that capital is not a thing, but a social relation, appears in the final chapter on colonialism – and he attributes this discovery to Wakefield.\(^{50}\)

This attribution is not entirely ironic. Marx and Wakefield understood more clearly than any political economists of their time that colonialism was intended to resolve contradictions engendered by Britain’s early advance as an industrial capitalist society. Moreover, like Marx, Wakefield saw in the growing British proletariat a new class that could bring about a political transformation. Yet their interpretations of these facts are fundamentally distinct. Wakefield examines the colonial situation as a would-be statesman, one fearful of the rising proletariat (‘with the continuance of discontent and the spread of education amongst the common people, chartism and socialism will have many a struggle for the mastery over a restricted franchise and private property: and in these struggles I perceive immense danger for everybody’).\(^{51}\) For Wakefield, the colonial situation is crucial for stabilising British capitalism, and so he advocates reforming the Colonial Office’s land-policies. In stark contrast, Marx sees the colonial scene as a laboratory within which to examine the emergence of capitalist social relations.\(^{52}\) Wakefield advocates colonialism to overcome two contradictions – the overaccumulation of capital, and labour-strife – by *extending* capitalist social relations to the colonies. Yet these contradictions were not actually explained until Marx wrote *Capital*. Thus both Wakefield and Marx saw, in their way, that colonialism would help save British capitalism. The difference between them is that only one felt British capitalism worth saving.

IV

The specific task of bourgeois society is the establishment of a world-market . . . and of production based upon this market. As the world is round, this seems to have been completed by the colonisation of California and Australia and the opening up of China and Japan. The difficult question for us is this: on the [European] Continent the revolution is imminent and will immediately assume a socialist character. Is it not bound to be crushed in this little

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\(^{50}\) Marx 1976a, p. 932.  
\(^{51}\) Wakefield 1849, letter XI.  
\(^{52}\) Though Marx respectfully refers to Wakefield as a ‘notable political economist’ (Marx 1967, p. 675), elsewhere he excoriates Wakefield’s simplistic method. Wakefield’s texts are peppered with statements that casually separate politics and economics, such as this: ‘[I]n treating of what British colonization ought to be, what it is, why it is what it is, and how to make it what it ought to be, we [should] separate considerations relating to politics from those relating to economy’ (Wakefield 2001, letter XI).
corner, considering that in a far greater territory the movement of bourgeois society is still in the ascendant?53

What led Marx to conclude *Capital* with the critique of Wakefield? Marx's decision to begin the analysis in *Capital* with commodity and to focus on industrial capitalism in England led him to study the totality of industrial capitalism emerging around him. This analysis did not require 'historicising' capitalism from a certain germ, an origin story. Marx thus excised the section on the forms of precapitalist formations, and *Capital* was spared this digression. Rather than introducing the concept of primitive accumulation to then inquire into the historical roots of capitalism, as in *Grundrisse*, Marx ends *Capital* with colonialism – the spatial diffusion of primitive accumulation. The origin of capitalism appears in a new way, through the elaboration of the ever-widening capital-labour contradiction on one hand and its spatial adumbration via colonialism: from precapitalist formations to the colonial present. The problematic of uneven development shifts from a temporal to a spatial accent.

Yet, to leave the answer at this is too elegant. For one thing, Marx may not have written about colonialism in the *Grundrisse*, but he anticipated doing so. Two tantalising passages indicate his intentions. The first comes in the 'Introduction', where Marx offers a summary outline of the topics he must address in *Capital*. He begins with the general concept of capital, and analyses its various forms, concluding with money; then, accumulation; value; exchange; credit; and finally, 'capital as source of wealth. The capitalist'. Having unravelled capital, in the next section 'landed property would have to be dealt with', which means rent. 'After that wage labour'. Taken together, capital, rent, and labour comprise the 'three classes as production posited in its three basic forms and presuppositions of circulation'. But Marx imagined weaving production and consumption into a broader analysis. He sketches these elements:


The real positing of individual labour as social and vice versa.54

Such was Marx's outline at this stage for *Capital* – from the first unfolding of capital all the way to communism in one hundred and fifty words. What stands out here is Marx's inclusion of territorial power. In a lapidary turn of phrase, he defines colonialism as 'the state externally'. Judging by this outline from the *Grundrisse*, Marx anticipated an intermediate analysis of colonialism and trade

in *Capital* between that of the nation-state and the world-market. This intermediate space is what we have come to know as uneven development. Yet Marx never wrote all this. He maintained his basic orientation, but his impetus to analyse the relations between the world-market-forming tendency of capital with ‘the state externally’ went unfulfilled, except again in the critique of Wakefield.55

The second mention of colonialism arrives via an abstract historical typology of the possible outcomes of imperial conquest. ‘In all cases of conquest’, Marx writes in the *Grundrisse*, three outcomes are possible:

1. The conquering people subjugates the conquered under its own mode of production (e.g. the English in Ireland..., partly in India); or
2. it leaves the old mode intact and contents itself with a tribute (e.g. Turks and Romans); or
3. a reciprocal interaction takes place whereby some thing new, a synthesis, arises. In all cases, the mode of production, whether that of the conquering people, that of the conquered, or that emerging from the fusion of both, is decisive for the new distribution which arises.56

In this third possible outcome we see Marx outlining, in embryonic form, a mode of analysis later to be elaborated by Samir Amin, Alain de Janvry, David Harvey,57 and all those who have analysed the ways that colonial capitalism preserves in synthesis elements of precapitalist social formations, thereby reproducing uneven relations between core and peripheral economies. Capitalism can then ‘resolve’ crises in the core – by exporting capital to the colonies during periods of overproduction and low profitability, by expanding markets during periods of low effective demand, and so on.

This second passage also underscores an important dimension of Marx’s thoughts regarding colonialism circa 1857. Note that India and Ireland are placed together in the first group, where ‘the conquering people’, in this case, the British, ‘subjugates the conquered’. But between Marx’s first jottings in the *Grundrisse* and the completion of *Capital*, the ‘conquered’ in India and Ireland made themselves (in Marx’s view) historical subjects. In 1857–9 Marx was confronted, in a direct and involved way, by two anti-colonial movements against British rule: the Sepoy mutiny in India and the (almost concomitant) rise of the Fenian movement in Ireland. During the period of Marx’s most intensive study of British capitalism, these two events formed arguably the most concrete manifestations of political resistance to Britain’s world hegemony.

As other writers have demonstrated, Marx’s analyses of these anti-colonial movements – executed to support his livelihood as a writer for the *New York Tribune* – changed his views on the ostensibly progressive effects of imperialism. Marx’s extensive writings on the insurrections of 1857–9 (including some twenty articles for the *Tribune*) are matched perhaps only by Mark Twain for their acerbic attacks on the hypocrisy of imperial liberalism. Take, for instance, Marx’s blistering article of 28 August 1857, which documents the torture of people in India by British imperial troops. After relaying accounts that appear only too familiar today, Marx concludes with this comment: ‘We have here given but a brief and mildly-colored chapter from the real history of British rule in India. In view of such facts, dispassionate and thoughtful men may perhaps be led to ask whether a people are not justified in attempting to expel the foreign conquerors who have so abused their subjects’.

Marx may well have remained eurocentric in certain respects, as some of his critics have claimed, but his views on imperialism and anti-colonial struggle shifted during the years after 1857 when he first put down an outline for his critique of political economy that included a study of ‘The state externally: colonies’. Here we find no apology for the British, only a demand: that his audience accept the justness of anti-colonial resistance.

Therefore it was not Hegel, but another sort of world-historical jolt – living anti-colonial movements – that led Marx to conclude *Capital* with Wakefield. For if he could analyse the violent transformation of precapitalist formations in the colonies as it was happening, there is no need for an historical digression. And if the ‘external’ expression of the British state produced resistance that challenged capitalism, then it deserves pride of place in the conclusion of *Capital*.

Thus Marx was not only studying political economy while he wrote the *Grunds"urisse*; he was also studying struggles around the world. A clear indication of

59. Compare Marx’s comments on British torture in India (Marx 1968) with Twain’s *King Leopold’s Soliloquy* (Twain 1905). Each text derives its force from the play of quotations of eyewitness-reports with wry observations. In this way, Jani argues that Marx ‘frees the subaltern testimony trapped within [the colonizers’ own text] as the unmediated ‘truth’ of the matter, the ‘real history’ of colonial India’ (Jani 2002, p. 91). Yet I find Twain’s text more effective in this respect. In representing the truth in the form of a soliloquy, historical truth is fictionalised, thus made all the more real.
61. This is to affirm Gidwani’s evaluation that ‘neither Nimtz’s defense nor – to a lesser degree – Jani’s confronts the criticism that Marx’s theory of capitalism is Eurocentric not in the parochialism of its spatial imaginary but rather in the presuppositions from which it derives epistemic warrant’ (Gidwani 2004, p. 532). Nevertheless, I read Marx as the quintessential proto-postcolonial thinker. For among other things, as we have seen here, his critique of political economy analytically unravels the dynamics of capitalism to show how what Giovanni Arrighi and David Harvey call ‘capital’ and ‘territorial’ projects are always already interrelated.
Marx’s sentiments may be gained from his letter to Engels on 8 October 1858: ‘The difficult question for us is this: on the [European] Continent the revolution is imminent and will immediately assume a socialist character. Is it not bound to be crushed in this little corner, considering that in a far greater territory the movement of bourgeois society is still in the ascendancy?’ By the time Marx finished the *Grundrisse*, he had raised his eyes well beyond ‘this little corner’. He still anticipated revolution to begin *in Europe*. But he saw that it would fail without revolutions *worldwide*.63

63. I thank Geoff Mann, Noel Castree, and Will Jones for their insightful criticisms. An earlier version of this essay was published in a symposium on the *Grundrisse* published in issue 40(5) of *Antipode*, a journal of radical geography. I thank Geoff Mann, with whom I co-edited the *Grundrisse* symposium.