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# **150 Years of *Capital* –with No End in Sight. Unsystematic Remarks on a Never-ending Story**

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## **Problems of Reception**

Marx had bad luck. When he published the first volume of *Capital* with the Otto Meissner publishing house in Hamburg in 1867, the time and place for this book could hardly have been worse.

Karl Marx was probably by far the best expert on economic theory in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. He had already begun studying economics in Paris in 1844. By the summer of 1845, Marx had been expelled from Paris and was living with his family in Brussels. He took, along with Friedrich Engels, a trip to Manchester in order to study economic literature at the Chetham Library. When Marx was forced to emigrate to London after the quashing of the revolution of 1848, this meant in the first instance horrible poverty for him and his family. But there was no better place for his studies: London was not only the center of what was then the most highly developed capitalist country, with a press that extensively dealt with economic topics and a parliament that published investigative reports on economic crises or the conditions in English factories; with the British Museum, London also disposed of what was then

the largest library in the world. Nowhere else can one find such a comprehensive collection of well-known as well as completely unknown economic texts from many countries and in various languages. If one reads the first volume of *Capital*, above all the footnotes give an impression of Marx's encyclopedia knowledge of the economic literature. However, only at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when Karl Kautsky published the *Theories of Surplus Value* between 1905 and 1910, could one discover how detailed Marx's actual engagement with numerous various authors was. How Marx actually worked, everything that he read, beyond what went into *Capital* and the *Theories of Surplus Value*, could first be retraced a few decades later, since the complete publication of Marx's excerpt notebooks started in the IV. Section of the great Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe (MEGA<sup>2</sup>).

This enormously comprehensive engagement with economic theory is what justifies the programmatic subtitle of *Capital*: critique of political economy. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, "political economy" was the designation in England and France for the then-new science of the economy of an entire country. *Critique of political economy* means not just the critique of individual theories, but rather the critique of an entire science – an enormous claim, but Marx had an overview of this science during his time like no one else.

In *Capital*, he primarily works through 'classical' political economy, which means primarily 'English' economics, which reached its high point with the works of Adam Smith (1776) and David Ricardo (1817). At the time that Marx published the first volume of *Capital*, this 'classical' economics had not yet really arrived in Germany. The works of Smith and Ricardo had already been (badly) translated and available in German for quite some time, but they did not fall upon fertile ground. Accordingly, German economists couldn't really do anything with Marx's critique. Not only political reasons were responsible for the lack of reception of *Capital* after 1867 but also the provincialism of German academic economics, which was nowhere near able to keep up with the English and French debates.

If the first volume of *Capital* had been published in London and in English in 1867, it probably would've caused a furore. But it was first published in English 20 years later – and by that point, it was too late for a decent reception in England. At the beginning of the 1870s, the 'marginalist revolution' started with the almost simultaneous publications by William Stanley Jevons (1871), Carl Menger (1871) and Léon Walras (1874). Whereas Adam Smith had successfully criticized utility theories of value and instead established human labor as the factor determining value, now the concept of "marginal" utility (meaning the additional utility of an additional unit of

a good) as well as other “marginal” concepts were introduced into economics, where they led very quickly to an extensive mathematicization of the field. In 1887, when the first volume of *Capital* was published in English, classical economics was already regarded as largely obsolete. Just three years after the English translation of *Capital*, Alfred Marshall's *Principles of Economics* was published, with which marginalism – referred to in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as neoclassical economics – was able to impose itself as the new orthodoxy. Even the name ‘political economy’ was replaced by ‘economics’. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, neoclassical economists counted Marx's *Capital* as part of the classical school, and considered it just as scientifically obsolete.

One might object that Marx did not at all write *Capital* for the professional community of economists, but rather that it was intended to be a weapon of political struggle, “the most terrible MISSILE that has yet been hurled at the heads of the bourgeoisie (landowners included)”, as Marx wrote in a letter to Johann Phillip Becker dated April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1867 (MECW 42, p. 358). But what kind of reading public did *Capital* actually aim for? The first volume cost 3 Taler, 10 Groschen (1 Taler = 30 Groschen). That was roughly the weekly wage of a skilled male worker; women workers earned considerably less. Only the smallest number of workers could actually afford *Capital* at all. If they attempted to read it, they encountered even greater difficulties than we do today. The first edition was hardly broken down into subsections: it consisted of only six chapters with just a few subsections. Engels was moved to a rare case of scolding: “But how could you leave the outward structure of the book in its present form! The fourth chapter is almost 200 pages long and only has fourth sub-sections, indicated by four headings in ordinary print, which it is hardly possible to refer back to. Furthermore, the train of thought is constantly interrupted by illustrations, and the point to be illustrated is never summarised after the illustration, so that one is forever plunging straight from the illustration of one point into the exposition of another point. It is dreadfully tiring, and confusing, too, if one is not all attention.” (MECW 42, p. 405f.) In the second German edition, the six chapters were turned into seven large sections with a total of 25 chapters, which in turn were further subdivided. But another difficulty was far from solved by the second edition. In contrast to contemporary editions, quotations in foreign languages were not translated: alongside Latin and Ancient Greek, there was English, French, and occasionally also Italian. Even unusual foreign words or names from mythology were nowhere explained. Whoever wanted to read *Capital* had to bring a considerable level of education to the table.

## Implicit Critique

But for *Capital's* explosive force to truly unfold, not only was education in general necessary, but also knowledge of the relevant economic and philosophical theories, in order to perceive not just the explicit, but also the *implicit* critiques. The first sentence of the first chapter already contains a fundamental critique of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*: "The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an 'immense collection of commodities'; the individual commodity appears as its elementary form. Our investigation therefore begins with the analysis of the commodity" (*Capital Volume I*, p. 125). Marx does not write here that wealth consists of commodities, but rather that wealth in certain societies (those in which the capitalist mode of production prevails) takes on a certain form, that of a collection of commodities. The converse of this is that in other societies, wealth possesses a different form. A few paragraphs later, the variety of social forms of wealth is explicitly addressed: "use-values [...] constitute the material content of wealth, whatever its *social form* may be" (ibid. p. 126; Marx emphasizes the term in the first edition). Adam Smith believed to the contrary that he could make an *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (the complete title of his work) without making such a distinction. He regards the commodity form of wealth as a totally self-evident, *natural* form-determination, so to speak. The critique of the naturalization of social form-determinations, which are regarded as eternal and immutable as a result of this naturalization, is found throughout all three volumes of *Capital*, from the examination of the fetish character of the commodity in the first chapter to the deciphering of the 'trinitarian formula' at the end of the third volume, but it already begins in the first sentence as an implicit critique of Adam Smith.

Such implicit critiques are found at multiple levels at the beginning of the second chapter (according to the numbering of the second edition) as well: "Commodities cannot themselves go to market and perform exchanges in their own right. We must, therefore, have recourse to their guardians, who are the possessors of commodities" (ibid. p. 178). Marx states here clearly that the second chapter is concerned with commodity owners. In the first chapter, Marx examined the exchange *relation* between *commodities*; in the second chapter, he analyzes the exchange *process* consummated by commodity *owners*. Only *after* the economic form-determinations of the commodity are presented is the activity of commodity owners examined on this basis; this is an implicit fundamental critique of

“methodological individualism” (the notion that one can analyze social interrelations proceeding from single individuals), the point of departure for classical political economy, neoclassical economics, as well as large parts of modern sociology. And only by means of this approach; the well-known statement from the preface that *Capital* only deals with capitalists and landlords to the extent that “they are the personifications of economic categories” (ibid. p. 92).

But that’s not all; further on Marx writes: “In order that these objects may enter into relation with each other as commodities, their guardians must place themselves in relation to one another as persons whose will resides in those objects, and must behave in such a way that each does not appropriate the commodity of the other, and alienate his own, except through an act to which both parties consent. The guardians must therefore recognize each other as owners of private property” (ibid. p. 178). Contrary to the fundamental assumptions of bourgeois social philosophy from Locke to Hegel, it becomes very clear that the characteristic of being an ‘owner of private property’ is in no way a characteristic of the ‘the’ human being as such who, in making a thing his property, realizes his freedom – which would mean conversely that the abolition of private property would be identical with the abolition of human freedom. On the contrary, mutual recognition as owners of private property first arises within a specific social nexus – the exchange of commodities – as a necessity. Being an owner of private property is not something universally human, but rather historically particular.

## What Was New about Marx’s Theory of Value and Capital?

The rise of marginalism had pushed Marx’s theory into the ambit of classical economics, and this was also more or less accepted by many Marxists: far into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, debate primarily revolved around the antagonism between the labor theory of value and a utility theory of value, whereby the labor theory of value was defended primarily as the foundation of a theory of exploitation. In addition, the first volume of *Capital*, which had the capitalist process of production as its object, was published almost 30 years before the third volume, and dominated the reception of *Capital*. ‘Production’ appeared to be essential, ‘circulation’ something subordinate and inessential.

The determination of value by labor and the proof that the exploitation of workers was the foundation of surplus value and profit were regarded as the central insights of the first volume of *Capital*. Both assertions can be found stated more or

less clearly long before the publication of *Capital*. The determination of value by human labor was already an insight of classical economics and Left-Ricardians such as Charles Wentworth Dilke (1789-1864) or Thomas Hodgskin (1787-1869) had already drawn the conclusion from this that capitalist's profit was based upon the value that workers create but do not receive (on this, see Hoff 2008).

Marx does not merely repeat these already available insights in *Capital*, he criticizes them by going deeper. He emphasizes that it is not simply labor that constitutes value, but rather 'abstract labour'.<sup>1</sup> That has consequences for the conception of value; as Marx stressed in the first edition, it is then namely only "an abstract objectivity, a mental thing" ((MEGA<sup>2</sup> II/5: 30, in the second edition this passage fell prey to revision, however, but there Marx refers to the "phantom-like objectivity" [German: "*gespenstige Gegenständlichkeit*"; "spectral objectivity", "ghostly objectivity"] of value (*Capital Volume I*, p. 128). This abstract or spectral objectivity requires an independent, concrete manifestation of value in order to be economically workable. If such a manifestation of value valid for the value of *all* commodities, if it is universally valid, it becomes the *money form*. Thus, in the second edition Marx names the goal of his analysis of the value-form: "Now, however, we have to perform a task never even attempted by bourgeois economics. That is, we have to show the origin of this money-form, we have to trace the development of the expression of value contained in the value-relation of commodities from its simplest, almost imperceptible outline to the dazzling money-form" (ibid. p. 139).

In the first century following the publication of the first volume of *Capital*, what Marx emphasizes here as his special contribution vis-a-vis bourgeois economy was not really appreciated, neither by critics of Marx nor by Marxists. In influential introductions to Marx's economic theory, this analysis of the value-form was largely ignored (Sweezy 1942; Meek 1956) or understood as an abstract sketch of the historical emergence of *money* (Zeleny 1962; Mandel 1968). This historicizing understanding not only overlooks the difference between the *money-form* and *money*, it also implies that Marx was quite the show-off: namely, with regard to the presentation of the historical emergence of *money*, one can in no way claim that it was not even attempted by bourgeois economists before Marx. On the contrary, it was even an often-treated topic. Not at all a topic, in contrast, was the genesis of the *money-form*, i.e. the *necessary categorical* relationship between value and the *money-form*, which Marx first made an object of inquiry and which allows for referring to Marx's theory of value as a *monetary theory of value*,<sup>2</sup> as distinct from the

non-monetary approaches of both the labor theory of value of classical political economy as well as the utility theory of neoclassical economics.<sup>3</sup>

For a long time, the second section (in the numbering of the second edition) was received in a similarly superficial way. Frequently, it was concerned only with the purchase and sale of the commodity labor power, and here all too often only ‘exploitation’ was emphasized – although Marx does not mention the term exploitation in a single passage of the second section. Exploitation of labor power is first mentioned completely incidentally in the eleventh chapter, where Marx shows that the rate of surplus value is a measure of the “degree of exploitation” of labor-power. Marx’s use of exploitation has nothing to do with a moral critique of capitalism. The incidental mention of the exploitation of labor power does not intend such a critique any more than the mention of the exploitation of natural laws (*Capital Volume 1*, p. 508f.) or the mention of the “exploitation [“*Ausbeutung*” in the original, loosely translated as “employment” in the Fowkes translation] of the power-loom” (ibid. p. 554). In his final economic manuscript, the *Marginal Notes on Adolph Wagner’s Lehrbuch der Politischen Oekonomie*, Marx defends himself against the notion that his theory of surplus value contains any sort of notion of a “robbery of the worker” (MECW 24, p. 535f). The analysis of the *commodity* labor-power was intended precisely to demonstrate that the creation of surplus value is also possible when workers receive the complete value of the commodity, labor-power, that they sell.

The fundamental form-determinations of capital (excessiveness, endlessness) are analyzed in the fourth chapter, and before Marx even comes to speak of the “capitalist”. The latter is described not as the *owner* of capital, but is rather introduced as “the conscious bearer [*Träger*] of this movement”: “The objective content of the circulation we have been discussing – the valorization of value – is his subjective purpose, and it is only in so far as the appropriation of ever more wealth in the abstract is the sole driving force behind his operations that he functions as a capitalist, i.e. as capital personified and endowed with consciousness and a will” (*Capital Volume 1*, p. 254). That the capitalist is categorically subordinate to capital has direct political consequences: it is not the actual or supposed ‘greedy capitalist’ that is the problem, but rather the economic relations that not only make possible this greed for ever-increasing profit, but outright compels it. Not scolding capitalists, but rather a critique of the capitalist mode of production is what follows from Marx’s analysis.

What was perhaps most underrated was the fifth chapter. There, Marx deals with illusory explanations of surplus value that lead to a notable result: “Capital cannot therefore arise from circulation, and it is equally impossible for it to arise apart from circulation. It must have its origin both in circulation and not in circulation” (ibid. p. 268). Whereas it was frequently argued that Marx explains the valorization of capital as originating in production, Marx here makes it clear that surplus value and capital cannot solely be explained by circulation, but they also cannot be explained without circulation. Pure production theories of value and surplus value are just as wrong as pure circulation theories.

## Stereotypes of the Critique of Marx

After Engels was still able to publish the third volume of *Capital* in the year before his death, contributions by bourgeois economists and social scientists were published that engaged critically with *Capital*, starting with Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk (1896) through Joseph Alois Schumpeter (1954) up to Karl Popper (1957). Current economic criticism of *Capital*, to the extent that it even occurs, essentially parrots the old theses, usually without even dealing in a rudimentary fashion with the answers to these theses or the considerably expanded textual foundation provided for years by the MEGA<sup>2</sup>. As before, the critique concentrates primarily upon two points: Marx’s ‘labour theory of value’ and Marx’s ‘predictions’.

The economist Hans-Werner Sinn, known from many German TV talk shows, makes things especially simple with regard to the critique of Marx’s theory of value (Marx never spoke of a ‘labour theory of value’): “Among Marx’s greatest scientific mistakes is the labour theory of value [...] the assertion that the relative prices of goods in a market economy are based upon the labour-time contained in commodities is simply wrong, since first of all wages are only one of many component costs for a firm, and secondly, prices are fundamentally scarcity prices, the value of which derives from the preferences and mutual competition between demanding consumers. What, for example, does the price of a painting by Rembrandt have to do with the wage of the master? What does the price of crude oil have to do with the wage of the workers at the drill hole? Nothing, or as well as nothing” (Sinn 2017, p. 24).

Even disregarding the fact that Sinn lumps together the determination of value by labor-time with its determination by the wage – a distinction first made not by Marx, but already by Ricardo in the first chapter of his principles – Marx nowhere

asserts that relative prices in a market economy (hence in everyday exchange) “are based upon the labour-time contained in commodities.” On the contrary, already in the first volume of *Capital*, Marx points out in two footnotes that the magnitude of value of commodities is in no way identical with the average prices of commodities in the everyday life of capitalism (*Capital Volume 1* p. 268f. and p. 328f.) and deals extensively with the topic in the third volume of *Capital*.

Critics of Marx whose readings are a little more exact than Sinn’s, therefore regularly invoke the so-called transformation problem as a refutation of Marx’s value theory. In the third volume, Marx demonstrates the values must be transformed into prices that allow for an approximately equal rate of profit in the various sectors. The quantitative transformation procedure Marx uses as an illustration is, strictly speaking, wrong – as Marx himself emphasizes (*Capital Volume III*, p. 264). What consequences arise from this false transformation procedure has in fact been heavily debated for a good 100 years. But a refutation of Marx’s value theory would only result from the transformation problem if *first* the aim of value theory would consist exclusively in explaining price relations in the everyday life of capitalism, and *second* if no kind of ‘transformation’ were possible. Instead of even addressing such questions, the ‘refutation’ of value theory is simply concluded from the existence of a ‘problem’, without further ado.<sup>4</sup>

The other stereotype is the refutation of Marx’s predictions, one of the favorites being the “tendency toward immiseration”. Thus Ulrike Herrmann writes (2017, p. 19): “For critiques, even today it’s amusing that Marx prognosticated complete immiseration. Thus the Nobel-prize winner Paul Samuelson mocked: ‘Look at the working classes of today, with their cars and microwave ovens: not very immiserated, are they?’” Herrmann kindly gives credit to Marx by acknowledging that there actually was much poverty in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: “the breakthrough to the modern affluent society began shortly before Marx’s death. From about 1880, real wages rose considerably” (ibid.). Herrmann thus arouses sympathy for the false prediction, but doesn’t call into question whether Marx actually made such a prediction.

In the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, Marx did in fact assume a tendency toward absolute impoverishment – but not anymore in *Capital*, published in 1867. He does write that “in proportion as capital accumulates, the situation of the worker, *be his payment high or low*, must grow worse” (*Capital Volume I*, p. 799, emphasis in the first German edition). But, what is envisioned by this “growing worse”? It is not any kind of “total impoverishment”, as the addition of “be his payment high or low” makes

very clear. Marx's point is formulated a few sentences later: "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labour, slavery, ignorance, brutalization and moral degradation at the opposite pole" (ibid.). With the capitalist unfettering of the forces of production, the wealth of society as a whole increases, but it is not only distributed very unequally; the development of the forces of production, oriented solely towards profit, occurs at the cost of wage workers, even when wages increase. Marx demonstrates extensively in *Capital* how even elementary rules of accident- and health-protection could only be implemented against the bitter resistance of capitalists, and how "more productive" technology was frequently accompanied by increased psychological stress. But, that everything fought for as a protective measure for wage workers and in part codified in laws of the state is in no way secured for all eternity, is demonstrated precisely by developments in Germany in the last decades. From the regulation of breaks in workplaces to protection against termination to the expansion of (usually more poorly paid) temporary work was changed in the last twenty years – and primarily during the period of a Red-Green national government – by a number of regulations and laws to the disadvantage of wage workers, so that their living and working conditions in part became considerably more insecure, even if wages haven't declined.

With regard to the purchasing power of wages, Marx had already shown in his analysis of the production of relative surplus value that surplus value and the rate of exploitation of labor-power can increase *without* a decline in the purchasing power of wages. If namely the productivity of labor increases (for example, through an improved organization of the labor process, increased division of labour, or the use of machinery), then less time is required for the production of a given number of a commodity. Even if the purchasing power of the wage remains the same, in the case of increased productivity a constantly decreasing portion of daily labour-time is required in order to create the value of the (daily) wage, correspondingly, a greater portion is used for the creation of the (daily) surplus value. If one wants to derive a prediction from *Capital*, then it is one not of total impoverishment, but rather of growing inequality between workers and those who dispose of capital, and this prediction has been confirmed quite well to this day.

## And is *Capital* finally finished?

In the preface to the first volume of *Capital* published in 1867, Marx announces a total of four volumes: on *the production process of capital*, the *circulation process of capital*, on the *process of capital in its totality*, and on *the history of theory*. Up until his death in 1883, however, there was only the first volume. It was first Engels who after Marx's death published the second and third volumes in 1885 and 1894 and, finally, Karl Kautsky published the *Theories of Surplus Value* from 1905-1910, which were regarded as the fourth volume of *Capital*. It took 40 years, but now *Capital* finally seemed to be available as a complete work. But the story isn't so simple; multiple problem levels became clear in the last few decades.

Already during the debates of the 1970s it became apparent that the *Theories of Surplus Value* were anything but a draft for the fourth volume planned by Marx. The latter was intended as a history of economic *theories*, but the *Theories of Surplus Value* is a history of a single *category*. The *Theories* was also not formulated on the basis of Marx's developed critique of political economy; rather, they constitute an important step in the *formation* of this critique (see PEM 1975). Thus, in the MEGA<sup>2</sup>, neither a fourth volume of *Capital* is published, nor are the *Theories of Surplus Value* presented as a separate work, but rather where they belong, as a part of the *1861-63 Manuscript* (MEGA<sup>2</sup> II/3).

A further problem is Engels' edition of Marx's texts. After Marx's original manuscript for the third volume was published at the beginning of the 1990s (MEGA<sup>2</sup> II/4.2) it became apparent that Engels had intervened considerably in the original text: there was a plethora of deletions, changes, reformulations, and insertions made by Engels not identified as such. A large part of the structuring of the manuscript, including the headings, came from him. The discussion that took place in the 1990s showed that some of these interventions had substantive consequences for a few statements that were not negligible (for a more extensive discussion, see Jungnickel/Vollgraf 1995, Heinrich 1996/97). Engels wanted to make Marx's unfinished text more readable, and without him, there would probably be no second and third volumes of *Capital* today. But great respect for Engels' achievement should not lead us to sweep the differences under the rug.<sup>5</sup>

Another problem is found in Marx's manuscripts themselves. Marx once wrote that *Capital* was an "artistic whole" (Letter to Engels, July 31 1865, MECW 42, p. 173). That the three "theoretical" volumes of *Capital* constitute a strongly interlocking unity is clear to all who have read these three volumes completely. If one reads only the

first volume, not only is the reading incomplete; it leads to erroneous conclusions: values are then easily misunderstood as centers of fluctuation for market prices, surplus value is easily confused with profit or profit of enterprise, and the capitalist production process appears to be the only truly important economic sphere. However, the three volumes as we know them today, namely in Engels' edition, are based upon manuscripts that were written at very different times, and which represent different levels in the analysis of the capitalist mode of production.

Marx considerably revised the first volume published in 1867 for the second German edition of 1872/73; he took further changes into consideration for the French translation, which was published between 1872 and 1875 in individual booklets. In the fourth German edition published by Engels in 1890, today the standard edition of the first volume worldwide, most (but not all) changes in the French translation were integrated into the second German edition. This edition thus represents the state of Marx's knowledge from the first half of the 1870s. For the edition of the second volume, Engels used manuscripts that were written between 1868 and 1879 (possibly even somewhat later). The third volume, in contrast, is based almost exclusively upon a manuscript written in 1864/65; it thus represents the least advanced state of knowledge of all three volumes of *Capital*.

In multiple areas, the third volume displays considerable deficits. Marx's research process into the credit system was far from finished, so that in the treatment of credit and banking capital, the presentation switches to a protocol for further research. Engels attempted to conceal this with a particularly intensive alteration, but in doing so obscured the direction in which Marx's research was moving. Marx in any case regarded this part as obsolete; in the 1870s, he planned to completely revamp this section, whereby the presentation was to be based not upon English, but rather American capitalism, the development of which Marx observed very exactly in the 1870s (see John Swinton's interview with Marx from 1878, ;MECW 24, p. 583-85).

The theory of crisis also exhibits deficits. It's an important achievement of Marx that he did not regard economic crises as coincidental operational accidents, but rather as a necessary consequence of capitalist development. However, his theory of crisis is not at all complete. The most extensive and repeatedly discussed texts by Marx on crisis come from the *Theories of Surplus Value* (1861-63) and from the manuscript for the third volume of *Capital* (1864/65). But Marx's analysis of crisis progressed after 1865. The English crisis of 1866 already showed a new face, so that in March 1867 Marx squeezed a few observations about the "purely financial

character” of the crisis (corrected translation of “*rein finanziellen Charakter*”, which is given as “predominantly financial character” in *Capital I* p. 822) into a completely unsuitable passage in the manuscript of the first volume. A more exact examination of this crisis was made in an excerpt notebook created between 1868 which is still unpublished (see Paula et al 2016). The comprehensive, also unpublished excerpt notebooks on credit, the money market, and crises, created between 1868 and 1869, were a consequence of this analysis of crisis. Marx’s engagement with crises and crisis theory was thus far from concluded. On April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1878 he wrote to his Russian friend Nikolai F. Danielson: “I should under no circumstances have published the second volume [which should encompass book II and book III, what later became volume II and III, M.H] before the present English industrial crisis had reached its climax. The phenomena are this time singular, in many respects different from what they were in the past [...] It is therefore necessary to watch the present course of things until their maturity before you can ‘consume’ them ‘productively’, I mean ‘*theoretically*’. (MECW 45, p. 354) So, Marx wanted to take up the most recent crisis not just as an empirical illustration; it’s obviously clear to him that his crisis theory is not yet theoretically complete.<sup>6</sup>

So *Capital* is far from finished. This is the case not just in the banal sense that capitalism has developed further and that updates or additions are necessary. *Capital* is still unfinished with regard to important *theoretical* basic questions, such as the theories of credit and crisis. In order to become acquainted with the state of Marx’s research, it’s not enough to deal with the various *Capital* manuscripts, which in the meantime have been published in complete form in the II. section of the MEGA<sup>2</sup>. In the future, one will have to deal increasingly with the excerpt notebooks published in the IV. section. What is all contained in these notebooks is made clear in a recently published study by Kohei Saito (2017).

Until recently, one could counter the accusation that Marx was blind to ecological questions by referring to a number of observations in *Capital* (see for example Foster 2000, Burkett 2014). Marx was not blind, but it could not be overlooked that ecological problems did not have a systematic importance in the critique of political economy. By evaluating Marx’s excerpt notebooks on the natural sciences from the 1860s and 1870s, Saito has demonstrated that the ecological problematic (without using this term) grew increasingly important for Marx. In the case of the systematic revision that Marx sought not only of the manuscripts for volumes two and three, but also of the first volume (see Marx’s letter to Danielson from December 13<sup>th</sup> 1881, MECW 46, p. 160), it is very probable that the *systematic*

development of the contradiction between the valorization of capital and the human metabolic exchange with nature would have been integrated into the presentation. So, after 150 years, it's in no way the case that everything has been said about *Capital*; in some areas, the discussion is just beginning.

*Translated by Alex Locascio*

1 The insight that “the labor contained in the commodity is double-edged” (so it's in no way the case that all labor is double-edged) is emphasized by Marx as his own central insight. (MEGA II/5: 22, in the second edition of *Capital* he then refers to “the dual character of the labor embodied [“*dargestellt*”] in commodities (*Capital Volume I*, p. 131). As concrete labor (for example as carpentry) labor constitutes a use-value, as abstract labor (labour abstracted from any particularity) it constitutes value.

2 The expression originates with the works of Backhaus in the 1970s (reprinted in Backhaus 1997), who understood Marx's theory of value as a critique of *pre-monetary* theories of value.

3 See Heinrich (2001; 2017, Chapter 5), an extensive presentation of relevant debates on value theory is provided by Elbe (2008a: p.30ff.)

4 Such as by Ulrike Herrmann (2017, p. 20) In the same journal issue as Sinn. This is not the place to engage in an extensive discussion of the transformation problem; see my early PROKLA article Heinrich (1988) as well as Heinrich (2017, Chapter 7.2). A new, interesting contribution to this discussion is provided by Moseley (2016)

5 With some delay, such an attempt was made by Krätke (2007). For a critique, see Elbe (2008b)

6 There is not enough space here to deal with another interesting topic: a few manuscripts from the late 1860s and 1870s suggest that Marx had doubts about the 'law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall', which he no longer mentioned after 1868 (see Heinrich 2016, p. 126ff.)

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