

Potentials in the Legacy of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Concepts of the Critical Edition (MEGA)

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Draft

Abstract

The editorial work on the Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA), the comprehensive edition of the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, indicates that there is no finished masterpiece *Capital*, and it also reveals that the earlier economic manuscripts are far from being only „preparatory studies“ culminating in *Capital*. To learn more about Marx’s process of research it is useful to consult his manuscripts and writings presented in the first and second sections of the MEGA, but also his correspondence in the third and the many note-books which he filled during all his life-time, many of them hitherto unpublished. The critical edition has its focus on the connections between different passages in all these sorts of texts, and the technologies of digitization offer new possibilities to visualize these connections. In my presentation, I will show some features and first results of the newly designed *MEGAdigital* in documenting the research and working process of Karl Marx.

Introduction

In his *History of Economic Analysis*, Joseph Schumpeter writes about Marx’s work that “the totality of his vision, as a totality, asserts its right in every detail and is precisely the source of the intellectual fascination experienced by everyone, friend or foe, who makes a study of him.”¹ What did this totality look like? Marx, in his 1867 preface to *Capital*, announces that his final purpose is “to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society.”² How Marx sought to realize this purpose, and where he ended up with his analysis can best be studied in the comprehensive edition of his works and writings, the Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe, or MEGA. First, there are Marx’s manuscripts devoted to *Capital* and its preparatory studies, all of which are now available in the second section of the MEGA, finished in 2012. One of the main results of our editorial labour shows that Marx left an unfinished work in progress, and an incomplete process of research. There are many different and repeated approaches and new beginnings for his drafts of *Capital* which never came to an end, at least for Book 2 and 3, and there are extensive studies on all sorts of topics, mostly documented in the fourth section of the MEGA (Excerpts, notes, marginalia). All in all, Marx’s work resulted in a massive interdisciplinary project that is rarely found elsewhere.³ One reason for the unfinished, interdisciplinary state of Marx’s research has to do with his way of balancing arguments, of looking for new material and approaches, and the way he critically turns over his own concepts to find the adequate model for them. By looking closer at the MEGA, we can better understand this aspect of Marx’s working process.

MEGA in print and online: status of our editorial work

The legacy of Marx and Engels in MEGA is presented in four sections: the first and second sections offer works, articles and drafts, the third section comprises of the correspondence between Marx,

¹ Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*, 384.

² MEGA² II/6, S. 67.

³ According to one handbook on Marx, his works and writings have had effects not only on economics, sociology, politics and history, but also on ten other disciplines. Quante und Schweikard, *Marx-Handbuch*, VIII/IX.

Engels and their many correspondants, and the fourth section presents Marx's and Engels' excerpts and notes.

Works, articles and drafts

To give you an impression on this way to reason to and fro let us first have a glance at a page of the second draft of a response to a letter from Vera Zasulich,⁴ a well-known Russian member of the Narodniki, dating from march 1881. Marx's letter and their four drafts are well known. Zasulich had asked him, on February 16, 1881, to let her and her Russian comrades know about his ideas on the possible destiny of the Russian rural community and to clarify if, in his view, the Russian rural community was condemned to perish or if it was "capable of developing in a socialist direction, that is, gradually organising its production and distribution on a collectivist basis".⁵ One of the many variants in the second draft, indicates Marx deleting an interesting passage: He started a sentence that the capitalist system in the Western countries became degenerated and was approaching the end of its existence, but then he crossed out this thought.⁶

Looking at these drafts and the letter to Vera Zasulich, there is another point to make: Marx stresses, in his drafts and in the letter he sent, that in the French edition of *Capital* he explicitly restricted the development of the actual capitalist mode of production to the Western countries. In the third and fourth German editions of this volume, the passage was still in the form Marx had given to it in 1867: the English development gave the pattern for *all* countries to follow. So this alteration in the French edition may be interpreted as Marx's own reservations about his earlier view of capitalist production as the only path of development that each and every nation or economy would share, then or in future.

Marx's balancing of arguments can also be observed in the twelve volumes of the MEGA (MEGA² II/4 to II/15), which now provides all manuscript materials that Marx left behind for his economic project on *Capital*, complemented by all printed versions of this work, the ones Marx himself did publish, and those which appeared in the responsibility of Engels. The most important drafts of Marx for Book 2 of *Capital* (on the circulation process) are to be found in MEGA-volumes II/4.3 and II/11; those for Book 3 (on the capitalist production process as a whole) in MEGA-volumes II/4.2, II/4.3 and II/14. (See also the detailed list in the Appendix.) Manuscripts for Book 1 and 2, edited in MEGA² II/4.1, had been published in earlier versions, all other drafts are new texts. Meanwhile, Marx's manuscript for Book 3 (MEGA² II/4.2) has been translated into English.⁷

To judge Marx's work on economic issues in total, however, one must also take into account numerous additional materials: namely, the 1861-63 Manuscript on Economics (MEGA² II/3), his first printed work from 1859, *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy. Issue 1*, (MEGA² II/2) and the *Grundrisse* (1857/58; MEGA² II/1), but also his first plans and writings in the 1840s,⁸ his intensive

⁴ MEGA² I/25, 231-234; in Engl.: Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road, Marx and the 'peripheries of capitalism'*, 97-126.

⁵ Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 98.

⁶ MEGA² I/25, 233.15 and correspondent variant on p. 885.

⁷ Marx, *Marx's Economic Manuscript of 1864-1865*.

⁸ Most important are his so-called *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*. written from end of May/June to August 1844 (MEGA² I/2), together with many excerpts (MEGA² IV/2) that are interwoven with the manuscripts. See also Rojahn, „Die Marxschen Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844 in der neuen Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)“.

studies and several newspaper articles from the 1850s, and, not to forget, his work and studies after 1867, around and apart from *Capital*.⁹

In 2008, we started our digital project, *MEGAdigital*, presenting central texts from the second section of the MEGA, available for free online at <http://telota.bbaw.de/mega/>. Unlike any previous edition of *Capital*, this section includes all versions and drafts for the three books resp. volumes of *Capital* written by Marx and partly published by Engels. In their editorial apparatus, the volumes of Section II provide detailed documentation of the relations and connections between these various versions; it is an essential instrument for understanding the development of Marx's ideas and thoughts in the last two decades of his life. The purpose of *MEGAdigital* is to visualize these relations and connections for the reader. Thus, all present versions of texts, manuscript or printed, can be easily compared with each other (you can open a separate window for every text and move it on the screen just as you need it – using the screen as a virtual desktop). Moreover, the intertextual linkage between individual manuscripts and print versions is made available for research either through accumulated registers or through full-text retrieval. Line and page enumeration of the edited texts are presented identically with the printed MEGA² volumes, which facilitates citation. Right now, you can find the following texts on our MEGAdigital platform:

- *Capital* Vol. 1 first edition from 1867 (by Marx) and fourth edition (by Engels) from 1890;
- *Capital* Vol. 3, edited by Engels in 1894;
- for *Capital* Vol. 2, there are Marx's manuscripts from 1864 to 1885 together with the printed version edited by Engels from 1885;
- finally, the *Grundrisse* from 1857/58 (by Marx).

Actually, we are involved in adding the one existing comprehensive draft for Book 3, written by Marx in 1864/65 (MEGA² II/4.2), before starting to write the final version of Book 1. Then, the essential manuscripts Marx had written for *Capital* will be readable in comparison to the printed versions prepared by Engels. Moreover, the introductions to the new MEGA-volumes are available at <http://mega.bbaw.de/>.¹⁰

Correspondence

Since the beginning of 2016, we have largely restructured and extended the MEGA online presence (<http://megadigital.bbaw.de/>), and have moved beyond just displaying printed books in digital form. First, we are going to include the third section of the MEGA: the correspondence from Marx and Engels, and their about 2000 correspondents. Thirteen MEGA-volumes covering the correspondence from 1837 up to 1865 have already been published in printed volumes. Now you can find online the correspondence between Marx, Engels and their correspondents from January 1 to December 31, 1866, comprising first the letters they have written and received, and second the commentary to these letters, developed using all the instruments of historical-critical editing. There are notes explaining the necessary context for understanding the contents of the letters and notes indicating connections to other letters, writings, excerpts, and so on, as well as information regarding the witnesses of the letters, the correspondents, date, previous editions, etc. If you are interested, you also can view all the variant expressions which Engels and, more often, Marx used by consulting the

⁹ For a survey on these texts see Heinrich, „Das Programm der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie; Grundbegriffe der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie“. For the articles, especially in the 1850s, see also Hecker, Sperl, und Vollgraf, *Die Journalisten Marx und Engels*.

¹⁰ They are listed with the bibliographical data for every volume in the four sections of the MEGA; for instance, you may look at the introduction of MEGA-volumes II/4.3 and II/11, II/12, II/13, II/14, II/15.

so-called “historical-critical text“ (*Kritischer Text*) of the letter. Otherwise, a “reading text“ (*Lesetext*) is presented.

The main advantages of the digital edition of the correspondence are:

- free access via Internet all over the world
- different gateways to the letters:
 - chronologically
 - assorted by individual correspondents
 - via central topics present in the letters
- additionally, a full text retrieval for passages in texts and commentary is at your disposal, and indexes allow one to look for persons, firms, and periodicals; soon, we will also offer indexes for works and writings, as well as places.

Excerpts and notes

The same benefits can be gained for the digital edition of the excerpts and notes, which make up the fourth section of the MEGA. Thirteen volumes, mostly from the early years up to the beginning of the 1850s, have already been published as books, together with one volume on the library of Marx and Engels.¹¹ However, many of the approximately 250 notebooks still have to be edited. Thus, for our next step, we will include excerpts and notes into our digital presentation. Many notebooks were filled in chronologically, often in a short period of time, with different excerpts for special subjects, for instance, the notebooks dedicated to “Physiology,” or the so-called “*Beihefte*” A to H, written as a supplement to the last parts of the 1861-1863 Manuscript. But Marx and Engels often used their notebooks in different periods of time to jot down information on different subjects.

The digital edition offers an opportunity not available in the printed edition: the reader can decide if she wants to see the excerpts:

- in the order they appear in the notebook
- chronologically
- ordered by subjects
- ordered by the sources from where the excerpts were drawn

As soon as we shall have integrated these different sections into our digital MEGA, we will start to digitize MEGA-volumes presenting works, drafts and articles from the *first section* of the MEGA. They will give us special challenges because these volumes will also be offered in a printed version. A first result of digital work on the first section may already be mentioned here. The “*Neue Rheinische Zeitung*”, founded and edited by Marx and Engels as an “*Organ of democracy*” during the Revolution 1848/49, has been digitized during the editorial work on the MEGA-volumes I/7, I/8 and I/9. At the moment, the articles from this newspaper may be read and searched, using a full-text retrieval, at <http://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/nrhz/>.¹²

¹¹ MEGA² IV/1-9, IV/12. Moreover, one volume covers Marx’s chemical studies, another his geological studies. (MEGA² IV/31 and IV/26.)

¹² Except the articles from Marx or Engels, due to the copyright of our publisher. These articles from February to October 1848 have already appeared in MEGA² I/7 in 2016.

New concept of MEGAdigital: Connections realized as hyperlinks

One of the major tasks of the critical edition is to provide the connections between any work, writing, or draft of our authors and, on the one hand, the sources they used, directly or indirectly, and, on the other hand, to corresponding passages in other parts of their legacy. These connections to corresponding passages will play a special role in MEGAdigital, because the supply of hyperlinks will offer an essential addendum for the readers of the digital edition. They will allow to realize on the spot all the connections between different texts, identified by the editors, in all texts available in the digital presentation, thus giving the reader the opportunity to actively study Marx's "work in progress". This feature was already offered in our "old" MEGAdigital with the cumulative index for the manuscripts and the printed version of Book 2 of *Capital*. In our "new" digital presentation, there will be other possibilities.¹³ I would like to present some examples from three sections, all of which shed light on the way Marx worked or, in some cases, illuminate the dimensions in which he, eventually, did not come to grips with his economic project.

1. Letters and works: some examples from the letters in 1866

In 1866, Marx wrote the version of Book 1 of *Capital* that eventually appeared in autumn 1867. He was also deeply involved in the politics of the *International Working Men's Association*, discussing its statutes on its first conference in Geneva, September 1866, after its founding meeting in London in 1864. The correspondence of Marx and Engels is an important source for studying the politics of the *International*.¹⁴ Moreover, the letters reflect the political situation in Europe, especially since the German War in 1866 (June to August) and the Constitutional Conflict in Prussia (since 1862). Last, but not least, in his letters Marx reveals his growing interest in the natural sciences. For the first and the last point, I would like to give you an example.

Opening the site of MEGAdigital (<http://megadigital.bbaw.de>), you can choose "Register" and turn to the topics ("Themen"); there, when opting for "'Das Kapital' (Arbeit an Manuskripten, Veröffentlichung)", you can find passages in the letters from 1866, where Marx talks about his work on the manuscript for Book 1 of *Capital*.

For example, in his letter from February 10, 1866, Marx tells Engels, that he had to stop working on theoretical parts of his book, because: "My brain was not up to that." He expanded the chapter on the "Working Day", which he considered to be a complement to Engels' *Condition of the Working Class in England* from 1845.

In our note to this passage, you find a link referring to the beginning of the chapter Marx talks about (in MEGA² II/5).

Later in this letter, Marx asks Engels to write to John Watts because he needed Watts' latest book. In our note you find a link carrying you to the passage in Book 1, where Marx quotes Watts.

In the future, every year of correspondence will be presented in MEGAdigital in this way, so that everyone can discover these connections between different parts and texts of the MEGA in the form of hyperlinks and follow them straightaway. In particular, this will give background information on the manuscripts that Marx and Engels wrote, as well as on the excerpts they made and books they read.

¹³ Moreover, the digital edition, differently from the printed edition, offers the possibility to continuously adding newly identified connections as soon as they become available during the editorial process of Marx's and Engels' texts. An update is much easier to organize than a new edition of a printed MEGA-volume.

¹⁴ Einführung. In: MEGA² I/21, 1139ff. (https://edoc.bbaw.de/files/13/i21_einfuehrung.pdf)

2. Excerpts and manuscripts: examples from the excerpts 1865/66 and the “Beihefte”

Also to be found only in the MEGA are those connections existing between manuscripts and excerpts, documenting Marx’s method of operation and the influence upon him of the works and authors he read. We thereby use a method which Marx himself preferred more than once, as he reflected in his encounter with Eugen Dühring in 1877. Marx told us that he “took the liberty” to look for the sources of political economists when analysing their ideas and thoughts, whereas Eugen Dühring asserted that an author would be offended by such a step, because this would shed doubt on his singularity.¹⁵ It is well known that Marx filled in many notebooks with excerpts from numerous works and authors, from his beginnings in the 1840s up to the last years in the 1880s. The MEGA edition of the manuscripts and excerpts has shown a strong connection between both parts of Marx’s legacy; in many cases, we might even call it an interaction between both these parts. In the digital edition we shall offer all connections, identified during the process of editing the texts, via hyperlinks to the texts available online. I would like to illustrate these possibilities by two examples.

The first example will deal with the excerpts from August 1865 to February 1866 regarding debates on productivity in agriculture and their potential limits, on the one hand, and with the manuscript dedicated to Book 3 of *Capital* usually dated 1864/65 (MEGA² II/4.2), on the other. Work on the edition of the excerpts – probably to be published this year in MEGA²-volume IV/18 – has gathered evidence that Marx probably did not finish his work on his manuscript for Book 3 in December 1865 (as he reported to Engels on February 13, 1866), but that he still worked on it in January, maybe also in February 1866. Marx was concerned with the question about the potentials of improvements in agriculture from early on. In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, he and Engels praised the achievements of science and technology, in agriculture as well as in industry, mentioning explicitly the application of chemistry to agriculture; they clearly were optimistic about the future developments and potentials of science and technology.¹⁶ With this in mind, Marx in the 1850s argued against David Ricardo’s law of diminishing returns in agricultural production by asserting the improvement of soil, in particular, by chemical fertilizer. This position was based on Marx’s reading of Justus von Liebig, James Johnston, and others.¹⁷ The main opponent in fact was Thomas Malthus and his warning of a surplus population which would grow faster than the agricultural product, and thus could not be nourished.¹⁸ At the beginning of the 1860s, in his 1861-63 Manuscript, Marx still favoured proportional if not increasing returns based on his findings in chemistry and the application of the capitalistic mode of production to agriculture.¹⁹

In the Manuscript for Book 3, written in the mid-1860s, however, Marx’s view had changed. Not only did Marx adopt the idea of diminishing returns in his considerations, at the end of his chapter on ground rent he explicitly noted: “*On the declining productivity of the soil when successive capital investments are made. Liebig should be consulted on this question.*”²⁰ Justus von Liebig, up to the late 1850s, always argued against diminishing returns and advocated the use of chemical fertilizers to assure proportional or even increasing returns. Now, in the 7th ed. of his *Agricultural Chemistry*, he contends that an increase in the productivity of the soil, even when using chemical fertilizer, could

¹⁵ MEGA² I/27, 155.

¹⁶ MECW, vol. 6, 489; see also Saitō, *Natur gegen Kapital*, 294f.

¹⁷ To be found mainly in the *Londoner Hefte* from 1851. (MEGA² IV/8 and IV/9.)

¹⁸ Saitō, *Natur gegen Kapital*, 216.

¹⁹ MEGA² II/3, 912a, 749, 762; Saitō, *Natur gegen Kapital*, 169f.

²⁰ MEGA² II/4.2, 833; Saitō, *Natur gegen Kapital*, 172.

only provide a short-term increase of crop yields; because, in the long run, the fertilizers were not able to replace all the mineral substances necessary for the optimal nourishment of the plants. Therefore, a regular cultivation of the fields would eventually exhaust them, since there existed natural limits to the increase of crop yields. Liebig coined the term *Raubbau* (exhaustive cultivation or robbery economy) to mark this method. Thus, once again the spectre of Malthusian over-population rose, but now with a scientific argument in the background.²¹ Marx read this modified version of Liebig's theory in 1865/66, making meticulous excerpts of passages explaining the reasons for diminishing returns, as Kohei Saito convincingly shows in his thesis.²² Henceforth, Marx defends the existence of a law of diminishing agricultural returns and warns his readers about the destructive potentials of capitalist agriculture, identifying large landed property as a leading factor in this process.²³ Moreover, Marx warns about the same threat caused by the use of technology in manufacture. Later, in Vol. 1 of *Capital*, he writes: "Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combining together of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of all wealth — the soil and the labourer."²⁴

In fact, we do not know how Marx would have arranged his section on ground rent in Book 3 of *Capital* after his reading of Liebig. We do know, after editing the excerpts from 1865/66, that Marx made more extensive use of them already in this manuscript for Book 3, without noting all references in detail.²⁵ After the publication of Vol. 1 of *Capital*, he further dealt with the subject, without producing another comprehensive draft on it. What has come down to us is a collection of passages on "Differential Rent". It was written possibly in the first half of 1868, definitely after the publication of Vol. 1 of *Capital*. Most of the references were drawn from the excerpts of 1865/66, but Marx also turned to the 1861-63 Manuscript and to his excerpts from the 1840s.²⁶

Looking at his excerpts, we find that Marx continued his studies on the exhaustion of the soil, or *Raubbau*, its causes and effects. In new excerpts, written down in 1868, he took particular notice of the debates on Liebig's position.²⁷ He read several books defending or challenging Liebig's arguments. Maybe the destructive powers of agriculture are based on other reasons than the ones that Liebig had alleged to; other writers argued against the claim that the exhaustion of the soil was a natural law valid always and everywhere.²⁸ Marx referred to a book by Carl Fraas on *Climate and Plant Life*, 1847, and to its main thesis that civilization resulted in the devastation of the land cultivated by this civilized people — a thesis Fraas illustrated with several historical cases.²⁹ Marx mentioned his new findings in

²¹ Ebd., 224ff.

²² IISG, Marx-Engels-Collection, Sign. B 106, 29-120; Saitō, *Natur gegen Kapital*, 176ff.

²³ MEGA² II/4.2, S. 752f.

²⁴ MEGA² II/5, 410/413; MEGA² II/9, S. 442f. See Vollgraf, „Marx über die sukzessive Untergrabung des Stoffwechsels“, 110f., indicating further passages in *Capital* where Marx talks of dangers threatening the vitality of whole nations. (MEGA² II/5, 184f, 208, 211, 335.)

²⁵ See Vollgraf, „Marx' erstmals veröffentlichte Manuskripte zum 2. und 3. Buch des ‚Kapitals‘ von 1867/68“, 87, Fn. 32., with numerous references between the manuscript and the excerpts from 1865/66.

²⁶ MEGA² II/4.3, 699ff. (http://mega.bbaw.de/struktur/abteilung_ii/dateien/mega_ii-43_inhalt-einf.pdf)

²⁷ IISG, Marx-Engels-Collection, Sign. B 111, 112.

²⁸ Saitō, *Natur gegen Kapital*, 249ff.; Vollgraf, „Marx über die sukzessive Untergrabung des Stoffwechsels“, 112ff. Vollgraf presents Marx's field of reading, comprising authors as Carl Fraas, Friedrich A. Lange, Julius Au, Friedrich Kirchof et. al.

²⁹ IISG, Marx-Engels-Collection, Sign. B 112; Saitō, „Marx' Fraas-Exzerpt“. Marx wrote down his excerpts up to page 53 of Fraas' work (about ten pages in his notebook), then he continued to place marginalia into the book itself which he had acquired. (Ibid. p. 123; MEGA² IV/32. Nr. 436.)

a letter to Engels (March 25, 1868), and his excerpts show interest in the examples Fraas presents for his idea. In particular, Fraas' statements on deforestation appear to have caught Marx's interest.

However, it is difficult to trace the effects of these studies in the manuscripts that Marx dedicated to *Capital* after 1868/69. In Saito's view, it is possible to draw a line from these excerpts to a passage in Manuscript II for Book 2, written between 1868 and 1870, where Marx discusses the long amount of time it takes for timber to grow within his considerations on the turnover of capital.³⁰ In Marx's last short comments to be found, he deals once again with differential rent, caused by nature or by investment of capital on the soil. These were written down in February 1876 in a notebook where he had collected materials on the first *International* (around 1871) and studies on Russia as well as on early history (after May 1876); they were published by Engels in his edition of Book 3 in 1894 as an supplement to Marx's chapter on differential rent in his main manuscript on Book 3 from 1864/65. In spite of Marx's detailed studies of Carl Fraas, there appears to be no more than a faint reverberation of Fraas' theory of alluvion, when Marx says that one meadow was naturally irrigated or covered with layers of silt, the other had to be made so by labour.³¹ What appears to be clear is that after publishing the first volume of *Capital*, Marx still showed much interest in the relations between nature, science and economics, though the substance of these later studies remains to be investigated in greater detail.³²

My second example turns to some earlier excerpts in the so-called "Beihefte", written probably between May and June 1863, and to their connection to the 1861-63 Manuscript, devoted to Marx's critique of political economy. Probably in May 1863, while still working on his manuscript, Marx began to collect new information in separate notebooks which he later called "Beihefte" and still later labelled with letters "A" to "H". To Engels, he referred to these notebooks as results of reading and making "excerpts from all kinds of earlier literature relating to the part of the political economy I had elaborated."³³ Marx thus produced notes from around 150 works on about 700 pages.³⁴ In addition, two pages have come down to us which probably were an index allocating his quotes to specific subjects, at least for the first pages of "Beiheft A".³⁵ And, eventually, we also find some of these quotes already included in his 1861-63 Manuscript, in fact within the pages of the last notebooks XXI to XXIII of this manuscript. Marx himself either noted a quote in his text or referred to a quote in one of his "Beihefte".³⁶ Thus, we now are able to observe a very lively interaction between Marx and the authors he read and observed.

One example is Marx's treatment of François Quesnay and his *Tableau économique*. Mentioning this economist already in the 1840s, Marx turned his full attention to him in his 1861-63 Manuscript. It

³⁰ Marx did not mention Fraas but another author, Friedrich Kirchof. MEGA² II/11, 203; Saitō, *Natur gegen Kapital*, 292f.; see also Vollgraf, „Marx über die sukzessive Untergrabung des Stoffwechsels“, 114f.

³¹ MEGA² II/14, 151; MEGA² II/15, 722ff.

³² See also Vollgraf, „Marx über die sukzessive Untergrabung des Stoffwechsels“, 112ff. with additional evidence for the activities of Marx in this field in the 1870s.

³³ Marx to Engels, May 29, 1863. The first of these notebooks. "Beiheft A" also offers about 30 pages containing references to the history of Poland, Russia and Prussia, which was another subject Marx was very interested in throughout this period. (Copy: RGASPI, f. 1, o. 1, d. 1691.) Moreover, Marx had collected several more excerpts on the remaining 200 pages of another notebook he had used for the last entries of his first comprehensive economic manuscript, known today as the *Grundrisse*. (IISG, Marx-Engels-Collection, Sign. B 91a.)

³⁴ MEGA² II/4.3. p. 462f., 902.

³⁵ It was published in the last MEGA-volume to appear in the second section, in Vol. II/4.3, 399/400 and commented on 902-927.

³⁶ MEGA² II/3, 2320ff.; for example „S. 13 Beiheft C“ (2320.18).

appears noteworthy that Marx deals with this subject at least three times. The first time, probably in May or June 1862, while reading Theodor Schmalz, *Économie politique*, 1826, concerning Adam Smith's distinction of productive and unproductive labour, Marx reproduced Quesnay's tableau in a separate notebook. Only shortly afterwards, probably in mid June 1862, Marx decided to include these considerations on Quesnay – he had classified them as a “digression” (“Abschweifung”) – as notebook X into his 1861-63 Manuscript.³⁷ About a year later, Marx got deeply involved in another debate with the works of Quesnay, documented by different witnesses. What is interesting here is his extensive discussion in “Beiheft C”, probably written in May 1863. Marx literally reproduced Quesnay's *Tableau*, as presented in the *Collection des principaux économistes: Physiocrates* by Eugène Daire in 1846, together with explications about the separate flows of products and money.³⁸ In notebook XXII, also written in May 1863, Marx develops his first version of the later so-called reproduction schemes, distinguishing two sections, one to produce food and another to produce constant capital, adding together the numbers and relations for the whole production process.³⁹ Some pages prior to that, Marx had noted: “One of the important merits of the physiocrats is the insight into the reproduction process.”⁴⁰ Then on July 6, Marx reported to Engels on his new findings about the reproduction process on the basis of Quesnay's *Tableau* together with his own version of the reproduction schemes, and asked for Engels's opinion.⁴¹ Moreover, probably shortly afterwards, Marx again transfers Quesnay's *Tableau*, in its original form, into his notebook XXIII, now concentrating in his explanatory notes on the circulation of money as well as on questions left open by Quesnay's approach to reproduction. Marx adds excerpts and ideas from other writings of Quesnay and closes with one quote stating that advances and capital were identical.⁴² These citations can also be found in different parts of “Beiheft C”.⁴³ This was not the last time Marx dealt with Quesnay and his ideas.

3. Marx's last manuscript for *Capital* and its edition by Engels

Presenting connections between manuscripts and printed versions is already established in MEGAdigital. Thus also his last manuscript for *Capital* that Marx wrote between 1877 and 1881 (edited in MEGA-volume II/11) may be compared with Engels' version (edited in MEGA-volumes II/12 an II/13). This last manuscript dealt with subjects of Book 2, the circulation process of capital. Engels, in his preface to the printed version, noted his ideas on how this manuscript came into being. Marx, according to Engels, was not satisfied with his presentation of the reproduction process in the third section of his book, and therefore Marx had set out to elaborate another draft for his book. The findings of the editors, however, cast doubts on this view. Rather, this manuscript emerged from a collection of material and ideas, which Marx started when he prepared some views on the works of Eugen Dühring in spring 1877. These notes were intended to offer arguments to Engels for his polemic against the German economist whose ideas on capitalist production met with a considerable response within Social Democrats in Germany.

³⁷ MEGA² II/3, 624ff., 2909.

³⁸ Beiheft C, RGASPI, f. 1, op. 1, d. 1696, 10. This excerpt is very similar to the one from about a year earlier.

³⁹ MEGA² II/3, 2271ff.; see also Gehrke und Kurz, „Karl Marx on Physiocracy“, 63ff., 80ff.

⁴⁰ MEGA² II/3. 2251 [XXII-1377] and Erl. Marx refers to further excerpts from Nicolas Baudeau which he had written down in “Beiheft C and D”. (RGASPI, f. 1, op. 1, d. 1696; IISG, Marx-Engels-Collection, Sign. B 93.)

⁴¹ MEGA² III/12. Br. 256.

⁴² MEGA² II/3. 2337f. [XXIII-1433f.]; presented in the *Theorien über den Mehrwert* (MEW, vol. 26.1., S. 354) as a “Supplement to the chapter on the physiocrats” in the section “Beilagen”.

⁴³ For example the last quote: Beiheft C, RGASPI, f. 1, op. 1, d. 1696, 37.

Marx directed his attention to the origins of political economy to prove the fallaciousness of Dühring's analysis and the incompetence of its author as an economist. At the same time, Marx aimed to reject Dühring's critique of Marx's own analysis in *Capital*. Marx declared Quesnay and his *Tableau* to be part of this controversy. Apart from many polemic statements, Marx offered a detailed analysis of the *Tableau* to present to the readers, because, according to Marx, they did not receive any correct ideas about the physiocrats when reading Eugen Dühring.⁴⁴ He also added a reproduction of the *Tableau* with some explications for Engels's private use, indicating that, in his view, the *Tableau* was "one of the most brilliant generalisations of political economy".⁴⁵

The publication of Engels's *Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft*, in 1877/78, included for the first time some of Marx's considerations on Quesnay and his *Tableau*, yet it abandoned a graphic presentation.⁴⁶ In a letter from March 7, 1877, he explained to Engels that he did not want to present "his own peculiar way to deal with the physiocrats" without having the possibility of arguing about it in greater detail. Thus, only in a separate note – that was to become the starting point of his last manuscript – Marx interpreted the *Tableau* using his own categories. Only there did Marx explicitly appreciate the system established by the physiocrats as "*the first systematic account of capitalist production.*"⁴⁷

This was the way Marx started to "work" on his last draft for *Capital*, and that explains the fragmentary character of this last text. It also elucidates the outward appearance of this manuscript: In contrast to other drafts for his books, Marx did not leave any space for footnotes on any page of this last manuscript; there were rarely any headings to be found, and he often used square brackets and horizontal lines to separate thoughts or passages on different topics. Yet is it not only formalities that allude to the character of this collection of material, but also its contents. At least the first 23 pages show obvious connections to his notes on Dühring that he sent to Engels in August 1877. The title was only added later, and it was in a rather cryptic form: "Ch. III, b. II.)"⁴⁸ We also find thoughts having no connection to the reproduction process or to *Capital* at all, that Marx noted every now and then. For instance, one can find a commented excerpt from the reports of the secretary of embassy and legation Victor Drummond, reporting on the cotton industry in Massachusetts and his ideas of workers as "rational consumers,"⁴⁹ or one can find a short notice to a book by Archibald Geikie on *Prehistoric Europe*.⁵⁰

If we compare Marx's last manuscript with Engels' edition of it in the printed version of Book 2, we find that Marx tentatively discussed several "difficulties," especially when he wrote down what was to become his first – and only – elaboration on expanded reproduction.⁵¹ He chose various numerical examples to prove his ideas, often without capturing the premises or clarifying the propositions of his

⁴⁴ MEGA² I/27, 137ff.

⁴⁵ MEGA² I/27, 210ff. It is similar to Marx's reproduction in "Beiheft C", complemented by some symbols to identify the different flows of money and products. (RGASPI, f. 1, op. 1, d. 1696.)

⁴⁶ MEGA² I/27, 847.

⁴⁷ MEGA² II/11, 701.

⁴⁸ MEGA² II/11, 698.1, variant and S. 1609; see also *ibid*, 1606ff.

⁴⁹ MEGA² II/11, 818f.; Engels adopted this passage in his printed version, but he left out the square brackets Marx had used to mark it as a special part.

⁵⁰ MEGA² II/11, 826. This, of course, Engels did not adopt, together with the passages on the following pages, as Marx had left some empty pages after his last notes on expanded reproduction. MEGA² II/11, 1614.

⁵¹ MEGA² II/11, 873ff. (http://mega.bbaw.de/struktur/abteilung_ii/dateien/mega_II-11_inhalt-einf.pdf)

argument. To give an example: he wanted to calculate the process of accumulation and got as a result decreasing numbers for the organic composition of capital. That, as he noted, “contradicts the course of capitalist production.”⁵² He dropped this calculation and started new ones: one deleted at once, another soon marked as finished by a separate line. Engels, in his presentation, did not mention any of the difficulties Marx encountered. Instead he offered a numerical example reflecting a process of accumulation that functioned well. He could do so, because he avoided Marx’s mistake of distributing the additional capital in a lower composition than the original parts of constant and variable capital.⁵³

In general, questions Marx articulated in his manuscript appear, if at all, in Engels’ presentation as merely rhetorical questions. And to issues that Marx had left open or insufficiently answered, Engels looked for answers in other parts of the manuscripts and presented them without further information as to their origins. One example: when Marx spoke of two sources providing the money necessary to realize accumulation, he only mentioned one of them. Engels offered a second one, in an additional sentence, and he refers to a – not very clear – passage, which he presented in his last point „Supplementary remarks“.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the role of money proved to be one of the issues that would need further reflection, the more, as in some of his examples Marx still explicitly excluded it from his considerations.⁵⁵ As later authors noted, there also was missing a detailed discussion of factors influencing the process of expanded reproduction like the development of technology and its impacts on the surplus rate, the profit rate and the composition of capital, or the effects of irregularities in circulation and crises.⁵⁶ Marx also only briefly alluded to the potentials of credit in the process of reproduction.⁵⁷ Thus, the “real conditions of reproduction, that is of a continued production”, as Marx stated at least up to 1872, required to be studied in greater detail.⁵⁸

All these and other differences as well as connections between Marx’s manuscript and the printed version prepared by Engels may be studied in detail in MEGA-volumes II/11, II/12 and II/13. The texts are available online; the apparatus printed in the MEGA provides comprehensive lists of provenience: for the manuscripts in II/11 used by Engels the list is to be found in the apparatus of II/12, presenting Engels’ editorial manuscript. And, available online in MEGAdigital, the subject index offers hyperlinks to Marx’s manuscripts in II/11 and the corresponding passages in Engels’ versions (in II/12 and II/13).

⁵² MEGA² II/11, 814.

⁵³ MEGA² II/13, 475-477 and 543ff. (http://mega.bbaw.de/struktur/abteilung_ii/dateien/mega_II-13_inhalt-einf.pdf) For a concise summary of the argument presented by Marx see also MEGA² II/11, 773ff.

⁵⁴ MEGA² II/11, S. 809f.; MEGA II/13, S. 474f. und 485f. Moreover, this first possibility presented by Marx contends that capitalists may betray one another, but this is hardly a systematic solution, inherent to the capitalist system. See also Marx’s refutation of cutting wages as a valuable explanation for the accumulation of money, some pages before (p. 808f.).

⁵⁵ Marx discussed five examples for his reproduction schemes with different settings, whereas Engels presented only one. The exclusion is to be found in Marx’s second example. (MEGA² II/11, S. 812.) To the state of elaboration of these last considerations on expanded reproduction see also MEGA² II/13, 543-545.

⁵⁶ It might be interesting to refer to a passage in the earlier manuscript of Marx from 1868 to 1870, where he discussed the reproduction in a more detailed way by introducing six departments into his reproduction schemes. Marx started a digression on the development of his examples given that the rate of profit was generalized, but he deferred it quickly to a later examination which did not take place in the manuscripts that have come down to us. (MEGA² II/13, 542f.)

⁵⁷ MEGA² II/11, 794, 799.

⁵⁸ MEGA² II/6, 522. In the changed wording of the introductory paragraphs to “the process of accumulation” in the French edition, which Engels adopted for the fourth edition, the “real conditions” were not anymore mentioned. (MEGA² II/7, 487f.; MEGA² II/10, 504f.)

Summarizing these aspects of the last manuscript, in my view, it remains doubtful if, as Engels assumed in his preface to Book 2, “what Marx intended to say is said there, in one way or another.”⁵⁹ This also applies to other subjects, still open when Marx died in 1883. Apart from ambivalences in concepts – for instance did Engels introduce the term “circulation capital”⁶⁰ – Marx more than once emphasized the importance of the relation between surplus-value and total capital advanced, and also of the laws governing this rate of profit; therefore he promised their extended analysis in Book 3.⁶¹ But neither his draft from 1864/65 (MEGA² II/4.2) nor his manuscripts on the laws governing the rate of profit from 1867/68 (MEGA² II/4.3) nor his manuscript on the relation between the rate of surplus value and the rate of profit from 1875 (MEGA² II/14) offer the clarity promised in Book 1. Rather, a note in this manuscript from 1875 appears to be symptomatic: “No further confusion necessary, bred by a bad night.”⁶² And Marx’s discussion of the falling rate of profit proved to be without a final decision so that Engels inserted the familiar sentence: “But in reality [...] the rate of profit will fall in the long run.”⁶³ A chapter on credit and his influences on the economic processes remained in an early state of collecting material still awaiting a thorough examination. Last, but not least, Marx left his analysis of the “economic law of motion of modern society”⁶⁴ without detailed reflections on classes. His draft from 1864/65 only offered one page on this subject, and no other considerations to this important topic have been disclosed up to now.⁶⁵

Concluding remarks

The comprehensive edition offers a reevaluated image of Karl Marx as a researcher, looking for information on numerous aspects, examining issues from different angles and critically turning over his own approaches. The letters and excerpts he left disclose more sources and influences than mentioned in his writings. These materials from other parts of the legacy also reveal developments, changes and ruptures in his reasoning, for instance with view to the discussion of rent. Recent research has uncovered a Marx who, by integrating scientific findings into his economic analysis, was considering results of economic processes not only for society but also for the ecological system, in the short and long run.

However, we are left to soberly observe Marx confronting the limits of new methods and thereby failing to come to grips with some of his ideas, for instance with the mechanisms of expanded reproduction. Furthermore, we can observe Marx refraining from bringing his economic and social analysis to some sort of closure, thus leaving open important aspects of his explanation of capitalist production as well as conclusions for the political and social constitution of modern society. On the other hand, although the explanations he offers may not always prove satisfactory, many of the phenomena and problems that he identified in the 19th century appear to be still valid today.

⁵⁹ MEGA² II/13, 8.

⁶⁰ MEGA² II/12, 516ff. (http://mega.bbaw.de/struktur/abteilung_ii/dateien/mega_II-12_inhalt-einf.pdf) – Marx, in Book 1, had criticised contemporary economists for a deficient use of “circulating capital” and “fixed capital”. (MEGA² II/6, 560, Fn. 68.)

⁶¹ For example MEGA² II/6, 224f., 394.

⁶² MEGA² II/14, 72.

⁶³ MEGA² II/15, 227 and MEGA² II/4.2, 319. See also Heinrich, „Entstehungs- und Auflösungsgeschichte des Marxschen ‚Kapital‘“, 194.

⁶⁴ MEGA² II/6, 67.

⁶⁵ MEGA² II/4.2, 901f.

Appendix

Economic Manuscripts and Printed Versions in the Second Section of the MEGA and in MECW			
<i>Manuscripts on the “Economics” by Marx</i>			
“Grundrisse”	1857/58	MEGA ² II/1	MECW 28–29
Economic Manuscript 1861-63	1861-63	MEGA ² II/3	MECW 30–34
<i>Printed parts from the “Economics” by Marx</i>			
A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy	1859	MEGA ² II/2	MECW 29
<i>“Capital”, Book 1</i>			
Manuscript-Material, by Marx	1863/64 1871/72 1877	MEGA ² II/4.1 MEGA ² II/6 MEGA ² II/12, 8, p. 5-36	MECW 34
Printed versions, by Marx Printed versions, by Engels	1867, 1872, 1872–75 1883 1890 1887	MEGA ² II/5–7 MEGA ² II/8 MEGA ² II/10 MEGA ² II/9	MECW 35
<i>“Capital”, Book 2</i>			
Manuscript-Material, by Marx	1865 1867/68 1868–1881	MEGA ² II/4.1 MEGA ² II/4.3 MEGA ² II/11	
Manuscript-Material, by Engels	1884/85	MEGA ² II/12	
Printed versions, by Engels	1885, 1893	MEGA ² II/13	MECW 36
<i>“Capital”, Book 3</i>			
Manuscript-Material, by Marx	1864/65 1867/68 1871–1881	MEGA ² II/4.2 MEGA ² II/4.3 MEGA ² II/14	
Manuscript-Material, by Engels	1883–1894	MEGA ² II/14	
Printed version, by Engels	1894	MEGA ² II/15	MECW 37

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