Pre-Capitalistic Forms of Production and Primitive Accumulation. Marx’s Historiography from the *Grundrisse* to *Capital*¹
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Marx wrote the *Grundrisse* in the middle of a crisis. In a letter to Engels dated 8 December 1857, he wrote: ‘I am working like mad all night and every night collating my economic studies so that I at least get the outlines clear before the deluge’.² In this book, one finds a strategy that allows one to comprehend and to go through the crisis by means of critique. This is a critique that unfolds the crisis and opens up new revolutionary possibilities. According to Gidwani, ‘Marx uses crisis to produce an agonistic knowledge that is intensely alert to fissures and interruptions in capital’s imperial being’.³

Marx considers the capitalistic mode of production as a social form that opens a new epoch, that is, the extension of the sphere of needs and of human capacities:

Hence the exploration of the whole of nature in order to discover new useful properties of things; the universal exchange of the products coming from the most diverse climates and lands; new (artificial) modes of processing natural objects to give them new use values. The all-round exploration of the earth to discover both new useful

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¹ This text is an extensively revised version of the paper I presented at the conference on the *Grundrisse* in Padova, January 2008. The papers from this conference have been published in Italian in Sacchetto and Tomba 2008.
objects and new uses for old objects, such as their use as raw materials, etc.; hence the development of the natural sciences to their highest point; the discovery, creation and satisfaction of new needs arising from society itself; cultivating [Kultur] all the qualities of social man [gesellschaftlicher Mensch] and producing him in a form as rich as possible in needs because rich in qualities and relations – producing man as the most total and universal social product possible (for in order to enjoy many different kinds of things he must be capable of enjoyment, that is he must be cultivated to a high degree) – all these are also conditions of production based on capital. This creation of new branches of production, i.e., qualitatively new surplus time, is not only the division of labour, but also the separation of a definite kind of production from itself as labour of a new use value; the development of a constantly expanding comprehensive system of different kinds of labour, different kinds of production, with a corresponding system of ever more extended and ever more varied needs.4

By producing new needs, capital breaks the umbilical cord that used to link humans and nature. Nature becomes for the very first time only an object for humanity to use, ‘nothing more than a matter of utility’.5 This is the form of modern luxury. One must consider the difference between luxury in Antiquity and in modern times in relation to the ‘new (artificial) modes of processing natural objects to give them new use-values’,6 the growth of human needs and new forms of experience. An anthropological modification, corresponds to these phenomena, a new kind of human being: the cultivating of all the qualities of ‘social man’. Marx calls this new human nature a ‘new subject’, the ‘social individual’.7 This is a very important concept, which marks an anthropological break. This is an individual who is no longer the same: he has broken his bond to nature, and society has become his new nature. This is not, however, the Hegelian second nature, which presupposes ethical relations that give concreteness to the individual. In the Marxian third nature, not only the Hegelian ständisch relations, but also the system of needs, are destroyed: capital produces not in view to satisfy human needs but in order to valorise value. The use-value of the commodity becomes the abstract bearer [Träger] of value and therefore a new form of use-value. The sensible becomes the phenomenal form of the suprasensible. Money ceases to be a means and becomes the end. The image of capitalist modernity is Verkehrung:8 inversion and perversion at the same time.