Introduction: Friedrich Engels and geography

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Abstract
Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) was Marx’s closest collaborator. He was influential in promoting Marxism both during Marx’s lifetime and after it. However, he is mentioned less often than Marx in geography. This editorial introduces a special issue of Human Geography on Friedrich Engels and Geography. It gives a brief overview of the key events in his life, discusses some of the geographical themes in Engels’ work – especially his relevance for work in political ecology, urbanism and geopolitics – and outlines the contents of the special issue.

Keywords
Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx, Marxism, political ecology, production of space, geopolitics, housing, social reproduction

Introducción: Friedrich Engels y la geografía

Resumen
Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) fue el colaborador más cercano de Marx. Fue influyente en la promoción del marxismo tanto durante la vida de Marx como después. Sin embargo, se le menciona con menos frecuencia que Marx en geografía. Este editorial presenta un número especial de Human Geography sobre Friedrich Engels y Geografía. Ofrece una breve descripción de los acontecimientos clave de su vida, analiza algunos delos temas geográficos de la obra de Engels, especialmente su relevancia para el trabajo en ecología política, urbanismo y geopolítica, y describe los contenidos del número especial.

Palabras clave
Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx, marxismo, ecología política, producción del espacio, geopolítica, vivienda, reproducción social

Life and times
Engels was born in 1820 in Barmen (now Wuppertal) in the Rhineland. His home did not survive the Second World War but his Grandfather’s nearby house now acts as the Engels-Haus museum (Carver, 2021). As the eldest son of an industrialist – his father was one half of the Ermen and Engels cotton thread spinning enterprise – Engels would have been expected to inherit this role in the business. However, his lifestyle and ideas soon diverged from those of his respectable parents (Royle, 2020). He showed a talent for writing and languages from an early age, and his family encouraged him to study languages and literature. Engels was also interested in science and technology, and he read extensively in these areas.

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early age. One of his earliest journalistic works, his “Letters from Wuppertal”, written when he was 18 years old, exposed the environmental and social effects of the new industries. Engels explained how the dye-works along the River Wupper were staining the waters red. Work in hot, dusty and smoke-filled rooms, with weavers spending all day hunched over their machines deprived the workers of “all strength and joy in life”. Highlighting the hypocrisy of the religious elite, Engels wrote:

Terrible poverty prevails among the lower classes, particularly the factory workers in Wuppertal; syphilis and lung diseases are so widespread as to be barely credible; in Elberfeld alone, out of 2,500 children of school age 1,200 are deprived of education and grow up in the factories - merely so that the manufacturer need not pay the adults, whose place they take, twice the wage he pays a child. But the wealthy manufacturers have a flexible conscience and causing the death of one child more or one less does not doom a pietist’s soul to hell, especially if he goes to church twice every Sunday (Engels, 1839: 10).

Engels would return to these themes. In late 1842 he was sent by his father to Manchester with the aim that he would oversee the Engels side of the business. But he resolved to forsake “the champagne of the middle classes” and instead carry out a study of the lives and resistance of the city’s working class, aided by his partner Mary Burns and her sister Lydia (“Lizzy”), who were part of the city’s large Irish migrant community (Hunt, 2010: 98–101). In a book length account of his findings, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (or *The Condition*, Engels, 1845), Engels again addressed issues of child labour, precarious work, expensive yet terrible housing, disgusting food, extremely long working hours, workplace injuries and more.

One of the many aspects of the book that is of obvious relevance today is its discussion of infectious disease epidemics. He describes how the conditions in which the poor live provided the ideal environment for epidemics such as typhus, typhoid fever and cholera to emerge and explains that these illnesses disproportionately affect those with the worst living conditions (Engels, 1845: 364–365). In the early 1840s Engels assumed – like his contemporaries – that infectious diseases spread through the air by the influence of miasma. However, he amended his thinking to account for the germ theory of disease in later works, partly due to his engagement with the work of scientific social reformers such as Edwin Lankester. As John Bellamy Foster explains in his recent book on the socialist origins of ecological thinking, Lankester was not only one of the scientists to discover that cholera is a water-borne illness but a radical who supported giving the vote to the poor (Foster, 2020: 29–30). This is just one example of Engels’ remarkable interest in keeping informed about the latest scientific discoveries and debates including a deep interest in Charles Darwin’s ideas on the origin of species (Foster, 2020: 27).

Engels showed how capitalist social structures reshape urban life in ways that impact workers, but at the same time also degrade the natural environment. *The Condition* contains numerous references to what we would now regard as ecological issues such as air and water pollution (Clark and Foster, 2006). For these reasons, Engels has influenced some of the founders of urban political ecology. Nik Heynen, Maria Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw mention that Engels already recognised in the 19th century how the ecological conditions of cities was related to the “class character” of their development. For these authors, Engels’ work helps develop an approach to understanding the history of cities whereby processes of urbanisation are inextricably linked to ecological transformations, in contrast to those accounts that treat “nature” as distinct from human activity (Heynen et al., 2006: 4; see also Royle, 2021).

After his time in Britain, Engels stayed in Brussels where he started to work more closely with Marx. Engels’ ecological sentiments are also evident in the collection of documents co-written with Marx around 1845–1846 that were later published as *The German Ideology*. In these texts, Marx and Engels distanced themselves from the idealist philosophy of the Young Hegelian circle that they had once associated with and which they refer to as “German philosophy”. Instead they outlined a “materialist conception of history”. Here they jointly, and famously, stated that: “The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. Thus, the first fact to be established is the physical organisation of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature” (Marx and Engels, 1845: 31). So, the two founders of Marxism started from an understanding of humanity as a part of nature. However, humans differentiate themselves from other animals by their ability to produce their means of subsistence. For Marx and Engels, the material conditions in which humans live forms the basis for their ideas, rather than the other way around:

In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here it is a matter of ascending from earth to heaven. That is to say, not of setting out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh; but setting out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process demonstrating the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process (Marx and Engels, 1845: 36).

In a later essay, “The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man”, Engels (1876) outlined a historical materialist approach to human evolution that supposes that humans transform themselves as they make adaptations to the external environment. The means through which humans create themselves is their labour. For some, this is the basis for an understanding of revolutionary praxis, the way in which humans – organised in societies – transform the reality in which they live through their practical activity and produce themselves, although not under conditions of their own choosing.
Engels was not just concerned with engaging in debates between philosophers. He was a revolutionary who lived through some of the most significant struggles of 19th century Europe and at times put aside his theoretical work to engage in political organising. He was more politically active than Marx (Streeck, 2020: 76), especially after retirement from factory work in 1870, when he took on responsibility for maintaining communication with his and Marx’s various associates across Europe from his house on Regent’s Park Road (Hunt, 2010: 244–245). During the revolutions of 1848, which impacted large parts of the continent, Engels attended mass meetings with Marx and produced a daily newspaper, the Neue Rheinische Zeitung to report on the insurrections and support their more radical demands (Hunt, 2010: 159–164). Engels had already undergone military service in Berlin in the early 1840s. He saw action towards the end of the 1848 revolutions where he fought as part of a militia in the Palatinate in an ultimately fruitless attempt to defend the Frankfurt Assembly from Prussian forces. After his return to Britain his experience and his occasional journalistic work covering various conflicts earned Engels the nickname “The General” (Boer, 2021: 42).

This points to another geographical aspect of Engels’ thought, his interest in the spatial aspects of international relations, what we might refer to today as geopolitics. In the pamphlet “Po and Rhine” (1859), Engels discusses the battles fought between the German states’ and France under Louis Napoleon over possession of the Po Valley which runs across northern Italy. Engels emphasises the influence of features of the landscape such as rivers, swampy terrain and snow filled mountain passes on military strategy. He points out that these terrestrial elements became more important in the 19th century as technology meant that war could take place at a continental scale rather than being confined to a smaller area. Recognising that the state that occupies the Po Valley could dominate over Italy, Engels stated: “Whoever held the Po Valley cut off the peninsula’s land communications with the rest of the Continent and could easily subdue it if the occasion arose” (Engels, 1859: 218). Conquering the West Bank of the Rhine would play a similar role for France as it would improve the prospects of defending Paris (p. 244). This aspect of Engels’ work is rarely mentioned in contemporary discussions – perhaps military strategy is far from the minds of most of the left today - but in his time Engels was considered an astute commentator on these matters.

In March 1871, conflict between France and Prussia provoked an impressive, but tragically short-lived experiment in workers’ self-government – the Paris Commune (the 150th anniversary of which was marked this year). In one of his later works, Engels (1891) explained how the Commune cancelled debt owed by renters, closed the pawn shops and established a plan to take over the closed factories and bring in unemployed workers to run them as cooperatives. Its representatives were paid a worker’s wage and could be immediately recalled. Judy Cox further describes how the Communards also “transformed their physical environment, destroying the symbols of the old regime”. They tore down the Vendôme Column, which was topped by a statue of Napoleon in Imperial Roman dress and considered a “symbol of chauvinism and incitement to national hatred” (Engels, 1891: 184–185). They instituted a programme of “communal luxury” on the basis that art should be part of everyday life rather than a privatised luxury available to the few (Cox, 2021: 111). The experience of the Commune in showing how ordinary people could produce a new kind of city is reminiscent of Alex Lofus’ turn to the 20th century Marxist Henri Lefebvre to theorise the role of culture as part of everyday life (Lofus, 2012: 123–126).

Max and Engels praised the proletarian character of the Paris Commune and its reforms rooted in the demands of working-class organisations. But they also highlighted its weaknesses. The Communards decided not to try to take on the forces of the French state headquartered at Versailles, or rather, those of their number who advocated this strategy were not able to win their position (Cox, 2021). Left the Commune vulnerable to attack. As Engels explains, the Communards underestimated the willingness of the French forces to collaborate with their Prussian military enemies in order to crush their class enemies in Paris. Again, he presents his case geographically:

The Prussians, who held the northern and eastern forts allowed the Versailles troops to advance across the land north of the city, which was forbidden ground to them under the armistice, and thus to march forward and attack on a long front, which the Parisians naturally thought covered by the armistice, and therefore held only with weak forces (Engels, 1891: 186).

The experience of the Commune would cause Marx and Engels to rethink their political strategy. As Engels remarked: “From the very outset the Commune was compelled to recognise that the working class, once come to power, could not go on managing with the old state machine”, they must “do away with all the old repressive machinery previously used against it itself” (Engels, 1891: 189). Engels started to conceive of the nation-state as a body with its own distinct capacities – including that of repression - rather than treating the state as simply a crystallisation of the economic interests of a particular class (Streeck, 2020). Although a full exploration of Engels’ thinking on the state and politics would be beyond what is possible here, it is important to note that Marx and Engels changed their thinking in response to events that they lived through. This should remind contemporary readers to be wary of assuming that Engels held the same views towards the end of his 50 year career as at its beginning.

The worldliness of Engels’ thought

Engels’ diverse interests overlapped with the subject matter of geography in several areas; this introduction has so far touched on some of them - political ecology, urbanism and geopolitics. In a recent essay, Streeck (2020) describes Engels’ approach as positivist, in that Engels the researcher made use of the kind of
empirical and ethnographic research that would be familiar to many geographers today. According to Streeck, “Engels had genuinely remarkable achievements to his name—and not despite, but precisely because his temperament inclined him towards the actually existing world, to realities rather than abstractions” (Streeck, 2020: 75, emphasis added). Some have even noted his use of cartography in *The Condition* where he provides maps and diagrams as well as written descriptions of the configuration of the city and arrangement of workers’ housing (see Engels, 1845: 350). By contrast, Marx, with a doctorate in philosophy, was able to develop a systemic – or even “all-encompassing” understanding of the circulation of capital employing the Hegelian method and operating at a more abstract level (Streeck, 2020: 75). This is not to argue, though, that Engels was a geographer – Terrell Carver rightly notes that Engels did not seem to feel the need to stick to such disciplinary boundaries (Carver, 2021: 263–264).

Nonetheless, Engels’ geopolitics seems limited by its adherence to the kind of classical geopolitics that has fallen out of favour in the academy these days to be more or less replaced by a critical approach that questions the former’s state-centric assumptions and environmental determinism. Indeed, Engels’ comments about the importance of the Po Valley for Germany are evocative of Victorian geographer Halford Mackinder’s infamous comments about the strategic significance of the “Heartland” regions of Eastern Europe (see Ó Tuathail, 1997), although Engels predates Mackinder’s “invention” of geopolitics by several decades. If all Engels left us were primordial versions of today’s more sophisticated geographical analyses there would be little point in revisiting his works.

Furthermore, Engels’ apparent positivism, although praised by Streeck, has more often been seen as a limitation. It is used in evidence that his thinking diverged significantly from that of Marx. Engels outlived Marx and edited the second and third volumes of *Capital* after the latter’s death. He also often took on the role of producing popular outlines of Marxist thinking, such as the pamphlet *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* for a general audience (Saito and Sasaki, 2021: xii–xiii). Therefore, Engels’ work was central to solidifying what many activists of later generations have come to see as Marxism. Most of Engels’ writings are short – especially when contrasted with the house brick of Marx’s *Capital* volume 1 – and often the need to respond to arguments from political opponents necessitated writing at rapid speeds. Some simplification of Marx’s formulations was inevitable. However, some have argued that Engels’ interpretation of Marxism went more fundamentally awry, that Engels gave Marxism a deterministic, economic slant that was alien to Marx’s own thought. These criticisms first emerged in the early 20th century with Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch and others and continue today (Saito and Sasaki, 2021: xiii). His critics have suggested that Engels’ interpretation of Marxism was partly responsible for what they see as distortions of socialist practice in the 20th century – including the reformism of the German Social Democratic Party and their like and the authoritarian dogma of Stalinism.

The contributors to this special issue take different approaches to this Marx-Engels debate. However, I think the articles here when taken together suggest a more dynamic, dialectical worldview than Engels is always given credit for. Dialectics, as Harvey (1996, chapter 2) explains, is a philosophical outlook that treats the world as a complex of processes rather than a series of things that come to relate to each other. It sees dynamism rather than fixity and continuity rather than separation (pp. 53–54). The contributors to this special issue point to just such an approach – one that integrates an understanding of the way in which human activity produces new natures with the social production of space (see also Loftus, 2012: 6–7).

Engels similarly offers a starting point for thinking through how economic processes that affect workers in the workplace also produce new relations of social reproduction beyond the workplace. According to social reproduction theorists, Marxists ought to be attentive to these relations if we wish to understand how the working class is itself “produced”; we should seek to integrate our analysis of production and reproduction even though the sites of these activities tend to be spatially separated (see Bhattacharya, 2015). In the 1980s, Lise Vogel accused Engels of paving the way for a dual-systems approach to production and reproduction by failing to clarify how the two processes relate to each other or assign greater relative weight to one or the other. This is viewed as politically problematic as it can lead to the treatment of workers’ exploitation and women’s oppression as two distinct problems (Bhattacharya, 2021; Vogel, 2013 [1983]). However, several of the contributors to this volume have nevertheless found inspiration in Engels for thinking about how issues outside the workplace – in particular the provision of housing - fit within a broader understanding of political economy, even if this was an incomplete project for Engels himself.

Therefore, I argue that Engels did, like Marx, adopt a “systemic understanding” in his studies despite the impression he gives of a writer who flirted from one subject to the next. His worldview was rooted in his and Marx’s early elaboration of historical materialism and especially the emphasis on human agency and praxis in their early work. Discussing the implications of Engels’ work for understanding the relationship between class struggle and processes of the production of space - as many of the contributors to this collection attempt to do – tends to support this more relational reading of Engels.

A second and related attribute of Engels’ work is his passionate support for the struggles of the working class and his outrage at their distress. A recent editorial in the *British Medical Journal* (Abbasi, 2021) has returned to Engels’ 1840s work in *The Condition*, adopting the term, “social murder”, as Engels did, to describe the failure of governments around the world to respond adequately to the Covid19 pandemic. Social murder describes the way in which society – and Engels states here that he means the ruling class within society – knowingly drives people into a situation in which they “inevitably meet a too-early and unnatural death”. As Engels states:
Its deed is murder just as surely as the deed of the single individual; disguised, malicious murder, murder against which none can defend himself, which does not seem what it is, because no man sees the murderer, because the death of the victim seems a natural one, since the offence is more one of omission than of commission. But murder it remains (Engels, 1845: 394).

Engels explains that he did not coin the term “social murder” himself but adopted it from working class organisations, likely from newspapers such as the Chartist Northern Star which we know he read (Hunt, 2010: 95). The Chartist movement of the 1840s was not just a struggle for universal male suffrage and for annual elections. The movement was supported by huge numbers of workers, for whom Chartism was an issue of being able to put food on the table (Engels, 1845: 519–523). Their demands for the vote were backed by a wave of militancy that reached its height in 1842 with the Plug Plot Riots, where thousands took part in strike action across the north of England, shutting down the steam powered machinery by pulling out the plugs (Hunt, 2010: 78–79).

Engels concludes The Condition by referring to an oncoming war between proletariat and bourgeoisie. He only hopes that enough of the workers will be won over to communist ideas for the revolution to be brought about in as bloodless and organised manner as possible but, in any case, the final battle seems to him to be inevitable. Engels’ breathless predictions of an imminent revolutionary struggle may read today like the exuberance of a 24-year-old (he later described these words himself as “youthful ardour”) but his talk of revolution was not ridiculous. The workers he described were already storming the Manchester workhouses and fighting armed battles with scabs and police (Engels, 1845: 521; Hunt, 2010: 79–80). Now we live in different times and the open class war on the streets of Manchester or Paris can seem very distant. But when we encounter inequality, poverty, overwork and the appalling and unjust effects of the current Covid pandemic, perhaps we should adopt a measure of Engels’ anger.

Space, Nature, Politics

The first three articles in this special issue address Engels’ relevance to discussions of space, nature and politics. Baruc Jiménez Contreras draws on the work of the Mexico-based Spanish philosopher Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez to address the role of revolutionary praxis in Engels’ work. He makes several key points. Firstly, that Engels was influenced by the Young Hegelians, especially Ludwig Feuerbach, throughout his career. Secondly, that Engels didn’t uncritically adopt Hegelian categories but instead transformed Hegel’s philosophy from an essentially static system to a dynamic approach that recognises the transformative potential of human agency. Thirdly, that, contra the critics, Engels was in agreement with Marx on these points. Jiménez Contreras explains how Engels’ ecological critique of capitalism was grounded in an understanding, adapted from Feuerbach, that nature is part of the “inorganic body” of human beings and that humans therefore depend on a continuous relationship with the rest of nature.

Sheila McGregor takes Engels’ historical materialist approach in “The Part Played by Labour” as a starting point for her own article. McGregor uses this and Engels’ Engels (1884) The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State to demonstrate how Engels saw women’s oppression as arising historically with the emergence of class societies, rather than being a fixed attribute of human nature. We can add that this analysis has also proved valuable in countering essentialist views about sexuality and gender identity. McGregor shows how more recent archaeological evidence aligns with Engels’ approach and responds to some critiques of his work. As McGregor notes, Engels’ analysis of the origins of women’s oppression has rarely been mentioned within geography.

Joe Pateman addresses another aspect of Engels’ work that has been overlooked, his opposition to state socialism. As Pateman explains, Marx and Engels were united in wanting to differentiate themselves from reformists, who wished to make changes to the existing state for the benefit of workers but ultimately would leave the existing capitalist relations intact. As Engels makes clear, a Prussian state nationalising the railway lines – so as to better have them available to use in warfare – is very far from being socialist. Pateman uses Engels to point to the limitations of the latest wave of what might be called “left reformist” political experiments: Greece’s Syriza; Bernie Sanders’ Democratic nomination campaign; Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party leadership and the Latin American Pink Tide, showing that Engels’ critique remains as relevant as ever.

Covid has meant state spending on a scale that we could not have foreseen a year ago – at least in the Global North. Most strikingly, Joe Biden has poured $1.9 trillion into the US economy through his American Rescue Plan (White House, 2021). A response to climate change capable of producing the rapid reduction in greenhouse gas emissions that is so urgently needed may require state intervention on an even greater scale. Socialists have been part of calling for these measures. But Engels would surely be warning us not to confuse these efforts at shoring up capitalism with a move towards socialism – as some commentators attempted at the start of the pandemic (e.g. Evans-Pritchard, 2020).

The condition of the global working class today

Several of the articles here apply Engels’ classic works to contemporary case studies from different parts of the world. Tanya Chaudhary points out that in The Condition, Engels sought to understand how changes in the mode of production led to changes in the way in which urban space is produced. Engels provides a rich empirical account of conditions outside the workplace – the way in which workers secure the necessities such as housing, food and education – that should be of interest
to theorists of social reproduction today. But, as Chaudhary notes, he neglects to discuss how workers organise around these issues and his accounts of workers’ struggles are instead mostly focused on trade union organisation. Using in depth interviews in Narela, a peripheral region of Delhi that is home to large numbers of displaced people, Chaudhary elucidates the contradictory ways in which gender influences the employment opportunities available to Narela residents.

In his 1872 pamphlet *The Housing Question* Engels addresses one of the most significant elements of the reproduction of labour. This work has been addressed by geographers in the past. Neil Smith noted the similarities between the expulsion of working-class people from the fashionable parts of cities in his day with what we would now call gentrification (Smith, 1982; see also Larsen et al., 2016). Engels criticised bourgeois responses to the problem of housing shortages in 19th century Europe (Engels, 1872: 365). The enlightened bourgeoisie proposed to allow workers to own their own homes, either by paying in instalments or by charity, thus allowing workers to become like “small capitalists”. Pitting himself against these “solutions”, Engels called for the type of workers’ revolution that would abolish the exploitation of workers, the ultimate source of the housing problem (p. 330). Two articles in this volume address the relevance of his thinking to struggles over housing in the United States and Barcelona today.

For Engels, the relationship between renter and landlord is not the same as that between worker and capitalist. Instead, it is essentially that of a consumer purchasing a good from someone who has something to sell. Here, Francesca Manning complicates this analysis, arguing that Engels neglected to address issues of ground rent. Including ground rent in the equation introduces a third class, that of landowners, who are themselves in conflict with the capitalist class. However, Manning takes issue with Engels’ disdain for struggles based on connection to the land, describing his approach to peasant struggles as racist. Bringing Engels’ work into conversation with that of theorists of racial capitalism such as Cedric Robinson, Manning points out that capitalism creates hierarchised divisions – along racial and other lines – and uses this to critique Engels’ vision of a homogenous proletarian subject.

Prachi Metawala, Kathrin Golda-Pongratz and Clara Irazabal – like Chaudhary – discuss the lives of precarious workers in the 21st century. They use *The Housing Question* as a starting point from which to address the condition of the immigrant working class in the gig economy in Barcelona today. The paper is based on interviews with immigrant riders working for food delivery platforms in the city during the Covid19 pandemic and amidst a crisis of skyrocketing housing costs and stagnant wages. The riders often earn less than minimum wage despite their apparent status as “essential workers” during the pandemic. Metawala et al use Engels to provide an original insight into the spatial dimensions of workers’ exploitation and lack of access to decent housing, both of which are subject to neoliberal logics. They also offer a balanced assessment of the shortcomings of the small acts of resistance by platform workers against Engels’ ideal of working-class revolution, expropriation of private property and compensation by the capitalists.

The rise of mobile phone based digital platforms such as Deliveroo and Uber is clearly a modern phenomenon. And there has been much discussion as to whether the “precariat” forms a new social class (see Standing, 2011). However, Engels would have recognised precarious work from his own observations, when periodic crises would throw people out of work, forcing them to rely on “occasional small jobs” or queue up at the gates of the docks each morning hoping for a day’s work (Engels, 1845: 384–385).

### Legacy

The final articles in the special issue discuss Engels’ legacy. Thomas Jellis and Joe Gelrach address Engels’ status as a geographer by discussing how his *The Condition* came to feature as a set text on the Oxford University exam “Ideas in Geography” between the 1980s and the mid-2000s. As they explain, Engels’ inclusion indicates that while he was not considered a geographer as such, his work was nevertheless seen as both relevant to and influential on the discipline. For a generation of students, Engels’ work played a role in informing their understanding of what counts as geography. According to Jellis and Gelrach, Engels’ text was an attempt to theorise the city, to understand the relationship between processes of urbanisation and of the creation of a proletarian subject.

Steve Hanson and Mark Rainey likewise address the contemporary return of Engels. They turn their attention to the presence of two statues of Engels in Manchester – a climbable fiberglass head located on the campus of the University of Salford and a former Soviet monument imported from Ukraine and installed in the city centre. Hanson and Rainey discuss these statues as “traces” that tell a contradictory story of change and continuity. Starting with the contemporary relevance of texts such as *The Condition* they imagine what Engels would make of Manchester today. They remind us that Engels noted the way the architecture of 1840s Manchester allowed the bourgeoisie to travel from city centre to suburbs without ever having to observe the poorest dwellings. As they point out, the two statues of Engels “provide a veneer of radical politics to sites of major land and property development”.

Concluding thoughts are provided here by Terrell Carver, professor of political theory at the University of Bristol and the author of numerous books on Marx, Engels and Marxism including *The Life and Thought of Friedrich Engels* (recently republished), *Engels Before Marx* and the Oxford *Very Short Introduction* to Engels.

The diversity of the articles collected in this special issue demonstrate that Engels, perhaps more than any other thinker from the classical Marxist canon, took an interest in an extraordinary range of topics. It is striking how even 200 years after his birth his works speak to issues that can seem so specific to our
late capitalist conjuncture: the Anthropocene and its associated pandemic diseases, the production of urban space, migration, precarious work, expensive housing, women’s and LGBTQ +oppression, and the enduring debate over revolutionary or left reformist socialist strategy.

Some aspects of the special issue did not go to plan. I would have liked to have been able to publish more articles from writers from the Global South (or addressing revolutionary politics in the South). I am very pleased to be able to publish Chaudhary’s wonderful research addressing Engels’ work to contemporary India. The initial plan for the special issue included other articles like this, but understandably the need to prioritise practical activity made it difficult for other contributors from the Global South to find the time to write. Given my own background in environmental geography and the huge public interest in radical responses to capitalism’s systemic destruction of the biosphere, I would also like to have included more on Engels as an ecological Marxist although Jiménez Contreras does address these themes – and much else – by elaborating on Engels’ relationship with Hegel and Feuerbach.

However, despite these omissions I hope that this special issue will contribute to our understanding of Engels’ thought today and perhaps even inspire further engagements with Engels and geography. I would like to thank the contributors and the peer reviewers for the enormous amount of unpaid and, in the case of the peer reviewers, anonymous labour that they have put into this project. The writers of these articles are from diverse political backgrounds and include those at the start of their academic career, more established scholars and writers from outside of academia. They build on Engels’ work, drawing on his ideas and showing that his work repays careful rereading alongside more contemporary scholarship. But articles here are not intended to be mere hagiography; although many contain praise for Engels’ insights, some are more critical. But this shows that Marxism does not start and end with its founders. It is an in an ongoing process of development. Yes, we must read the classics. But we can also learn by engagement with the working class struggles of our own time and the ideological debate they throw up.

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Notes
1. Germany was not unified until 1871.

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See also Mavroudeas, 2020, on the debates over Engels’ editorship of the later volumes of Capital.

3. The term social murder has also been used in reference to the 2017 Grenfell fire – for example, in Chakrabortty, 2017

4. With apologies to the editors of Gramsci: Space, Nature, Politics, an earlier project bringing attention to the work of another classical Marxist thinker within geography – Ekers et al., 2012

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