



Marko LOVEC  
Faculty of Social Sciences,  
University of Ljubljana

Slavoj Žižek, Frank Ruda  
and Agon Hamza

**Reading Marx**

Wiley, New York 2018, 180 pages,  
USD 59.95

(ISBN 978-1-509-52140-1)

The context of the reviewed work is the slowing down to a halt and absence of alternative ideas in contemporary society, something that calls for the humanities and philosophers to respond. The successors of Karl Marx, a founding father of social critique that opened new horizons for social change, find themselves in a crisis today since, while rejecting his 'medicine', even conservatives agree with Marx's diagnosis while pointing out the failures of the communist states, resorting instead to nationalism. In other words, having lost its progressive dynamism and returning to pre-modern 'barbaric' forms (like building walls and fences to keep refugees out), the crisis of capitalism has deepened the crisis of Marxism.

What the authors propose in this setting – in order to respond to Marx's critics and reclaim the right to propose ideas – is to read Marx in reverse in the sense of reading him first and then proceeding back towards the work of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (noting of course, especially for Marxists, the usual way is the other way around). This means, in my opinion, that scholars should start by

analysing the contradictions found in the present; instead of moving towards quasi-objective explanations based on a particular experience, they should see them as historical and relational, the result of a process of anticipation of the correct way, while, in fact, these explanations are abstract prisons of their own design.

Apart from the collectively written introduction and conclusion, among the individual contributions one finds three chapters by individual authors where the authors develop their own different perspectives. Slavoj Žižek criticises two deviations from Marxism; namely, object-oriented ontology and new materialism on one hand and assemblages on the other, arguing that the former contains no subject, something unacceptable given the dynamics of late capitalism, while the latter, despite being seemingly ever more relevant (such as when Donald Trump won the US presidential elections based on an apparently contradictory mix of anti-tax, anti-elite, anti-capital and anti-immigrant sentiments), flattens the ontology by only looking at the tip of the iceberg seen above sea level.

Frank Ruda goes on by, to paraphrase Badiou, criticising the sophism of post-communist 'philosophers' who legitimise the absence of alternatives by not recognising the difference between the existing practice and objectivity, while Marx himself, instead of rejecting the work of the classical economists before him, tried to understand capitalism from a subjective perspective of actual

---

practice and move beyond that. Simultaneously, he is critical of the reductionist and abstract operations of capitalism, transforming man as a series of chemical bodily processes into a mechanical being.

Finally, Agon Hamza questions the traditional Marxist perspective as well as Marx's view of Hegel as someone who rationalised the actual state of affairs, namely the European type of modern capitalist development involving an authoritarian-nationalist Prussian regime in response to the market pressures and crises of that time, which was in fact a similar situation to that faced nowadays, and arguing that Hegel's concern with the present and the past was to avoid speculative abstraction turning into its opposite (that is, capitalism into fascism and communism into Stalinism).

Interested readers should not be misled by the above attempt to reconstruct the key messages since they might be misunderstood and/or are not always easy to follow. From a social science perspective, departing from the big modernist approaches is not new, yet it is also true that, under the guise of the interdisciplinary approach, openness and synthetic thinking, social science research is today ever less aware of some of the fundamental assumptions and ever more subjected to particular social expectations, with both serving to reproduce the existing order. In this sense, philosophers who take a vertical perspective by linking the most abstract with the most concrete are

the most welcome critics of such work.

Apart from a certain degree of eclecticism, ambiguity and encrypted messages, mixed with wild creativity, something interested readers have by now become used to in the writings of Žižek and his colleagues, it should be noted that parts of the work are difficult to read for those without an education in philosophy (such as the author of this review).

Tomaž KRPIČ  
Fakulteta za družbene vede,  
Univerza v Ljubljani

Vincent Miller  
**Crisis of Presence in  
Contemporary Culture**  
SAGE, Los Angeles, London, New  
Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC  
2016, 144 pages,  
GBP 46.99  
(ISBN 978-1-4739-0657-0)

What is possibly more evident than presence? Or less questionable? Although people are not always fully aware of their own or anybody else's presence, any doubts as to whether they are actually present or not, which might appear in the course of their everyday life, are immediately and nonchalantly dismissed by strong self-evidence of being always radically present within oneself at any given moment and frequently enough present to others. The presence of other people and material objects surrounding an individual is