

Intellectuals and the Liberated Marx: Žižek and Karatani

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I Men of intellectual ability and breadth of mind! I venerate your talents and cherish your human feelings. But have you also fully considered what you are doing, and what your attacks on reason are likely to lead to? You doubtless wish that freedom of thought should remain inviolate; for without it, even the free flights of your genius would soon come to an end.

—Kant, ‘What is Orientation in Thinking?’ (Kant 1991a, p. 247)

Jacques Derrida in his *Specters of Marx* wrote: ‘The responsibility, once again, would here be that of an heir. Whether they wish it or know it or not, all men and women, all over the earth, are today to a certain extent the heirs of Marx and Marxism’. Except that Derrida forgot to mention that, among these ‘men and women, all over the earth’, the genuine heirs of Marx are freed from Marxism—freed from the canonized Marx. Marx is not continuous with Marxism. Marx has been recovered from Marxism. The latter had for long obfuscated the former. Translating ‘spirits’ into ‘ghosts’, Derrida said that Marx was accompanied by many ‘ghosts’ in his life. Here we should note that Hegel’s *Geist* is etymologically related to ‘ghost’. (Inwood 1992) In this regard, we can say that the ghost of a certain Marx, that is, the liberated Marx, has been haunting the intellectuals of the world. The intellectuals who are haunted by this specter are themselves the liberated intellectuals—liberated from a century long Marxism. Unliberated Marxists and, for that matter, servile non-Marxist intellectuals, are in a ‘holy alliance’ to conjure away specters of the liberated Marx. Exactly at what moment did the liberated Marx arrive on the scene? In his introduction to the Penguin ‘deluxe edition’ of *The Communist Manifesto*, published in 2011, Marshall Berman wrote the following:

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, this system came apart very fast. All over Eastern Europe, Marx statues were torn down. Pictures of people doing this were page one material for a while. Readers who love Marx can only be thrilled at his loss of sanctity. His canonization after 1917 was a disaster. A thinker needs beatification like a hole in the head! (Marx and Engels 2011a, p. 1)

What actually did happen in 1989? If we follow Berman, the answer is that after the crash of 1989, as Boris Buden has put it, ‘even Karl Marx went through a double liberation: a life freed from Marx has recovered Marx freed for the intellectuals of the world’ (Buden 2019, p. 151). As David Leopold in his *The Young Marx* has noted, the actual Soviet communism undoubtedly distorted our knowledge of Marx’s work. Leopold properly surmises that ‘its subsequent collapse might provide an unexpected opportunity, not to bury Marx, but better to understand him’. (Leopold 2007, p. 8) We are, ever since, in this period of understanding Marx ‘better’. On the contemporary intellectual scene, Slavoj Žižek and Kōjin Karatani are the two distinct thinkers among ‘the intellectuals of the world’ who have understood Marx ‘better’. They are liberated intellectuals, each in his own unique way, as I will examine later. Each must be identified as a genuine reader of Marx releasing him from Marxism. In their respective readings, a place is secured for Marx as philosopher, returning him to the proper lineage to which he belongs: German Idealism. I will submit the terms ‘intellectual’ and ‘Marxism’ to a close examination in my attempt to bring out the two interrelated elements in Žižek’s and Karatani’s singular readings of Marx, namely, the notions of ‘the Unconscious’ and ‘Communism’. I begin by first posing this question: What kind of intellectual was Marx himself? In a letter to the novelist Berthold Auerbach, dated September 2, 1841, Moses Hess described the young Marx who had just earned his doctoral degree:

the greatest, perhaps, the only real philosopher living today ... Dr. Marx ... is still a very young man and going to give the death blow to medieval religion and politics. He combines the sharpest wit with the most profound philosophical gravity; imagine Rousseau, Voltaire, Holbach, Lessing, Heine and Hegel united in one person—and I mean united, not thrown together—there you have Dr Marx. (Rockmore 1976, p. 21)

This ‘Dr Marx’, we should note, is the intellectual who later in his lifetime liberated himself twice, first from ‘German philosophy’ and second from the intellectual circle of young Hegelians. Therefore the year 1989 should really be marked as the third stage in Marx’s liberation, a posthumous libera-

tion. In relation to the young Marx's characterization by Hess in 1841, we come to the year 1848 when The Communist Manifesto was drafted. Berman writes that 'one group whose identities as workers was crucial for Marx was his own class: intellectuals'. (Marx and Engels 2011a, p. 11) He quotes from The Manifesto: 'The Bourgeoisie has stripped of his halo every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers'. Berman goes on to say that 'This does not mean that these activities lose meaning or value. If anything, they become more urgently meaningful. But the only way people can get the freedom to do what they can do is by working for capital. Marx himself had to live this way'. (Marx and Engels 2011a, pp. 11-12)

As is well-known, at one point in time, Marx separated himself from Marxism. In a letter that Friedrich Engels wrote to Eduard Bernstein in 1882 he famously quoted Marx writing to his son-in-law, Paul Lafargue in French: 'Ce qu'il y a de certain c'est que moi, je ne suis pas Marxiste.' ['If anything is certain, it is that I myself am not a Marxist.'] (Institute of Marxism-Leninism 1975, p. 353) Žižek in his short *The Relevance of the Communist Manifesto*, published in 2019, cites this statement to say that in Soviet translation it was rendered as: 'If this is Marxism then I am not a Marxist'. (Žižek 2019, p. 58) Žižek perspicuously takes this mistranslation as an indication that in Soviet Marxism 'even Marx was a Marxist and participated in the same universal knowledge that composes Marxism; the fact that he created the teaching later known by this label made no difference. So his denial above does not refer just to a specific, wrong version that falsely proclaimed itself to be "Marxism"'. (Žižek 2019, p. 58) Žižek goes on to say that Marx meant something 'more radical' in the fact that 'a gap separates him, the creator who has a substantive relationship with his teaching, from the "Marxists" who follow his teaching'. (Žižek 2019, p. 58) Žižek concludes with a typically witty citation of a joke by the Marx Brothers. It goes like this: 'You Look like Emmanuel Ravelli. —But I am Emmanuel Ravelli.—So no wonder you look like him.' In Žižek's paraphrasing: 'The guy who is Ravelli does not look like Ravelli, he simply is Ravelli. In the same way, Marx himself is not a Marxist—one among others; he is the point of reference exempted from the series, because it is by

reference to him that others are Marxists. And the only way to remain faithful to Marx today is to stop being a Marxist and to repeat instead Marx's grounding gesture in a new way'. Our two prodigious thinkers, Žižek and Karatani, are an intellectual pair who have carried this Marx's 'grounding gesture in a new way'; I will return to this when I take up the problem of 'Marxism' in more detail later. Here we first need to examine who exactly we call an 'intellectual'. For its definition I can only go to Immanuel Kant. But first some preliminary remarks are in order.¹² Yesteryear may be remembered as the time of an 'intellectual laziness' named 'Marxism'. That intellectual laziness failed to bring out and distinguish the two elements in Marx, namely, the literary 'metaphorical' style, in contrast to his scientific theory, which results in confusion of the two and therefore an injustice to his real theoretical/scientific work. This is what Ludovico Silva in his groundbreaking *Marx's Literary Style* has told us. (Silva 2023) The outcome of this intellectual laziness is the missing of 'Marx, the intellectual', Silva says. Nowadays we are fortunate in having been able to overcome that intellectual laziness. Žižek and Karatani, in my view, stand out today as two thinkers and intellectuals who have begun to read Marx independent of Marxism. Here I use 'Marxism' in a pejorative sense as a term for 'anti-intellectual' in specific sense of the term. I should also point out that the very term 'Marxism', as we are told by Karatani, was coined immediately after Marx's death by none other than his intellectual friend Friedrich Engels. I will come back to this point after examining the meaning of term 'intellectual'.

II Who is an 'intellectual'? Or, more properly, who is a liberated intellectual? Let me put it first in this way: This privileged figure named 'the intellectual' is the one who is affected by the liberated Marx who in turn was affected by Kant through Hegel. This intellectual is philosophically grounded in political theory in Kantian terms. Kant had possessed a set of distinct political theory that has only recently been brought to our attention. (Reiss 1976; Saner 1973)

¹For the term 'intellectual laziness' and the distinction between metaphor and scientific theory in Marx I am following Ludovico Silva in his groundbreaking *Marx's Literary Style*, 2023. I will come back to this work later.

²In this respect see the excellent remarks by Reiss in his 'Introduction' to Kant, 1979, 1991, See also Saner, 1973.

The figure of the intellectual is first and foremost that of an enlightened man. Karatani and Žižek have both drawn our attention to the distinction between the notion of private use of reason as opposed to public use of reason, against our own received understanding of public and private, a distinction that Kant himself had brought out in his essay 'An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"'. Kant's essay was written in September of 1784 and was published in December of the same year. It is proper to read Kant's 'answer' in conjunction with other short essays he wrote after the publication of the first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781, namely, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose' (November 1784), 'What is Orientation in Thinking' (1786), 'Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch' (1795), and 'The Metaphysical Elements of Right' (1797). These essays finally culminated in the last book Kant wrote that was entitled *The Conflict of the Faculties*, published in 1798. Kant famously begins by saying that 'Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity', telling us that 'Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without guidance of another'. He wrote: 'It is so convenient to be immature!' And further, 'If it is now asked whether we at present live in an enlightened age, the answer is: No, but we do live in an age of enlightenment'. (Kant 1991b, p. 58) Elsewhere he wrote: 'To think for oneself means to look within oneself (i.e., in one's own reason) for the supreme touchstone of truth; and the maxim of thinking for oneself at all times is enlightenment'. (Kant 1991a, p. 249) For enlightenment, Kant said, all that is needed is freedom: 'And the freedom in question is the most innocuous form of all—freedom to make public use of one's reason in all matters'. Everywhere, he continues, we hear: 'Don't argue!'. The tax officer says do not argue and pay your taxes. The clergyman says do not argue and believe! Kant here mentions the King of Prussia, Frederick II (the Great), as the 'only ruler in the world' who said: 'Argue as much as you like and about whatever you like, but obey!'. (Kant 1991b, p. 55) If this means 'restriction on freedom everywhere', then what kind of restriction would prevent enlightenment? Kant's answer to his own question goes as follows: 'The public use of man's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men; the private use of reason may quite often be very narrowly restricted, however, without

undue hinderance to the progress of enlightenment'. (Kant 1991b, p. 55) The same tax officer and the same clergymen cannot act in freedom because they are under the command from outside. But, 'Conversely, as a scholar addressing the real public (i.e., the world at large) through his writings, the clergyman making public use of his reason enjoys unlimited freedom to use his own reason and to speak in his own person. For to maintain that the guardians of the people in spiritual matters should themselves be immature, is an absurdity which amounts to making absurdities permanent'. (Kant 1991b, p. 57) This is the crux of the matter. The intellectual lives in the age of the enlightenment, which is not yet an enlightened age. The intellectual work is incomplete and its task is interminable. Moreover, in a larger context of Kant's political theory as related to moral law, nature and freedom, an intellectual is the one who makes 'A philosophical attempt to work out a universal history of the world in accordance with a plan of nature aimed at a perfect civil union of mankind', which 'must be regarded as possible and even as capable of furthering the purpose of nature itself'. (Kant 1991c, p. 51)

If we choose Kant's definition we must then conclude that the much recycled term 'public intellectual' is essentially a contradiction in term. In the annals of history, Socrates must be seen as the first intellectual. He was exemplary, and still to be emulated today, precisely based on the tenets of the Kantian notion of 'cosmopolitan', and his political theory. In his ground-breaking *Isonomia* and the *Origins of Philosophy*, Karatani reflects on 'The Riddle of Socrates', bringing up Kant and Marx to shed light on the aforementioned distinction between private and public reason in the case of the historical Socrates. Karatani begins by saying that the riddle of Socrates lies in the instances of his 'fighting for truth and justice, not from a public but from a private [position]. This was a contradiction, because to be in the private sphere was to be apolitical. Socrates lived this paradox, and it rendered both his life and his death enigmatic'. (Karatani 2017, pp. 114-115) The historical Socrates is not the fictional character Plato tried to portray him as in his *Dialogues*, according to Karatani. 'What Socrates brought about', Karatani writes, 'was an inversion of the value associated with public and private capacity. This was first of all to place the private in a position of superiority to the public, hence [making it]

political'. (Karatani 2017, p. 115) Contrary to Plato, who tried to attribute his own idealism and his notion of philosophizing to Socrates, we must not forget that, as Karatani notes, Socrates refused to become a public figure. Nevertheless, 'he neither would rest content merely with the private. He did remain a private figure within the polis; however, never did he neglect to continue to truly fight for the right. Plato sought the true form of polity rooted in this Socrates'. (Karatani 2017, p. 116) But, nevertheless, Karatani writes, Socrates's position is nowhere close to that of Diogenes or Plato. Rather, Socrates's position is this: 'act publicly while remaining in your private station, which is to say, while remaining within the polis, be cosmopolitan. From this perspective, Socrates seems more political than the Cynics, while being cosmopolitan in comparison to Plato'. (Karatani 2017, p. 116) It is at this point that Karatani makes his point clear by referring to Kant's 'What is Enlightenment?'. Karatani reiterates Kant's notion of public and private in succinct terms yet adds an illuminating point to its original meaning: 'For Kant, to act in accord with the position of the state is the private, while the universal standpoint (of the citizen of the world) is the public. To truly be public, one must take up a private station that transcends the state. Of course, such a cosmopolis transcending the state as such does not exist. What Kant is saying is that while existing as an individual within the state, one should make judgments and act as a citizen of the world. That is to say, Kant's inversion of value between public and private is neither Plato's nor Diogenes's, but rather Socrates's position.' (Karatani 2017, p. 116) To make his point even clearer, Karatani masterfully brings up Marx's Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Reminding us that Hegel had placed state above civil society, Karatani states that here civil society is conceived as 'system of desire, while the state transcends this at the rational level', which means that 'in civil society people function in a private capacity, while in the state they become public citizens; That is to say, they assume their true form. Marx inverted the position. If people exhibit their real form in private capacity, there is no need to assume a public sphere. To put it in Marx's terms, if people exhibit their 'species-being' in civil society, there is no longer any need for the political state above that. That is to say, if one can dissolve the class antagonisms within civil society, the state

as a political entity will be superseded.’³ We will come back to Socrates later when discussing the unconscious agency in Marx brought out by Žižek and Karatani both. Žižek takes up Kant’s inversion of public and private, offering his own interpretation in the context of his discussion on Communism. In the second part of his *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, entitled the ‘The Communist Hypothesis’, in the Section ‘Public Use of Reason’, Žižek first puts forward an ‘elementary definition’ of communism: ‘in contrast to socialism, communism refers to singular universality, to the direct link between the singular and the universal, bypassing particular determinations’. (Žižek 2009, p. 104) Citing Paul who said that from the Christian standpoint ‘there are no men and women, no Jews or Greeks’, thereby claiming that, in Žižek’s words, ‘ethnic roots, national identities, etc., are] not a category of truth. To put it in Kantian terms: when we reflect upon our ethnic roots, we engage in a private use of reason, constrained by contingent dogmatic presuppositions; that is, we act as ‘immature’ individuals, not as free humans who dwell in the dimension of the universality of reason’. (Žižek 2009, p. 104) In this relation, Žižek brings up ‘the opposition between Kant and Rorty’ regarding the dimension of public and private that he says is rarely noted. He writes: ‘Both sharply distinguish between the two domains, but in opposite ways. For Rorty, the great contemporary liberal par excellence, the private is the space of our idiosyncrasies where creativity and wild imagination rule and moral considerations are (almost) suspended; the public, on the contrary, is the space of social interaction where we are obliged to obey the rules in order not to hurt others. In Rorty’s own terms, the private is the space of irony, while the public is the space of solidarity’, p.104.⁴

³Karatani, 2017, p. 117. In this respect, Karatani in the footnote refers to what Marx wrote in *On the Jewish Question*. There Marx wrote: ‘Human emancipation will only be complete when the real, individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a species-being; and when he has recognized and organized his own powers (forces propres) as social powers so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as political power’, p. 151, n. 12.

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Here Žižek takes issue with Richard Rorty's misconception of difference between public and private 'space' to say that, on the contrary, for Kant 'the public space of the 'world-civil-society' exemplifies the paradox of universal singularity, of a singular subject who, in a kind of short-circuit, bypassing the mediation of the particular, directly participates in the Universal'. (Žižek 2009, p. 104) Quoting a passage from Kant's 'What is Enlightenment', Žižek says the following: 'The paradox of Kant's formula 'Think freely, but obey!' (which, of course, poses a series of problems of its own, since it also relies on the distinction between the 'performative' level of social authority and the level of free thinking where performativity is suspended) is thus that one participates in the universal dimension of the 'public' sphere precisely as a singular individual extracted from, or even opposed to, one's substantial communal identification—one is truly universal only when radically singular, in the interstices of communal identities'. (Žižek 2009, p. 105) Žižek further remarks that 'It is Kant who should be read here as critique of Rorty. In his vision of public space characterized by the unconstrained exercise of Reason, he invokes a dimension of emancipatory universality outside the confines of one's social identity, of one's position within the order of (social) being—precisely the dimension so crucially missing in Rorty', p. 105.⁵

III I now come to the problem of Marxism in relation to the figure of the 'intellectual'. Boris Buden takes issue

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with the famous passage in *The Communist Manifesto* that Berman had cited. It is a well-known passage:

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men at last are forced to face ... the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men. (Karatani 2020, p. 24–25) Buden explains that he took the quote from Berman's book and that 'translation is more accurate, since Berman himself slightly altered the standard translation made by Samuel Moore in 1888', 158, n. 35. The translation in the Penguin deluxe edition is slightly different and goes as follows: 'All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept way, all- formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind', in Marx and Engels, 2011, p. 68. (Marx and Engels 2011b, p. 68)

'This vision has been proved wrong', Buden asserts. He remarks that 'In fact, individuals in capitalism can never face the reality in which they live and social relations in which they are involved, in their immediacy. It is the fetishistic character of commodity production that prevents this from happening, or, more precisely, makes these individuals experience their mutual relations as relation between things'. (Buden 2019, p. 158) Buden wants to affirm that 'As far as capitalism puts both intellectuals and workers into the same wage-relation, they also share a common class and historical position', and therefore, 'This is why Berman can see in today's intellectuals of the world the rightful heirs to the emancipatory legacy of the historical workers' movements, those proletarians who once had nothing to lose but their chains'. (Buden 2019, pp. 137–138) However, in Buden's view, 'intellectuals of the world' still have something to lose: 'the freedom that Berman has implicitly ascribed to their social role and that makes it possible for them to detach themselves from historical praxis and encounter 'directly' the authentic world of Marx's

ideas'. (Buden 2019, p. 138) He properly finds this 'freedom' of the intellectuals in the 'public use of reason' by invoking Kant. As was said above, this would mean that, as citizens of the world and 'scholars' addressing the general public, intellectuals can argue freely in using their reason publicly. This might explain, in Buden's words, why 'Berman and all genuine readers of Karl Marx have welcomed 'a life without Marx' brought about by the crash of 1989'. (Buden 2019, p. 138) Buden keenly makes the following observations:

In Kant's sense, it liberated Marx's writings from their private use— by, for instance, those apparatchiks of an official Marxism, also known as Marxologues, who were not able to read Marx and discuss his ideas freely because they had to obey their totalitarian masters, the Party and the state. In other words, the post-1989 liberation of Marx's writing might be understood as a sort of reappropriation by public reason. It has liberated Marx as author, who is now finally free—to address, as a scholar (Gelehrte), 'the intellectuals of the world', or, in Kant's parlance, the society of world citizens (Weltbürgergesellschaft).⁶

At this point we might yet ask: What did actually happen in 1989? If we follow Berman the answer is that after the crash of 1989, and, as I have already mentioned above, this is the crux of matter so it is worth reiterating here, 'even Karl Marx went through a double liberation: a life freed from Marx has recovered Marx freed for the intellectuals of the world'. (Buden 2019, p. 151) Among its consequences, Buden notes, is the fact that, as a result of the 'democratic revolutions' in the aftermath of 1989, everybody talked about 'transition to democracy' but not the restoration of capitalism. This relates

⁶Buden, 2019, pp. 138–139. Buden further adds that 'it is not difficult to recognize in Berman's notion of "the intellectuals of the world" an older intellectual figure, which, in fact, still echoes in Kant's notion Weltbürgergesellschaft—the so-called "republic of letters": an international community of scholars of which Kant, for instance, was a typical member. It emerged at the time of the Renaissance, and as a new historical form of intellectual exchange it prepared and finally made possible the Age of Enlightenment', p. 139.

to the notion of the ‘abstract figure of the so-called free and equal individual’. We should remember that this ‘abstract figure’ originally belonged to the bourgeois capitalist society, yet in the former system of ‘actually existing socialism’ the same figure ‘was banned from the political life of the state. Nevertheless, it reappeared in a place where it essentially does not belong as such, in the sphere of civil society’. Thus Buden remarks: Recalling the young Marx’s critique of the limits of bourgeois political emancipation, inspired by Hegel and epitomized in the concept of the bourgeois *Homo duplex*, one might say that in the struggle for freedom under the conditions of the one-party system the abstract political figure of citizen moved over to the realm of its non-political *doppelgänger*, the bourgeois. Here, on the stage of civil society, behind the backs of the party-state, the abstract political figure of citizen performed a sort of monodrama, disguised in the costume of a living flesh-and-blood person. It was best personified in the image of an anti-communist dissident heroically fighting for human rights. (Buden 2019, p. 153)

And further:

The left critics of historical communism were never anti-communists. Rather, they remained at all times within the horizon opened up by the emancipatory promise of Marx’s critique of capitalism, sharing its highlights, shortcomings and contradictions, and taking active part in the theoretical disputes and dramatic political conflicts that accompanied the communist movement from its very beginning—for which they often paid dearly. (Buden 2019, p. 154)

This brings us back to the central point that is the notion of the ‘liberated Marx’: Recovering Marx from Marxism, linked to Marx’s relation to his life-long friend Friedrich Engels. Here I must reiterate that the hallmark of this ‘liberated Marx’ concerns, first and foremost, the recovery of Marx as a philosopher and not as a ‘political economist’, and this must prompt the tracing of his philosophical roots to post-Kantian German Idealism, in particular to Hegel. Here I want to point out that, as Tom Rockmore has incisively argued, in our attempt to ‘recover’ Marx, it is important that we free him from Engels as the ‘first Marxist’. There is a ‘grain of truth’ in what

Rockmore says: 'Marxism is the series of misunderstandings of Marx's theories'.⁷ This concerns the alleged expressions of the categorical difference between 'materialism' and 'idealism', between 'science' and 'philosophy', which goes back to Russian Marxist

IV We have seen that the notion of the 'liberated Marx' is the key to understanding the contemporary intellectual scene. Slavoj Žižek and Kōjin Karatani, as we have argued, are the two prominent thinkers who have made significant contributions to this understanding. In this final section, we will explore the implications of this liberated Marx for the contemporary world, particularly in relation to the notion of communism.

Žižek's reading of Marx is deeply influenced by his Lacanian background. He argues that Marxism is not just a theory but a practice, a way of engaging with the world that goes beyond mere intellectual understanding. For Žižek, the unconscious is not just a psychological concept but a political one, deeply intertwined with the structure of capitalist society. (Mills 2002) The unconscious, in this view, is not something that can be simply overcome through rational enlightenment but must be engaged with politically, through a revolutionary practice that challenges the existing social order.

Karatani's approach, while different from Žižek's, shares a similar concern with the philosophical foundations of Marx's thought. He emphasizes the importance of returning to Marx's early works, particularly the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, where Marx develops his theory of alienation. (Henry 1983) Karatani argues that the unconscious dimension of Marx's thought is not just a leftover from his Hegelian influences but is central to his understanding of capitalism and its effects on human subjectivity.

The unconscious, for both thinkers, is not merely a psychological category but a political one. It is through the understanding of the unconscious that we can grasp the true nature of alienation under capitalism and the possibilities for its overcoming. This is why the return to the 'liberated Marx' is so important: it allows us to see beyond the dogmatism of

⁷See Rockmore, 2002, p. 1. For my reflection on the issue of the relation of Marx to Marxism I follow Rockmore's convincing argument.

traditional Marxism and to engage with Marx's thought as a living, breathing critique of contemporary society.

In conclusion, the notion of the 'liberated Marx' opens up new possibilities for understanding Marx's thought in the contemporary world. By freeing Marx from the constraints of traditional Marxism, we can engage with his ideas in a more nuanced and critical way, one that takes seriously both his philosophical and political dimensions. This is the legacy that Žižek and Karatani have bequeathed to us, and it is one that we must continue to develop and explore in the years to come.

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