

Reading Marx as a 'trouble-making journalist' who explored the use of satire and scorn as a political strategy in his writings

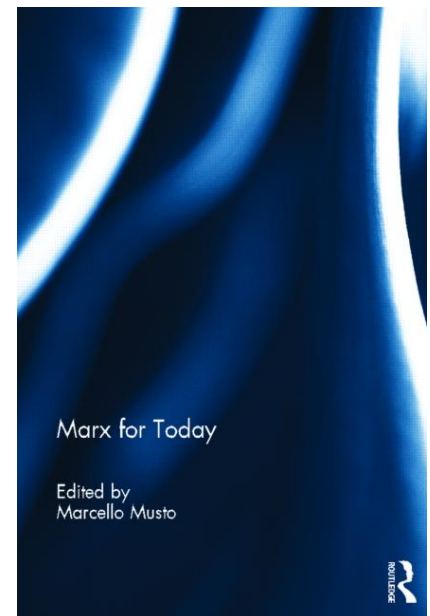
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*Since the onset of global crisis in recent years, academics and economic theorists have been drawn to Marx's analysis of the inherent instability of capitalism. The rediscovery of Marx is based on his continuing capacity to explain the present. In the context of what some commentators have described as a "Marx renaissance", the aim of this book, edited by **Marcello Musto**, is to make a close study of Marx's principal writings in relation to the major problems of our own society, and to show why and how some of his theories constitute a precious tool for the understanding and critique of the world in the early twenty-first century. Reviewed by **Nick Taylor**.*



Marx for Today. Marcello Musto (ed.) Routledge. April 2012.

[Marcello Musto](#) has produced an edited volume which provides not only a robust defence of the continuing relevance of Marx to our times but also new and challenging perspectives for those already accepting of such relevance. Musto, a Visiting Professor of Political Theory at York University (Toronto), has considerable experience in both areas, having previously edited [Karl Marx's Grundrisse 150 Years Later](#). Indeed, the depth and breadth of his knowledge of Marx's texts can hardly be in doubt, as he has carried out extensive research on the latest historical-critical edition of the collected works of Marx and Engels, known as [MEGA](#)². Here this knowledge is demonstrated in Musto's introduction which outlines some of the ways in which twentieth-century Marxism distorted Marx's thought and why we should celebrate a revival of interest in the original texts. It also provides a useful chronology of Marx's writings across his lifetime.



Marx for Today is split into two parts. Part One offers new interpretations of Marx's writings and Part Two presents the 'global reception' of Marx across a range of countries including South Korea, China, France as well as Hispanic America. The first set of essays are likely to have a much wider appeal; Marxist scholars will find the shorter global reception surveys of useful reference, providing as they do a "who's who" of those who have published on Marx in the last decade or so across the world.

The new interpretations in Part One offer a comprehensive look at Marx's thought and feature a number of notable scholars such as Kevin Anderson, George Comninel, Terrell Carver, Michael Lebowitz, Rick Wolff and Ellen Wood (whose chapter is in large part a reprint of a 1997 article). Stand-out contributions come from Anderson on Marx and non-western societies, nationalism and ethnicity, Musto himself in a chapter on alienation and Carver on Marx's rhetoric. [Rick Wolff](#) also provides an excellent chapter outlining a Marxist approach to the global financial crisis and some suggestions for installing democracy in the workplace.

Anderson's chapter challenges the view – common to post-colonial critics – that Marx was eurocentric, that he was unconcerned with race, nationalism and ethnicity and that he prescribed a single path to development. He shows another side to Marx, one which came to focus increasingly on and give support to resistance to colonialism in India, national liberation in Ireland and Poland, and anti-slavery movements in the U.S. Of particular interest is the existence of notes that Marx made in his last years of anthropological studies in India and elsewhere, many analysing communal forms of property and some of which have yet to be published.

Carver's chapter urges us to read Marx as a 'trouble-making journalist' and explores the use of satire and scorn as a political strategy in his writings, in particular a little-known piece called 'Herr Vogt'. Marx's rhetorical flourishes, Carver argues, had a serious, if cryptic purpose: 'the parodic qualities of the presentation – and subtle ironies of the covertly critical wit – misled many if not most readers into reproducing as truth the very "truths" that Marx was painstakingly ... deconstructing as collective illusions.' Similar rhetorical strategies, we are told, may be found in Jon Stewart's "Daily Show" or *Private Eye*, if only in method.

What many of the contributions highlight is the importance of returning to Marx's texts to see what he actually wrote, rather than relying on second-hand characterizations. The diversity of topics in this book suggests that there is still much to be salvaged from the original works. But nowhere are we told that there is one, "true" representation of the author; on the contrary, many of the chapters celebrate the multiplicity of Marxisms that exists to the present day. What would have been welcome in Part Two of the book on Marx's 'global reception' is more of a joining-up of the Marxist intellectual scene with national histories – something that Sobrino manages well in his piece on Marxism in Hispanic America, a task perhaps made simpler due to the violent history of left-right political conflicts in the region.

I would recommend this book to those already familiar with some of Marx's works. Though most of the chapters are accessible and the introduction provides an outline of Marx's intellectual objectives, some prior knowledge of the texts will bring greater rewards for the reader.

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In this special episode we visit the Marxism 2012 Festival in London's Bloomsbury to hear the latest from Marxist thinkers and activists. Professor of European Studies at King's College London, Alex Callinicos, speaks about austerity and how Karl Marx's theories have found increasing relevance in today's recession-weary world. We then take a look at the leftist movements across the Atlantic with Eli Zaretsky, Professor of History at The New School for Social Research in New York. He talks to us about his latest book *Why America Needs a Left*, the rise of the Tea Party and how President Obama failed his left-leaning supporters.

Presented by Amy Mollett and Cheryl Brumley. Produced by Cheryl Brumley.

Music courtesy of Harri at [freesound.org](#) for his song Hypno5 as well as Thee

Faction for their song "Ready". Published 19th July 2012.



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