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REVIEWS

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SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, *SURPLUS-ENJOYMENT: A GUIDE FOR THE NON-PERPLEXED*,  
BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC, LONDON, 2022.

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It seems that the COVID-19 pandemic, which started in 2020, announced the beginning of a series of societal crises that have only been exacerbated in 2022: the new economic recession, which has been on the horizon even before the pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the various consequences of the climate crisis like droughts and forest fires across Europe. All of these, seemingly disparate, events call for critical reflection about the underlying conditions of their possibility and for thinking about possible paths that humanity can take in order to tackle their consequences. Therefore, the summer of 2022 graced us with a fitting new piece of radical theory, *Surplus-Enjoyment: A Guide for The Non-Perplexed*, the latest addition to the enormous bibliography of the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek.

Like many of his previous works, *Surplus-Enjoyment* should not be seen as disinterested philosophizing or as a value-neutral socio-cultural analysis. This book is an example of “theoretical practice” in the Althusserian sense: an engagement with various theoretical notions and problems that are closely tied to existing social contradictions. Therefore, it is not just a piece of academic

writing, but an attempt at an engaged intervention with a goal of influencing the way readers think about problems that plague us globally. *Surplus-Enjoyment* fits with Žižek’s general style of writing about important topics in a provocative way which aims to induce a feeling of urgency in his readers. Also, this book is aligned with an intensely engaged period of Žižek’s work (starting around 2015) that is characterized by various attempts at thinking through the possibilities for social change. Various chapters of *Surplus-Enjoyment* are focused on this topic both in the more abstract theoretical parts and in the parts where Žižek is analyzing social and cultural problems more concretely.

The book *Surplus-Enjoyment* consists of four chapters which are preceded by a relatively short introduction. The introduction aims at connecting the four chapters by giving a general overview of their content but, more importantly, its goal is to present the general nature of the book to its readers. As Žižek claims, his intention is to engage with the “topsy-turvy” aspects of our current world. More precisely, he claims that our current historical reality is permeated with crises which point to the inevitability of large-scale social

change. Therefore, he intends to analyze how those crises are being reproduced as well as how we could fight them. As Žižek admits in the introduction, the chapters are written in his recognizable erratic style, characterized by a constant shifting between topics and numerous examples through which he illustrates theoretical points. Hence, the experience of reading *Surplus-Enjoyment* may invoke conflicting emotions in its readers. The process of going through the chapters can feel as an exciting journey through the thought process of one of the greatest contemporary thinkers; at the same, however, trying to find a common thread that connects various topics, concepts, and examples that Žižek touches upon can feel as a chore which definitely lessens the quality of the reading experience.

As Žižek himself claims in the introduction, *Surplus-Enjoyment* was written as a “reader’s report”, since every chapter is inspired by a certain text. In each of the four chapters he develops his concepts and analyses as a response to texts that theoretically deal with pertinent social issues. In the first chapter, Žižek reflects on the current climate crisis by trying to understand the relationship between ecological problems and the nature of capitalism. He does this through a dialogue with Kohei Saito’s book *Karl Marx’s Ecosocialism*. In the second chapter, Žižek deals with the problematic relationship between psychoanalysis and politics by reflecting on Gabriel Tupinamba’s book *The Desire of Psychoanalysis*. He relates this discussion to the contemporary debate on the nature of gender and gives his take on the question of the relationship between gender and sex. The third chapter is dedicated to the traditional

object of Žižek’s critique – contemporary permissive culture and the nature of authority within it. By using Lacanian concepts like Law and the super-ego and by reflecting on Frenk Ruda’s book *Abolishing Freedom*, he illustrates how in contemporary postmodern culture subjects are made to “desire” their own oppression. The topic of this chapter transports into the fourth chapter where Žižek develops and illustrates his understanding of “subjective destitution,” a concept developed originally by Lacan. While reflecting on Saroj Giri’s understanding of this concept, he presents it as a form of subjectivity that characterizes actors of radical social change thereby showing the readers what kind of subjectivity is capable of resisting forms of oppression he presented in the previous chapter.

*Surplus-Enjoyment: A Guide for The Non-Perplexed* is definitely a timely piece of theoretical reflection, desperately needed in a historical period saturated with contingency and feelings of perplexity. Žižek is not known for proposing practical solutions in his work, claiming that his job as a philosopher is first and foremost to ask the right questions. *Surplus-Enjoyment* is not an exception to this for the most part; nevertheless, it can definitely be said that it stands out, compared to his other works, with its sense of urgency and calls for immediate global cooperation as the only solution for numerous crises that have beset our world. Therefore, even though it is not an easy read, *Surplus-Enjoyment* is a valuable addition to the edifice of critical theory and shows how Žižek’s original combination of Hegelian philosophy and Lacanian psychoanalysis can give priceless insights into our contemporaneity.