



SITUATED

Theoretical Practices in State Socialist Europe

MARXISM

Edited by
Adela Hîncu,
Stefan Baghiu,
Alex Cistelecan, and
Christian Ferencz-Flatz

Situated Marxism

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Central European University Press
Budapest–Vienna–New York–Amsterdam

The publication of this book is made possible by a grant from the Romanian Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS/CCCDI-UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2020-0707, within PNCDI III.

Cover illustration: Marx and Engels statue at Jászai Mari Square, DOK/FTV-ÉGA/176/82-47/2/10, Construction Documentation and Information Center, Budapest.

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 96 3386 873 7

e-ISBN 978 96 3386 874 4 (pdf)

e-ISBN 978 96 3386 875 1 (accessible ePub)

DOI 10.5117/9789633868737

NUR 686



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Acknowledgements

This volume is the result of the exploratory research project “Philosophy in Socialist Romania: A Case Study in Institutionalized Thought,” funded by the Romanian Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS/CCCDI–UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2020-0707, within PNCDI III. Hosted at the “Alexandru Dragomir” Institute of Philosophy in Bucharest, the project was led by Alex Cistelecan and included Stefan Baghiu, Christian Ferencz-Flatz, and Adela Hîncu as researchers, with the essential administrative support of Ramona Ferencz-Flatz. What started as a project that aimed to situate philosophy institutionally, epistemically, and in relation to other disciplines in one national context developed into a comparative endeavor and later the transnational research project “Philosophy in Late Socialist Europe: Theoretical Practices in the Face of Polycrisis,” led by Siyaves Azeri at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca.

We thank Paul Mihai Paraschiv for language editing, and the Construction Documentation and Information Center, Budapest, for granting permission for the use of the cover photo, the Marx and Engels statue at Jászai Mari Square in Budapest, Hungary, DOK/FTV-ÉGA/176/82-47/2/10. The seven-meter-high monument was created by sculptor Segesdy György and architect Schall József from gray granite, and it was inaugurated next to the headquarters of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party in 1971. We are especially grateful to our editor Jen McCall for her support of the project at Central European University Press and at Amsterdam University Press.

Introduction: Situating Marxism in State Socialist Europe

*Adela Hîncu, Stefan Baghiu, Alex Cistelecan,
Christian Ferencz-Flatz*

Abstract: Previous historiography on the Marxist thought of state socialist Europe has taken the perspective of ideology, state repression and censorship, or biographical and institutional changes. This volume proposes studies of Eastern European Marxism on its own terms and *in situ*: in relation to its changing conceptual and epistemological configuration over time, as well to the institutional, social, and historical contexts in which Marxism was situated. The introduction lays out an analytical framework for situated Marxism as well as the main arguments emerging from the studies on Marxist philosophy of science, Marxist social thought, and futurology and global studies included in the volume. It argues for the continued relevance of Eastern European Marxism within a broader history of postwar theoretical practices.

Keywords: Marxist-Leninist thought; Eastern European philosophy; socialist epistemology; comparative history of state socialism; Cold War intellectual history; intellectual exchanges

Few historical conjunctures saw philosophy play as central a role in the self-construction of a new sociopolitical order as in postwar Eastern Europe. Whether dogmatically, creatively, or instrumentally, Marxism-Leninism represented for several decades the scientific basis for understanding nature, society, and the changing conditions of the postwar global order. This was neither a straightforward nor a homogeneous process throughout the region. While scholarship has explored some of the institutional transformations involved, as well as the often dramatic effects these had on the individual

biographies of philosophers trained before the Second World War,¹ engagement with the Marxist philosophical thought of the postwar period on its own terms and as situated in the specific contexts of Eastern Europe has become more common only over the past decade.² This volume offers the first collective and comparative engagement with the Marxist philosophy of state socialist Europe since *The Road to Disillusion: From Critical Marxism to Post-Communism in Eastern Europe*, edited by Raymond Taras in 1992. It covers almost the entire region as well as two case studies from the Soviet Union, but moves away from the model of comprehensive national surveys. Instead, the twelve chapters proceed thematically, examining the making and unmaking of orthodoxy (part I), socialist philosophical takes on global issues (part II), and re-readings and resignifications across time and the so-called East–West divide (part III). Case studies from Marxist philosophy of science, Marxist humanism, and Marxist futurology, among others, collectively call into question the very categories of orthodoxy and heterodoxy that have structured the field of research into state socialist philosophy so far, re-signifying them thematically, comparatively, and transnationally. What we call “situated Marxism” is the result of this complex work of contextualization and historicization of Marxist philosophical thought and of the categories that have been used to define it. Analyzing Eastern European Marxist theoretical practices *in situ* means relating them both to their internal conceptual and epistemic configuration, as well as to their institutional, social, and historical contexts, and most of all, analyzing precisely the situational relation between these two levels—the internal dynamics and configuration of theory, and its immediate and mediated socio-historical context.

The existing literature on Marxist philosophy in socialist Eastern Europe, produced before 1989/1991 or in the immediate postsocialist period, saw philosophy and intellectual discourse more generally as “dangerous ideology,” a reflection of state policy and of the shifting sociopolitical aspirations of the state socialist regimes, sustained through repressive state censorship.³

1 For the introduction of Marxism-Leninism in universities during the so-called Sovietization period, see John Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945–1956* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

2 For much of the scholarship on this topic, see *Studies in East European Thought*, which has published in recent years edited issues on Evald Ilyenkov (2024), the reception of existentialist philosophy in socialist Eastern Europe (2023), Jan Patočka (2021), Merab Mamardashvili (2019), Mikhail Lifshits (2016), or the Marxist roots of science studies (2015), among others.

3 See, e.g., Vladimir Tismăneanu, *The Crisis of Marxist Ideology in Eastern Europe: The Poverty of Utopia* (London: Routledge, 1988).

At the same time, observers and analysts were particularly interested in instances of criticism “from within,” especially during the heyday of Marxist revisionism in the region.⁴ While this perspective did not impede foundational analyses of the philosophical arguments articulated within the Marxist-Leninist framework,⁵ the perception of philosophy as instrumental fed directly into teleological accounts that wove the fall of state socialism and the failure of critical Marxism together.⁶ Consequently, interest in the Marxist philosophy of state socialism almost entirely disappeared in the first postsocialist decades, despite parallel efforts to historicize postwar Western Marxism and especially the New Left for critical analyses of the present.

This volume challenges the existing consensus regarding Eastern European Marxism, which was constructed mainly as anti-communist metahistory after the fall of the authoritarian regimes in the region and in the Soviet Union. This consensus posits that philosophy in this area amounted to a dogmatic compromise made in the face of politics, and that Marxism failed to evolve in the postwar period except through Western post-Marxist developments. Although many of the contributions in this volume demonstrate that Marxism in general, and dialectical materialism in particular, lost significant ground by the late socialist period, the paths leading to that fatigue are far from straightforward. Taken together, they tell a story of both institutional dependency and social engagement, of both

4 See, e.g., Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: The Founders; The Golden Age; The Breakdown*, trans. P. S. Salla (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), first published in Polish in 1976 and English in 1978. James H. Satterwhite, *Varieties of Marxist Humanism: Philosophical Revision in Postwar Eastern Europe* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992).

5 On science and philosophy, see, e.g., Loren Graham, *Science and Philosophy in the Soviet Union* (New York: Knopf, 1972); and Loren Graham, *Science, Philosophy, and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987). On the configuration of Soviet dialectical and historical materialism, see Gustav A. Wetter, *Dialectical Materialism: A Historical and Systematic Survey of Philosophy in the Soviet Union* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958); J. M. Bocheński, *Soviet Russian Dialectical Materialism* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1963). For a survey of the main representatives of Romanian Marxism, covering also the state socialist period, see Alex Cistelecan and Andrei State, eds., *Plante exotice: Teoria și practica marxiștilor români* [Exotic plants: The theory and practice of Romanian Marxists] (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2014). For Czechoslovakia, see Jan Mervart and Jiří Růžička, *Rehabilitate Marx!: The Czechoslovak Party Intelligentsia and Post-Stalinist Modernity* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2025).

6 Tismăneanu, *The Crisis of Marxist Ideology in Eastern Europe*; Raymond C. Taras, ed., *The Road to Disillusion: From Critical Marxism to Post-Communism in Eastern Europe* (Armonk, NY: N. E. Sharpe, 1992). Conversely, for the Marxist critiques (both Western and Eastern) of state socialism, see Marcel van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union: A Survey of Critical Theories and Debates since 1917* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007), which covers Eastern European authors such as Milovan Djilas, Rudolf Bahro, or Pavel Câmpeanu.

compliance with party ideology and revolutionary incentives, and of both national frameworks of organizing thought and international cooperation—often extending beyond the rigidly perceived political communities of the Cold War.

Chapters in this volume offer an approach to the situated Marxist philosophy of state socialist Europe that foregrounds its intellectual stakes as they shifted throughout the postwar period in relation to the articulation of different disciplines, as well as within the transnational and international contexts in which these disciplines were increasingly integrated from the 1960s onward. The volume seeks to write the history of Marxist philosophical thought during state socialism into the broader intellectual history of the postwar period. Marxist authors from Eastern Europe offered reflections about science and scientificity, were invested in social and political critique, and addressed the pressing question of the future of humankind—geopolitical, sociocultural, and ecological—while continuously redefining their relation to both past and contemporary non-Marxist philosophy.⁷ The volume documents the concern with transforming orthodox Marxist thought in postwar socialist Europe without it becoming revisionist, that is, while attempting to hold ground against intellectually and politically non-Marxist positions (such as idealist philosophy, irrationalism, or ethnonationalism). Some of these transformations occurred at the level of epistemology; others resulted from responding to emerging global concerns; and still others arose from engagement with and resignifications of Western philosophy, both Marxist and non-Marxist. Although orthodoxies were the first to be abandoned after 1989/1991, they endured, often still creatively, through to the late socialist period.

Academic interest in the history of philosophy under state socialism has been revived in recent years in response to several developments. First, a generation of researchers trained during socialism has begun offering

⁷ Some of these connections are also addressed in the podcast series *Revisiting State Socialism*, stemming from the project “Philosophy in Late Socialist Europe: Theoretical Practices in the Face of Polycrisis.” For the intellectual history of postwar East Central Europe, see, among others, Balázs Trencsényi, Michal Kopeček, Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčič, Maria Falina, Mónika Baár, and Maciej Janowski, *Negotiating Modernity in the “Short Twentieth Century” and Beyond*, part I: 1918–1968, and part II: 1968–2018, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Zsófia Lóránd, Adela Hîncu, Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc, and Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz, eds., *Texts and Contexts from the History of Feminism and Women’s Rights: East Central Europe, Second Half of the Twentieth Century* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2024). In respect to “crisis discourse” more broadly, and in state socialism more specifically, see Balázs Trencsényi, Lucija Balikić, Una Blagojević, and Isidora Grubački, eds., *East Central European Crisis Discourses in the Twentieth Century: A Never-Ending Story?* (London: Routledge, 2024).

new readings of the period. Second, contemporary interest in political economy, cybernetics, ecology, futurology, and related areas has extended to their historical roots in the philosophical thought of socialist Eastern Europe. There has also been a marked resurgence of interest in various trends within historical materialism and its Soviet articulation. Finally, an ever more pronounced tendency in contemporary philosophy and intellectual history is to read key moments in philosophy from a socially and historically grounded perspective, thus combining philosophical hermeneutics, ideology critique, and socio-political contextualization with the latest quantitative methods. This volume brings together chapters that trace the main lines of argumentation in the Marxist philosophy of science, Marxist social thought (including Marxist humanism), and in futurology and global studies as they were articulated in Hungary, Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, the GDR, and the Soviet Union. Taken together, these contributions highlight, on the one hand, continuities across national contexts rooted in the common project of developing a Marxist analysis of nature, society, and internationalism / later globalization. On the other hand, they reveal the varying emphases and perspectives shaped by the local intellectual and institutional contexts in which philosophers operated, and by the different degrees of access they had to transnational networks at different moments in time.

The main thematic fields addressed in the volume have drawn increased interest in the historiography on the social sciences and humanities under state socialism.⁸ There have been studies on the philosophy of science and science studies in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union,⁹ social thought and sociology,¹⁰ futurology and systems theory,¹¹ as well as a growing body

8 For an overview of this historiography, see Adela Hîncu, "Introduction: Peripheral Observations and Their Observers," in *Social Sciences in the "Other Europe" since 1945* (Budapest: Pasts, Inc. Center for Historical Studies, 2018). For recent investigations of literary and cultural policies of state socialism, see Stefan Baghiu, Ovio Olaru, and Andrei Terian, eds., *Beyond the Iron Curtain: Revisiting the Literary System of Communist Romania* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021).

9 Elena Aranova and Simone Turchetti, eds., *Science Studies during the Cold War and Beyond: Paradigms Defected* (New York: Palgrave, 2016).

10 Ulf Brunnbauer, Claudia Kraft, and Martin Schulze-Wessel, eds., *Sociology and Ethnography in East-Central and South-East Europe: Scientific Self-Description in State Socialist Countries* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2011); Matthias Duller, "Regime and Sociology: A Comparative History of Sociology in Postwar Europe with Qualitative Comparative Analysis," *Social Science History* 46, no. 1 (2022): 143–72.

11 Jenny Andersson and Eglė Rindzevičiūtė, eds., *Forging the Future: The Struggle for the Long-Term in Transnational Science and Politics* (London & New York: Routledge, 2015); Eglė Rindzevičiūtė, *The Power of Systems: How Policy Sciences Opened Up the Cold War World* (Ithaca,

of scholarship that re-situates Eastern Europe within global history and economy,¹² including in terms of knowledge production.¹³ Nevertheless, weaving these different strands of philosophical thought back together has remained a challenge. Reconstructing the internal logic of Marxist-Leninist philosophy in socialist Eastern Europe—dialectical materialism, historical materialism, and scientific socialism, roughly focusing on the scientific study of nature, society, and political praxis—requires careful attention to contextual and diachronic developments. This volume offers an entry point by reconsidering what has historically been defined as orthodox and heterodox philosophical thought and consequently integrated into historiography as such. Different chapters show that orthodoxy could be a flexible and diverse field of intellectual activity, holding its ground while also conceiving Marxist philosophy as a dynamic, self-actualizing body of thought rather than a static dogma. Conversely, the authors also explore the mechanisms by which anti-dogmatic positions could serve as vehicles for genuinely Marxist revisionism, but also for conservative, ethno-nationalist, or neoliberal political thought.

The chapters draw on a wide range of material, from archives to personal correspondence, memoires, and oral history interviews, as well as a rich corpus of published sources (philosophical journals, philosophical literature in original language, other media sources). In broad terms, the authors share the methodological approaches of intellectual history, the history of science, and hermeneutics, analyzing texts as they were embedded in their respective biographical, intellectual, and sociocultural contexts. At the same

NY: Cornell University Press, 2016); Jenny Andersson, *The Future of the World: Futurology, Futurists, and the Struggle for the Post-Cold War Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

12 Johanna Bockman, *Markets in the Name of Socialism: The Left-Wing Origins of Neoliberalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Besnik Pula, *Globalization under and after Socialism: The Evolution of Transnational Capital in Central and Eastern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018); Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *The Soviet Union and the Construction of the Global Market: Energy and the Ascent of Finance in Cold War Europe, 1964–1971* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023); Eszter Bartha, Tamás Krausz, and Bálint Mezei, eds., *State Socialism in Eastern Europe: History, Theory, Anti-Capitalist Alternatives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

13 James Mark, Artemy M. Kalinovsky, and Steffi Marung, *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020); James Mark et al., *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022). On the history of international law and socialist jurisprudence, see Raluca Grosescu and Ned Richardson-Little, eds., *Socialism and International Law: The Cold War and Its Legacies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024); Cosmin Cercel, *Towards a Jurisprudence of State Communism: Law and the Failure of Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2017).

time, the volume asks about the continued relevance of the Marxist-Leninist philosophy of socialist Eastern Europe, whether in connection to present-day struggles around ecological, housing, and human rights, or in imagining more economically and socially just futures for all.

The making and unmaking of orthodoxy

At the core of this volume is the question of Marxist orthodoxy in postwar Eastern Europe (and the Soviet Union). While this theme runs through all the chapters, the contributions by Alex Cistelecan, Bakar Berekashvili, Monika Woźniak, and Ondřej Holub thematize it most prominently. Analyzing the evolution of dialectical and historical materialism textbooks in socialist Romania, Cistelecan asks how dogmatic official Marxist philosophy actually was to begin with, and what happened to the dogma as it was continuously challenged into the late socialist period.¹⁴ If we understand orthodoxy as philosophical continuity with the works of Marx and Engels, Cistelecan shows that the starting point for official philosophy in socialist Romania—the Marxism-Leninism established via Soviet mediation after the Second World War—already marked a significant departure from the classic formulations of the two thinkers. As essential background to the debates about orthodoxy elsewhere in socialist Eastern Europe, Cistelecan recapitulates the development of Marxist-Leninist philosophy in the Soviet Union. The trajectories it then took in the Romanian context after 1948 are both broadly shared across the region and specific to the local setting: from the vigilant orthodoxy of the 1950s to the extensive debates of the 1960s on the relationship between historical materialism and particular socio-historical sciences, to reimagining orthodoxy with a “human face” in the 1970s, and finally to an all-encompassing “general philosophy” with little historical and even less dialectical substance in the 1980s. Marxist philosophy, supposedly the ideological core of state socialism, concludes Cistelecan, was in fact continuously depoliticized, and as Katherine Verdery

¹⁴ For a more detailed analysis of this topic, see the original version of the chapter in Romanian: Alex Cistelecan, “Materialism dialectic și istoric în comunismul românesc I” [Dialectical and Historical Materialism in Romanian Communism I] *Transilvania*, no. 6–7 (2021): 12–24. Alex Cistelecan, “Materialism dialectic și istoric în comunismul românesc II” [Dialectical and Historical Materialism in Romanian Communism I], *Transilvania*, no. 12 (2022): 14–23. Cistelecan has also addressed the issue of “local agency” in socialist Eastern Europe in Alexandru Cistelecan, “*Le sujet supposé agir*: Assessing Local Agency and Structural Determinacy in Socialist and Postsocialist Europe,” *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 33, no. 1 (2024): 87–108.

had previously argued, de-Marxisized.¹⁵ Unlike Verdery, however, Cistelecan focuses on the mechanisms inherent to Marxist-Leninist thought itself, rather than on the rise of national communism as a competing ideology. He concludes that whereas dialectical materialism shifted from being “the supreme guide of the sciences” to “an empty terminological umbrella,” historical materialism was rendered obsolete by the evolution of the very regime it had ideologically underpinned towards the supposed resolution of the tensions that historical materialism was meant to address.

The comparison between this evolution of orthodoxy in an Eastern European context and the role of orthodoxy in Soviet Georgia is instructive and challenges some common assumptions in the region’s historiography, especially the bias towards heterodox Marxism and non-Marxist philosophy. Bakar Berekashvili offers an account of the development of Marxist thought across two generations of philosophers in the Georgian context, where revisionism or reform socialism never played a formative role.¹⁶ The supposed absence of meaningful revisionist thinking has been interpreted in the Romanian context as a consequence of the regime’s rapid neo-Stalinization,¹⁷ although more recent scholarship has reconstructed a history of humanist Marxist thought dating from the 1960s, which, while never becoming central to official ideology, persisted throughout the socialist period.¹⁸ In Soviet Georgia, however, Berekashvili argues that maintaining orthodoxy in the understanding of the relationship between Marxism, science, and society—and adhering to the Marxist-Leninist disciplinary structure of scientific communism, political economy, and historical materialism—was part of sustaining the ideological struggle against capitalism and bourgeois academia, while reaffirming the intertwined political and scientific mission of Marxism for the construction of communism. Berekashvili introduces the main Marxist thinkers in Soviet Georgia, little if at all known in English-language scholarship, and their approach to imperialism, anti-communism,

¹⁵ See Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics under Ceaușescu’s Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

¹⁶ For the postcommunist developments of Georgian and Soviet leftist thought and nationalism, see Bakar Berekashvili, “Nationalism and Hegemony in Post-Communist Georgia,” *Caucasus Edition–Journal of Conflict Transformation* 3, no. 2 (2018): 67–79; Bakar Berekashvili, “After the Soviet Union: A Melancholy of Unwanted Experiences,” *New Eastern Europe* 6, no. 49 (2021): 159–64; and Bakar Berekashvili, “Ideological Dialectics of Post-Soviet Nationalism,” *The Copernicus Journal of Political Studies* 2 (2021): 73–90.

¹⁷ See Vladimir Tismăneanu, “From Arrogance to Irrelevance: The Avatars of Marxism in Romania,” in Raymond C. Taras, ed., *The Road to Dissolution*, 135–50.

¹⁸ Adela Hîncu, “Social Science and Marxist Humanism beyond Collectivism in Socialist Romania,” *History of the Human Sciences* 35, no. 2 (2022): 77–100.

the social role of science, and communist morality as some of the crucial topics of Marxist criticism in the postwar period. Maintaining orthodoxy did not preclude meaningful engagement with Western scholarship, as shown by the Georgian Marxists' reception of C. Wright Mills. Ultimately, however, Berekashvili paints the picture of a principled and consistent commitment to Marxism-Leninism as the main philosophical, ideological, and political line from which dialog was possible.

With Monika Woźniak's chapter, the question of orthodoxy shifts from the level of Marxism's relationship to the political and ideological evolution of the socialist regime, as in Berekashvili's account, to the inner workings of philosophical theory. Whereas the evolution of dialectical materialism in socialist Romania away from a meaningful orthodoxy appears to have been swift and relatively unproblematic, the situation in socialist Poland, as reconstructed by Woźniak, reveals the complexity of redefining orthodoxy in the historical understanding of the relationship between nature and science. Woźniak closely analyzes the evolution of the dialectical materialist thought of Polish philosophers Jarosław Ładosz and Czesław Nowiński, arguing that while they never politically opposed the official party line, their engagement with epistemology, particularly the theory of reflection, demonstrates a deeper grappling with Stalinism than that seen in the work of Georgian orthodox Marxists discussed by Berekashvili, though still without becoming revisionists.¹⁹ Instead, they arrived at "new orthodoxies" in the philosophy of science that were closer to Lenin's interpretation of Marxism and engaged in dialog with Jean Piaget's genetic epistemology. In their respective approaches to mathematics and biology, Woźniak identifies a productive dialectical materialism "that avoids both subjectivism and relativism," all the while taking them in different directions that emphasized practice or structure in their philosophy of science. Woźniak sees the integral approach both philosophers sought to maintain through their rethinking of orthodoxy as a potentially valuable inspiration for the philosophy of science today, particularly in its renewed interest in the relationship between science and nature.

Compared to Jarosław Ładosz and Czesław Nowiński, the intellectual trajectory of Slovak Marxist Rudolf Šíma illustrates the more familiar mechanisms by which Marxist orthodox thought was redefined in a context of

¹⁹ For an account of humanist tendencies within Polish socialism, see Monika Woźniak, "Dialectical Logic or Logical Dialectics? The Polish Discussion on the Principle of Non-contradiction (1946–1957)," *Studies in East European Thought* 74, no. 1 (2022): 111–27; and Monika Woźniak, "The Anthropological (Humanist) Tendency within Marxist Philosophy in Poland," *Studies in East European Thought* (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-024-09686-7>.

political reformism and subsequently retracted during periods of political “normalization.” Often told as a story of the creative transformation of Marxist thought from humanist positions, open to criticism and repression because of its political implications, Ondřej Holub’s account instead raises the question, also addressed by Una Blagojević in a later chapter, of the contradictory intellectual potentialities that emerged through challenges to orthodoxy.²⁰ Trained in the 1950s, Šíma was initially a direct beneficiary of Soviet modernization and a staunch proponent of Marxist determinism. Yet in the 1960s, he began incorporating ideas from philosophical anthropology to rethink the relationship between determinism and individual freedom, advocating for the free exchange of opinions, and reflecting on the issues of bureaucratism and socialist democracy. Holub follows Šíma as he developed his ideas into a humanist eschatology centered on the notion of a “cosmocentric sense of being,” which notably accommodated spirituality, irrationalism, and parapsychology as integral, even necessary, parts of humanity’s cosmic becoming. During normalization, Šíma abandoned this line of thought, adapting instead to the objectivism of the late socialist period. Holub shows that through these transformations, Marxist determinism remained the bedrock but also the ideological unifying framework for both orthodox and revisionist humanist thinking. The same internal contradiction resonates through all the accounts of orthodoxy in this first part of the volume, whether it is interpreted as potentially hazardous (Cistelecan, Berekashvili) or potentially productive (Woźniak, Holub) for the development of Marxist philosophy during socialism.

Global issues, socialist concerns

Some of the internal contradictions of Marxist orthodoxy identified in the first part of the volume also appear in the approach that socialist philosophy took toward the global issues of the time, as it sought to redefine them. One of the most prominent topics to emerge in the 1960s–70s were the ecological consequences of industrial development on a planetary scale. The 1972 Club of Rome report *The Limits to Growth*, which modeled ecological catastrophe

²⁰ For different intellectual biographies at the intersection of orthodoxy and revisionism, see Ondřej Holub, “To Live not by the Bomb, but by Reason: The Legal Philosophy of René Marcic and the Marxist Humanism of Ernst Fischer as a Confrontation between Two Perspectives on Civil Society in the Era of Chancellor Josef Klaus (1964–1970),” *Kontradikce/Contradictions* 3, no. 1 (2019): 13–35; Ondřej Holub, “Emanuel Famíra—The Man Who Was Not Longing for the Spring. The Portrait of an Orthodox Communist,” *Soudobé dějiny* 27, no. 2 (2020): 279–324.

under conditions of continued development and advocated limiting growth to achieve sustainable levels of resource use, demographic growth, and technological development, echoed forcefully throughout socialist Eastern Europe.²¹ In their account of the reception of *The Limits to Growth* and subsequent global models in socialist Romania, Christian Ferencz-Flatz and Adela Hîncu argue that while the ecological issue was understood primarily, but not exclusively, as a consequence of capitalism, it was also seen as a potential site for overcoming capitalism as a socioeconomic system based on the exploitation of both humans and nature. This approach, however, was not without contradictions, especially when it came to reconciling national and supranational interests. While being recognized as a global issue, the environmental crisis simultaneously raised socialist concerns for maintaining national sovereignty and for the de-ideologizing potential implicit in the broadly globalist language of “ecological philosophy.” Beyond these overarching concerns, the local engagement with the prospect of ecological crisis in the humanities, social, and economic sciences in socialist Romania ranged from the Marxist redefinition of the concept of revolution to integrate the potential for fundamental change by way of shifting from quantitative to qualitative growth in capitalist and socialist societies alike; to reflections on the social and economic inequalities exposed by different global models, particularly regarding underdeveloped countries of the Global South; to identifying the human resources for growth in terms of the potential of learning by anticipation and participation; to interventions at the level of political economy and the redefinition of the Marxist theory of expanded reproduction to account for the reproduction of the natural environment.

In analyses of the socialist debates on ecology, the future, or globalism, the question often arises whether Marxist philosophers truly believed in socialism’s potential to solve global issues, or whether this belief was taken for granted, almost as an ideological reflex, in their reflections on the future of the planet and humankind. This question is central to Jan Mervart’s account of global studies in late socialist Czechoslovakia, in which he focuses on the Marxist-Leninist theoretical underpinnings of the idea of a “new cosmic stage,” echoing some of Rudolf Šíma’s concerns in a very different register.²² The background to global studies was the extensive

²¹ For the broader context of ecological thinking in socialism, see the special issue on Ecosocialism: Daniel Rosenhaft Swain and Monika Woźniak, eds., *Kontradikce / Contradictions: Časopis pro kritické myšlení / A Journal for Critical Thought*, no. 1–2 (2022).

²² On the intellectual history of Czechoslovakia and especially Marxist thought, see, among others: Adam Hudek, Michal Kopeček, and Jan Mervart, eds., *Czechoslovakism* (London: Routledge, 2023); Jan Mervart, “Czechoslovak Marxist Humanism and the Revolution,” *Studies in East*

theorizing of the scientific and technological revolution dating back to the 1960s, but as Mervart shows, it was not until the first half of the 1980s that the field established itself in Czechoslovakia. Scholars engaged in this field expressed genuine optimism and confidence in socialism's ability to address global issues. In doing so, they not only reaffirmed the superiority of socialism over capitalism but went further to project a stage of development that transcended the model of socialism in one country (one of the main points of contention in the Romanian discussions). The result would be "a new interconnected planetary whole of socialist humanity and the living world," which Mervart identifies as the true measure of the enduring belief in Czechoslovakia, up to the very end of the socialist period, and partly prefiguring perestroika, in the potential of Marxist-Leninist theory and socialism more broadly to solve the global issues of humanity.

From this perspective, the case of socialist Romania's futurology, discussed in Stefan Baghiu and Alex Cistelecan's chapter, is particularly noteworthy. On the one hand, just like the intellectual constellation presented by Jan Mervart, futurology in socialist Romania developed in a political context shaped by de-Stalinization and peaceful coexistence, with a strong emphasis on the scientific and technological revolution. On the other hand, however, this intellectual practice emerged in a political and ideological setting that was less globally oriented and instead infused with sovereigntist and nationalist rhetoric. This peculiar stance of Romanian communism, according to Baghiu and Cistelecan, explains the particular nature of Romanian communist futurology, namely its highly cybernetic and algebraic prose. In this respect, the authors depart from the previous historiography on Romanian futurology and interpret this unique brand of socialist futurology developed by the local authors as a logical reflection of the regime's geopolitical and ideological orientation. Once the world and its future were no longer to be deciphered through the lens of class struggle and capitalism's contradictions, but rather as an open arena in which various sovereign nation-states pursued their own competitive advantage, an abstract, mathematical futurology came to replace the old, all-encompassing ambitions of dialectical materialism—stripped, however, of its dialectical engine and narrative. Having identified the specifics of Romanian communist futurology as a sort of *Diamat* without dialectics,

European Thought 69 (2017): 111–26; Jiří Růžička and Jan Mervart, "Marxism and Existentialism in State Socialist Czechoslovakia," *Studies in East European Thought* 75, no. 3 (2023): 399–416; Jan Mervart and Jiří Růžička, "Czechoslovak Post-Stalinism: A Distinct Field of Socialist Visions," *East Central Europe* 48, no. 2–3 (2021): 220–49.

Baghiu and Cistelecan conclude their contribution by unveiling the Kantian deadlocks undermining this discourse.

Closing the second part of the volume, Una Blagojević sets out to grapple with one of the most striking cases of intellectual and political discontinuity in socialist Eastern Europe—the shift of humanist Marxist intellectuals from the Yugoslav *Praxis* group from universalist to ethnonationalist positions on the issue of human rights in the late socialist period.²³ For Blagojević, the question of how this happened has so far been misframed, as it tends to reinforce the continued centrality of Western perspectives in the articulation of global issues and the marginal and passive role assigned to socialist thinkers. Rather than evaluating the latter by the standard of a supposedly universalist language of human rights, she argues that the language of human rights discourse itself should be understood as encompassing the tension between universalism and particularism. In the case of Yugoslavia, this tension was made explicit by *Praxis* intellectuals' challenge of the human rights framework established by the League of the Communists of Yugoslavia in the postwar period, which they saw as grounded in orthodox Marxist positions. While a "new humanism" was broadly embraced in official Marxist ideology with the establishment of self-management beginning in the 1950s, *Praxis* intellectuals developed personalist approaches that placed the human being as the central concern, rather than treating the individual within the context of overarching political and economic matters. According to Blagojević, this stance confronted the orthodox approach to socialist human rights, opening up the possibility for particularist, including ethnonationalist interpretations.

Marxist resignifications

The final central topic in the history of situated Marxism thought that this volume addresses is that of the Marxist reading and resignification of theoretical ideas circulating between the capitalist and socialist worlds. Issues

²³ On *Praxis* and the history of Marxist thought in Yugoslavia, see also Una Blagojević, "Worlds of *Praxis*: 1968, Intellectuals, and an Island in the Yugoslav Adriatic," in *Unsettled 1968 in the Troubled Present: Revisiting the 50 Years of Discussions from East and Central Europe*, eds. Aleksandra Konarzewska, Anna Nakai, and Michał Przeperski (London: Routledge, 2019), 7–23; Una Blagojević, "L'histoire intellectuelle globale et les marxistes humanistes yougoslaves," *Balkanologie. Revue d'études pluridisciplinaires* 17, no. 2 (2022); Una Blagojević, "Phenomenology and Existentialism in Dialogue with Marxist Humanism in Yugoslavia in the 1950s and 1960s," *Studies in East European Thought* 75, no. 3 (2023): 417–36.

of transfer, exchange, collaboration, or co-production have preoccupied historians of knowledge and science, as well as intellectual historians of socialism, for decades.²⁴ The case studies included here reflect this diversity of methodological approaches while integrating the issue of knowledge circulation into a broader concern with the establishment, reproduction, defense, and transformation of Marxist orthodoxy.

In his analysis of philosopher Lothar Kühne's resignification of functionalism after its initial rejection in the 1950s, Martin Küpper shows how aesthetics, architecture, design, and theory came together throughout the 1960s and 1970s, culminating in the height of aesthetic functionalism in the GDR in the early 1980s. As Küpper shows, the industrialization program of the GDR and its cultural revolution paved the way for a renewed interpretation of the aesthetic principles of the Bauhaus movement, which had flourished in the interwar period. Departing from an aesthetics centered on artworks and ornament, Kühne advocated a specifically socialist view of functionalism, framing architecture and object design primarily as social practices. Küpper's chapter traces the contorted development of this conception through to its final demise in late socialism, a period marked by reduced investments in infrastructure and modernization.

The two chapters by Jan Surman and Ádám Takács address the processes by which Western authors were resignified in socialist contexts with the engagement of the authors themselves. Surman reconstructs the very successful career of John Desmond Bernal in Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Poland, and the Soviet Union through an analysis of the translation of his works in these countries, and specifically by focusing on the paratexts accompanying them. Bernal, who gained prominence as a pro-Soviet peace activist in the postwar period, was already widely translated by the early 1960s. Surman shows that while epitexts focused on the intertwining of his scientific and political persona, peritexts, to which Bernal himself also contributed, sought to establish a more clearly deterministic relationship between the two. Whether presenting Bernal's scientific excellence as the basis for his critique of Western science and support for Marxist scholarship, or highlighting his peace activism over his scholarly work, Bernal's reception in socialist contexts was clearly ideological but not unilateral.

²⁴ For a recent case study on the topic of philosophy in socialist Eastern Europe, see the edited issue on the reception of existentialism: Christian Ferencz-Flatz and Alex Cistelecan, "From Fertile Hostility to Stale Benevolence: Guest Editors' Introduction," *Studies in East European Thought* 75, no. 3 (2023): 367–72; Christian Ferencz-Flatz and Alex Cistelecan, "Encounters: East/West Dialogs on Existence," *Studies in East European Thought* 75, no. 3 (2023): 373–97.

With his own involvement, Surman argues, Bernal became more influential in socialism—his translations forming “part of the effort to build a new socialist science”—than he had ever been in the West as a pioneer of science studies.²⁵

In his chapter, Ádám Takács discusses an instance of a more tumultuous reception of Western Marxism in the socialist East, particularly in Hungary: namely the case of Althusser.²⁶ While Althusser enjoyed wide reception in the socialist bloc in the 1970s, a dialogue in which the French Marxist himself actively participated, this was a case where East–West interaction did not lead to a gradual erosion of the boundaries between orthodoxy and reformism, or between Eastern and Western Marxism. Rather, it resulted in a hardening of these divisions. This should have been quite surprising, given that Althusser’s project shared, from the beginning, many affinities with the humanist and reformist Marxist attempts in the East—a decidedly anti-Stalinist stance, a call to return to Marx and his philosophy, and not least, a certain tension toward the local communist party as guardian of orthodoxy. However, as Takács shows in his survey of Althusser’s reception in a socialist context, the translation of his works led to quite the opposite result: his works were promoted, not without his consent, by orthodox authorities as a valuable philosophical tool in the battle against the humanist Marxism of Lukács’s Budapest School. This instrumental use of Althusser’s reception in the East explains why, despite the various cursory critiques voiced by many humanist Eastern Marxists—such as György Márkus, Ágnes Heller, but also Adam Schaff or Leszek Kołakowski—the dialogue articulated between them never went beyond tactical, ideological, and political demarcations, and did not develop into proper philosophical considerations.

²⁵ For a broader context, Jan Surman has written extensively on the history of science in East Central Europe before and after the Second World War: Jan Surman and Tomáš W. Pavlíček, “The Formal and the Informal in the History of Socialist Scholarly Interconnectedness in East Central Europe,” *NTM Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Wissenschaften, Technik und Medizin* (2024): 1–30; Jan Surman, “Imperial Science in Central and Eastern Europe,” *Histories* 2, no. 3 (2022): 352–61.

²⁶ For the case of socialist Hungary, Takács has also analyzed the reception of existentialism: Ádám Takács, “Unbalanced Exposure: Existentialism, Marxism, and Philosophical Culture in State Socialist Hungary,” *Studies in East European Thought* 75, no. 3 (2023): 437–53; as well as the parallel development of sociology: Ádám Takács, “The Heads and the Walls. From Professional Commitment to Oppositional Attitude in Hungarian Sociology in the 1960–1970s: The Cases of András Hegedüs, István Kemény, and Iván Szelényi,” *The Hungarian Historical Review: New Series of Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 6, no. 4 (2017): 856–82; Ádám Takács, “The Sociological Incident: State Socialism, Sociology and Social Critique in Hungary,” *Divinatio*, no. 42–43 (2016): 241–99.

Synthesizing questions raised in several of the preceding chapters, Siyaves Azeri's contribution takes Evald Ilyenkov's in-depth reading of Kant, in his 1971 essay "Humanism and Science," as a starting point for reflecting on the dichotomy of reason and emotion, which Azeri identifies as lying at the core of modern thought.²⁷ This dichotomy, he argues, also manifests in several classical philosophical oppositions and in the broader tension between humanism and science, which socialist philosophers often regarded as definitive of the contemporary age. As Azeri insightfully shows, this contradiction is not merely a recurring idiosyncrasy in the history of philosophy, but rather highlights an essential antinomy—one that socialist thought ultimately seeks to overcome. Thus, Azeri follows the way Marxist thinkers come to conflate the struggle against capitalist relations of production with a profound critique of key tenets of Western philosophy in order to shape the idea of an authentically humane science, which no longer dissociates ethics and value from true and objective knowledge.

While dealing primarily with issues pertaining to the history of ideas, and more precisely with the evolution and configuration of Marxist philosophy in the socialist bloc, the contributions in this volume are not without contemporary relevance. Many of the topics addressed in the following chapters can be seen as early iterations of today's major topics, as first approximations of the many facets of today's polycrisis: the climate emergency; the entanglements of global, regional, and national dynamics; the search for the "science of the future" and its corresponding "science of leadership"; the erosion and metastasis of the official ruling consensus; the challenges of humanism, anti-humanism, and post-humanism; as well as the crisis of capitalism and the potential pathways for socialism.

Examining how these challenges were addressed theoretically in recent history should not reinforce fatalistic notions of history as a series of endless cycles of crisis and collapse. Instead, reflecting on socialism's strategies for confronting its own polycrisis may offer a new perspective and renewed momentum for breaking the chains of today's moribund capitalism. Another world might still be possible, given that it was possible—and quite real—not that long ago.

²⁷ See also Siyaves Azeri, "Evald Ilyenkov's Marxian Critique of Epistemology and Education," *Science & Society* 84, no. 3 (2020): 342–68; Siyaves Azeri, "Vygotsky and Ilyenkov on Language, the 'Ideal' and the Constitution of Consciousness," *Socialism and Democracy* 33, no. 3 (2019): 9–33; Siyaves Azeri, "The Historical Possibility and Necessity of (Ilyenkov's) Anti-innatism," *Theory & Psychology* 27, no. 5 (2017): 683–702.

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Part I

The Making and Unmaking of Orthodoxy

1. Orthodoxy Unraveled: *Diamat* and *Histomat* in Communist Romania

Alex Cistelecan

Abstract: The chapter takes aim at the core of Marxist orthodoxy under state socialism, by analyzing the evolution of the official handbooks and courses of dialectical materialism and historical materialism in communist Romania. After briefly sketching the Marxian origins and the Soviet mediations of what came to be designated as 'dialectical materialism' and 'historical materialism', it traces the paths of evolution from the 1950s to the 1980s of these two institutionalized discourses in communist Romania, in a parallel journey which describes two paths of "de-Marxization," similar in outcome, yet different in their respective dynamics and configuration.

Keywords: Marxist orthodoxy; dialectical materialism; historical materialism; Eastern European philosophy; party doctrine

The question of the object, configuration, and evolution of Marxist philosophy in communist Romania has often been treated as self-evident in the existing historiography and therefore remains underexplored: obviously, it is assumed, communist ideology was one of the main determinants of the historical action of the former regime, and clearly, this ideology was the faithful political translation—even if mediated through Lenin and Stalin—of Marxist philosophy. Moreover, because communist regimes, and the Romanian one all the more so, proved to be unreformable, immune to evolution and change, it is implicitly assumed that the Marxist philosophy they professed and by which they justified themselves remained substantially unchanged, a rigid block of predefined

ideas and principles that tirelessly guided and legitimized the political practice of their rulers.¹

This chapter contributes to this question of the configuration, object, and stakes of official Marxist philosophy in communist Romania by analyzing the evolution of the textbooks of dialectical and historical materialism (henceforth: Diamat and Histomat) from this period and the discussions they generated. In turn, this analysis questions both of the aforementioned assumptions. It shows that, far from being a monolithic bloc of predefined ideas and principles unchanged over the decades, Marxist philosophy was in a state of continuous change. This change, of course, reflects developments in the immediate sociopolitical context, but it also traces a fairly coherent internal trajectory of evolution over the decades. This general direction of evolution, in fact, runs counter to the second assumption prevalent in historiography: the idea that the Marxist philosophy of communist Romania remained faithful—at least in spirit—to the philosophy of Marx and Engels. Instead, this chapter traces a continuous departure from their founding principles, which starts from the very beginning in 1948 with Stalinist Marxist-Leninist positions that were already significantly removed from those principles.

In this investigation, two questions are of particular interest, revealing the evolution of Marxist philosophy both from the outside and from within: on the one hand, how does the metaphilosophical perspective (the philosophy about philosophy—what it is or should be, what its object is, and what its role in society should be) evolve in the transition from Marx and Engels to Marxist philosophy in communist Romania? And on the other hand, how does the internal thematic and disciplinary configuration of this philosophy evolve throughout this period—what concepts, methods, theories, sub-disciplines appear, develop, and disappear during these decades?

Marxist origins, Soviet mediations

Marx and Engels's metaphilosophical perspective is well known and relatively clear, albeit infused with a certain utopianism or inbuilt teleology—either

¹ See, e.g., Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); or the official report of the Tismăneanu commission, commissioned by president Băsescu and whose conclusions were solemnly read by him in Parliament on the eve of Romania's EU accession. See Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România, *Raport final* [Final report] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007).

an idealist, Hegelianizing one, from Marx's early writings, or a positivist, scientistic one, from Engels's later writings. In his *Introduction to Hegel's Critique of the Philosophy of Right* (1843), Marx famously established a relationship of mutual fulfillment/abolition between philosophy and the proletariat: the destiny of philosophy—of the principles active in German idealism and in the progressive and rationalist traditions in the history of Western thought—was to be both fulfilled and absorbed into the concrete and immediate practice of post-revolutionary society, at the same time being abolished as “philosophy,” i.e., as abstract and separate knowledge. The unity of theory and practice was, at least declaratively, elevated to the lofty rank of one of the two defining principles (along with that of “partinity”) of Marxist-Leninist philosophy in its codification in socialist Eastern Europe. But, as was already noted at the time regarding this emerging orthodoxy (see Gustav A. Wetter, Herbert Marcuse, but also the Trotskyist critique of “substitutionism”), the distance from the original Marxist meaning was already considerable, with the necessary intermediary instance of the party added as the sole guarantor and enforcer of the unity of theory and practice—i.e., of official philosophy with socialist reality, but also of political strategy with its declared subject, the proletariat. Beyond this original application of the principle of theory and practice, which introduced a necessary disjunction and mediation where Marx had seen a spontaneous unity and mutual attraction, it is clear that just as the proletariat was not abolished in socialist societies, neither was philosophy absorbed into practice, universalized, and routinized within these political systems. On the contrary, it was subjected to a process of continuous disciplinary expansion and further specialization, both within itself and in relation to the other socio-historical disciplines.

If young Marx envisioned philosophy dissolving into the immediate experience of the classless society, in Engels's *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1886), the destiny of philosophy is likewise teleological and dissolving, though as a result of a different kind of revolution—not a social or socialist revolution, but a revolution in the natural and social sciences of his time. In both these fields of knowledge, the fate of philosophy was to be replaced by the corresponding sciences, i.e., the new scientific developments in the natural sciences, and by Marx's “materialist conception of history” for the social sciences. The contrast between Engels's view of the destiny of philosophy—in which it is gradually displaced by the new natural and socio-historical sciences and relegated exclusively to the domain of thought—and, on the other hand, the Soviet (especially Stalinist) codifications of philosophy is striking. As Wetter

observed in his classic work, “nature and history have again been smuggled back into the jurisdiction of philosophy, from which Engels wished to exclude them.”² However, this twisting or even reversal of Engels’s prescriptions in the meta-philosophy of communist regimes, as Wetter suggested, exploits certain ambiguities already present in Engels. Some of his later texts seem to contradict his earlier view of the destiny and proper role of philosophy: in *Anti-Dühring* (1877) and in the posthumous *Dialectics of Nature*, there are entire chapters of genuine philosophy of nature, in its most traditionally metaphysical version of ontology.

All these ambiguities in Engels’s treatment would erupt in the philosophical practice and meta-philosophical theory of the communist states. Here, far from being confined to the exclusive domain of thought processes, philosophy re-emerged in its old classical overflowing structure, encompassing ontology and philosophy of nature, as well as psychology, ethics and aesthetics in the realm of the spirit. By contrast, the most authentic strand of Marxist philosophy—historical materialism—occupied the most precarious philosophical position under communist regimes. It was continually at risk of being either subordinated to the higher logic of dialectical materialism (reduced to a mere application of its formulaics) or absorbed into the particularism of the social sciences (as a mere generalization—perhaps superfluous, perhaps illicit—of their laws), only to reassert itself, in the end, as a spiritual philosophy of man and humanism, eminently ahistorical and non-materialist.

In what concerns not the metaphysical perspective, but the internal configuration of Marxist philosophy in the writings of its founders, things are far less clear. The two formulas—“dialectical materialism” and “historical materialism”—are rarely (if at all) found as such in the body of writings of Marx and Engels, making it impossible to verify the fidelity of the “dialectical and historical materialism” later codified in the communist states. Moreover, while the metaphysical considerations of Marx and Engels can be relatively easily identified, it is much more difficult to isolate, within their overall corpus, texts that can be strictly classified as philosophy. This is undoubtedly due to the well-known disciplinary hybridity that characterizes the texts of the two founders—political economy, philosophy, and socialism, “the three sources and component parts of Marxism,” according to Lenin’s classicized formula. Moreover, it is precisely the impossibility of isolating a pure, supra-historical philosophy above the particular sciences that is

² Gustav A. Wetter, *Dialectical Materialism: A Historical and Systematic Survey of Philosophy in the Soviet Union* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1958), 255.

defining for Marxism—"we know only one science, that of history," no philosophy therefore that can claim to be more, above, or beyond, historical materialism. And historical materialism, in its original Marxist sense of a materialist conception of history, is something very elusive when it comes to being framed into a discipline. It remains unclear whether it is, or can be instituted as, a new philosophy that applies to man and society the laws of materialist dialectics (deduced or discovered beforehand); or a sociology, a science—even the most general one—of the laws of motion of society; or, finally and if possible, something in between the two. All these original ambiguities would leave lasting imprints and produce divergent trajectories, points of rupture and transformation, disciplinary exclusions and reintegrations, in the evolution of the internal configuration of Marxist philosophy in the socialist camp.

Before being adopted in communist Romania as an official paradigm of thought, Marxist philosophy went through three decades of institutionalization, reconfiguration, and transformation in the Soviet Union, a trajectory through which it also entered Romania,³ and to which it remained extremely faithful, at least until the early 1960s. In the first two post-revolutionary decades, the Soviet philosophical field was highly contested and dynamic, engaged in the struggle between the two trends of dialectical materialism—Abram Deborin's dialecticians versus the "Menshevik" mechanists, with Deborinists carrying the day only to be further denounced and surpassed by Mark Mitin's synthesis. The complete stabilization of the "philosophical front" took place in 1938, immediately after Nikolai Bukharin's trial, with the publication in Stalin's *Short Course of the History of the CPSU* of the chapter on "Dialectical and Historical Materialism."⁴ This chapter would serve as the foundation for textbooks and treatises on Marxist philosophy until after Stalin's death, thereby implicitly providing the model for the first

3 The reason why Marxism had to be imported from the outside, and mainly from the USSR, after the establishment of the socialist regime in 1948 had to do with the poverty, or inconvenient nature, of the prewar local Marxist traditions: the most important communist Marxist in interwar Romania was Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, who was arrested in 1948 and executed in 1954; while other available local Marxist traditions stemmed from the rival Social Democratic Party (e.g., Șerban Voinea, Lothar Rădăceanu). See Alex Cistelecan and Andrei State, eds., *Plante exotice. Teoria și practica marxiștilor români* [Exotic plants: The theory and practice of Romanian Marxists] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Tact, 2015).

4 I. V. Stalin, "Dialectical and Historical Materialism," *Marxists Internet Archive*, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1938/09.htm>; translated in Romanian as I. V. Stalin, *Despre materialismul dialectic și materialismul istoric* [On dialectical materialism and historical materialism] (Bucharest: Editura Partidului Muncitoresc Român, 1951).

textbooks and works on dialectical and historical materialism to appear in Romania after 1948.

Dialectical materialism is defined in Stalin's text as "the worldview of the Marxist-Leninist Party. It is called dialectical materialism because its approach to the phenomena of nature, its method of research and knowledge of them, is *dialectical*, while its interpretation of the phenomena of nature, its conception of these phenomena, its theory, is *materialistic*." As such, dialectical materialism seems to be both a method—a logic of knowledge (as prescribed by Engels in *Ludwig Feuerbach*)—and a general theory of existence which, this time in clear contrast to Engels, seems to constitute a first philosophy of nature from which the sciences are merely derived. Consistent with this view, the section on dialectical materialism is divided into two: first, a "Marxist dialectical method," which comprises a survey of the laws of dialectics; and second, a "Marxist philosophical materialism," which asserts that the world exists objectively and can be understood according to determinate laws. If the section on the dialectical method can be said to draw on, but also modify, the list of the three laws of dialectics left by Engels (discarding the law of the negation of negation and doubling the other two remaining theses into four), the axioms of "Marxist philosophical materialism" are far more difficult to trace back to Marx and Engels, other than as a kind of commonsense realism that underlies any theory assuming that there is indeed a real world that can, to some degree, be known and explained.

Underneath these two levels of method and philosophy of dialectical materialism lies historical materialism, presented as an application of their principles to the realm of social life. The text identifies the mode of production, and particularly the development of the forces of production, as the decisive factor in determining the material conditions of social life. Among these forces, the evolution of the instruments of production is singled out as most important—already a shift toward technological determinism and technocracy, and away from Marxist social historicism. From this standpoint, the text then derives three main theses: a) production is in constant change and development—which is not necessarily consistent with Marx and Engels's initial perspective, where long periods of relative stagnation in the forces and relations of production are acknowledged; b) the development of the instruments of production is the most important factor in the evolution of production; c) and finally, the emergence of new forces of production and of the relations of production corresponding to them occurs spontaneously and organically within the old system. This latter thesis, somewhat aligned with the stabilizing needs of the Soviet

regime, seems to tip the balance in the dilemma inherent in Marxism traditionally, between voluntarism and rupture vs. objective, spontaneous, gradual change, towards the more realistic and sober, gradualist perspective of the latter.

If the founding principles of Marxist philosophy already emerged somewhat compromised from this initial attempt to institutionalize and formalize them from the highest echelons of political authority, Stalin's later writings, particularly *Marxism and the Problems of Linguistics* (1950),⁵ carried this process even further. His reconsideration of the status of language automatically opened up two chains of consequences, not only for the conceptual structure of linguistics but especially for that of Marxist materialism. First, it established the existence of a domain of the spiritual that eludes socio-historical determinism and lies beyond the pincers of base and superstructure, thus undermining one of the fundamental principles, if not the very essence of historical materialism. Second, it posited the existence of a domain that is both nature and history—the spontaneous and natural expression of society as a whole—which, as such, evades the laws of dialectics. The contribution of *Marxism and the Problems of Linguistics* to Marxism was indeed a "creative" one, insofar as it suspended both the basic principle of materialism (by postulating a trans-historical spiritual instance) and the foundations of dialectics (by postulating the continuity, identity, supra-historicity of historical becoming).

Obviously, these changes in the conceptual structure of Marxism reflected the political needs and imperatives of the time: once the conditions for the realization of socialism had been met, or at least declared as such, Soviet politics could no longer be the politics of a single class. Since there were now essentially no more antagonistic classes and contradictions, politics became the natural and harmonious expression of the people as a whole. Accordingly, social evolution was no longer conceived as occurring through revolutionary leaps and ruptures, but rather through smooth, continuous, and harmonious development under the all-knowing guidance of the Party. In a gesture repeated many times in the declaredly Marxist philosophy of communist Eastern Europe, Stalin reaffirmed the authority of Marxism while restricting its applicability only to the history prior to the emergence of socialist regimes.

5 J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1950). Online at Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1950/jun/20.htm>. Translated in Romanian in *Lupta de clasă*, no. 6 (1950): 3–22.

Romanian trajectories

The Stalinist codification of Marxist philosophy spilled as directly as possible into its Romanian articulations after 1948. In fact, the first textbooks on dialectical and historical materialism published in Romania were translations of Soviet textbooks produced, under the direction of F. V. Konstantinov and G. F. Aleksandrov, by the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.⁶ The handbook of historical materialism translated in 1952 (1951 for the Soviet edition),⁷ which appeared before the course on dialectical materialism in 1954, reproduces very faithfully the section devoted to this topic in Stalin's 1938 text. At the same time, because it was not only the first but also the most substantial volume (720 pages) in the successive series of historical materialism textbooks, it had to improvise extensively, to take risks by proposing content that had not yet been officially sanctioned—a risk that is demonstrated by the very fact that the textbook appeared in Romania along with the translation of a review from *Bolshevik*, which was particularly critical of the textbook's structural and conceptual shortcomings.

The most striking aspect, as the reviewers of *Bolshevik* rightly observed, is its chaotic, disjointed structure, with many overlaps, repetitions, but also jumps in the natural order of the topics. As for its Marxist content, or its fidelity to the philosophy of its founders, the situation is somewhat more complicated. If we refer strictly to the content of the textbook, setting aside the numerous pages and chapters devoted to the Soviet revolutionary and post-revolutionary experience, as well as the numerous references to the international politics of the day, there are relatively few passages that can be directly derived or anchored in Marx and Engels: fewer than 100 pages out of more than 700. For the rest, most chapters and subsections develop and generalize, often beyond the limits of plausibility and historical concreteness that the founders would have permitted, certain principles of Marx and Engels (such as the relation between basis and superstructure, social consciousness, the distinction between bourgeois and social revolutions, etc.) in veritable mini-treaties. Most of these elaborations distort or even suspend the applicability of basic Marxist principles (the historicity of the

⁶ Before them, the first texts popularizing these disciplines appeared already in 1948, in two booklets published by ARLUS—Asociația română pentru strângerea legăturilor cu Uniunea Sovietică [Romanian Association for Closer Ties with the Soviet Union].

⁷ F. V. Constantinov, ed., *Materialismul istoric* [Historical Materialism] (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură politică, 1952).

class structure, the tension between relations and forces of production) to the present and future of socialist society, or they overturn their original dialectic. Instead of the forces of production breaking through the fetters of existing relations of production, as in Marx's formulation, the textbook presents socialism as a system in which the relations of production are fully aligned with the forces of production—or even so advanced (through collectivization, nationalization, and technologization) that they drive the development of the latter forward, under the omniscient guidance of the Party.

As for the textbook *Dialectical Materialism* (1954)⁸—a translation of the volume published in the USSR that same year under Aleksandrov's editorship—it is even more faithful, in its very structure this time, to Stalin's 1938 treatment of the subject. In the first sections, one notices the deduction or obligatory folding of the sciences to the predetermined method of dialectics. At the same time, at least declaratively, since this is contradicted by the rest of the textbook, the dialectical method is restricted to the domain of thought, to logic and epistemology. Similarly, the chapters on the principles of dialectics massively restrict or distort its applicability to socialist society: since antagonistic class contradictions are said to have disappeared, the principle of the struggle of opposites as a motor of progress is recalibrated to focus on the management of non-antagonistic contradictions, but also on the dialectic of form and content, i.e., the tension between the new, socialist content and the old form. The main adversary, the opposite of dialectics, is metaphysics, understood here as any philosophy that fails to recognize the processual nature, transformation, and continuous development of the natural and social world. This framing—which is somewhat metaphysical in its own right, insofar as it is supra-historical and predetermined—not only adheres closely to Stalin's codification of the dialectical method but also provides philosophical justification for the Stalinist developmentalist hypermobilization seen in the USSR and, in parallel, in Romania during those years. In much the same way, the 1970s emphasis on “structurality” as the essence of dialectics would later reflect the corresponding phase of regime stabilization and consolidation.

After this first half on the dialectical method, the second half of the volume is devoted, just as faithfully as Stalin's text, to Marxist materialist philosophy and its tenets: the materiality of the world and the objectivity of its laws, the priority of matter over consciousness, and the cognizability

8 Georgij Fedorovič Aleksandrov, ed., *Materialismul dialectic* [Dialectical materialism] (Bucharest: Editura de stat pentru literatură politică, 1954).

of the world and its laws. In the end, then, dialectical materialism returns full circle to an epistemology, but only after a long detour through the *philosophia prima* of hardcore ontology. If, in the first section, the enemy was metaphysics and its immobilism, in the second section the declared adversary is idealism, which errs both ontologically (admitting the existence of ideas and spirit alongside matter) and epistemologically (by giving primacy to the cognizing consciousness at the expense of its material support and the external objective world).

The *Handbook of Dialectical Materialism*, which appeared shortly after Stalin's death, but was the fruit of a long gestation in Stalin's shadow and under his direct influence, was criticized in the Soviet Union upon publication for this unquestioning fidelity. The main reproach leveled against it was that it preserved an unnatural order of sections, in which the exposition of the dialectical method precedes the problematization of philosophical materialism. This gives the impression that this method is not determined precisely by the nature and specificity of the object of philosophy, but is instead a predetermined formula that philosophical materialism merely applies and subsequently confirms through its research.⁹ In the question of the status and content of Marxist philosophy, de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union had the effect of reanchoring dialectics in materialism, thereby tacitly shifting the focus of attention and importance from dialectical materialism to historical materialism.

In Romania, the two textbooks did not generate much debate. By the time the next generation of textbooks appeared, several articles had begun to raise questions about the nature and status of the two disciplines. As far as dialectical materialism was concerned, two opposing perspectives emerged, though without generating a debate between them. One perspective, following Engels's prescription, restricted dialectical materialism to the domain of thought, to a logic and theory of knowledge.¹⁰ The other understood dialectical materialism as both logic and ontology, or, more precisely, as a perfect superposition of the two spheres.¹¹ These views never resulted in

9 See also Wetter, *Dialectical Materialism*, 237.

10 Henri Wald, "Dialectica materialistă ca logică" [Materialist dialectics as logic], *Cercetări filozofice*, no. 4 (1957): 97–119; Barbu Zaharescu, "Despre manualul unic de istorie a filozofiei" [On the textbook of history of philosophy], *Lupta de clasă*, no. 1 (1948): 68–75.

11 Erno Gáll, "Despre importanța studierii categoriilor materialismului dialectic" [On the importance of the study of the categories of dialectical materialism], *Cercetări filozofice*, no. 4 (1955): 283–303; V. T. Tugarinov, "Unitatea dintre ontologie, gnoseologie, logică și metodologie în materialismul dialectic" [The unity of ontology, gnoseology, logics, and methodology in dialectical materialism], *Cercetări filozofice*, no. 2 (1958): 105–18.

a genuine confrontation like the one between the “epistemologist” camp (based in Leningrad) and the “ontologist” camp (with representatives in Moscow and in the provincial centers) in 1970s Soviet Union.¹²

As for historical materialism, the discussions of this period increasingly questioned the uncertain status of this discipline and its proper placement along the axes of philosophy-sociology, dialectical materialism-scientific socialism.¹³ These discussions would continue and gain momentum in the articles that accompanied the second generation of materialism textbooks, this time written by Romanian authors, starting in 1959.

Vigilant orthodoxy

The political context in which the new textbooks of dialectical and historical materialism appeared was tense. On the one hand, the de-Stalinization announced by Khrushchev at the 20th Congress of the CPSU was leaving its mark, in refracted ways, in Romania as well. On the other hand, the same political authorities in the USSR as in Romania demanded the intensification of the struggle against Marxist revisionism after the revolution in Budapest in 1956. Revisionism was understood to mean both deviations from Soviet orthodoxy within the communist bloc (the Titoist betrayal, the Hungarian counterrevolution) and revisionist tendencies in Western Marxist sociology and philosophy, as well as in the reformist policies and anti-communist rhetoric of European center-left parties and publications. Finally, the period between 1959–61 also marked the beginning of Romania’s policy of relative autonomy from the USSR, which would only become explicit and coherent in the mid-1960s.

What changes did this complicated context impose on the structure and configuration of the two textbooks? The first volume of *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* (1959),¹⁴ considered a “trial,” as the group of authors led

¹² See also Loren Graham, *Science, Philosophy, and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 58–61.

¹³ Pavel Apostol, “Conferința internațională a catedrelor de materialism dialectic și istoric” [The international conference of the departments of dialectical and historical materialism], *Cercetări filozofice*, no. 1 (1958): 167–69; Mihail Frunză, “Contribuții la precizarea obiectului și metodei materialismului istoric” [Contributions to the clarification of the object and method of historical materialism], *Cercetări filozofice*, no. 4 (1958): 111–35.

¹⁴ *Curs de materialism dialectic și istoric* [Course on dialectical and historical materialism], vol. 1, *Materialism dialectic* [Dialectical materialism] (Bucharest: Universitatea C. I. Parhon, 1959).

by Tudor Bugnariu acknowledged,¹⁵ features a reversed structure compared with the previous edition. It begins with four chapters on philosophy (its object, method, and its partisan, class character); a history of pre-Marxist materialism; the “revolution in philosophy,” marked by the emergence of Marxism and the Leninist stage (Stalin’s contribution disappears); and a chapter on the materiality of the world and its forms of existence. The dialectical method is introduced only in the fifth chapter, as the “science of universal connections.” The following three chapters are devoted to individual laws of dialectics, readjusted according to the initial classification and order established by Engels. The importance given to “development” as the essence of dialectics is greatly reduced to only a dozen pages. The last four chapters of the textbook focus on the theory of knowledge, concluding with a critique of the neopositivist idealism said to dominate Western philosophy of science. Throughout the volume, the Marxist revisionism of authors such as György Lukács, Henri Lefebvre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, or Leszek Kołakowski is criticized on several occasions, primarily for failing to grasp the centrality of practice as the basis of knowledge and truth, and, by extension, for attempting to detach a renewed, authentic, and philosophical Marxism from the practical reality of socialism in the East. This struggle with revisionism took precedence over the previously central struggle with idealism and metaphysics.

If the 1959 textbook of *Dialectical Materialism* effectively overturns the structure and emphases of the previous edition of 1954, with philosophical materialism anticipating and grounding the dialectical method, the 1961 edition of the course on *Historical Materialism*,¹⁶ published as the second volume of the joint course, differs from the 1952 textbook more in terms of content rather than structure. In defining the status and object of historical materialism, the 1961 edition aimed to be more explicit than its predecessor, which had merely repeated Stalin’s 1938 formula of “extending the principles of dialectical materialism to the study of social life.” But it may have been precisely this effort to clarify the issue that sparked, or at least contributed to, the debates of the 1960s concerning the relationship between philosophy, sociology, historical materialism, and scientific socialism. For as clear as

¹⁵ The other members of the editorial team were Constanța Alexe, Constantin Borceanu, Florin Georgescu, Ștefan Georgescu, Nicolae Melinescu, Ion Rebedeu, Radu Tomoiagă, Henri Uschersohn, Andrei Roth, and Gheorghe Fischer.

¹⁶ *Curs de materialism dialectic și istoric*, vol. II, *Materialism istoric* [Historical materialism] (Bucharest: Universitatea C. I. Parhon, Editura de stat didactică și pedagogică, 1961). The authors are Octavian Băncilă, Alexandru Borceanu, Marcel Breazu, Gáll Ernö, Călina Mare, Andrei Roth, Magda Stroe, Constantin Vlad, coordinated by an editorial staff composed of Tudor Bugnariu, Paul Popovici, Ion Drăgan, Ludwig Grünberg and Ovidiu Trăsnea.

the textbook tried to be in its disciplinary institutions, certain tensions, overlaps, or ambiguities could not be eradicated.

First, on the philosophical side of the relationship with dialectical materialism, the new edition advanced two types of disciplinary claims that are ultimately quite contradictory. On the one hand, historical materialism was presented as “a continuation and concretization of the fundamental theses of dialectical materialism,” an application of “the universal laws of objective reality, mirrored in the laws of materialist dialectics,”¹⁷ which implies a clear relation of subordination to the principles of dialectical materialism. On the other hand, the textbook insists just as emphatically that historical materialism is by no means “the fruit of the speculative deduction of the laws of social development from the general laws of dialectical materialism,” since “the materialist conception of history ... is the first and only teaching completely freed from all apriorism [...], [being] fully based on real history.”¹⁸

Secondly, the textbook’s disciplinary definitions are equally aporetic in relation to the social-historical sciences. On the one hand, it states that “historical materialism is Marxist-Leninist sociology, i.e., the philosophical science about society,”¹⁹ which appears to fold sociology into philosophy, as a philosophical, most general science of society. On the other hand, historical materialism, which studies society from the point of view “of its fundamental problem and in its most general aspect,” is presented as distinct from the particular social sciences (political economy, scientific socialism, legal sciences, ethics, aesthetics, linguistics), and especially from the science of history, with which it risks being confused, but which is relegated to the study of what Braudel would call *histoire événementielle*. This move seems to resolve the dilemma of the disciplinary status of historical materialism (philosophy or science of society?) by cutting off the very field of the social sciences, assimilating sociology into the philosophy of historical materialism and then separating this general science of society from all the other merely “particular” social-historical sciences.

The textbook includes chapters on the central concepts of base and superstructure, which had previously been dealt with only in passing, as well as the usual excursions into social classes and class struggle (relegated again to pre-socialist history), the state and revolution, and the forms of social consciousness. The last chapter, devoted to the critique of contemporary bourgeois sociology, is entirely new. Its criticism as “reformist and revisionist,”

¹⁷ *Curs de materialism dialectic și istoric*, vol. II, *Materialism istoric*, 21.

¹⁸ *Curs de materialism dialectic și istoric*, vol. II, *Materialism istoric*, 21.

¹⁹ *Curs de materialism dialectic și istoric*, vol. II, *Materialism istoric*, 20.

in its various currents (biological, geopolitical, psychological, existentialist, pragmatist, neo-Thomist, and personalist), reflects a renewed emphasis on ideological vigilance and the struggle against Western ideology, which Khrushchev's doctrine of peaceful coexistence and the reaction to the events in Hungary have imposed as the main objectives of the "philosophical front."

The two textbooks enjoyed a much wider echo in the philosophical press of the time, giving rise to extensive and sustained debates that focused on their relationship with the particular sciences. As far as dialectical materialism is concerned, the question of its relationship with the sciences was addressed and reexamined in various forms, ranging from surveys²⁰ to conferences and symposia,²¹ and culminating in an impressive series of nineteen collective volumes on *Dialectical Materialism and the Natural Sciences* published between 1959 and 1982. Two aspects emerge from these discussions: first, the considerable diversity and, implicitly, the relative freedom of positions. In a review of some of these volumes, Călina Mare and Bogdan Stugren draw a telling distinction between "disputes of a philosophical character, which reflect the class struggle at the ideological level," where the correct positions are thus fairly fixed from the outset; and the open and free "struggle of opinions" among various "scientific hypotheses."²² This distinction—between the predetermined nature of ideological disputes and the relative openness of scientific debate—points to a second, increasingly articulated theme: the gradual autonomization of scientific methodologies and theories of nature from the constraints imposed by the principles of dialectical materialism.

This growing autonomy inevitably led also to a questioning of the status and specificity of philosophical knowledge in general, and of dialectical materialism in particular, which in turn began to emancipate themselves from the presumption of scientificity to which they were held until then. At the same time, they were forced to negotiate more and more carefully their relationship with those philosophical (or already extra-philosophical) disciplines such as ethics and aesthetics, which had been recognized as legitimate since the 1950s alongside dialectical and historical materialism, the main strand of Marxist philosophy.

²⁰ For example, "Oameni de știință despre însemnatatea materialismului dialectic pentru avântul cercetărilor științifice" [Scientists on the significance of dialectical materialism for the progress of scientific research], *Cercetări filozofice*, no. 4 (1960): 181–214.

²¹ Such as a meeting devoted to "Dialectical Materialism and the Natural Sciences" organized in Moscow in 1966.

²² Călina Mare and Bogdan Stugren, "Filozofia marxist-leninistă și științele naturii" [Marxist-leninist philosophy and natural sciences], *Lupta de clasă*, no. 12 (1962): 77–87.

All these discussions and rearrangements of disciplinary positions did not affect much of the structure and content of the 1963 edition of the *Handbook of Dialectical Materialism*.²³ Only the chapter on consciousness (as a function of the brain and a product of social development) was moved forward, from the final section on the theory of knowledge to the very point of transition from materialism to dialectics, i.e., between the chapters on the materiality of the world and the dialectics *qua* universal connection. The final chapter of the previous edition was also divided into a chapter on dialectical materialism and the contemporary natural sciences, in which the same fine balancing act is attempted between the crucial importance of dialectics for the sciences and of the sciences for dialectics, and one devoted to the critique of contemporary bourgeois philosophy, in its neopositivist, existentialist, pragmatist, and neo-Thomist versions. What is significant here is precisely the divergence that is beginning to emerge between the orthodoxy of the textbook, which continues unabated on the same pattern tested in the previous edition, and the diversity of positions and problematizations that accompany the textbook, but which do not yet find their place within it.

In the case of historical materialism, things were more turbulent in this period. Simply put, the aporia of the disciplinary institutions of the 1961 textbook—which can also be seen in the fact that it began by establishing historical materialism (alongside dialectical materialism) as the *philosophical* foundation of Marxism-Leninism, but ended with a polemic with contemporary bourgeois *sociology*—can be formulated as follows: if historical materialism is to have disciplinary autonomy, if it is to be something more than a mere application and deduction from the principles of dialectical materialism, without being something else, something alien or

²³ *Materialism dialectic. Manual* [Dialectical Materialism: Textbook] (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1963). The textbook was written by an editorial staff consisting of Tudor Bugnariu, Elena Bellu, Ludwig Grünberg, Ion Perianu, Ovidiu Trăsnea, Henri Uschersohn, who “worked on the basis of the lessons by C. Alexe, C. Borceanu, I. Drăgan, M. Flonta, Fl. Georgescu, St. Georgescu, L. Grünberg, C. Mare, I. Perianu, H. Uscherson, Al Valentin.” The chapter on natural sciences was elaborated by a special team composed of Gh. Constantinescu, C. I. Dimitriu, I. Mărculescu, I. Petrea, and U. Tomin. As regards the process of drafting this handbook, Mircea Flonta, one of the authors of the volume, recalled: “The way in which we arrived at the published text illustrates very well the precautions taken to ensure full ideological conformity. The texts submitted by the authors were processed and rewritten by an editorial team of six people. Six other people were also involved as ‘consultants.’ Finally, the text was finalized by two editors from the Political Publishing House. The result was the elimination of all the elements that could have been contained in the initial texts, which were to some extent personal.” Mircea Flonta, *Drumul meu spre filozofie* [My road to philosophy] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2016), 67.

incompatible with it, then it can only be a concretization, development, and further specification of the principles of materialist dialectics. But if what is specific to historical materialism is its leaning towards the concrete, both in method and in theory, then it can be assimilated to sociology, while its philosophical claims become increasingly impure. In short, its autonomy from dialectical materialism comes at the price of its exclusion from the philosophical realm and its relegation to the level of a general social science, while its demarcation from sociology comes at the price of it being crushed back under the wing of dialectical materialism. All these variants, plus other oblique, intermediate ones, were proposed and tried in the debate that accompanied the appearance of the textbook in Romania, which was similar to that in most of the countries of the socialist bloc.²⁴

Here we encounter the same two directions as in the evolution of dialectical materialism and its relation to the particular sciences. First, there is a gradual autonomization of the social sciences from historical materialism, which began by recognizing a field of concrete sociology alongside the general sociology still contained in historical materialism, and then gradually emancipated all of sociology together with the other social sciences (political science, economics, law), which also benefited from this rearrangement of the disciplinary field. Secondly, the philosophical status of historical materialism was implicitly questioned, with attempts to find a compromise solution to an otherwise very difficult dilemma: how to safeguard the philosophical specificity of historical materialism and its delimitation from the socio-historical sciences, without reducing it merely to a pure and aprioristic philosophy. Insistence on its eminently practical, transformative, revolutionary character was not a solution, because it risked overlapping it with scientific socialism—and, in fact, with all revolutionary socio-historical sciences which, unlike bourgeois sciences, also assume a practical, transformative role. To confine it to the highest spheres of generalization was not a convenient solution either, since, once again, it risked submerging it into dialectical materialism.

All these debates are echoed somewhat obliquely, refracted, *sotto voce*, in the new 1967 edition of the *Handbook of Historical Materialism*.²⁵ Here, too,

²⁴ The debate is very pertinently presented and commented in Adela Hîncu's PhD thesis, "Accounting for the 'Social' in State Socialist Romania, 1960s–1980s: Contexts and Genealogies," CEU, Budapest, 2019, 51–65.

²⁵ *Materialism istoric. Manual* [Dialectical Materialism: Textbook] (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1967). The authors are C. Borceanu, C. Vlad, C. Petre, T. Bugnariu, I. Achim, C. I. Gulian, L. Grünberg, E. Dobrescu, O. Trăsnea, V. Liveanu, M. Cernea, and S. Tamaş, coordinated by an editorial board composed of C. Borceanu, C. Nicuță, C. Petre, P. Popovici, and C. Vlad.

the differences in content are rather punctual compared to the previous edition: a further problematization of the concepts of social determinism and social formation in the introductory chapters, which indeed can be said to fill a gap in the logic of the structure of the previous editions; a greater emphasis on the “people,” the “nation,” and state “sovereignty” in the course of some chapters—developments reflecting the new ideological emphases of the Ceaușescu regime. There was also a series of new topics, coming either from the sphere of sociology and anthropology proper (chapters on the historical forms of human community, on the origin and essence of the family), but also from the general and generic sphere of the philosophy of culture—such as new chapters on culture and civilization, on social progress, but also on “man in contemporary society” and “socialist humanism.” The 1967 textbook responds somewhat to its contemporary debates by trying to reconcile all the positions articulated within them: taking up both precise sociological themes and broad openings in the philosophy of culture and humanism. Just like the solution to all these disciplinary aporias from the textbook on dialectical materialism, here too the official course attempted to keep in place a beneficial, mutually enriching relationship between philosophy and science, thus synthesizing and defusing the debates raging at the time. The last chapter was again devoted to the various schools of contemporary bourgeois sociology, but in a much less warlike tone than in the previous edition, even making unexpected concessions of relevance and usefulness to the functionalist and structuralist currents in contemporary sociology, which were recognized as complementary and compatible with Marxist dialectics. This reconsideration of contemporary currents in Western sociology would leave much deeper traces in subsequent editions of the textbook in the 1970s.

Debating orthodoxy

If the 1963 and 1967 editions of the textbooks of dialectical and historical materialism are, as we have seen, both somewhat too ecumenical and somewhat too detached from their contemporary debates, their reception will attempt to bring them back to the heart of these polemics. The main objection to the course on dialectical materialism was precisely the treatment of the relationship between this discipline and the particular sciences. The outdated nature of Engels’s classification of the forms of motion of matter and of their corresponding sciences was again raised, and the textbook was generally criticized for being completely out of touch with the latest methodological and theoretical developments from the field

of sciences. These observations made the supposedly scientific status of dialectical materialism and, implicitly, the legitimacy of its tutelage over the particular sciences increasingly uncertain.²⁶ However, what solution the textbook might adopt to account for this emancipation of the sciences from dialectical materialism remained far from clear.

The 1967 textbook on historical materialism gave rise to a wide-ranging debate published in *Revista de filozofie*,²⁷ part of the broader and increasingly heated discussions already taking place at that time on the relationship between historical materialism and sociology. Participants at this roundtable levelled two main criticisms at the textbook. Firstly, several participants (Mihail Cernea, H. Culea, Oancea Aron, Pavel Apostol, and Constantin Petre) demanded a clearer delimitation of historical materialism from sociology and, implicitly, a “greater emphasis on the philosophical character of historical materialism, on the unity between dialectical materialism and historical materialism.” The second set of objections also echoed more general ideological trends of the time—namely, the turn towards the individual and humanism. Thus, most participants in the debate appreciated the textbook’s openness to the problems of man in contemporary society, but expected more in this direction. They criticized the still too unidirectional and deterministic treatment of the theme of social determinism, which left no room for the freedom of action of the individual, as well as the abstract approach to the issue of man in contemporary society. As Pavel Apostol argued, this should instead have “started not from abstract conceptions of man, but from an analysis of the concrete existential situation of man

²⁶ Such criticism was formulated by I. Stroie, “Un ajutor în studiul materialismului dialectic” [A support in the study of dialectical materialism], *Lupta de clasă*, no. 12 (1964): 109–19; Fl. Georgescu, “Manualul de materialism dialectic și exigențele didactice” [The historical materialism textbook and teaching exigencies], *Lupta de clasă*, no. 2 (1965): 121–24; and in “Dezbateri pe marginea manualului de materialism dialectic” [Debates about the dialectical materialism textbook], *Lupta de clasă*, no. 3 (1965): 86–102. The complete separation of the sciences from philosophy is then enshrined, albeit still tacitly, in a text such as Ion Tudosecu’s “Clasificarea și sistemul științelor” [The classification and the system of sciences], *Revista de filozofie*, no. 3 (1968): 307–22. This outlines a complete classification of the sciences, from the most general (cybernetics, mechanics, mathematics) to the most particular (whether of existence, from chemistry and biophysics to logic and sociology, or of action, from the industrial, agricultural and zootechnical sciences to the sciences of the organization of society), a complete and complex picture from which philosophy is completely missing, a sign that it was already deemed unscientific.

²⁷ Elena Ferariu, “Manualul de materialism istoric—masă rotundă la Institutul de filozofie” [The historical materialism textbook—roundtable at the Institute for Philosophy], *Revista de filozofie*, no. 8 (1968): 979–88.

at the present time and only secondly as an analysis of the conceptions of man in contemporary culture.”²⁸

In short, once sociology had been emancipated from historical materialism, the latter was pushed back into the capacious arms of dialectical materialism. Thus, what began as a questioning of the relationship between Marxist philosophy and science, became, after the emancipation of the social sciences from the tutelage of materialism, an increasingly pressing questioning of what philosophy in general, and Marxist philosophy in particular, could still mean. Constantin Petre concluded the debate with the telling observation, taken up in subsequent debates at the Institute of Philosophy, that

Historical materialism cannot simply be replaced by sociology, just as I do not think it is possible for them to coexist as long as historical materialism is seen as a discipline separate from dialectical materialism, with the problems it is currently facing. That is why I believe that the discussion of this problem must start from the way we conceive historical materialism itself and Marxist philosophy in general.²⁹

In the context of these debates, Henri Stahl made a totally discordant note when, in a new dossier on the object of sociology hosted by *Revista de filozofie*, he pointed out that “to conceive of historical materialism as merely a philosophy is a thesis that lends itself to the abusive interpretation that Marxism is not scientific.”³⁰ Against the consensus that was beginning to take hold regarding the role of historical materialism as a mere methodological guide for the now autonomous social sciences, and against the legitimacy of a “concrete sociology”—a particular science that, for Stahl,

²⁸ *Revista de filozofie*, no. 8 (1968): 984. In his intervention in the debate, Constantin Borceanu, one of the main authors of the textbook, explains these shortcomings as follows: “[the course] was drafted in 1964, but for certain reasons it appeared in 1967, with, of course, a number of corrections; it represents a transitional stage between a rigid way of treating philosophy and sociology and a rich, multilateral one. [...] When the textbook was drafted, we agreed to conceive of historical materialism as the general sociology of Marxism, without making this explicit, so as not to confuse students with debatable questions of principle, though I now think that the procedure was not a happy one. As for the future textbook, I think that the questions essential to historical materialism are essential to dialectical materialism as well, which argues for a course in Marxist philosophy as a whole.” Constantin Borceanu in *Revista de filozofie*, no. 8 (1968): 986.

²⁹ *Revista de filozofie*, no. 8 (1968): 987.

³⁰ Henri Stahl, “Sociologie ‘concretă’ și istorie” [“Concrete” sociology and history], *Revista de filozofie*, no. 4 (1968): 382.

was irremediably static and ahistorical—he reaffirmed the scientific status of historical materialism, practically superimposing sociology—in its true sense, as a totalizing science that can only be a two-dimensional approach to the concreteness of a given society *and* its historical becoming—on Marxist historical materialism.³¹

But this reassertion of the philosophical *and* scientific status of historical materialism as the total science of society and its laws of development seemed, in this context, more like a heroic rearguard action, the battle having already been lost. The two other texts in the dossier, by Ovidiu Bădina and H. Culea, were already leaning in the opposite direction, advocating for a concrete, specialized, and professionalized sociology, with its own tools and theories.³² The debate would be settled a few issues later, in a roundtable on philosophy's relationship with the sciences.³³ With minor differences of emphasis, the consensus here held that philosophy is not a science, but at most a “scientific knowledge” or “scientific philosophy”—whose scientificity was, however, sufficiently vague and elastic to correspond to any theoretical discourse.³⁴

But even with this attempt at saving philosophy's scientific honor by deliberately blurring the terms of the question, it remained in danger of being absorbed and monopolized by the sciences—especially by the new information sciences, for which Romania, like the other countries of the socialist bloc, showed boundless enthusiasm at the time. Investment in cybernetics, for example, held the promise of offering the kind of total science of society and of its socialist management that materialism, historical or dialectical, could no longer fulfill precisely because of its purely philosophical nature. In Uros Tomin's intervention, for instance, even the

31 Stahl, “Sociologie ‘concretă’ și istorie,” 379–94.

32 Ovidiu Bădina, “Reflecții în legătură cu obiectul sociologiei” [Reflections on the object of sociology], *Revista de filozofie*, no. 4 (1968): 395–404; H. Culea, “Criteriul logic-gnoseologicul al enunțului sociologic” [The logical-gnoseological criterion of the sociological statement], *Revista de filozofie*, no. 4 (1968): 405–16.

33 “Filozofie și știință. Lucrările sesiunii științifice a Institutului de filozofie” [Philosophy and science: Proceedings of the scientific session of the Institute of Philosophy], *Revista de filozofie*, no. 7 (1968): 769–804.

34 Several quotes from the debate: “A scientific philosophy can only be a general framework, compatible with science, on which science can be based” (Stelian Popescu); “[dialectical materialism serves] in the present conditions as a general methodological basis for scientific research. In this sense, and only in this sense, Marxist philosophy is scientific” (Uros Tomin); “being theoretical, philosophy enjoys the attributes of the theoretical of being rigorous and coherent. Only in *this* sense [...] the qualifier of ‘scientific’ that is given to philosophy can be understood” (Gabriel Liiceanu).

last bastions of authority of Marxist philosophy—the theory of knowledge and the general worldview—were about to be taken over by cybernetics and the new information sciences. All that remained of philosophy was, according to Tomin, a meditation on the human condition, as eternal as that condition itself. Or in more vivid terms, as Henri Wald concluded his intervention, the social function of philosophy was to constitute the necessary dream of society—which allowed it to continue to sleep, we might add Freudianly—and without which it would slide into psychosis.

Thus, in less than a decade, Marxist philosophy—for of course it alone was the total philosophy *and* science of the world and of its socialist transformation that the 1950s heralded—was redefined and restricted to a generic, timeless humanism, with a therapeutic role in society, of reconciling the individual with the world. Tellingly, an anniversary issue dedicated to Marx, on the 150th anniversary of his birth, in the same *Revista de filozofie*, listed as its themes “the Marxist conception of the human essence,” “a noble ideal of humanity,” “Marx’s concept of the real man,” “the concept of alienation,” etc. It thus extrapolated some of the themes of Marx’s early writings in order to melt them into a perennial and generic humanism, at the same time evacuating the main vein of the critique of political economy and the historical sociology of Marxist materialism—for the supposedly logical reason, if it were true, that the history of class antagonism is over, and from now on the rediscovery and reaffirmation of the human essence was all that remained.

Orthodoxy with a humanist face

These reconfigurations and rescalings of the content and status of Marxist philosophy found their official codification and confirmation in the joint textbook *Filozofie. Materialism dialectic și istoric* published in 1975.³⁵ Accepting the proposals put forward in the debates of the late 1960s, the textbook merged the contents of the two materialisms into a single thematization so successfully that it is not at all clear where one ends and the other begins. Instead of the traditional presentation which allocated, in turn, about half of the exposition to each of the two materialisms, here dialectical materialism is practically dissolved into historical materialism. Only one

³⁵ Ion Tudosescu, Mihai Florea, and Cornel Popa, eds., *Filozofie. Materialism dialectic și istoric* [Philosophy: Dialectical and historical materialism] (Bucharest: Editura didactică și pedagogică, 1975).

of the nine chapters—on the materiality of the world—represents the dialectical materialism part, with some of its traditional considerations woven into the sections of the other chapters, which dealt mainly with the social-historical world. But historical materialism is not necessarily too recognizable here either, being in turn dissolved or broadened into supra-historical issues (world structurality, determinism, humanism), or transposed into a direct apology of the “multilaterally developed socialist society” of Romanian communism.

The first chapter, on the object and specificity of philosophy, confirmed the most classical architectonic of the “fields of philosophical reflection” (ontology, gnoseology, logic and methodology, philosophy of history and social philosophy, ethics, aesthetics) and then revisited the question of the relationship between philosophy and the sciences. This appeared in a completely new light: the textbook maintained that “the separation of the scientific disciplines from philosophy contributed both to the development of the sciences and to the maturation of philosophical reflection,” leaving only a vague relationship of “bilateral influence and stimulation”³⁶ to be established between the two. The final section of the chapter, “Marxism and the Struggle of Ideas in Contemporary Philosophy,” was also modified considerably from previous editions, with the aim apparently to show that there were still contemporary Western philosophers who occasionally referred to Marx. Moreover, the textbook stipulated that “it is entirely possible for a thinker or philosophical school which does not adhere to the principles of dialectical materialism to propose a viable research topic, to develop new techniques or methods of investigation, and to achieve remarkable accomplishments.”³⁷ This meant that Marxist materialism was no longer needed even in its restricted role of methodological guidance or inspiration, not only in the field of sciences, but even in philosophy itself.

The following chapter, on matter, finally explicitly addressed one of the inherent problems of Marxist philosophy, namely the question of “dialectical materialist monism,” a rather delicate and aporetic question, after all, in the tradition of Marxist philosophy: its materialism seeming to imply a monism of substance, while the very distinction between a dialectical and a historical materialism rather supporting the hypothesis of the existence of two different domains of existence (nature and society), each with its own laws and principles. This aporetic question was however quickly resolved

³⁶ *Filosofie. Materialism dialectic și istoric*, 31–32.

³⁷ *Filosofie. Materialism dialectic și istoric*, 39.

by the textbook's presentation with the argument that the natural and the social worlds intersect in the "domain of humanity." Even more surprising, however, was the way in which the textbook argued this monism of Marxist humanism philosophically—namely, by referring, for support, to the contributions of *Gestalt* theories in psychology, the (unfortunately racist) conception of Jan Christian Smuts, the (unfortunately Christian) metaphysics of Teilhard de Chardin and, for the sake of ecumenism and balance, the pluralist (and anti-communist, incidentally) conception of Karl Popper. This need to justify the philosophical grounding of Marxist materialism by its declared compatibility with philosophical theories that were not just non-Marxist, but quite reactionary, is particularly telling for the later evolution of *Diamat* and *Histomat* in Romanian communism, and for the latter's nationalist drift.

The next chapter took this tendency even further: what should have been a presentation of the basic principle of Marxist dialectics appeared instead as a total capitulation of Marxist dialectics to the new structuralist and functionalist trends. Thus, if in the previous editions of the textbooks, development turned out to be the unstoppable essence of dialectic, here this essence is identified in the exact opposite: "structurality is the universal property of existence, which results from the capacity of all systems to build successively from each other, to organize themselves into homogeneous and relatively stable levels of structures."³⁸ The convergence of this perspective with the structuralist theories of Saussure, Levi-Strauss, or Foucault was emphasized repeatedly throughout these pages.

After a series of rather eclectic chapters on "science and society," establishing "the dialectical unity between research, education, production," on human action and "praxeology" as the theory of "scientific leadership," on "culture, civilization, humanism"—drawing the line, reconciliation seems to be the watchword of the new philosophy textbook. From a philosophy and a historical sociology of contradiction, all that remained from Marxism was a philosophy of aprioristic reconciliations (between determinism and freedom, between science-technology and man, etc.). Through its humanist triumphalism, the textbook evacuates—or at least sends back to pre-socialist prehistory—most of the intuitions and constitutive principles of classical Marxism that were still to be found in previous textbooks, and which were now mentioned only insofar as they were deemed compatible with contemporary Western orientations, or to the extent that they are such lofty principles (such as the three laws of dialectics) that they no longer

³⁸ *Filosofie. Materialism dialectic și istoric*, 103.

influence anything concrete and can therefore be kept as mere Marxist relics in a now fully de-Marxified philosophy.³⁹

Orthodoxy—that's the spirit.

The late 1970s and 1980s witnessed in philosophy a broadening of the preoccupations with the history of philosophy, international and Romanian. This included many recoveries and rehabilitations of interwar nationalist authors such as Lucian Blaga, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, Mircea Eliade, etc., alongside positive commentaries on contemporary Western philosophy, but also a thinning of the discussions of Marxist philosophy. When they did not content themselves with this passive and appeasing attitude towards contemporary trends in Western philosophy and its Marxology, instead turning their attention inward, the fewer and fewer local texts by or about Marxist philosophy were limited to homages to Nicolae Ceaușescu's contribution to its renewal.⁴⁰

The 1980s produced just one new textbook edition of *Dialectical Materialism*,⁴¹ which seems to mark the natural conclusion of this long evolution. The review that Angela Botez dedicated to this new course captured very well the specifics of this textbook, the differences from the previous editions, but also the general evolution in the configuration of these courses. Thus, on the one hand, she appreciated “the special treatment in the textbook of the concept of ‘system’ in relation to the ‘universal connection’ and the concept of ‘structure,’” but she pointed out that “references to other notions that are widely used in contemporary science, philosophy, and culture [...], such as [technical-scientific] revolution, communication, information,

39 The mode of production and the dialectics of base and superstructure, for example, are discussed as mere applications of the concepts of structure, system, and function. As proof of the fact that the debates about the status and content of Marxist philosophy at the end of the 1960s were totally exhausted in the new decade, the 1975 textbook received only one short and positive review by Teodor Dima, who insists on the textbook's success and originality in matters of ontology and theory of knowledge—that is, the most ahistorical and traditional topics in a textbook that already excels in these de-Marxisizing directions. See Teodor Dima, “Un nou manual universitar de filozofie” [A new philosophy textbook for university], *Revista de filozofie*, no. 2 (1976): 209–12.

40 See, as a quite illustrative example, the misleadingly titled: Alexandru Boboc, “Unitate și diversitate în gândirea marxistă contemporană” [Unity and diversity in contemporary Marxist thought], *Revista de filozofie*, no. 3 (1982): 240–43.

41 Alexandru Valentin, Călină Mare, Ion Irimie, Mircea Flonta, and Ștefan Celmare, *Materialism dialectic* [Dialectical materialism] (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1982).

paradigm, value, etc., would also be required.⁴² This underscored the increasing permeability and passivity of these treatises of Marxist philosophy to developments in contemporary non-Marxist sciences and philosophies. At the same time, however, Botez formulated two objections that seem quite justified, although rather belated, considering the long-term evolution of these textbooks. First, she noticed that

in order to adequately render the specifics of the Marxist conception, the theory of existence cannot be reduced to the philosophy of exact sciences, or sometimes to a philosophy of nature *sui generis* ... Marxist philosophy cannot be reduced to the philosophy of science, and even less must it be exclusively referred to the physical-mathematical sciences.⁴³

Secondly, and perhaps more worryingly, “after reading the summary a question arises: why is the textbook called dialectical materialism, when only two chapters (II and III) announce that they deal with the Marxist stage of the evolution of philosophy, while the others would fit just as well in a general philosophy textbook.”⁴⁴ This indeed captures the sense of the overall evolution of these textbooks: first, the tendency to reduce dialectical materialism to a mere aggregator of contemporary scientific theories;⁴⁵ and then the tendency to sublimate materialism into a generic and as classical or standard as possible philosophy—with realism in ontology and the theory of reflection in epistemology—so standard that we could hardly find a figure in the great history of philosophy, much less Marx, who could be reduced to these positions.

⁴² Angela Botez, “Manualul de materialism dialectic” [The textbook on dialectical materialism], *Revista de filozofie*, no. 3 (1984): 263.

⁴³ Botez, “Manualul de materialism dialectic,” 262.

⁴⁴ Botez, “Manualul de materialism dialectic,” 262.

⁴⁵ This development is best illustrated by the evolution of the series of volumes *Dialectical Materialism and the (Contemporary) Natural Sciences* (nineteen volumes between 1959 and 1982), which has been decreasing in frequency since the second half of the '60s, to the same extent as the direct problematization of dialectical materialism and its relation to the particular sciences gradually gives way to contributions and collections of texts on the latest developments and research from the field of sciences, without any pretense (apart from the title and cover) of still being under the same paradigmatic or conceptual umbrella of dialectical materialism. The development is also described in Flonta's memoir thus: “Where not so long before there had been talk of ‘Soviet science,’ of the struggle between materialism and idealism in physics or biology, and it had been emphasized that the appropriation of dialectical materialism offers incomparable premises for the progress of knowledge in all fields, now reflections by such leading scientists as Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg, or Dirac were presented in translations to the public interested in the philosophy of science.” Flonta, *Drumul meu spre filozofie*, 80.

As far as historical materialism is concerned, the 1980s produced no new textbook. But the destiny of this branch is quite visible in the evolution of the themes of the annual sessions of the Institute of Philosophy. The last seven editions of these sessions (from 1983 to 1989), as reported on in *Revista de filozofie*, always present a dense structure of sections, but in which it is difficult to identify anything that could correspond to historical materialism. This also holds true for dialectical materialism, at least if we are to understand it as anything other than a mere generic philosophy of science. Relatively unchanged throughout these years, the sections of the annual sessions include “social philosophy and theory of human action,” “theory of culture and aesthetics,” “ethics,” “history of Romanian philosophy,” “history of universal philosophy,” “epistemology and theory of science,” and “logics.” In all likelihood, all that is left of historical materialism has been dissolved into the themes of the first section—and that it is indeed a dissolution is proven by the topics of the presentations that range from “the axiological dimensions of lifestyle,” or “the role of feelings and values in the spiritual universe of the new man,” to “the problem of hope in contemporary philosophy,” “methods for developing creativity in leadership work,” and “freedom as a value experience.” Historical materialism, then, would be all that remains from the sphere of the spiritual once we extract the constituted philosophical disciplines (ethics, aesthetics, logic and theory of knowledge, history of philosophy), as well as the natural or socio-historical sciences. That is to say, historical materialism becomes a residual but all-sufficient sphere of humanist desiderata and ruminations, a kind of not very distant ancestor of today’s shelves of self-help and spirituality.

Conclusions

This, then, would be the trajectory of dialectical and historical materialism in Romanian communism: from their status as the supreme sciences of nature, society, and the transition to socialism, they eventually became a generic theory of the sciences, based on a minimal framework of axioms as standardized as possible (objective existence and constant transformation of the material world, plus truth *qua* correspondence) in the case of dialectical materialism; while historical materialism became a pure philosophy in the worst sense of the expression—a residue of humanistic and spiritualizing speculation, impervious to historical and social determinations, and impossible to integrate or assimilate into particular socio-historical sciences.

These developments prompt three concluding comments. First, as far as the relation of Marxist philosophy to the other components of local culture is concerned, the evolution of dialectical and historical materialism textbooks is consistent with processes of depoliticization and de-Marxization recorded and analyzed in other cultural fields—from social and political sciences,⁴⁶ to literary theory and history,⁴⁷ to the field of philosophy⁴⁸ itself. The only element of surprise is that this evolution is recorded even in the ideological core of the professedly Marxist doctrine. As for the directions of escape from the strict corset of the *Diamat* and *Histomat* of the 1950s, they also confirm the directions already prefigured by Adriana Stan in the literary field. In the latter, the exigencies of socialist realism and sociologizing criticism were defused and eschewed either in an abstract, technical, structuralist-inspired direction (in literary theory) or in a neo-impressionist and neo-romantic direction of reaffirming the uniqueness of the artistic voice and critical intuition (in literary criticism). In the same way, the field of Marxist philosophy was evacuated, starting from the 1970s, on the one hand in the direction of professionalization and technicization of philosophical discourse in epistemology, logic, and the philosophy of language and science (e.g., the work of Mircea Flonta), and on the other hand in the neo-Romantic direction of spiritualist humanism, with roots in Heidegger, existentialism, and interwar thought (e.g., the work of Gabriel Liiceanu⁴⁹). It remains, of course, to be discussed and clarified whether this development was achieved thanks to the resistance and struggle for moral and professional autonomy of the authors active in the local philosophical field of those years, or whether it was allowed, perhaps even facilitated, by the political authorities, after the nationalist turn of the Ceaușescu regime. There are a number of possible reasons for this: to dissociate themselves from a dialectical and historical materialism increasingly seen as Soviet interference; to allow that autonomy of conception and method to the scientific and

46 See Hîncu, “Accounting for the ‘Social.’”

47 Adriana Stan, *Bastionul lingvistic. O istorie comparată a structuralismului în România* [The linguistic bastion: A comparative history of structuralism in Romania] (Bucharest: Editura Muzeului Literaturii Române, 2017).

48 See Mircea Flonta, *Drumul meu spre filozofie*, 79–143; but also Christian Ferencz-Flatz, “Filozofia Institutului de filozofie” [The philosophy of the Institute of Philosophy], *Observator cultural*, no. 983 (2019), <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/filozofia-institutului-de-filozofie/>.

49 Gabriel Liiceanu had already outlined and announced this path at the end of the 1960s—see, for example, Gabriel Liiceanu, “Filozofia, o știință?” [Philosophy, a science?], *Contemporanul*, January 26, 1968, 9.

humanist-literary intelligentsia which would co-opt and stimulate the former into the technical-scientific revolution and render the latter at least harmless and self-centered; and, last but not least, to discourage a materialist, socio-historical approach to the social totality as a moving contradiction, in the light of which the multilaterally developed society at home risked appearing to be something quite different from what it was claimed to be.

What can be said about the overall trajectories of the two materialisms? As regards, firstly, the significance of dialectical materialism of the Soviet tradition, the verdicts of those who have studied it at length are as divergent as can be: on the one hand, J. M. Bochenski considered that dialectical materialism, in its Soviet configuration and codification, was at best a platform of common sense, with its presumption of the objectivity of the material world and the adequacy of knowledge to its laws, but which loses all credibility and value as soon as it is elevated to the status of a paradigm and method binding on all natural and historical sciences alike.⁵⁰ On the other hand, Helena Sheehan⁵¹ or Loren Graham⁵² argued that, at least in some of its periods and in some of its configurations, Soviet dialectical materialism provided a solid and fertile basis of concepts, methods, and axioms for investigations in the fields of epistemology, philosophy, and sociology of science. This divergence in their appraisals has, no doubt, in part to do with the divergent political sympathies of their authors, but it also has to do with the constitutive ambiguity of dialectical materialism, which we have already identified in Engels's ambiguous treatment of the relation between philosophy and science. Is dialectical materialism the starting point and inspiration of all the sciences, or the point of arrival and final aggregation of their progress? The fact that, in its evolution in communist Romania, dialectical materialism slipped from the first to the second meaning, and from being the supreme guide of the sciences it ended up as an empty terminological umbrella under which collections of scientific investigations and findings are gathered, is also due to the elasticity of a link that was elastic, metaphorical from the very beginning—that constitutive metaphor of dialectical materialism that assumes an equivalence or correspondence between the historical dialectics of society and the laws of motion of the natural world. The more

⁵⁰ J. M. Bochenski, *Soviet Russian Dialectical Materialism* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing, 1963).

⁵¹ Helena Sheehan, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science* (London; New York: Verso, 2017).

⁵² Graham, *Science, Philosophy, and Human Behavior*.

the metaphor is literalized and tightened, the more dialectical materialism becomes a dense *Weltanschauung*, saturated with anthropomorphizing presuppositions and inapplicable or inhibiting for the diversity of concrete scientific research. The looser the metaphor, and the more “dialectic of nature” means only the universal processes of development, crystallization, evolution, or change, the more welcoming *Diamat* is to the sciences, but also the more irrelevant it is, reducing itself to a simple common-sense, pre-philosophical basis.

If, therefore, the limit of dialectical materialism is settled by the conceptual and disciplinary limits of the relationship between philosophy and science, for historical materialism in communist Romania the main challenge and constitutive limit came—naturally, perhaps—from its relationship with its contemporary history and society, or more precisely from its obligatory conformity to the official version of them. In other words, its main challenge, difficult if not impossible to overcome from within this paradigm, was to argue and justify the existence of a society in which the dynamic principles of historical materialism (class structure, contradiction in motion) were overcome in favor of a harmonious assemblage, rationally administered from the top down. In these radically changed conditions, historical materialism, as a philosophy and historical sociology of modern society, inevitably becomes inoperative, inapplicable. This is why the only notable achievements of historical materialism in the last period of communist Romania were made only by bypassing the space of official historical materialism and its prescriptions. Henri Stahl achieved this in an historicizing direction, bypassing the imposed present with studies on feudalism, and Pavel Câmpeanu turned it, in the samizdat *Syncretic Society* and his trilogy on Stalinism published in the West, into an explicit criticism of the regime.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS–UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2020-0707, within PNCDI III. This chapter is a shortened and edited translation of Alex Cistelecan, “Materialism dialectic și istoric în comunismul românesc I” [Dialectical and Historical Materialism in Romanian Communism I] *Transilvania*, no. 6–7 (2021): 12–24; and Alex Cistelecan, “Materialism dialectic și istoric în comunismul românesc II,” *Transilvania*, no. 12 (2022): 14–23.

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2. Marxism, Science, and Society in Soviet Georgia

Bakar Berekashvili

Abstract: Marxism played a central role in the rich scientific and intellectual life of Soviet Georgia. This chapter analyses the development of Marxist thought over two generations of intellectuals in the postwar period, focusing on the topics of imperialism, anti-communism, the social role of science, and communist morality. It argues that maintaining orthodoxy and the Marxist-Leninist structure of scientific communism, political economy, and historical materialism was essential for sustaining the ideological struggle against capitalism and bourgeois academia in Soviet Georgia. While engaging with Western scholarship, notably the work of C. Wright Mills, Georgian Marxists maintained a principled and consistent commitment to Marxism-Leninism as the main philosophical, ideological, and political line from which dialog was possible.

Keywords: Soviet Marxism; scientific institutions; knowledge production; historical materialism; political economy; scientific socialism

In September 1962, the Soviet Marxist philosopher and sociologist Vladimir Mshvenieradze (1926–90) traveled to Washington, DC, to participate in the Fifth World Congress of Sociology. Mshvenieradze was a devoted Marxist thinker and a prominent theoretician of the postwar generation in the Soviet Union. He graduated from Tbilisi State University in 1953 and soon moved to Moscow where he worked at the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union in various academic positions, including as deputy director of the institute. In the 1970s, Mshvenieradze also headed UNESCO's department of social sciences in Paris. He was one of the most successful Soviet Georgian Marxist scholars, who made a remarkable

academic career in Moscow. In Washington, Mshvenieradze presented a paper titled “Objective Foundations of the Development of Society: A Critical Study of Some Sociological Theories.” In this paper, he developed a strong scientific critique of the famous American anti-communist scholar W. W. Rostow, particularly of his theory of the stages of growth. As a Marxist, Mshvenieradze emphasized the social meaning of science and theory:

We must study history not for the sake of history itself. History must help us learn and know historical laws, help people use these laws consciously in practice, to forecast the very course of social events, to plan their lives. Any scientific theory (on nature, society, or human thinking) must not only describe phenomena or events, but it must also disclose cause-effect relations between social events and phenomena, inherent moving forces that determine progress in nature and society. Sociological theory must also help people transform the world consciously, according to a plan founded on the general and specific objective laws of social development, help people actively and consciously take part in social progress.¹

Seven years later, in 1969, in Tbilisi, the Central Committee Press of the Georgian Communist Party published a book titled *tanamedrove kapitalizmi da burzhuaziuli propaganda* (Contemporary capitalism and bourgeois propaganda), authored by the Soviet Georgian philosopher and social theorist Otar Dzhioev (1928–99). Dzhioev was a man of letters, an outstanding social thinker, and a Marxist philosopher. In Soviet Georgia he headed the Department of Historical Materialism at the Institute of Philosophy of the Georgian Academy of Sciences. In his works, Dzhioev applied Marxist theoretical and methodological approaches to criticize the ideological nature of Western capitalism. The aforementioned book broadly analyzed the problems of capitalist societies, including the tasks of science, particularly of sociology, in the capitalist West:

Contemporary bourgeois sociology is reluctant to deal with new problems, because they are problems of capitalism. In this way, any attempt to solve those problems means direct involvement in ideological struggle. But direct involvement in ideological struggle is considered by bourgeois

¹ Vladimer Mshvenieradze, “Objective Foundations of the Development of Society: Critical Study of Some Sociological Theories,” in *Transactions of the Fifth World Congress of Sociology, Washington D.C., 2–8 September 1962*, volume 3 (Leuven: International Sociological Association, 1964), 35. The English original has been slightly edited for clarity.

sociologists an improper behavior for “holy” science. That’s why they try to avoid investigation of the fundamental problems of our era, and alternatively, they aspire to investigate useless details. Also, instead of researching major problems of social life, they obsessively study how to research those problems, meaning that in place of problems they research methods. Of course, studying methods is necessary, but we must not forget what the use of those methods is. Such obsession with methods by capitalist scholars was rightly criticized by one sociologist who noted the following: Ok, they use the bridle, but where is the horse?²

For Dzhioev, science, including sociology as a scientific discipline, had a greater and larger meaning and importance than just reducing it to the principles of methodological accuracy. Certainly, Otar Dzhioev never ignored the importance of methodological strategies in social sciences, as he clearly understood their necessity. It would be wrong to read or understand Dzhioev merely as a rebellious scholar fighting against methods in social sciences. What he argued, instead, was that science had a greater historical and social importance. For him, sociology had a moral and ethical mission. Specifically, the very task of sociology, as well as of social sciences overall, was to help human beings and human society deal with social changes and with the problems arising from them, to provide a sort of roadmap on how to live and how to build a better society: “Sociology must identify the meaning or essence of social changes, it must also characterize the new reality under which human beings found themselves, and by doing this, sociology must clarify the tendencies and thus to offer ways of implementing the prospects faced by the human being.”³

Of course, Otar Dzhioev considered Marxist theory and Marxism to be an important scientific and intellectual instrument in sociological work. Following the Marxist theoretical tradition, he believed that a scientist, particularly a Marxist scholar, was especially inspired to deconstruct the ideological pretensions of capitalism that captured society, and thus to clarify the reality under which society lived. As Dzhioev concluded: “The very special task of the Marxists is to uncover the liberal-bourgeois illusions and mystifications promoted in capitalist society by the defenders of capitalism. But this could be done successfully in so far as we identify the changes that occurred in contemporary capitalism.”⁴

2 Otar Dzhioev, *tanamedrove kapitalizmi da burzhuaziuli propaganda* [Contemporary capitalism and bourgeois propaganda] (Tbilisi: Central Committee Press of CPG, 1969), 8.

3 Dzhioev, *tanamedrove kapitalizmi da burzhuaziuli propaganda*, 8.

4 Dzhioev, *tanamedrove kapitalizmi da burzhuaziuli propaganda*, 19.

The critical reflections and social observations developed by Vladimer Mshvenieradze and Otar Dzhioev articulated and contrasted the tasks of social sciences in Soviet Union and in the capitalist West. They maintained that while the social sciences and philosophy in the West were predominantly oriented towards methodological issues and pursued so-called ethical neutrality, in the Soviet Union social sciences instead had the moral task of contributing to the formation of socialist society as a sociocultural and socioeconomic alternative to the capitalist system. Moreover, they argued that although social sciences in the West purported to be an ideologically free scientific field, in practice they never functioned outside the realm of ideology.

Soviet scholars were aware of the anti-communist and even antisocial disposition of Western academia. In Soviet Georgia, for example, Marxist circles believed that Western academia not only was limited by ideological constraints, but it also produced no valuable knowledge for society, as it performed as a cultural apparatus of bourgeois imperialism, legitimizing the capitalist order either by ignoring the existence of other socioeconomic systems or by rejecting the possibilities of other systems. In comparison, in Soviet Georgia, like in the entire Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe, science was understood as contributing to the social progress and revolutionary transformation of society, while Western academics were said to foster antisocial and regressive views on human society.⁵ Along these lines, Paata Gugushvili (1905–87), one of the leading sociologists of Soviet Georgia, who served as director of the Institute of Economy of the Georgian Academy of Sciences for more than thirty years and who was also one of the founders of the Soviet Sociological Association (established in 1958), described the moral problems of science in bourgeois societies:

During the Second World War, reactionary bourgeois sociologists never hesitated to pose as the “theoreticians” of antihuman aspirations of the imperialist and fascist governments. From the positions of race “theories” they proselytized the idea of the “inferiority” of certain peoples, while some of those scholars (pragmatists) generally reject the existence of the laws of social development. According to this “situation theory” human

⁵ On social sciences in the Soviet and Eastern European contexts and their relation to Western social sciences, see, among others, the special issue Olessia Kirtchik and Ivan Boldyrev, eds., “Social and Human Sciences across the Iron Curtain,” *History of the Human Sciences* 29, no. 4–5 (2016); Adela Hincu and Viktor Karády, eds., *Social Sciences in the “Other Europe” since 1945* (Budapest: Pasts, Inc. Center for Historical Studies, Central European University, 2018).

behavior (action) is determined not by the spirit to serve and to take care of the motherland (country), but only by the aspirations dictated with the interests of personal success and richness—to adapt with changing social life.⁶

In the fall of 1959, Paata Gugushvili traveled to Italy to participate in the 4th World Congress of Sociology, organized by the International Sociological Association in Milan and Stresa.⁷ There, Gugushvili observed the work and the agenda of the congress and underlined that during the discussions, bourgeois scholars: “avoided to talk about general theoretical problems and paid attention mostly to empirical sociological issues.”⁸ Gugushvili was critical of the hegemonic “microsociology” in Western academia, exemplified by the empirical transformation of sociology and the gradual marginalization of theoretical works and traditions of scientific thinking. Like Dzhioev, he expressed concerns about the excessive focus on scientific methods in bourgeois academia. Bourgeois scientists, he argued, knowingly or unknowingly ignored theorizing the fundamental problems of bourgeois societies. There was a strong consensus in Soviet Georgia among Marxists regarding the criticism of bourgeois sociology for researching narrow, specific, and irrelevant social processes, aimed at legitimizing the atrocities of capitalism.

At the same time, Soviet Marxists generally believed that rejecting the supremacy of sociological empiricism did not necessarily mean abandoning the study of the specificities of social relations. However, they held historical materialism as the only appropriate scientific method for such studies. Whereas they observed that contemporary Western sociology did not completely neglect addressing the problems of capitalist society, they maintained that it never questioned the fundamental wrongs of the capitalist system and avoided engaging with the possibility of its revolutionary transformation. Not everyone in Western academia was considered opportunistic, as there were also scholars who mounted intellectual resistance to the prevailing academic conformism. Among them, the works and Marxist reflections of American sociologist C. Wright Mills enjoyed a wider scientific and intellectual reception in the Soviet Union.

⁶ Paata Gugushvili, *tanamedrove burzhuaziuli sotsiologiis shesakheb: sotsiologta IV ms oflio kongressis delegatis shtabechdilebani* [On contemporary bourgeois sociology: The impressions of the delegates of the 4th World Congress of Sociology] (Tbilisi: Georgian SSR Political and Scientific Knowledge Promotion Society, 1960), 9–10.

⁷ This was the first ISA congress attended by a delegation from Soviet Union. The theme of the congress was “Society and Sociological Knowledge.”

⁸ Gugushvili, *tanamedrove burzhuaziuli sotsiologiis shesakheb*, 17.

Paata Gugushvili met C. Wright Mills in 1959, at the World Congress of Sociology. He noted that C. Wright Mills's famous work, *The Power Elite* (1956), was widely discussed at the congress. Gugushvili characterized Mills as a scholar who belonged to "the circle of American sociologists who during the recent years leads the opposition against the bourgeois academia and ideology in general."⁹ Indeed, Mills was probably one of the Western sociologists most welcomed in the Soviet Union, where he was appreciated because of his political and academic stances. As a devoted Marxist sociologist, Mills not only described the problems of capitalism but also aspired to change it. In the spring of 1960, he traveled to the Soviet Union, where he visited Moscow, Leningrad, Tashkent, and Tbilisi.¹⁰ Here, he met Paata Gugushvili again. Gugushvili reflected: "We had interesting conversations on actual topics of sociology. Currently, he works on the sociology of intelligentsia and the history of Marxism. Prof. Mills was impressed by the success of the building of socialism in our country."¹¹

The kind of clear demarcation between Western bourgeois and Soviet Marxist social science articulated in the postwar period in Soviet Georgia was not unlike similar discussions in socialist Eastern Europe in the 1950s and early 1960s. Yet, the scholarship of Marxist social scientists from Soviet Georgia is almost entirely unknown in English-language scholarship. Importantly, Marxist thought in Soviet Georgia never embraced the philosophy of revisionism, Third Way, or reformist socialism. Even after perestroika, Soviet Georgian Marxist scholars maintained that scientific communism, Marxist political economy, and historical materialism were the principal Marxist theoretical-methodological approaches to analyze the problems of contemporary politics and society. What kind of "orthodoxy" did Marxist social scientists articulate, and what were its intentions and limitations in the context of Soviet Georgia? How did they engage with Western scholarship, and what authors, such as Mills, did they follow more closely and meaningfully? And, most importantly, what kind of research did they conduct and for what purposes? This chapter aims to shed light on the intellectual history of Marxist thought in Soviet Georgia, to describe its principal directions, and to reconstruct the significant social role that Marxist science played by professing a very clear responsibility towards socialist society.

⁹ Gugushvili, *tanamedrove burzhuaziuli sotsiologiis shesakheb*, 33.

¹⁰ See C. Wright Mills, "Soviet Journal," in *The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills*, selected and introduced by John H. Summers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 235–42.

¹¹ Gugushvili, *tanamedrove burzhuaziuli sotsiologiis shesakheb*, 33.

The first generation of Marxist scholars in Soviet Georgia

In their pedagogical and scientific activities, Marxist scholars in Soviet Georgia followed scientific communism, political economy, and historical materialism as the main approaches in Marxist theory and praxis. Taken together, these covered all social, political, economic, cultural, or philosophical topics. In this context, leaving the scope of the three methodological and theoretical approaches also meant the betrayal of Marxism as a science, and was considered a rejection of scientific work in general, as established in the 1930s by Stalin. In his *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (1938), Stalin put strong emphasis on the significance of scientific communism. According to him, scientific communism is based on three fundamental principles of the communist transformation of society: socialist revolution, the elimination of private property, and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Therefore, using scientific communism as a method and theory meant not just analyzing or describing specific or general social and political processes but also proposing alternative solutions to end capitalist hegemony. Of course, this approach closely corresponds to the eleventh of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845): "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it."¹² Following this core principle of Marxism, Marxist thought in Soviet Georgia aimed to contribute to the revolutionary struggle for the destruction of capitalism and the construction of communist society. Scientific communism as an academic discipline was also widely promoted at the level of higher education institutions. Departments of scientific communism were established at various universities in Soviet Georgia; of these, the one at Tbilisi State University was the biggest and most famous. The principles of scientific communism were also taught at faculties outside the fields of humanities and social sciences, for example, at the faculty of engineering.

Marxist political economy was another valuable scientific instrument and approach to the study of the socioeconomic and political world. As Givi Chanukvadze (1924–84), a distinguished Soviet Georgian Marxist political economist argued, Marxist political economy: "uncovers the demagogical discourses of the theoreticians of market economy."¹³ In this way, as an alternative theoretical approach to the study of the capitalist world,

¹² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 5: *Marx and Engels: 1845–1847* (London: Lawrence & Wishart: 1975), 5.

¹³ Givi Chanukvadze, *vulgaruli burzhuaziuli politikuri ekonomiis kritika*, natsili mesame [Critique of vulgar bourgeois political economy], vol. 3 (Tbilisi: sabchota sakartvelo, 1964), 25.

Marxist political economy was widely developed at the level of scientific and academic institutions in Soviet Georgia. The Institute of Economy of the Soviet Georgian Academy of Sciences and Tbilisi State University had strong departments of political economy.

Considering the importance of the method of historical materialism in the original Marxist tradition, historical materialism represented one of the most important, and probably the dominant direction of Marxism in Soviet Georgia. The materialist conception of history was instrumental for Soviet Georgian Marxists—philosophers, political economists, social theorists, and historians, among others—who analyzed the historical and contemporary problems of state, capitalism, human society, or ideology. The department of historical materialism represented one of the main pillars of the Institute of Philosophy at the Soviet Georgian Academy of Sciences. Together with scientific communism and political economy, historical materialism provided a coherent system of knowledge to understand socioeconomic and political issues and to seek for the replacement of the capitalist system. The overall task of Marxism in Soviet Georgia was to develop such a comprehensive social, political, economic, cultural, and philosophical critique of capitalism and its pathologies, and at the same time to defend, actualize, and promote socialism as an alternative socioeconomic and sociocultural system to capitalism.

Who were the Marxist thinkers in Georgia and what were the major institutional loci of Marxism and Marxist thinking? Most of the Marxist scholars were trained as philosophers, historians, and political economists. The philosophers and political economists also developed sociological thinking and positioned themselves as sociologists. This was the case because sociology emerged as a separate academic discipline in the Soviet Union only at the very end of the 1950s, when sociological institutions were gradually established. Nevertheless, in Soviet Georgia, sociological works and activities were integrated at the level of various scientific institutions within the Academy of Sciences, including the Institute of Philosophy and the Institute of Economy. This was framed strictly in the Marxist sociological tradition, where historical materialism played a central role.

In Soviet Georgia, almost all universities had Marxist-oriented departments and circles of scholars, including the universities in small towns. However, Tbilisi State University and the Soviet Georgian Academy of Sciences represented the major bastion of Marxist thought in the country. Practically all faculties of Tbilisi State University, as well as all institutes of the Soviet Georgian Academy of Sciences, predominantly worked within the scope of Marxism. However, the faculties of philosophy, economy, and

history at Tbilisi State University, as well as the Institute of Philosophy and the Institute of Economy of the Soviet Georgian Academy of Sciences, had a distinguished role in the development of Marxism and Marxist political, social, historical, and philosophical thinking in the country. Soviet Georgian Marxist scholars and institutions also enjoyed a strong reputation in the Soviet Union, while their works were also translated in many languages, including French, German, or Chinese. Soviet Georgian scholars regularly participated at scientific events abroad, including the 4th World Congress of Sociology in Milan and Stresa in autumn of 1959, the 5th World Congress of Sociology in Washington in autumn of 1962, the 7th World Congress of Sociology in Varna in the autumn of 1970, the 14th World Congress of Philosophy in Vienna in the autumn of 1968, the 17th World Congress of Philosophy in Montreal in the summer of 1983, the 18th World Congress of Philosophy in Brighton, UK, in the summer of 1988, and many more.

Soviet Georgian Marxist scholars belonged to two generations: the first generation, of those who started their academic careers before the Second World War, and the postwar generation. Tbilisi State University (founded in 1918) was the first academic locus of the first generation of Marxist-oriented scholars in Soviet Georgia, and then another one became the Soviet Georgian Academy of Sciences (founded in 1941). The most important and eminent representative of the first generation of Marxist scholars in Soviet Georgia was philosopher Kote Bakradze (1898–1970). He received his philosophical training at Tbilisi State University (1922) and in Germany, at the University of Freiburg and at the University of Heidelberg (1922–25). In 1930, Kote Bakradze was appointed professor of philosophy at Tbilisi State University.¹⁴ Bakradze also lectured at the Pedagogical Institutes in Kutaisi, Batumi, and Sokhumi, as well as at the Moscow Philosophical Institute. For many years, he also worked at the Institute of Philosophy of the Soviet Georgian Academy of Sciences. Bakradze was a prominent specialist in Hegelian philosophy, widely recognized in philosophical circles. He authored many important books, establishing the tradition of Marxist philosophical thought in Soviet Georgia, including the *dialektikis problema germanul idealizmshi* (The problem of dialectics in German idealism; 1929), *sistema da metodi hegelis filosofiashi* (System and method in Hegel's philosophy; 1936), *tanamedrove amerikul-englisuri burzhuaziuli filosofia imperializmis samsakhurshi* (Contemporary Anglo-American bourgeois philosophy in the service of imperialism; 1955), *logika* (Logic; 1955), *egzistentsializmi*

¹⁴ Bakradze was appointed professor of philosophy without having a doctoral degree. He received his doctoral degree in philosophy in 1958.

(Existentialism; 1962), *akhali filosofis istoria* (History of new philosophy; 1969), and others. Bakradze's philosophical thinking was strongly influenced by the traditions of Marxist philosophy. He had fundamental knowledge of the original principles of Marxism and used Marxism as the principal scientific approach in his philosophical studies.

Another essential representative of the first generation of Marxist scholars in Soviet Georgia was philosopher Kita Megrelidze (1900–1944). Like Bakradze, Megrelidze also received philosophical training at Tbilisi State University (1923). After graduation, he continued his philosophical education abroad, particularly in Germany, studying at the University of Freiburg and at the University of Berlin (1924–27). While studying in Germany, Megrelidze regularly contributed to Soviet Georgian scientific journals on the socioeconomic and political developments in the Weimar Republic. After his return from Germany, Megrelidze's scientific life in the Soviet Union was divided between Tbilisi (1927–39) and Leningrad (1932–40). His main scientific interests included the process of thinking, culture, philosophy, history, and dialectical materialism. Megrelidze's only scientific work in the field of sociology and philosophy was *The fundamental problems of the sociology of thinking* (first published in Russian in 1965).¹⁵ The book is considered one of the most important texts in the field of Marxist social and philosophical theory in the Soviet Union.

There were many other names in Soviet Georgian academia representing the first generation of Marxist scholars. Professionally, many of them were philosophers, but political economists and historians also had a very strong representation in this first generation. Paata Gugushvili was probably the most significant and acknowledged Soviet Georgian Marxist sociologist and political economist of the cohort of the first generation. In 1930, he was appointed docent at Tbilisi State University, and in 1940 he completed and defended his doctoral dissertation at Tbilisi State University, and was consequently awarded a doctoral degree in economic sciences. From 1940, he was a professor at Tbilisi State University and headed the department of political economy between 1940–45. Gugushvili, as already mentioned,

¹⁵ After its publication, the book enjoyed growing popularity among many Soviet Marxist philosophical circles. Megrelidze was valued as an "eminently enlightened Marxist" and the department of philosophy at the University of Rostov decided to nominate the book for the USSR State Prize. See Kita Megrelidze, *azris sotsialuri fenomenologia* [Social phenomenology of thinking] (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 1990), 12. The book was published in Georgian with an introduction by Otar Dzhioev, as *azris sotsialuri fenomenologia* [Social phenomenology of thinking] (Tbilisi, 1990). It was also translated into English: Konstantin Megrelidze, *Fundamental Problems of the Sociology of Thinking*, trans. Jeff Skinner (Leiden: Brill, 2023).

also directed the Institute of Economy at the Soviet Georgian Academy of Sciences for more than three decades. The institute was established by his initiative in the period of the Second World War, in the summer of 1944. It represented a strong scientific platform for Marxist political economy and sociology in Soviet Georgia. Organizationally, during the various stages of its development, the Institute of Economy was composed of many departments, including the departments of political economy, history of the national economy, statistics, Soviet economy and development of economic thinking, sociology, demography and sociology, industrial economy, etc. Scientifically and intellectually, the institute flourished especially in the period 1944–76, when it was directed by Gugushvili. He enjoyed a high reputation not only in scientific circles but also in Soviet Georgian society, and authored more than 500 works in the field of sociology, demography, history of national economy, and in political economy. As a university professor, Gugushvili lectured for many years on the history of national economy, sociology, and political economy.

The first generation of Marxist scholars in Soviet Georgia also included a number of historians who greatly contributed to the development of Marxist understanding and the Marxist conception of history. Niko Berdzenishvili (1895–1965) was the most eminent and influential representative of Marxist-oriented historians in the country. After graduation from Tbilisi State University in 1926, Berdzenishvili continued his academic career there, and in 1939 was appointed professor of history. Like many other scholars, including Kote Bakradze and Paata Gugushvili, Berdzenishvili was also affiliated with the Soviet Georgian Academy of Sciences, where he directed the Institute of History from 1948 to 1965. He also held the position of vice-president of the academy of sciences, and like Kote Bakradze, he also lectured outside Tbilisi State University, particularly at the Pedagogical Institute of Kutaisi.

Marxism in postwar Soviet Georgia

The postwar generation of Soviet Georgian Marxist scholars continued the intellectual traditions of Marxist thought established by their teachers, the first generation of Marxists in the country. Yet, there are some discrepancies in academic biographies and career paths between those two generations. Specifically, many scholars representing the first generation received academic training or scientific qualification abroad, particularly in Western European universities, among which German and French universities were

the most popular. Furthermore, the first generation was assigned the role of leading or contributing at establishing new scientific institutions and academic programs, and also wrote the first Soviet Marxist textbooks and works in the field of history, philosophy, or social sciences in general. The postwar generation had slightly different academic trajectories. It did not receive academic education in bourgeois Europe but was trained within the academic programs established by the first generation at universities in Soviet Georgia, and received scientific qualification at the scientific institutions established by their teachers.

The new generation of Marxist scholars made an invaluable contribution to the advancement of the intellectual and academic life in postwar Soviet Georgia. The number of scholars in the field of philosophy and social sciences (history, political economy, sociology, etc.) increased, as did the number of academic faculty members, as well as scientific staff at the many institutions of the Academy of Sciences. New academic divisions or departments were established. Marxist philosophical, economic, historical, or sociological works were intensively published and promoted by publishing houses affiliated with the Communist Party, with universities, or with scientific institutions. Also, the academic periodicals of the Academy of Sciences or outside of it became an important platform for Marxist thought.¹⁶ Legitimacy was drawn from the postwar triumph of socialism and the diagnosed moral crisis of capitalism; the ideological character of the Cold War, which provoked anti-Soviet and anti-communist sentiments and discourses in the bourgeois West, was also acknowledged and fueled the development and consolidation of Marxist thought in the Soviet Union. The global process of decolonization, neo-colonization, and the Western aspirations for new capitalist and imperial domination, which preoccupied Marxist scholars, also defined the directions of Marxist thought in postwar Soviet Georgia. During the Cold War, both the first and the postwar generations of Marxists were consolidated in the process of ideological struggle against bourgeois academia.

Alongside ideological struggle, the postwar period was also characterized by the active involvement of Soviet scholars in critically understanding Western scholarship. In 1970, a group of scholars from the Institute of Philosophy published a large volume on contemporary bourgeois philosophy, including pragmatism, neopositivism, the Marburg School, the Freiburg School, Fictionalism, neohegelianism, Italian neoidealism, neothomism, personalism, phenomenology, realontology, Anglo-American neorealism,

¹⁶ There were two major scientific-educational periodicals in Soviet Georgia—*Mnatobi* and *Matsne*.

existentialism, etc.¹⁷ Soviet Georgian Marxists were also engaged in the scientific critique of various Western sociological theories and discourses. The famous thesis of the “end of ideology” proposed by American sociologist and philosopher Daniel Bell in the 1950s–60s, also provoked academic reactions from the Soviet Marxist community, including critiques by Dzhioev and Mshvenieradze. Furthermore, Georgian philosopher and sociologist Guram Asatiani (1927–2023) contributed to the scientific critique of Western sociological thought and theories, including those of industrial sociology, the bourgeois theories of social structure, the sociology of revolution, political sociology, and others.¹⁸

Soviet Georgian Marxist academic circles were also the site of disagreements on specific scientific issues. For example, Dzhioev and Gugushvili debated the terminological use of the word *value* in the fields of philosophy, sociology, and political economy.¹⁹ Such discussions, however, never divided or atomized the Soviet Georgian academic community, which remained relatively homogeneous and in line with Soviet scholarship in general, as fundamental views on Marxist science were shared. A good example is that of sociology, on which the positions of Soviet Georgian Marxists and scholars of the USSR Academy of Sciences were congruent. As Soviet philosopher and sociologist Mikhail Rutkevitch (1917–2009) emphasized on behalf of Soviet sociologists:

The task of science (as we understand it) is to reflect the dynamics of real processes and to forecast their future development. In a socialist society (and in the U.S.S.R.) the basic task of policy is to control the further economic, social, and cultural progress of society. Obviously, the control of society requires utilization of all data about society provided by all the sciences and, in particular by sociology, and therefore presupposes a union of policy and sociology.²⁰

He also underlined the interrelation between Soviet sociology, society, and state, and the dialectical relation of sociology and policy: “In a society in

¹⁷ See Guram Tevzadze, ed., *XX saukunis burzhuaziuli filosofia* [Twentieth-century bourgeois philosophy] (Tbilisi: ganatleba, 1970).

¹⁸ See Guram Asatiani, *tanamedrove burzhuaziuli sotsiologija* [Contemporary bourgeois sociology] (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 1987).

¹⁹ See Otar Dzhioev, “kultura da sazogadoebrixi urtiertoba” [Culture and social relations], *Matsne* 1 (1980): 11. Dzhioev also hosted the international conference on values organized in Tbilisi in 1974.

²⁰ Mikhail Rutkevitch, “On Soviet Sociology,” *Current Anthropology* 19, no. 3 (1978): 621.

which policy is based on science, the contraposition of scientific and political criteria, of the proper scientific and ideological functions of sociology, becomes absurd.²²¹ This statement corresponds to the positions on sociology held by the Marxist scholars in Soviet Georgia discussed above. Yet another example of the homogeneity of Marxist thought in the Soviet Union can be found in the strong consensus around the struggle against revisionism and the Western interpretations of Marxism.²²

Marxist scholarship in Soviet Georgia was understood to have both political and scientific significance. The main themes of scientific investigation included the critical study of Western capitalism, imperialism, and neo-imperialism, the critique of Western bourgeois sociology (including sociological theories and methods), the critique of bourgeois philosophical theories, including Western Marxism, the critical study of anti-communism and bourgeois ideology, and the study of the ethical and moral foundations of communism, of Marxism and Marxist methodology (including the scientific study of socialism and historical materialism), and others.

The critical study of imperialism, like most directions of Marxist thought in Soviet Georgia, was shaped by the problem of ideology. Apolon Nutsu bidze (1903–83), a political economist and the head of the department of political economy at the Institute of Economy of the Soviet Georgian Academy of Sciences (1960–80), identified four theories of contemporary imperialism: the racist theory of imperialism, the geopolitical theory of imperialism, the cosmopolitan theory of imperialism, and the Malthusian theory of imperialism.²³ Nutsu bidze wrote against the cosmopolitan nature of postwar Western imperial domination led by the United States of America, which he saw as based on “the principles of bourgeois nationalism, [...] characterized by national nihilism and anti-patriotism.”²⁴ Instead, he argued for proletarian internationalism, understood as “the international unity, solidarity, and mutual support of the working class of all countries. The idea of the proletarian internationalism is naturally related with patriotism and love of motherland.”²⁵ This social critique of cosmopolitanism offered by Nutsu bidze corresponds to the tradition of the general line of postwar Marxist thought in Soviet Georgia, which promoted the idea of anticolonial

²¹ Rutkevitch, “On Soviet Sociology,” 621.

²² See, for example, Pyotr Fedoseyev et al., *Philosophy in the USSR: Problems of Dialectical Materialism*, trans. Robert Daglish (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977).

²³ See Apolon Nutsu bidze, *tanamedrove imperializmis ideologiuri formebis kritika* [Critique of the ideological forms of contemporary imperialism] (Tbilisi: metsniereba, 1965).

²⁴ Nutsu bidze, *tanamedrove imperializmis ideologiuri formebis kritika*, 73.

²⁵ Nutsu bidze, *tanamedrove imperializmis ideologiuri formebis kritika*, 73.

revolutionary struggle of the oppressed nations against Western bourgeois cosmopolitan imperialism.

The critical study of imperialism was directly related to the study of capitalism. The latter included a critique of the capitalist economic system as well as an account of the crisis of capitalism. The work of political economist Valerian Melkadze (1912–81), *ekonomiuri krizisebi kapitalizmis ganukreli tanamgzavria* (Economic Crisis is a permanent companion to capitalism), is a successful scientific attempt to portray and investigate the problems of capitalism and the reasons for its crisis from the perspective of Marxist theory. He offers an insightful critical analysis of bourgeois apologetics, the causes of crisis, the militarization of economies, foreign economic expansion, the exploitation of the working class, etc.²⁶ The critical study of capitalism was also largely linked to the social critique of the ideological nature of capitalism and its pathologies, including greed, consumerism, or individualism. As Otar Dzhioev argued, the ideals of traditional bourgeois individualism could be captured by the following: “becoming rich is a goal of life and egoism is a law of life.”²⁷

Considering the ideological confrontation between the bourgeois West and the Soviet Union, and the pervasiveness of anti-Soviet views among Western scholars, the critical study of anti-Sovietism and anti-communism was at the center of the scientific interests of Marxist circles in Soviet Georgia. The conflict between Soviet and Western academia was not merely a reflection of scientific resistance, but also an example of political-ideological struggle. Sociologists, philosophers, political scientists, or historians in the West developed sharply critical reflections on the Soviet Union and on Soviet communism, which were in turn strongly countered by their Soviet counterparts, who proclaimed the moral-ideological bankruptcy of the capitalist West. Soviet Marxists considered the postwar capitalist West to be a reactionary power attempting to reestablish a strictly oppressive system and declaring ideological war against communism. For example, in 1955, Kote Bakradze argued that the West aspired to create a cultural weapon that would confront the Marxist views and would be useful in the imperialist fight against communism: “Therefore, the struggle against communism and Marxism means not only to use armies, nuclear or hydrogen bombs, espionage and sabotage, but first of all it means to use the cultural

²⁶ See Valerian Melkadze, *ekonomiuri krizisebi kapitalizmis ganukreli tanamgzavria* [Economic crisis is a permanent companion to capitalism] (Tbilisi: Georgian SSR Political and Scientific Knowledge Promotion Society, 1957).

²⁷ Dzhioev, *tanamedrove kapitalizmi da burzhuaziuli propaganda*, 64–65.

weapon, in philosophy, sociology, art, and science—this is a goal promoted by the imperialist bourgeoisie for its academic degree holder servants.”²⁸ Bakradze interpreted the Cold War in terms of the cultural-ideological struggle between two different ideological systems. He observed that although there were many intellectual circles in the West competing with one another in terms of different views on state, society, economy, culture, or politics, the struggle against the Soviet Union and communism was a subject of consensus in bourgeois academia.

“The whole bourgeois ideology is in the service of anti-communism. For this purpose, a long list of literature was written, in which philosophical theories take an important place,”²⁹ argued Otar Bakuradze (1926–86), one of the most eminent representatives of the postwar generation of Marxist philosophers in Soviet Georgia. Bakuradze, who trained in dialectical and historical materialism, worked at the Institute of Philosophy of the Soviet Georgian Academy of Sciences (1949–70). He was the rector of the Batumi Pedagogical Institute (1970–78) and of the Kutaisi Pedagogical Institute (1978–86), and also the head of the department of philosophy at Tbilisi State Conservatory (1986).

In Soviet Georgia, Marxist-oriented scholars wanted to shed light on the objectives of the dominant ideology of anti-communism in the West, and by doing so they strove to expose different ideological trajectories in capitalist societies. One of the scientific interests of Vladimer Mshvenieradze was to investigate the character and ideology of anti-communism as an ideology of bourgeois imperialism—he argued that in the West there was a huge apparatus of anti-communist propaganda that was used to disintegrate progressive forces, to weaken socialist societies, and to attack the ideology of the working class.³⁰

As already mentioned above, Soviet Georgian Marxists never embraced revisionist ideology and remained critical of Western currents of Marxism, also in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1977, Tbilisi State University published a volume which included papers presented at a scientific session on the

²⁸ Kote Bakradze, *tanamedrove amerikul-englisuri burzhuaziuli filosofia imperializmis samsakhurshi* [Contemporary Anglo-American bourgeois philosophy in the service of imperialism] (Tbilisi: sakhelgami, 1955), 9.

²⁹ Otar Bakuradze, *tavisufleba da autsilebloba* [Freedom and necessity] (Tbilisi: metsniereba, 1964), 8.

³⁰ See Vladimer Mshvenieradze, *antikomunizmi umomavlo ideologiaa* [Anti-communism—An ideology without future] (Tbilisi: sabchota sakartvelo, 1971) and *antikomunizmi imperializmis politika da ideologiaa* [Anti-communism—The politics and ideology of imperialism] (Tbilisi: sabchota sakartvelo, 1973).

critique of contemporary bourgeois ideology. These papers analyzed topics such as “Sovietology” as a weapon of anti-communism, but also currents of Western Marxism, including revisionism. Specifically, they focused on the critique of the philosophical views of Jürgen Habermas and the Frankfurt School, of contemporary bourgeois interpretations of Marxist dialectics, and of reformist-revisionist economic views on the transition from capitalism to socialism.³¹ The scientific critique of revisionism and contemporary Western Marxist views also continued into the 1980s. In 1988, the department of history of philosophy at Tbilisi State University published a volume on contemporary bourgeois philosophy that offered a critical study of Western Marxist philosophical theories, as well as an analysis of their class roots. This included criticism of the Frankfurt School (including the philosophical views of Max Horkheimer, Adorno’s negative dialectics, Marcuse’s theory of the “one-dimensional man,” the reformist philosophy of Jürgen Habermas, and the philosophical views of Erich Fromm), the philosophy of Ernst Bloch, and of French structuralism.³²

Anti-communism was also seen as a feature of Western Marxism. In Marxist scientific literature in Soviet Georgia, Western Marxists were predominantly portrayed as right-wing socialists. According to this scholarship, right-wing socialists were revisionists or European social democrats who rejected the idea of socialist revolution, or the revolutionary destruction of capitalism, and thus favored reformed capitalism as an alternative to communism. As Givi Chanukvadze argued: “The theoreticians of reformism do not hesitate to speak about the necessity of the transition to socialism but only without social revolution, socialist nationalization, and the dictatorship of the proletariat.”³³ In this context, he considered reformist “democratic socialism” as a socialism without Marx. Even the so-called radical Marxist schools in the West were not perceived as radical (original) Marxist in the Soviet Union. For example, one of the radical circles of Western Marxism and its most popular bastion—the Frankfurt School—was also a subject of

³¹ See *tanamedrove burzhuaziuli da revizionistuli ideologia antikomunizmis samsakhurshi, sametsniero sesiis masalebis krebuli* [Contemporary bourgeois and revisionist ideology in the service of anti-communism; Scientific session papers] (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 1977).

³² See Guram Tevzadze, ed., *tanamedrove burzhuaziuli filosofia* [Contemporary bourgeois philosophy] (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 1988).

³³ Givi Chanukvadze, “kapitalizmidan sotsializmze gadasvlis reformistul-revisionistuli ekonomikuri shekhedulebebis kritika” [Critique of the revisionist-reformist economic views on transition from capitalism to socialism], in *tanamedrove burzhuaziuli da revizionistuli ideologia antikomunizmis samsakhurshi*, 83.

sharp scientific and social critique in Soviet Georgia. The Frankfurt School was described by Chanukvadze as a revisionist, bourgeois, left-opportunistic, and anti-Soviet (and thus anti-communist) academic group or institution that also encouraged and provided ideological inspiration to other revisionist and anti-Soviet groups of scholars outside of the capitalist West, for example the Yugo-Marxism or Praxis School.³⁴ In Soviet Georgia, the Frankfurt School was considered an anti-communist circle of melancholic intellectuals cultivating pessimism and anarchist dialectics. The critical theory of society developed and promoted by the members of the Frankfurt School was critically described and analyzed as an anti-communist theory, critical of any form of society. It was understood as a pessimistic perception of social progress and the future of society, which scholars in Soviet Georgia argued legitimized the present capitalist system.³⁵

The relationship between science and society

In the summer of 1957, the American geographer Chauncy Harris traveled to the Soviet Union. Harris was impressed with the achievements of science in the USSR and with the importance of science for Soviet society. He observed that while in practice the final decision in scientific matters might have been that of the political leader rather than the scientist: "According to the Soviet view, Soviet society is based on science and the evolution of society can be scientifically planned and controlled. In theory at least science rules supreme and nothing is allowed to interfere with the progress of science."³⁶ Harris also highlighted the culture of communication between scientists and society: "A major effort is made to bring science to the people in a series of popular lectures. Great scientists are strongly encouraged to give such popular talks. The All-Union Geographical Society, for example, has an extensive program of such popular lectures, either at the Society

³⁴ Chanukvadze, "kapitalizmidan sotsializmze gadasvlis reformistul-revisionistuli ekonomi-kuri shekhedulebebis kritika," 96–97. On the topic of Yugoslav Marxism, see Una Blagojević, "Phenomenology and Existentialism in Dialogue with Marxist Humanism in Yugoslavia in the 1950s and 1960s," *Studies in East European Thought* 75 (2022): 417–36. On reception of the Frankfurt School in communist Romania, see Alexandru Cistelecan, "Humanist Redemption and Afterlife: The Frankfurt School in Communist Romania," *Historical Materialism* 30, no. 2 (2022): 56–90.

³⁵ See Guram Tevzadze, "frankfurtis skola" [The Frankfurt School], in *tanamedrove burzhuaziuli filosofia* [Contemporary bourgeois philosophy] (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 1988).

³⁶ Chauncy D. Harris, "Society, Science, and Education in the Soviet Union," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 45, no. 5 (1959): 687.

or in schools and factories.³⁷ In his article, Harris described the successful historical achievements of science and education in the Soviet Union, including the institutional, financial, technical, or moral support provided by the government to science, concluding that

The evidence seems clear that the Soviet Union has succeeded admirably in training and productively utilizing a very large number of scientists, that it has been able to achieve high levels of scientific effort in many fields, and that it has been able strongly to motivate scientists by a system of high financial rewards, high social status, and appeals to patriotism and social responsibility as well as to scientific curiosity.³⁸

Harris was not the only American who observed the progressive development of culture, science, and education in the USSR in the 1940s–50s. Sociologist C. Wright Mills and writer John Steinbeck made similar assessments.

Indeed, the relationship between science and society in the Soviet Union was very close: scientific works were supposed to have not just an academic relevance but also broader social relevance, which in broad lines meant exposing the problems of capitalism and affirming the inevitable triumph of communism. Along these lines, in Soviet Georgia, Marxist thought had an important role in society; it aimed to contribute to the formation and development of socialist culture and communist values in society. To achieve this goal, it addressed society on the issues of bourgeois social, cultural, political, or economic pathologies and on the moral catastrophes of capitalism. Marxist scholars in Soviet Georgia advanced communism in their works as the most progressive form of human life in the history of human society.

Shalva Bitsadze (1905–80) was among the Marxist scholars who promoted the moral ideals of communism in Soviet Georgian society. He was a devoted Marxist philosopher, who received his philosophical education at the Communist University of Transcaucasia and at the University of Marxism-Leninism, where he completed his doctoral studies in 1935. Bitsadze was a professor of philosophy at Tbilisi State University, and his academic research interests included historical materialism, ethics, socialist revolution, and the political-philosophical views of Russian revolutionaries. In his work, *komunisturi moralis shesakheb* (On communist morality; 1955), Bitsadze wrote on morality as a form of social consciousness and identified communist morality as the only moral guideline of Soviet society. He

³⁷ Harris, "Society, Science, and Education in the Soviet Union," 689.

³⁸ Harris, "Society, Science, and Education in the Soviet Union," 692.

defended its principles (unity of human society, virtue, collectivism, social equality) against bourgeois morality (individualism, egoism, oppression), and emphasized the importance of Marxism in the moral upbringing of the Soviet society. Bitsadze explained the meaning and origin of communist morality:

Communist morality develops from the morality of the proletariat. The proletarian morality is formed in capitalist society, and it is specifically determined by the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat. The morality of the proletariat as a morality of the new and progressive forces of society contributes to the destruction of an obsolete capitalist order and to the triumph of the new social order realized by the proletarian revolution.³⁹

Bitsadze argued that the characteristics of communist morality were formed in the process of working-class struggle against capitalism:

Exactly here, the true human moral and cultural features that are characteristic of proletarian morality are developed and formed: comradely mutual help and solidarity, collectivism, the feelings of love and class brotherhood, mutual respect, truth, frankness, straightforwardness, honesty, mutual trust, faithfulness to given promise, strong character, commitment to common class objectives, discipline, braveness, and so on.⁴⁰

He underlined the differences between proletarian and communist morality, and argued that while proletarian morality aims to destroy the base of capitalist society, communist morality was “an element of the superstructure in socialist, communist society.”⁴¹

Bitsadze largely focused on the peculiarities, nature, and driving character of communist morality. Among other ideals, he emphasized labor, Soviet patriotism, and socialist humanism as crucial elements of the communist morality of Soviet citizens. On the personal and public importance of labor in Soviet society, he wrote: “New attitudes to labor are based on a full conformity between public and personal interests in socialist society. Working for

³⁹ Shalva Bitsadze, *komunisturi moralis shesakheb* [On communist morality] (Tbilisi: sakhel-gami, 1955), 37.

⁴⁰ Bitsadze, *komunisturi moralis shesakheb*, 37.

⁴¹ Bitsadze, *komunisturi moralis shesakheb*, 48

the public good at the same time means working for the personal well-being of every worker, as the welfare of socialist society is a precondition and source for the personal welfare of the Soviet citizen.”⁴² Although Bitsadze recognized the achievements of communist morality in the field of labor, he also called for greater improvements in the communist attitude towards labor, as well as for socialist labor discipline, to fight against the remnants of capitalism in socialist society.

Bitsadze distinguished Soviet patriotism from bourgeois patriotism, claiming that: “By its nature, bourgeois ‘patriotism’ is nationalistic and chauvinistic, as it is based on the power of capital and on the oppression and exploitation of conquered nations by the dominant nations.” In comparison, Soviet patriotism meant: “to strive and fight for the equality of all oppressed nations and people, for their identity and freedom, to emancipate them from oppression and slavery, to call for their sovereignty and to help them to organize their life according to their desire, to support their material, economic, or cultural development, and to respect their national culture, language, and traditions.”⁴³ Given this, Soviet patriotism was not possible without socialist humanism. Bitsadze defined socialist humanism as follows:

The notion of socialist humanism in communist morality is a very broad and many-sided, meaningful notion. This notion of humanism reflects love, care, and respect for humans. Socialist humanism is a true revolutionary humanism. It aims through revolutionary struggle to emancipate all oppressed and exploited people from the oppressors and exploiters. Love for workers, their social freedom, their welfare and care for them—this is a subject of socialist humanism.⁴⁴

Bitsadze also elaborated on the major principles of socialist humanism: human freedom, internationalism, the struggle against any forms of human oppression and exploitation, collectivism, and the principle of “one for all, all for one.” As with the attitude towards labor, Bitsadze emphasized the importance of better progress and greater developments in the realm of communist morality, noting that Soviet society must work to overcome the troubled legacy of capitalism.

The tasks of Marxist science in Soviet Georgia were not only to provide critical ideological and social analysis of the capitalist system and bourgeois

⁴² Bitsadze, *komunisturi moralis shesakheb*, 85.

⁴³ Bitsadze, *komunisturi moralis shesakheb*, 102.

⁴⁴ Bitsadze, *komunisturi moralis shesakheb*, 109.

life, but also to encourage the ethical and moral advancement of Soviet society. In this process, it was also essential to address everyday problems such as greed, egoism, the fetishization of private property, or the culture of consumerism which were thought to plague especially capitalist societies. However, Marxist scholars also conceded that socialist society was not immune to the pathologies of capitalism. Considering this, science in Soviet Georgia was also assigned the role of preventing the negative processes that could affect socialist society. Along these lines, Otar Dzhioev observed that:

Property relations deeply damage human beings and yet it would be naïve to argue that egoism and individualism are only related to private property and especially to its capitalist form. All beings are “egoistic” and “individualistic,” as they mostly care about their existence, and in the struggle for survival they confront with the “interests” of other beings. Of course, in social sciences, the idea of private property is not extended to the level of all sorts of personal belongings, but it explicitly means ownership over the means of production, which can be used to take over the results of someone’s work. But by their nature, individualism and egoism as positions in life are not substantially different from the tendencies of private property. Nevertheless, they are not necessarily linked to the existence of private property. This is why there is no surprise that we still fight against the tendencies of private property while private property was abolished a long time ago.⁴⁵

Like Bitsadze, Dzhioev also focused on moral and ethical issues in Soviet society, and reflected on the culture of socialism. Critical towards the capitalist system, Dzhioev never hesitated to also closely inspect Soviet society, to reveal the challenges of late Soviet life, and to defend the ideals of socialism. In this way, Marxism as a science in Soviet Georgia also performed the important role of identifying the problems of Soviet society and searching for solutions to them.

Therefore, the task of Marxist scholars and that of Marxist science more generally was to disclose the problems and troubles of the bourgeois system, and by this to contribute to the formation of communist society. In this sense, science was not considered ethically neutral and value-free. Marxist scholarship in Soviet Georgia was animated by a spirit of ideological struggle and a deep desire to strive for a better future of society.

⁴⁵ Otar Dzhioev, *kultura adamianis tskhovrebashi da brdzola uarkofit movlenebtan* [Culture in human life and the struggle against negative tendencies] (Tbilisi: metsnireba, 1985), 19.

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3. Towards New Orthodoxy: Epistemology and Philosophy of Science in Jarosław Ładosz and Czesław Nowiński

Monika Woźniak

Abstract: This chapter recovers two overlooked Marxist philosophies of science by Polish thinkers Jarosław Ładosz and Czesław Nowiński, situating them within their broader epistemological frameworks. Both Ładosz and Nowiński abandoned the primacy of ontology characteristic of Stalinism, and rearticulated Marxist orthodoxy through Lenin's theory of knowledge, in dialogue with Piaget's genetic epistemology, reconceptualizing reflection as dialectical, historical, and practical. In line with Lenin's approach, they developed their epistemological and methodological views in engagement with the history of science. Nowiński focused primarily on biology, exploring questions such as the relationship between the individual and the universal, the role of idealization, and the nature of scientific laws within evolutionary theory. Ładosz, in turn, interpreted mathematics as rooted in historically evolving forms of human cooperation.

Keywords: Marxist orthodoxy; dialectics; theory of reflection; Marxist philosophy of science; Marxist epistemology; post-Stalinist Marxism

The turn towards the dialectics of nature and the philosophy of science in Marxism was often met with suspicion, particularly from a Western perspective. Perhaps no one put it more boldly than Henri Lefebvre, who referred to it as a “massive exercise in diversion,”¹ a Stalinist plot designed

¹ Henri Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism*, trans. John Sturrock (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 3.

to distract Marxists from critically analyzing the social world. Such accusations often play into dichotomous narratives of good (Western, humanist, critical) versus bad (Eastern, Engelsian, dogmatic) Marxists. Moreover, the history of the relationship between Marxism, science, and nature is still haunted by many specters: from the ghost of Trofim Lysenko, symbolizing the ideological distortion of science, to the shadow of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant disaster. Nevertheless, there have always been scholars who have sought to nuance this image, portraying a complex and multifaceted history of Marxists' engagement with science.²

In recent decades, these questions have gained new urgency. The ecological crisis has not only heightened awareness of the catastrophic planetary costs of capitalism, but also underscored the need to understand our relationship with nature in less mechanistic terms. In this context, various scholars have pointed to the relevance of the dialectics of nature and the influence of dialectical materialism on the development of natural sciences.³ Nature and the scientific understanding of its laws are increasingly seen as essential components of critical thought rather than a diversion. This sheds new light on various traditions of dialectical materialism, including state-socialist philosophies of science, transforming them into potential partners in dialogue and sources of inspiration. The aim of this chapter is to recover and analyze two cases of such forgotten Marxist philosophies of science, developed by Polish philosophers Jarosław Ładosz and Czesław Nowiński. The former specialized in mathematics (since the 1970s abandoned for social philosophy, political essays, and Marxist apologetics), and the latter in biology. Their philosophies were distinct from, and often directly critical of dominant currents in Polish Marxism (namely anthropological and scientific ones), and they were often characterized as orthodox Marxists. Because of that, the analysis of their thought will be preceded by a biographical introduction and a description of their place in Polish Marxist philosophy, aiming to explain how their orthodoxy can be understood. In the final part of the chapter, I discuss the intellectual inspirations of their project, particularly their interest in Swiss psychologist and epistemologist Jean

² One notable example is Helena Sheehan, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science: A Critical History* (London: Verso, 2017), first published in 1985.

³ See, e.g., Brett Clark and Richard York, "Dialectical Materialism and Nature: An Alternative to Economism and Deep Ecology," *Organization & Environment* 18, no. 3 (2005): 318–37; John Bellamy Foster, *The Return of Nature: Socialism and Ecology* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2020); Rogney Piedra Arencibia, "Engels' Fourfold Revenge: On the Implications of Neglecting Engelsian Dialectics in Science, Philosophy, Ecology, and Revolutionary Practice," *Marxism & Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2022): 13–35.

Piaget, and argue why their approaches remain relevant to contemporary philosophy of science.

Who's who: Short biographical introduction

Jarosław Ładosz (1924–97)⁴ came from a family with strong socialist traditions; he was a member of socialist youth organizations as a child and a member of the Communist Party since 1942. During the Second World War, he was arrested and imprisoned in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. After the war ended, he studied mathematics, but he never obtained his degree, moving to philosophy instead in 1952, first at the Polish equivalent of the Soviet Institute of Red Professors, namely the Institute for Training Scientific Cadres (Instytut Kształcenia Kadra Naukowych, IKKN), and then at the University of Warsaw. In 1958, he obtained his master's degree from the latter, simultaneously preparing a doctoral dissertation.

After obtaining his PhD in 1959, Ładosz started working at the University of Wrocław, at that time strongly connected to the tradition of the Lvov–Warsaw School. His career—both within the party and as an academic—was connected to the university until 1968. During the events of 1968, he was a pillar of the anti-revisionist campaign, publishing against Leszek Kołakowski on the pages of *Trybuna Ludu* (People's tribune), the official party organ.⁵ At the same time, he was engaged in the internal critique of the official party line, namely of its anti-Zionist rhetoric and its repression of workers.⁶ In 1969, he was transferred to the Silesian University in Katowice, where he became the director of the Institute of Philosophy. He returned to Wrocław a few years later, and was employed there until 1981, when he moved to the Higher School of Social Sciences (Wyższa Szkoła Nauk Społecznych) of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party. In the late 1970s, and especially in the 1980s, he became increasingly critical of the direction

⁴ Unless indicated otherwise, the information on Ładosz comes from the autobiographies attached to his academic file. See “Jarosław Ładosz” (personal folder), Ministry of National Education in Warsaw, Archive of the Modern Acts in Warsaw, 2/2521/0/1/3183, pages 87, 124, 191–92, 232, 270–71, 329–30.

⁵ Jarosław Ładosz, “Marksizm a filozoficzne poglądy Kołakowskiego” [Marxism and the philosophical views of Kołakowski], *Trybuna Ludu*, April 14–15, 1968, 5, 9.

⁶ See, e.g., Wojciech Wrzesiński, “Wydarzenia marcowe 1968 roku na uczelniach wrocławskich w świetle dokumentów. Wybór materiałów” [The March 1968 events at Wrocław universities in the light of documents: A selection of materials], *Studia i Materiały z Dziejów Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego* [Studies and materials on the history of the University of Wrocław], vol. 3 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1994), 179–80.

of the party. However, this did not prevent him from defending the Leninist understanding of the party's role and opposing various democratic proposals. He remained a committed Marxist until his death in 1997, leading the Association of Polish Marxists and commenting on the new challenges and tasks facing socialists after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Czesław Nowiński's academic and political path was very different. He was born as Sawa Frydman in 1907.⁷ Before the Second World War, Nowiński obtained a PhD in law at the Stefan Batory University in Vilnius. His legal philosophy was influenced by the Lvov–Warsaw School,⁸ and sometimes he is even treated as one of its representatives,⁹ although this is an overextension. He lost his wife and father to the Nazis. After the war, he legalized the Polish name under which he had been hiding during the war. Nowiński joined the Polish Workers' Party in 1946, and in the following years became the Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Supply and Trade, and an important figure in the communist takeover of the academic system. Between 1949 and 1952, he was rector of the Central School of Planning and Statistics (Szkoła Główna Planowania i Statystyki),¹⁰ and worked at the University of Warsaw, the Polish Academy of Sciences, and the Medical Academy in Warsaw.

After the war, Nowiński changed his research focus, becoming a specialist in dialectical materialism and Marxist methodology. It is not entirely clear when exactly this happened: he obtained his habilitation in philosophy and the theory of law from Jagiellonian University in 1946, and initially seemed to retain his prewar interest,¹¹ but in the following years he moved to dialectical materialism. In 1950, the Scientific Section of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party held a meeting devoted to

⁷ The information on Nowiński's life and career until 1955 is based on the autobiographies attached to his official academic file. See "Czesław Nowiński" (personal folder), Ministry of National Education in Warsaw, Archive of the Modern Acts in Warsaw, 2/2521/0/1/4116.

⁸ See, e.g., Jan Woleński, "Lvov–Warsaw School: Historical and Sociological Comments," in *Interdisciplinary Investigations into the Lvov–Warsaw School*, eds. Anna Drabarek, Jan Woleński, and Mateusz M. Radzki (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 17–33, here 25.

⁹ See Marcin Koszowy and Michał Araszkiewicz, "The Lvov–Warsaw School as a Source of Inspiration for Argumentation Theory," *Argumentation* 28 (2014): 293.

¹⁰ This had replaced the main Polish prewar economic higher education institution, the Central Economic School (Szkoła Główna Handlowa).

¹¹ Krzysztof Motyka lists him among the participants at the 1947 private seminars devoted to the ideas of Leon Petrażycki organized by Krzysztof Piętka. See Krzysztof Motyka, "Miejsce teorii Leona Petrażyckiego w polskiej refleksji teoretycznoprawnej pierwszych lat po II Wojnie Światowej (1945–1948)" [The place of Leon Petrażycki's theory in Polish legal theoretical reflection in the early years after World War II (1945–48)], *Roczniki Nauk Społecznych* 32–33, no. 1 (1994–1995): 38f.

his self-criticism and rejection of prewar views.¹² Nevertheless, the general expectation was that he would correct his mistakes in the same sphere, that is, the theory of law.¹³ His shift towards dealing with the very core of Marxist method was seen as problematic in that regard, and as such, it expressed rather his personal choice than external necessity.

In the 1960s, Nowiński started writing extensively on the philosophy of biology, particularly the theory of evolution. In 1964, he spent a year at the International Center for Genetic Epistemology (Centre international d'épistémologie génétique) in Geneva, to collaborate with Jean Piaget on the relationship between dialectical logic and genetic epistemology.¹⁴ Unfortunately, we do not know much about his life in the following years outside of his academic activity. His political significance seems to have decreased starting in the 1960s.¹⁵ He continued writing on the methodology of science, genetic epistemology, and biology in the following years, in both Polish and French. He died in 1981.

Nowiński and Ładosz are remembered by their contemporaries as “orthodox Marxists” or, in the case of the latter, even “dogmatists.”¹⁶ Indeed, both were engaged in post-Stalinist criticism of other accounts of Marxism, including anti-revisionist critiques, and published in the official journal of the party, *Nowe Drogi* (New roads).¹⁷ Nevertheless, Ładosz was significantly

¹² His situation was exacerbated by a comparison between the legislation of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in one of his prewar books. His self-criticism is quite a striking document: beautifully written, it goes beyond a mere formality, rather offering a deeply personal critical intellectual autobiography of a Jew enculturated in the German philosophical tradition and crushed by the experience of Nazism. It was poorly received, not least because he complained of being exhausted and overworked by extensive responsibilities in the new system; many documents reflect his poor physical and mental health at the time. Nevertheless, he was supported by Stefan Żółkiewski and Adam Schaff, which probably tipped the scale in his favor.

¹³ Stanisław Ehrlich, “W sprawie tow. Czesława Nowińskiego (notatka I sekretarza POP PZPR dla Sekretarza KC PZPR)” [Regarding comrade Czesław Nowiński (note from the First Secretary of the basic party organization at the University of Warsaw to the Secretary of the Central Committee) of the Polish United Workers’ Party], The Polish United Workers’ Party. Central Committee in Warsaw, Archive of the Modern Acts in Warsaw, 2/1354/0/1.16.1/237.XVI.1, p. 34.

¹⁴ “Wiadomości osobiste” [Personal news], *Ruch Filozoficzny* 24, no. 3–4 (1966): 307.

¹⁵ It is probable that this was connected to the nationalist turn within the party (with the antisemitic campaign in 1968); nevertheless, further archival research is needed to confirm this.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Władysław Krajewski, introduction to *Polish Essays in the Philosophy of Natural Sciences* (Dordrecht: De Reidel, 1982): xix; Andrzej Walicki, “Moralne wątpliwości co do ‘moralnych rozliczeń’” [Moral doubts regarding ‘moral reckoning’], *Znak* 12 (1997): 73–85.

¹⁷ Czesław Nowiński, “Filozofia zaangażowania” [Philosophy of commitment], *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 4, no. 1–2 (1960): 151–79 (criticism of scientific/humanist division from the perspective of Lenin’s philosophy of practice); “Nowe wcielenie materializmu historycznego” [A new incarnation of historical materialism], *Nowe Drogi*, no. 3 (1959): 150–61 (critique of sociology).

more active politically. Their academic positions also differed: Nowiński, older than Ładosz, was well-educated before the war, especially compared to the somewhat tumultuous academic start of Ładosz. While both enjoyed successful academic careers, heading institutions and earning professorships, they operated on slightly different levels. Nowiński worked at the highly prestigious Polish Academy of Sciences, published internationally, and traveled abroad to Western and socialist countries (besides Geneva, he made visits to Sofia and Belgrade).¹⁸ Ładosz's academic position was less prestigious: while important in party philosophical organs, he worked in less central institutions and almost never published abroad.

Orthodoxy and revisionism in post-Stalinist Poland

Polish Marxist philosophy has repeatedly been described as divided into two main currents: scientistic and humanist. In the simplest terms, humanist Marxists were interested in the human, cultural, and social world; most of them used the language developed by early Marx and treated existentialism or phenomenology as their main area of (critical) inspiration. Scientistic Marxists, on the contrary, were concerned with questions of exact and natural sciences (including the question of matter), and they oriented themselves toward the traditions connected to neo-positivism and empiricism (especially the prewar tradition of the Lvov–Warsaw School) and the methods and norms developed within it (e.g., precision, coherence, semantic analysis, etc.).¹⁹ Nowiński and Ładosz did not belong to either of these groups. They shared an interest in science with scientistic Marxists, but not the ontological framework prevalent in the majority of scientistic authors. In contrast to the latter, Ładosz and Nowiński strongly distanced themselves from

Nowiński criticized revisionism also in the press, see his cycle "Dogmatyzm, rewizjonizm, filozofia" [Dogmatism, revisionism, philosophy] in the journal *Polityka* (May 1958). For Ładosz's criticism, often harsher in tone, see, e.g., Jarosław Ładosz, "Marksizm a filozoficzne poglądy Kołakowskiego" [Marxism and the philosophical views of Kołakowski]; "Wobec rewizjonizmu" [In regard to revisionism], *Współczesność* 25 IX–8X (1968): 1, 11. Ładosz was also a participant in the discussion about Adam Schaff's *Marxism and the Human Individual* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), published in *Nowe Drogi*, no. 12 (1965).

¹⁸ "Wykłady, odczyty, referaty" [Lectures, speeches, presentations], *Ruch Filozoficzny* 19, no. 1–2 (1959): 121.

¹⁹ For more on the division, see, e.g., Władysław Krajewski, introduction to *Polish Essays in the Philosophy of Natural Sciences* (Dordrecht: De Reidel, 1982): xvii–xx; Damian Winczewski, "Scientystyczna szkoła filozofii marksistowskiej w Polsce i rewizjonizm" [Scientistic school of Marxist philosophy in Poland and revisionism], *Studia z Historii Filozofii* 4, no. 12 (2021): 127–51.

both non-dialectical materialism and the neo-positivist tradition. While their emphasis on a historical approach and on praxis was something they shared with some anthropological Marxists, they differed in their intellectual sources, terminology, and interests, as well as in their strong emphasis on the methodological side of Marxism and the theory of knowledge.

Both scientific and humanist currents have been characterized as revisionist, while Ładosz and Nowiński were described as “orthodox” Marxists. Both these terms are notably vague, with various scholars tracing their changing role, scope, and meaning.²⁰ While the political aspect was easy to explain—its meaning was defined by whoever held the power within Communist organizations and authorities—the philosophical aspect has often been less clear. This led some commentators to even treat the latter as completely subordinated to politics. Władysław Krajewski, for example, suggested that theoretical issues played merely instrumental function in the condemnation of revisionism:

It was not philosophical views but political attitudes that were decisive here. [...] If someone deviated politically, if someone went against the party line at some point or criticized some move of the party, then philosophical slips, deviations from the orthodoxy, were hastily searched for in them—when you wanted to, you could always find them—and one was called a revisionist. By contrast, someone who had always been a loyal party member, who always voted as required, and supported the policy of the party leadership, could actually write whatever he wanted in philosophy. At most, he was mildly criticized, and more often than not, his deviations from orthodoxy in philosophy were passed over in silence [...], the attackers sometimes had nothing to say, but sometimes they had something to say, and then they took very different philosophical positions.²¹

Indeed, most authors labeled as revisionists in official documents and in the press were seen as a threat to the authority of the party, either in theory (e.g., openly criticizing the realities of state-socialism or the course of the party)

²⁰ In the Polish context, see Magdalena Mikołajczyk, *Rewizjoniści. Obecność w dyskursach okresu PRL* [Revisionists: Their presence in the discourse of the Polish People's Republic era] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, 2013).

²¹ Władysław Krajewski, “Skutki Marca dla filozofii polskiej” [The impact of March 1956 on Polish philosophy], in *Marzec 68. Referaty z sesji na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim w 1981 roku* [March '68: Papers from the 1981 session at the University of Warsaw] (Warsaw: Otwarta Rzeczpospolita—Stowarzyszenie Przeciw Antysemityzmowi i Ksenofobii, 2008), 147–48.

or practice (e.g., by supporting forms of political opposition, signing open letters, or defending protesting students), or both. In that sense, many notable “scientists” and “anthropologists”—but definitely not all of them—were indeed political revisionists.²² Nevertheless, the authorities in Poland never identified the political stance with the philosophical program to such an extent as to cleanse all representatives in the manner of Czechoslovak normalization. Despite the emigration of many influential authors, both currents survived 1968, and the humanist current—in its “politically safe” option—was even celebrated in the following years.

The label “orthodox” applied to Ładosz and Nowiński is closely connected to their political position and relative absence of open criticism towards state socialism or of proposals of reforms. It can also be seen as a form of auto-identification: those who chose to label their opponents as revisionist, especially in texts targeted at a broader, non-scientific audiences (e.g., the press), automatically posited themselves as defenders of orthodoxy. It is worth mentioning that authors who engaged in such labeling, especially in the period of heightened political discussions (around 1956 or 1968) were remembered as “orthodox” by their contemporaries, even if their own philosophical projects arguably had very little to do with any tenets of Marxism-Leninism. A striking example is Jan Szewczyk, author of texts in the philosophy of labor heavily influenced by phenomenology, who nevertheless was often considered an orthodox Marxist by his contemporaries because of his political line and attacks on different philosophical currents.²³

The philosophical sense of the term “revisionism” and “orthodoxy” is more elusive, partially because it often entails subjective judgments about what constitutes “true” or “correct” Marxism. In its most common usage, especially in reference to state-socialist Marxism, it refers to a narrowly understood Marxism-Leninism, interpreted not as the whole body of Soviet Marxism, but as a continuation of the line of canonical texts including works by Engels, Plekhanov, and Stalin, as well as Lenin’s *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*.

²² The best-known examples of political revisionists are Leszek Kołakowski and Marxist philosopher of nature Helena Eilstein. Among the people who did not significantly cross the party line and were not repressed were anthropological Marxist Marek Fritzhand and Zdzisław Cackowski, a representative of the scientific current who later developed interest also in anthropological questions.

²³ See, e.g., *Marzec 68. Referaty z sesji na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim w 1981 roku*, passim. The papers in 1981 session (especially by Stefan Amsterdamski and Władysław Krajewski) mention his anti-revisionist attacks and nationalism. However, shortly before his death Szewczyk became the defendant of self-government, which caused him to lose his job. This proves that not only the intertwining of politics and theory, but also political evolution itself was quite complex in some cases.

Ładosz and Nowiński cannot be treated as representatives of orthodoxy in this sense, as they abandoned two pillars of dialectical materialism (Diamat) understood in accordance with Stalin's *Short Course*, namely the primarily ontological understanding of philosophy and its division into dialectical and historical materialism (with the latter subordinated to the former as merely its specific application). In fact, this understanding of Diamat was to a degree continued in the scientific current, where it was combined with inspirations from non-dialectical materialism and transformed into a much more complex and nuanced theory.

This inspiration or so-called "critical assimilation"²⁴ of non-Marxist currents, characteristic for both scientific and anthropological Marxists, can be seen as one of the main reasons why these currents have often been labeled revisionist. Nevertheless, Ładosz and Nowiński also drew inspiration from non-Marxist sources, as their engagement with Piaget, discussed below, proves. Ładosz was well aware of that and tried to distinguish between the "fashionable postulate of adaptation" and his own position, writing:

The slogan of adaptation prompts us to seek philosophical inspiration where speculative philosophy is well-developed, rather than where there is the most substantial material and actual scientific problems presented in a less elegant philosophical guise; where more coherent speculation on problems prevails, rather than where the problems of contemporary science, tinged with speculation, dominate.²⁵

This criticism is targeted above all at the anthropological Marxists, who indeed called for Marxism to engage with new (or at least forgotten) anthropological problematics. Over time, their proximity to non-Marxist currents increased, and many of them ultimately abandoned Marxism. The trajectory of the scientific current followed a similar pattern, even if their innovation lay more in methodology than in problematics. In contrast, Ładosz and Nowiński strongly believed in the superiority of the Marxist method and remained steadfast in their commitment to it. In engaging with non-Marxist thought, they sought empirical material, critiques towards common adversaries, and materialist and dialectical kernels.

²⁴ This formulation comes from Bronisław Baczko, "Marksizm współczesny i horyzonty filozofii" [Contemporary Marxism and horizons of philosophy], in *Filozofia i socjologia XX wieku* [The philosophy and sociology of the twentieth century], part 2 (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna), 376–77.

²⁵ Ładosz, *Szkice z epistemologii matematyki*, 210.

The question of method plays an important role here. Already in 1958, Czesław Nowiński called for a more concrete analysis of Marxist methodology, accusing revisionists of abandoning the Marxist view on the relationship between theory and practice as well as between theory and fact. This, he said, resulted in the cult of supposedly pure science, devoid of ideology and interpretation within a theoretical framework, and cleansed from any influence of dialectics.²⁶ While this opinion might seem exaggerated, dialectics was indeed rarely seen by revisionists as a defining element of Marxism. For scientific Marxists, the crucial element was rather materialism, with the role of dialectics reduced to providing the general ontological premises about the changing nature of reality. Humanists, in their turn, started defining Marxism through its goals and relationship with socialist movement rather than through methodology, or limited the latter to the directive of historicism (applied primarily to the investigation of culture and social consciousness). Ładosz and Nowiński, in contrast, emphasized dialectics as both a method and a theory of knowledge, drawing on Lenin's writings (primarily the *Philosophical Notebooks*) and Marx's method in *Capital*. Consequently, their philosophies of science are closely tied to their theories of knowledge, and so I will begin my presentation of their projects with a discussion of their epistemological views.

Czesław Nowiński: “Developmental whole” and the dialectical epistemology of biology

According to Nowiński, Marxism treats all knowledge as coming from our senses. In that, it belongs to the tradition of empiricism. Nevertheless, Marxism is fundamentally different from traditional (contemplative) empiricism. Nowiński explains its active character the following way:

By an active revolutionary-empiricist theory of cognition, we mean a theory which, while acknowledging that the source of all knowledge is the senses, at the same time recognizes that human cognition—as a social developmental process, reflecting the external world—arose genetically from the formation and development of material production. [It is a] theory which holds that the development of material social practice (the practice

²⁶ Czesław Nowiński, “Kształt myśli rewizjonistycznej” [The shape of revisionist thought], *Polityka*, no. 18 (1958): 3, 7.

of production and class struggle) determines the main developmental tendencies of human cognition, and that in material social practice we find the criterion of the truthfulness of our cognition as conformity with the reality in which we live, act, and which we transform.²⁷

This emphasis on practice involves recognizing that human senses change historically. It also requires abandoning the view of knowledge as the contemplation of the object. Nevertheless, the differences between “contemplative” and “active” empiricisms go further than that. Nowiński argues that since Locke, empiricism has abandoned the theory of reflection in which the symbolic function of language was tied to mirroring the necessary relations between things. Instead, it has absolutized the moment of signification, turning knowledge into a fixed system of symbols unambiguously assigned to the individual thing or state. Nowiński demonstrated how this element was later enhanced in Berkeley and Hume, and then undertaken by neopositivism. Indeed, perhaps nothing expresses this view better than Moritz Schlick’s simple definition, “to know a thing means no more than to give it its right name.”²⁸

While we can find echoes of that concept of knowledge in the Marxist tradition (e.g., in Plekhanov, who derived it from French materialists), it is foreign to its very essence. Marxism approaches knowledge differently: it treats cognition as a developing reflection of the world in human consciousness. Thanks to absorbing Hegel’s achievements, Marxism is able to combine materialism with a consistently historical and genetic perspective. Because of this, it does not settle for mere generalization, an abstract notion fixing the common properties. Instead, it aims at explaining the regularity in these properties, their genesis:

Can one deny that individuals possess common features, [...] that they are similar in certain respects? Clearly, one cannot! However, this statement, understood as a response to the question of the relationship between the universal and the individual in objective reality, presupposes a view of the world as a collection of separate ready-made things: cats, houses, lilies, etc., with cats being grey, lilies white, and so on. Yet, when we consider things as arising in a developmental process [...] [w]e attempt to discern

²⁷ Czesław Nowiński, *To, co jednostkowe i to, co ogólne* [The individual and the universal] (Warsaw: PWN, 1957), 27.

²⁸ Moritz Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, trans. A. E. Blumberg (New York; Vienna: Springer, 1974), 8, see also 20.

the developmental regularity of the system in which objective things, states, and situations have arisen and formed [...]. [W]e cannot reduce the developmental regularity of such a whole to the repeatability of features of the objects composing it; on the contrary, the features of these objects, and in particular the repeatability of these features, are to be explained based on the developmental tendencies of this whole.²⁹

Historicism, thus understood, forms the first premise of Marxist epistemology. Importantly, it applies not only to the world but also to its reflection. Marxist epistemology views knowledge as a historically developing whole, applying this developmental perspective not only to the content of knowledge but also to its forms, which it considers dialectically intertwined.

The second premise of Marxist epistemology is its combination of analytical and synthetic moments. Understanding any particular thing is impossible in isolation from totality. At the same time, the totality cannot be immediately apprehended—its cognition requires empirical investigation of a multitude of individual facts. Therefore, the investigation involves the dialectical relationship between the individual and the universal. As Nowiński says, “we rely [*bazujemy*] on factual material, and the results of deduction are juxtaposed with empirical generalizations and are checked and corrected by them.”³⁰ Knowledge advances thanks to reflecting more and more expanded relationships that the individual thing is entangled in. Only by creating a system of such determinations, one can deepen the knowledge of individual things.

The synthetic-analytic theory of knowledge is connected to the method of concrete abstraction. Its model can be found in Marx’s *Capital*. The investigation starts with facts, with a living social whole. Through analysis,

29 Nowiński, *To, co jednostkowe*, 51. Nowiński developed the outlines of his epistemology as the voice in the Polish discussion on the nature of universals and abstraction and nominalism/realism discussion—a context which we abstract from, particularly because the central question was significantly modified during the discussion (already by Leszek Kołakowski). Nowiński reinterpreted universality of scientific laws as a question of their relation to the totality (see below) and integrated them into wider epistemological and methodological discussion.

30 Nowiński, *To, co jednostkowe*, 81. In the following years, Nowiński will describe the dialectics between empirical facts and scientific theory in terms of feedback, see especially “Die Gesetze der Evolution und ihre Veränderung” [The laws of evolution and their change], in Herbert Hörz and Czesław Nowiński, eds., *Gesetz—Entwicklung—Information: zum Verhältnis von philosophischer und biologischer Entwicklungstheorie* [Law—development—information: On the relationship between philosophical and biological development theory] (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1979), 38–59, here 40; “O współczesne ujęcie dialektyki wiedzy naukowej” [Toward a contemporary understanding of the dialectics of scientific knowledge], *Człowiek i Światopogląd*, no. 11 (1974): 29.

we aim to reveal the essence of a developing whole—namely, the simplest determination that shapes its trajectory and is critical in reconstructing the internal logic of this development.³¹ Finding that essence is “a basic methodological norm,” crucial for the success of investigation. Nevertheless, it is only the first step. Reconstruction of the concrete requires describing the succeeding external forms in which this essence historically manifests. Essence and appearance are not polar opposites. As Nowiński notes,

In *Capital*’s system, the movement of abstraction from appearances to their essence, which leads to their one-sided apprehension, to idealization, to the detection of the regularities of phenomena “in their pure form corresponding to their concept,” is intimately connected to the reverse movement from the abstract to the concrete, from essence to the forms of its manifestation, from the simplest determinations to their systematic enrichment leading finally to the reflection of the concrete through a multiplicity of determinations. The relation of the essence to the concrete, of the universal to the individual, is thus not a relation of direct subsumption, not the relation of a generic concept or a general name to its referents (as it is understood in the so-called formal theory of abstraction). This relation is “mediated” by a whole series of conceptual links.³²

Capital combines idealization with the movement towards concreteness. The law abstracts from secondary factors and incidental circumstances; the purity of conditions it requires might never be met in reality. Abstractness, idealization, and one-sidedness are important moments in scientific development. Materialist dialectics acknowledges their importance but does not stop there, instead pointing the path towards the concrete.³³

The dialectical relationship between essence and phenomena, as well as between the universal and the individual, implies that notions do not simply refer to groups of individuals with similar properties. They form a theoretical system from which they cannot be isolated. In *Capital*, the

³¹ Nowiński considers this simplest determination in *Capital* to be the concept of surplus value, expressing it slightly differently to Evald Ilyenkov, who saw it in simple commodity exchange, and to Jindřich Zelený, who saw it in commodity as such.

³² Nowiński, *To, co jednostkowe*, 93.

³³ Nowiński sees the evidence for this in the very structure of *Capital*, where the first volume is said to present the idealization of the essence of capitalist formation (in abstraction from circulation), the second one, the idealization of the process of circulation, and the third one, the move towards concreteness, to phenomena and processes as they appear empirically, “on the surface.”

succession of forms is presented in accordance with the “internal logic” of the whole. The notions that appear later in the system are logically dependent on the ones introduced earlier—nevertheless, as they are simultaneously enriched with new determinations, they cannot be simply deduced from them. Moreover, determining the essence of the elements of a certain whole relies upon understanding the essence of that whole. The notion of the proletariat, for example, is not created in accordance with the so-called formal theory of concept formation: Marx did not search for the property common to all proletarians. Rather, his notion of the proletariat is derived from the investigation of the regularities of the whole capitalist formation. Nowiński also refers in detail to Lenin’s views on the peasantry, arguing that the notions of kulak, middle peasant, and poor peasant are derived from the analysis of the tendencies of development of capitalism and class struggle in the rural environment, and involve a complex dialectic between essence and its historically changing external manifestations (e.g., wealth or forms of exploitation).

Finally, the third premise of dialectical materialist epistemology concerns the practical character of knowledge, already mentioned above. Cognition is connected to the material transformation of the world. The very act of identifying a part of the whole as an individual object is based on the principles governing its emergence (or production) and functioning. Recognizing a thing as a representative of a certain class based on its sensory properties is subordinated to practice. As Nowiński explains, “the sensory properties ‘signal’ that from this or that object, in accordance with the natural relations thereof, one can produce a hoe, while another thing can be ground and then used to satisfy bodily needs.”³⁴ It means that our knowledge of an individual object is not based on a simple, immediate observation but always involves the universal, general element. The notion is always connected with a certain regularity, law of genesis, and functioning. Practice is both the origin and end of cognition; only through practice can we confirm if the reflection of the laws of nature is the right one. This remains true, Nowiński argues, even if the knowledge—or one of its secondary functions—gains relative independence in the course of historical development. In the final instance, they are still connected to social development and the mastering of nature and should be regarded as such.

The resemblance of Nowiński’s epistemological sketch with the ideas developed by Soviet Marxist philosopher Evald Ilyenkov (1924–79) is striking: concrete abstraction, totality, criticism of generalizing abstraction—these

³⁴ Nowiński, *To, co jednostkowe*, 67.

are all ideas we know best in Ilyenkov's formulation of them.³⁵ Nowiński was familiar with Soviet methodological studies: he mentions Ilyenkov explicitly (along with Mark Rozental and Valentin Asmus).³⁶ Nevertheless, one should not overestimate his influence. Nowiński's text was published in 1957, and presented already in 1956; the only text by Ilyenkov he could have known at that point was an article in *Voprosy filosofii* from 1955, presenting his understanding of concreteness in Marx in very concise form.³⁷ Even if Nowiński's account of Marxist theory of knowledge was inspired by Ilyenkov's text, it was significantly developed and enriched, with Nowiński's own studies in Marx and Lenin playing here an important part. Nowiński returned to ideas developed in the 1957 essay throughout his life. In 1980, a year before he died, he turned to Quine, Popper, and Kuhn to show how philosophy of science itself attempted to overcome positivism, and why this overcoming was only partial, once again reiterating the views he had already formulated in the 1950s.³⁸

In the essay on the relationship between the individual and the universal, Nowiński insists that Marxist epistemology should be based on the empirical study of an actual history of knowledge. In the following years, he turned to the realization of that postulate, engaging in collaborations with representatives of other scientific disciplines. The essay analyzed so far was followed almost immediately by the volume *Z problematyki psychologii i teorii poznania* (On the problems of psychology and theory of knowledge), co-written with psychologists.³⁹ In the following years, Nowiński devoted himself mainly to the philosophy of biology. In 1973, he organized an international conference in historicism and the concept of information in biology, attended both by philosophers and biologists.⁴⁰ Leszek Kuźnicki (co-author

35 For more on Ilyenkov's methodological ideas, see, e.g., Evald Ilyenkov, *Dialectics of the Abstract & the Concrete in Marx's Capital*, trans. Sergei Kuzyakov (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982); David Bakhurst, *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy: From the Bolsheviks to Evald Ilyenkov* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 135–74.

36 Nowiński, *To, co jednostkowe*, 89.

37 Evald Ilyenkov, "O dialektike abstraktnogo i konkretnogo v nauchno-teoreticheskem poznani" [On the dialectic of the abstract and the concrete in scientific-theoretical knowledge], *Voprosy filosofii*, no. 1 (1955): 42–56.

38 Czesław Nowiński, "O reliktach pozytywizmu" [On the relics of positivism], *Studia Filozoficzne*, no. 6 (1980): 99–116. References to and quotations from the essay on individual and universal are also present in his other works, e.g., Nowiński, "Die Gesetze der Evolution und ihre Veränderung," 46, 55.

39 Czesław Nowiński, ed., *Z problematyki psychologii i teorii poznania: studia* [On the problems of psychology and theory of knowledge] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1958).

40 The conference resulted in the publication Hörz and Nowiński, eds., *Gesetz—Entwicklung—Information*.

of one of his books) claims that this interest belonged to the initially bigger investigation into the formation of scientific notion in various disciplines, including psychology and chemistry.⁴¹ Nevertheless, that larger project remained unrealized: in the following years, Nowiński—while occasionally venturing into other sciences—focused mostly on the problems of evolution.

His 1965 book *O rozwoju pojęcia gatunku* (On the development of the notion of species), co-written with the aforementioned Leszek Kuźnicki, is intimately linked with the problematics of the universal and individual. The authors analyze the history of the notion of species from Aristotle to Darwin, concluding that through all phases of its development, it had a theoretical character: it belonged to a more general theory of organic nature and served an explanatory rather than simply descriptive role. The notion explained the reasons behind the stability of the forms that nature takes (despite its constant movement and variability), their distinctiveness (despite mutual relations), and purposefulness (in the sense of compatibility between organs as well as between organism and environment).

At the same time, they identified three different types of explanation. Aristotle aimed to explain the structure and development of organic matter theologically, assuming the point of view of the purposes set in the eternal forms shaping matter. Linnaeus considered it from the perspective of the creation of separate species and the eternal structure of nature. In Darwin, the explanation becomes deterministic: the species are seen as the relatively stable forms adapted to their life conditions, and their emergence stems from natural causes determining natural selection. Their notions of species and its understanding are, therefore, a part of their general theories of living nature. Moreover, with time the notion of species became necessary to express the general statements of the theory—it became a biological category.

As part of the biological theory, the notion of species changed with its transformations. These changes are deeper than often thought. The transition from the static to the dynamic concept of species does not simply mean that what was once considered eternal, is now seen as changing. Rather, the whole explanation is transformed into another realm. As Nowiński and Kuźnicki summarize:

Darwin ascended, as it were, to a higher level of consideration, and instead of classifying the various structures as species or varieties, he considered the problem of species formation in the process of transformation of

⁴¹ Leszek Kuźnicki, *Autobiografia: w kręgu nauki* [Autobiography: in the world of science] (Warsaw: Polska Akademia Nauk, 2002), 88n2.

one relation between groups into another relation. The strange mosaic of continuity and discontinuity, variability and relative stability, sexual isolation and its absence, etc., gained its explanation in the developmental tendencies of the process, in the dynamic relations between relations.⁴²

Therefore, Darwin's theory operates on a different logical level than the previous ones. The static theory was concerned with relations, such as continuity or discontinuity, and on their basis determined if something was a species. In contrast, the dynamic theory of species is concerned with relations between relations (rather than simply relations between individual organisms): it does not treat relations of continuity and discontinuity as given, but investigates how they emerged and transformed into one another.

This "developmental" point of view changes the whole structure of classification and the relationship between their elements and cannot be simply "translated" into static terms. First of all, the notion of species is an idealization based on an abstract theoretical model: while many concrete species are close to the "pure model," not all of them are, for example because of incomplete sexual isolation. Moreover, the notion is relative, not only in the sense that the investigated forms relate to forms they emerged from, but also in the sense that it is no longer described in absolute terms—the terms Darwin uses are consciously relative (e.g., "more stable" or "more pronounced").

In the following years, Nowiński applied his epistemological principles to the modern theory of evolution.⁴³ He saw the synthetic theory of evolution as divided into two main currents. The first one, represented by Theodosius Dobzhansky, was a genetic theory of evolution. It put emphasis on the experimental verification of theory (with mechanics as its methodological model), and was mostly concerned with the level of the microevolution processes rather than with general theory. Nowiński claims it was mostly ahistorical (at least until 1950s, when it started changing). He saw himself

⁴² Nowiński and Kuźnicki, *O rozwoju pojęcia gatunku*, 269.

⁴³ Czesław Nowiński, "L'évolution de la théorie de l'évolution" [The evolution of the theory of evolution], in *Psychologie et épistémologie génétiques* [Psychology and genetic epistemology] (Paris: Dunod, 1966), 389–402; "Kryzys struktury teorii ewolucji" [The crisis of the structure of the theory of evolution], *Studia Filozoficzne*, no. 2 (1969): 47–67; "Pojęcie doboru naturalnego" [The notion of natural selection], in *Ewolucja biologiczna* [Biological evolution] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1974), 39–124; "Biologische Gesetze und dialektische Methode" [Biological laws and dialectical method], *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 23, no. 7 (1975): 926–37; "Syntetyczna teoria ewolucji (Julian Huxley)" [Synthetic theory of evolution (Julian Huxley)], *Kwartalnik historii nauki i techniki* 17, no. 4 (1972): 695–718.

closer to the second current, represented by Ivan Schmalhauzen and Julian Huxley, which was more historical and dialectical in character and treated evolution as the process of self-organization.⁴⁴

One of Nowiński's main interests in modern evolutionary theory was the notion of law. Admitting the difficulties in distinguishing laws from random generalizations,⁴⁵ he nevertheless argued that

In history, it is possible to formulate *general* laws if we understand them as laws of the development of structures. On the one hand, the historical whole must be kept in mind, but on the other hand we must go back to the most primitive factors and follow them in their own development. The main category of such a methodology is the category of the developing whole and not either the whole or the development.⁴⁶

Therefore, the objective of the general theory of evolution is to causally explain the general direction of structural change in the historical self-organization of life. It means that laws operate on a very high level of abstraction, and do not concern causal relationships between individual events. In the case of regularities concerning specific phylogenetic lineages—the level of detailed (*szczegółowe*) theories of evolution—we can speak of laws only in terms of their integration with the general theory. This understanding of the universality of laws in terms of their integration into the system of deeper and deeper interconnections has already been suggested in his 1957 epistemological essay.⁴⁷ Nowiński refers in this context also to Jean Piaget's concept of causality, which distinguished between *legalité* (empirical generalizations) and *causalité* (necessity that takes its source in the system).⁴⁸

44 Through Schmalhauzen, Nowiński put great hopes in cybernetics (despite strong insistence on anti-reductionism). Ładosz also saw cybernetics and mathematization in general as a promising tool, although he warned they can lead to ahistoricism.

45 "We know that stating the recurrence of certain components of evolution is by no means proof of their natural necessity. We know that processes occurring, in particular phylogenetic lineages, cannot be derived from the explanations of the theory, since the role of chance in shaping them cannot be eliminated. Nor is it clear what empirical laws of evolution are to be derived from the assumptions of theory, since the tendencies of evolutionary processes are often contradictory [...] the factors and mechanisms of evolution change historically." Nowiński, "Die Gesetze der Evolution und ihre Veränderung," 51.

46 Nowiński, "Die Gesetze der Evolution und ihre Veränderung," 55.

47 Nowiński, *To, co jednostkowe*, 58–59.

48 Nowiński, "Die Gesetze der Evolution und ihre Veränderung," 47. See also Nowiński, "O reliktach pozytywizmu," 112.

Jarosław Ładosz: The epistemology of mathematics as the history of human material cooperation

Similarly to Nowiński, Ładosz also presents his outline of the Marxist theory of knowledge as overcoming the contemplative character of traditional empiricism. He argues that many textbook accounts portray this overcoming in a distorted manner, simply adding rationality to senses as the sources of knowledge or mentioning practice in very vague terms.⁴⁹ Instead, one should show in detail how practice forms the foundation of knowledge. Only by pointing to practice as the basis for both sensory and conceptual cognition, one can avoid the eclectic combination of empiricism and rationalism. For Marxism,

[a]t any level, cognition is not simply the result of the passive reception of material external and internal stimuli by the biologically structured human nervous mechanism. Impressions and concepts arise as a result of the fixation, the stabilization of biologically and socially determined material actions, which are then internalized, i.e., performed only inside the nervous system, without being effectively performed in practice.⁵⁰

Cognition, therefore, is not something happening simply between the material world and a biological organism. The human brain and sensory apparatus are, of course, necessary conditions for human knowledge, but they do not determine its content and forms; these are determined by social practice, understood as “the entirety of human material activity that transforms the social and natural environment.”⁵¹

This dependence on practice is noticeable already on the sensory level. Impression is not simply the mental counterpart of an individual external fact; it is not a simple copy, but a copy reflected through the prism of historically evolving collective activity. Among the myriads of various stimuli affecting human sensory organs, only those relevant from the point of view

⁴⁹ He criticizes, among others, Adam Schaff's *Główne zagadnienia i kierunki filozofii* [The main issues and currents in philosophy] (Warsaw: Uniwersytet Warszawski. Dział Wydawnictw, 1958); and the Soviet textbook *Osnovy marksistskoy filosofii* [Fundamentals of Marxist philosophy] (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1959).

⁵⁰ Jarosław Ładosz, “Marksizm a tradycja empiryzmu i racjonalizmu” [Marxism and the tradition of empiricism and rationalism], *Człowiek i Światopogląd*, no. 7–8 (1969): 121. The notion of interiorization alludes to Jean Piaget, important for Ładosz's philosophy of mathematics (see below).

⁵¹ Ładosz, “Marksizm a tradycja empiryzmu i racjonalizmu,” 121.

of practice are paid attention to and fixed in impression. It is practice that decides which stimuli are selected and generalized (i.e., which non-identical stimuli lead to the same impression). Ładosz refers to Piaget's research on child development to argue that even the very structuration of the world, its differentiation into separate objects, is acquired through material activity: "as long as the child does not master the activity of playing the rattle [*zawładnie w działaniu grzechotką*], he does not perceive it as a separate object."⁵² The human being is not a "tabula rasa": the individual is always integrated into an already humanized world, organized and modified by human activities and socially articulated in language. Since birth, human beings impose the structures of their activities on the world, both in the form of coordinated movement patterns and inborn reflexes (the latter born in the course of evolutionary adaptation to the world and therefore flexible).

This dependence on practice, Ładosz argues, is even more evident in the case of conceptual knowledge: an individual cannot acquire the ability to talk, to use language, outside of society. Conceptual knowledge reflects the regularities of natural and social processes relevant for collective production, in which individual actions satisfy needs only in cooperation with others, securing the coordination of activities and communication. At the same time, the point of view of practice poses the question of abstract knowledge anew. While conceptual knowledge presupposes impressions, notions do not emerge as an abstraction or generalization from them. Notions are not simply reducible to impressions. Moreover, the conceptual knowledge influences our sensibility: "[c]onceptual thought activity structures our sensory images, perceptions on the basis on deeper relations [*związki*] of reality."⁵³ At the same time, conceptual knowledge, Ładosz argues, is not innate or independent from experience. Nor is it, as Hume suggested, based on merely subjective rules of the mind. Rather, it comes from a collective material practice and reflects the regularities of the world. The last point is important to Ładosz, who argues that the emphasis on the social and practical character of knowledge does not lead to subjectivism. As he explains:

Our actions themselves, after all, are part of the material world, and their coordination into specific structures ultimately takes place according to the properties of the material that is transformed. Material, social production is the transformation of the world according to its own regularities.

52 Ładosz, "Marksizm a tradycja empiryzmu i racjonalizmu," 123.

53 Ładosz, "Marksizm a tradycja empiryzmu i racjonalizmu," 133.

The human material world, i.e., the natural environment created by the labor of generations, is consistent [zgodny] with the *non-human* world.⁵⁴

This objectivist tendency, shared also by Nowiński and coherent with their science-oriented approach, distinguishes them from the humanist account of practice and its epistemological role found in Leszek Kołakowski. The latter's famous essay "Karl Marx and the Classical Definition of Truth" not only counterposes Lenin (and Engels) with Marx, but suggests Marx's affinity with a pragmatist, relativist concept of truth. It ends with the image of a man that "in all the universe [...] cannot find a well so deep that, leaning over it, he does not discover at the bottom his own face."⁵⁵ In contrast, the "orthodox" philosophers of practice aimed to integrate practice into the realist framework of the theory of reflection. They argued that practice is the basis of knowledge and the criterion of truth because it must be in accordance with the laws of nature it ultimately reveals. To put it simply: there is no action transforming the world that would not conform to its own laws.

Ładosz's philosophy of mathematics is presented in two books: *Wielowartościowe rachunki zdań a rozwój logiki* (Multi-valued propositional calculi and the development of logic; 1961)⁵⁶ and *Szkice z epistemologii matematyki* (Sketches in the epistemology of mathematics; 1968). I will focus here on the latter, in which Ładosz develops his fundamental epistemological premises and applies them to mathematics. His starting point is a critical analysis of constructivism—one of the major tendencies in

54 Ładosz, "Marksizm a tradycja empiryzmu i racjonalizmu," 127 (emphasis in original).

55 Leszek Kołakowski, "Karl Marx and the Classical Definition of Truth," in *Marxism and Beyond: On Historical Understanding and Individual Responsibility*, trans. Jane Z. Peel (London: Pall Mall, 1968), 58–86, here 86. Nowiński sees this subjectivist turn as resulting from turning nature into unordered chaos, and overemphasizing needs in anthropology: Nowiński, "Filozofia zaangażowania," 165. See also Ładosz, "Marksizm a filozoficzne poglądy Kołakowskiego."

56 Jarosław Ładosz, *Wielowartościowe rachunki zdań a rozwój logiki* (Warsaw: Księżka i Wiedza, 1961). The book is devoted to the critical analysis of multi-valued logic and its relationship with modal categories. Ładosz argues there that modality cannot be formalized because the relationship between different modalities is not quantitative or formal; it makes sense only within a specific context of reference and in relation to external world. He acknowledges the benefits of multi-propositional calculi for both mathematics and technology but claims that these benefits are restricted to multi-valued algebra and that classical logic should not be replaced by multi-valued logic. As a result, he rejects the concept of dialectical logic as multi-valued formal logic, instead defending its non-formal understanding as a theory of knowledge. See also Damian Winczewski, "Dialektika wiedzy logikomatematycznej w ujęciu Jarosława Ładosza" [The dialectic of logico-mathematical knowledge in the interpretation of Jarosław Ładosz], *Studia Philosophica Wratislaviensia* 15, no. 4 (2020): 32–35.

twentieth-century philosophy of mathematics. The term “constructivism” refers to the interpretation of mathematics as an activity of mental construction. This perspective has far-reaching consequences, the most significant of which is a new understanding of provability. According to constructivism, a mathematical proof must provide a method to explicitly construct the mathematical object, rather than merely follow logically from axioms. This leads to the rejection of any claims lacking such a constructive proof (e.g., the Law of Excluded Middle), resulting in mathematical and logical theories that are significantly different from classical ones.

Ładosz views constructivism as an intrinsic “mathematical ideology”—a set of perceptions held by mathematicians about their own activity, emerging from certain regularities in the development and specialization of knowledge. This ideology accompanies and inspires the development of mathematics, freeing it from being viewed as something static and predetermined. However, it is ultimately idealist, as it attributes the sources of certainty in mathematics solely to the subject (ultimately, to their intuition), thereby severing its connection to the external world. Therefore, in the second part of the book, Ładosz attempts to recover the “rational kernel” behind the mystical veneer of the notion of construction: to dialectically surpass it by explaining and preserving its achievements while simultaneously addressing its idealist character.

The search for that explanation, Ładosz argues, requires delving into specific historical, sociological, and psychological research; as he notes, “[o]ne cannot speculate out the experience.”⁵⁷ Therefore, the guide for him becomes Jean Piaget, whose doctrine “is fused with concrete research more than any other.”⁵⁸ Indeed, Piaget’s genetic epistemology contained one of the most interdisciplinary and empirically rooted theories of mathematical knowledge at that time. Moreover, one of the central premises of genetic epistemology is the connection between cognition and activity: in Piaget’s words, “knowing an object [...] means acting upon it [...], constructing systems

57 Ładosz, *Szkice z epistemologii matematyki*, 11. This postulate is, of course, linked to Lenin’s interdisciplinary program for the theory of cognition sketched out in the *Philosophical Notebooks*. Ładosz suggests that the optimal solution would be the establishment of interdisciplinary teams working on the basis of a mutually agreed and implemented plan; nevertheless, he defends also a much humbler program of publication of separate works by scholars representing different disciplines, and their mutual dialogue and criticism (see Ładosz, *Szkice z epistemologii matematyki*, 14).

58 Ładosz, *Szkice z epistemologii matematyki*, 11. In genetic epistemology, this concrete research concerns developmental psychology (ontogeny) and history (phylogeny). While Piaget is mostly remembered for the former, his project of epistemology was broader.

of transformations that can be carried out on or with this object.”⁵⁹ This insistence on activity was important for Ładosz, who nevertheless argued that Piaget’s understanding of the latter was idealist, as he understood it as something independent from the external world (although he claims that Piaget sometimes suggests the accordance between activity and the laws of objective reality, allowing for a “materialist inconsistency” within his program).

These idealist beliefs, Ładosz argues, do not negate Piaget’s concrete empirical findings, his “discoveries of objective structures of human actions and mechanisms of transitions between them, structures and mechanisms that lead to the emergence of mathematical knowledge.”⁶⁰ He describes these findings in detail, emphasizing the complexity of operations and their transitions in a polemic against intuitionists’ belief in their simplicity and obviousness. His high evaluation applies, however, mostly to the results obtained from studies on child development, which he considers to be objective and beneficial in resolving certain disputes in the philosophy of mathematics (e.g., concerning the nature of natural numbers). His attitude towards Piaget’s views on the emergence of more complex mathematical notions, such as infinity or complex numbers, is far from that praise: he calls them speculative, lacking empirical basis, largely reproducing dominant approaches to the philosophy of mathematics, and entirely idealistic in their insistence on the autonomy of the development of mathematics at this level.

Ultimately, therefore, according to Ładosz Piaget offers “a factually rich but subjective dialectics,”⁶¹ and must be supplemented and corrected in a materialist spirit, which he proceeds to do:

According to our hypothesis, logico-mathematical concepts [*pojęcia*] and operations will be the internalized and mentalized structures of previously coordinated general structures of material social cooperation. The recognition [*uświadomienie sobie*] of these structures by science will be the result of the reconstruction of the coordination of human actions that takes place as a result of their socialization. Socialization, in turn, consists in the fact that the material activities of the individual are [...] reconstructed and coordinated interpersonally, in the form of an exchange of interpersonal actions.⁶²

59 Jean Piaget, *Genetic Epistemology*, trans. Eleanor Duckworth (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), 15.

60 Ładosz, *Szkice z epistemologii matematyki*, 249.

61 Ładosz, *Szkice z epistemologii matematyki*, 323.

62 Ładosz, *Szkice z epistemologii matematyki*, 335–36.

In short, the idea is to present mathematical concepts and operations as abstractions from actions that are not individual but social, and whose structures have become generalized, and therefore dominant in material production.⁶³ This generality is characteristic of mathematics; the concepts of other scientific disciplines are said to be shaped by structures devoid of such universality, although Ładosz never developed this theme. Such “non-universalized” structures are also used by Ładosz to explain the presence of “anticipations” of later discoveries in mathematical theories—the lack of their conscious development is said to be caused by the lack of that universalization.⁶⁴

In Piaget’s view, mathematical and logical knowledge arises from what he calls reflective abstraction: abstraction not from the object but the operation itself, from the actions that can be carried on the object and that are coordinated with other actions.⁶⁵ Ładosz’s explanation of the emergence of mathematical concepts is based on this scheme but complicates it by including the social aspect.⁶⁶ The basis is the evolution of the division of labor, the “historical differentiation of the activities of individuals,”⁶⁷ whereby the activity of an individual ceases to produce an immediate biological benefit, while the interaction produces it. Importantly, the structures of this collective production are adapted to the laws of transformation of the external world. The internalized action of the individual becomes adapted to the structures of this collective interaction.

Significantly, the decisive role in the development of mathematics is played not by technological advancement as such (especially not by the

63 It seems that Ładosz believed that psychogenetics was still a valid method; nevertheless, he maintained it had to be subordinated to the research of materialist production. Nowiński (on his connections to Piaget see below) explicitly affirmed the assumption that the process of child development to a certain degree reflects the social process of the development of knowledge (Nowiński, *Z problematyki psychologii i teorii poznania*, 14). It follows Lenin’s inclusion of the science of the mental development of the child among the disciplines on which dialectics and the theory of knowledge should be based.

64 For example, the “anticipations” of mathematical discoveries in Archimedes are explained by his connection to military technology (especially in the sense of the organization of the army), with relations within the army themselves “anticipating” the development of later economic relations. Ładosz, *Szkice z epistemologii matematyki*, 344.

65 Piaget, *Genetic Epistemology*, 16.

66 Ładosz also tries to overcome what he perceives as Piaget’s lack of realism: he tries to bring abstraction from action and abstraction from object closer together, stress and overextend the notion of accommodation, and get rid of the element of construction emphasized by Piaget. His attitude towards Piaget is complex, and its detailed reconstruction would require a separate study.

67 Ładosz, *Szkice z epistemologii matematyki*, 337.

technological activity of an individual) but rather first by the exchange of commodities and, later, by the technical co-operation between people. As Ładosz details, “[m]athematics grows out of a different social organization [...] of activities, provided that this different organization is not just something imposed on the world, but also expressing an accommodation to the world’s own structures.”⁶⁸ Therefore, mathematics can be treated as the expression of the general quantitative transformations of the world. At the same time, the recognition that the mathematical structures apply to the world and to the structures of the individual’s activities is most often made retrospectively, and the deliberate study of structures of economic interaction does not typically lead to new mathematical discoveries.

Ładosz stipulates that the verification of his hypothesis requires extensive interdisciplinary research, in the course of which it might need to be corrected. He does, however, cite a handful of historical arguments in support of it,⁶⁹ which clarify his approach to the concrete relationship between material cooperation and mathematical knowledge. The notion of natural number, Ładosz argues, is born out of the coordination of material activities occurring in the simple exchange (as Piaget himself suggests). Citing the results of research on so-called primitive societies, Ładosz suggests that operating with numbers involves the internalization of activities such as arranging exchanged objects into parallel rows, an internalization necessitated by the intersubjective nature of this activity. He points also to cuneiform writings, in which preserved mathematical calculations are concerned with questions of “accounting” (calculating quantities of building materials, food for workers, etc.), not with technical calculations, in order to argue that the early development of mathematics was linked primarily to the development of exchange rather than technology. This changed not earlier than with the emergence of manufactures and industry, when the development of mathematics becomes clearly linked to the development of technology and physics.

As Ładosz argues, grounding mathematical knowledge in the material cooperation of people allows one to explain the specific nature of

68 Ładosz, *Szkice z epistemologii matematyki*, 343.

69 He also suggests that further confirmation can be found in the economic works that approach mathematical methods historically (as an example he cites V. Novozhilov’s article on the measurement of social labor expenditures, see Valentin Novozhilov, “Izmerenie zatrata i ikh rezul’tatov v sov’szialisticheskem khoziastve” [The measurement of expenditure and its results in the socialist economy], in Vasili Nemchinov, ed., *Primenenie matematiki v ekonomicheskikh issledovaniakh* [The employment of mathematics in economic research] (Moscow: Sotseksgiz, 1959), 42–214.

mathematical necessity: it is the division of social labor that “forces one to become aware of the general structures of the world independent of time, common to temporal and spatial orders.”⁷⁰ He is also convinced that this provides a better explanation of the historical development of mathematics than Piaget’s conception referring to individual actions such as the child’s mastery of rotation, as the latter are relatively stable historically.

Finally, such an approach to mathematics allows Ładosz to explain the successes of constructivism, which according to him stem from the fact that “mathematical knowledge indeed grows out of the activities of cognitive subjects, out of the schemas that stabilize [*utrwalają się*] in these activities, and not out of the contemplation and classification of some immutable logico-mathematical entities.”⁷¹ Nevertheless, contrary to the constructivists’ belief, this activity is not purely spiritual and autonomous in nature. Rather, it is rooted in a historically variable material cooperation. Mathematical structures are subjective and objective at the same time. Their objectivity, however, does not mean that they express the structures of our actions and the world in an absolute and definitive way.⁷²

In recent years, Siyaves Azeri turned to Soviet activity theory and to Evald Ilyenkov’s theory of the ideal in order to explain the applicability of mathematics to physics. He argues that mathematics “is a specific form of the schemata of human activity” and “it is no miracle that a specific form of the scheme of human activity in social nature matches or corresponds to another scheme of activity”⁷³ (namely physics). Ładosz’s book can be seen as an attempt to resolve the same problem with similar means: to explain the objective character of mathematics by interpreting it as a scheme of activity. Ładosz’s turn to the division of labor and exchange rather than to technological advancement in explaining the origins of mathematics seems to go into a similar direction to Alfred Sohn-Rethel’s famous thesis of the interconnection of commodity form and formal thinking.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Ładosz does not explicitly link the development of science with capitalism (which brought Sohn-Rethel to call for radically re-think the

⁷⁰ Ładosz, *Szkice z epistemologii matematyki*, 353.

⁷¹ Ładosz, *Szkice z epistemologii matematyki*, 374.

⁷² This combination of non-absoluteness or specifically understood relativity, connected to development, and objectivity was a characteristic feature of reflection theory already under Stalinism. It is present also in Ładosz’s thinking of probability and modal categories.

⁷³ Siyaves Azeri, “The Match of ‘Ideals’: The Historical Necessity of the Interconnection between Mathematics and Physical Sciences,” *Social Epistemology* 35, no. 1 (2020): 14.

⁷⁴ Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1977.

division of manual and intellectual labor—and therefore, of the character of science—under socialism).

Intellectual sources: Lenin, Piaget, and the surprising marginality of Soviet epistemology

An important context for the development of Nowiński's and Ładosz's theories was Lenin, particularly his *Philosophical Notebooks*. Nowiński's essay on the individual and the universal was part of a Leninist conference; he devoted a whole paper to Lenin's philosophy in 1960, and referred to Lenin in many of his other works. Ładosz was the author of an anniversary lecture on the *Philosophical Notebooks* (1960). Both of them referred repeatedly to *On the Question of Dialectics* in their understanding of dialectics. They emphasized the central role of practice and history in Lenin's philosophy, and paid special attention to Lenin's emphasis on the theory of knowledge. Finally, it is Lenin's insistence that "the continuation of the work of Hegel and Marx must consist in the dialectical working out of the history of human thought, science, and technique"⁷⁵ that should be seen as the main inspiration for their turn to the philosophy of science.

A more surprising ally in their search for the "new orthodoxy" was Jean Piaget.⁷⁶ There are a number of reasons for that presence. Piaget's genetic epistemology attracted them because of its developmental and historical approach towards knowledge and its emphasis on activity (even if both Ładosz and Nowiński criticized that his account of it was not sufficiently materialist and historical⁷⁷). His programmatic rationalism and holistic

⁷⁵ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 38: *Philosophical Notebooks*, trans. Clemens Dutt (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 146–47. Quoted in: Nowiński, "Die Gesetze der Evolution," 38.

⁷⁶ Nowiński collaborated with Piaget and visited Geneva multiple times in the 1960s, and wrote a number of highly sympathetic articles on his thought ("Jean Piaget," *Człowiek i Światopogląd* (1969): 26–50; and the introduction to: Jean Piaget, *Strukturalizm* [Structuralism] (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1972), 7–30. He compared the notion of development in Piaget and Marx ("Biologie, Théories du Développement et Dialectique"), and was also interested in Piaget's theory of causality ("Die Gesetze der Evolution und ihre Veränderung," 47; "O relikach pozytywizmu," 112–14).

⁷⁷ Ładosz spoke in that context of Piaget's "impossibility of reconciling man as a thinking being with man as a biological organism because of overlooking the role of material and historical human production" (*Szkice*, 239). A criticism towards Piaget's idealism is present in the entire book, especially chapter 7 and 9. Nowiński criticized similar aspects (idealism and absence of material practice), adding also lack of relationship to proletariat and emphasis on equilibrium. See "Jean Piaget," 46–50; introduction to Piaget, *Strukturalizm*, 29–30.

attitude, combining philosophical and historical interests with empirical investigation, also rendered him a natural reference point. Piaget's interdisciplinary approach to epistemology, linking it with the history of science and the psychology of child development, can be seen as close to program sketched out by Lenin and in some parts undertaken by both Ładosz and Nowiński.⁷⁸ This interest in Piaget was also present in Western Marxism; nevertheless, in comparison to Lucien Goldmann, they put much more emphasis on differences between genetic epistemology and Marxism.⁷⁹

Piaget had been criticized by the founding fathers of Soviet activity theory: Lev Vygotsky and Sergei Rubinstein.⁸⁰ Ładosz was well aware of Rubinstein's criticism; nevertheless, while agreeing with the majority of his concerns, he argued that Rubinstein did not sufficiently appreciate Piaget's achievements.⁸¹ At the same time, Ładosz always refers to Rubinstein as an example of a consistent materialist theory of activity. Both Nowiński and Ładosz followed the development of Soviet thought in philosophy and science. Ładosz was well-versed in the development of Soviet logic, mathematics, and the philosophy of mathematics; similarly, Nowiński closely followed Soviet developments in biology (with special attention paid to Ivan Shmalhauzen). However, the presence of Soviet epistemology is rather marginal in comparison to Western theories. The answer to why Piaget's presence is so prominent, I argue, lies in the prevailing negative attitude towards Soviet thought among Polish philosophers: the preference for Western non-Marxist theories (rather than Soviet works) can be seen as a general feature of Polish philosophical culture. In Piaget—an internationally renowned representative of a highly influential non-Marxist school—Ładosz and Nowiński found a partner in their criticism of empiricism and neo-positivism far more difficult to dismiss than Soviet Marxists. Piaget's dialecticism and development towards realism or materialism could be seen as resulting from purely scientific rather than political interests.

⁷⁸ Nowiński notices this in his review of Piaget, see "Jean Piaget," 29.

⁷⁹ See Lucien Goldmann, "L'épistémologie de Jean Piaget," in *Recherches dialectiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 129–45.

⁸⁰ At the same time, Piaget was a politically safe context: he visited Soviet Union multiple times, was sympathetic to Soviet psychology and even celebrated. He received an honorary doctorate from University of Warsaw in 1958; Nowiński claims he was also awarded Lomonosov Prize in 1966 (I was unable to confirm that information up to date). It must be also noted that Vygotsky knew very early stage of Piaget's development.

⁸¹ Ładosz, *Szkice z epistemologii matematyki*, 217, 241–42. He does not mention Vygotsky's criticism. On the latter, see: Siyaves Azeri, "Conceptual Cognitive Organs: Toward an Historical-Materialist Theory of Scientific Knowledge," *Philosophia* 41 (2013): 1102–4.

Therefore, the references to genetic epistemology were meant to legitimize their approach.

Conclusions

In the cases of Ładosz and Nowiński, we can speak of Marxist orthodoxy in two senses. The first is political: they did not publicly criticize the party or Polish reality, nor did they significantly deviate from the party line. In terms of philosophical orthodoxy, they did not adhere to the understanding of Marxist philosophy as defined by Stalin's *Short Course*, but rather returned to Lenin's program as outlined in his *Philosophical Notebooks*. They emphasized a consistently dialectical approach to science and a scientific approach to dialectics. This "methodological" sense of orthodoxy, as a commitment to a method that does not require improvement, can best be described—despite differences in their interpretations of the Marxist method—by the words of Lukács:

Orthodox Marxism [...] does not imply the uncritical acceptance of the results of Marx's investigations. It is not the "belief" in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a "sacred" book. On the contrary, orthodoxy refers exclusively to method. It is the scientific conviction that dialectical materialism is the road to truth and that its methods can be developed, expanded and deepened only along the lines laid down by its founders. It is the conviction, moreover, that all attempts to surpass or "improve" it have led and must lead to over-simplification, triviality, and eclecticism.⁸²

Nowiński's and Ładosz's philosophies can be seen as part of a reckoning with Stalinism: they abandoned the primacy of dialectical materialism in its ontological understanding, instead returning to Lenin's emphasis on the theory of knowledge and the role played in it by history and practice (not only in terms of the criterion of truth). Their epistemological views were an attempt to reconceptualize the theory of reflection in a direction that would emphasize its distinctiveness from the empiricist tradition and explain its dialectical, historical, and practical character. They criticized the understanding of reflection as something passive and sensual, and aimed to restore what they perceived as the original meaning of it. Ładosz spoke of

⁸² Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectic*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972), 1.

the “Marxist theory of reflection treated as a social and historical process, and not as a single act or a sum of acts of taking a “copy” of an object,”⁸³ and Nowiński emphasized that while reflection gives us an increasingly faithful reproduction of nature, it is not “passive photo-taking” but rather “an active processing of external influences (particularly through a system of abstraction) in the practical mastery of nature.”⁸⁴ They articulated this position against the simplification or distortion of reflection theory in both Stalinist (and post-Stalinist) textbook accounts and in the revisionist accounts of the theory.

Both Nowiński and Ładosz understood practice as the act of transforming nature and society—or, to put it in more precise Marxist terms, the activity of material production and the transformation of relations of production, which they sometimes express with the phrase “production and class struggle.”⁸⁵ For both thinkers, practice is the origin of knowledge. Both emphasized the activity of subject in cognition. Transforming nature and manipulating objects in the process of producing material life shapes cognition on all levels, from our sensory perception and categorization to development of scientific theories and understanding laws governing complex structures (the independence of the latter gained in the process of division of labor is only relative). In that regard, both Ładosz and Nowiński went beyond the official diamat accounts, in which, as Vladislav Lektorsky and Andrey Maidansky write, “the concept of praxis was interpreted in a manner that did not differ greatly from the way the Pragmatists treated it, which meant that praxis as a criterion of truth was *de facto* identified with ‘success’ in action.”⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the latter concept was not entirely alien to them—we find it in Nowiński’s text on Lenin, quoting mostly *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* and counterposing “armchair philosophy” and “perspective of practice” (“life”).⁸⁷ Both also list experiment as one of the main forms of practical activity. In both, the stress on material production was also connected to the revolutionary character of Marxism and the epistemologically privileged

83 Ładosz, *Szkice z epistemologii matematyki*, 187.

84 Nowiński, *Filozofia zaangażowania*, 170.

85 Ładosz, who sought to distance himself from revisionist interpretations of practice, placed additionally a somewhat excessive emphasis on materiality and the distinction between theory and practice. See especially Jarosław Ładosz, “Uwagi o pojęciu praktyki w filozofii marksistowskiej” [Remarks on the notion of practice in Marxist philosophy], *Acta Universitatis Vratislaviensis. Prace filozoficzne* 78 (1968): 3–27.

86 Andrey Maidansky and Vesa Oittinen, “Introduction,” in *The Practical Essence of Man: The ‘Activity Approach’ in Late Soviet Philosophy* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016), 2.

87 Nowiński, “Filozofia zaangażowania.”

perspective of the proletariat; this is why they sometimes treat the category of activity as too broad. While they both emphasize practice in their theories of knowledge, only Ładosz developed this concept consistently (including his philosophy of science as well as philosophy of personhood).

Nowiński focused more on the dialectics of the developing whole: a perspective he applied both to the object and, even more importantly, to knowledge itself. Ładosz, on the other hand, was interested primarily in the element mediating between knowledge and its object, which he argued was practice. Knowledge, therefore, was portrayed by him as the interiorized scheme of activity that takes place in accordance with the laws of the world and its transformation. While these two approaches could be seen as complementing each other rather than competing,⁸⁸ this difference in focus has far-reaching consequences for their projects of philosophy of science. In Nowiński's work, the centrality of the notion of the developing whole is expressed through his interest in the category of species as an integral part of biological theory and in the evolving structure of the theory itself. The movement of theory is explained here in immanent terms. Ładosz, on the contrary, is interested in explaining the external genesis of the theory: he describes development in mathematics as dependent on the historically evolving structures of human cooperation.⁸⁹

Ładosz's and Nowiński's philosophies exemplify a consistently historical approach to science that avoids both subjectivism and relativism. Equally important is their engagement with concrete material from specific sciences, such as mathematics and biology, which goes beyond merely outlining fundamental theoretical principles. By emphasizing structure (Nowiński) and the genetic role of practice (Ładosz), they demonstrated the productivity of the dialectical materialist perspective. This approach remains viable and inspiring for materialistically and dialectically oriented thinking about science, though it must be complemented by a critical investigation into the social dimensions of knowledge production. To advance the Marxist philosophy of science today, it is essential to uphold the belief in science's objective role in explaining the world and its regularities, while integrating a critical view of the social context of knowledge and maintaining a

88 Their relation can be compared to the one between Ilyenkov's "Dialectics of Abstract and Concrete" and "Dialectics of the Ideal": while the latter explains what is the ideal and its relationship to subject and the external world, the former deals with the immanent movement of scientific knowledge.

89 Of course, this can be seen also as reflecting the context they were working in (with philosophy of biology plagued by atomism and reductionism, and philosophy of mathematics dominated by objective idealism or constructivism).

historical approach. Such synthesis can help counter the rise of anti-science sentiments, which have made previous critical theories of science politically contentious.⁹⁰

Ładosz's *Sketches in the epistemology of mathematics* were praised by one of his contemporaries as "a philosophy that does not isolate itself within the circle of immanent research, that programmatically refers to such disciplines as psychology, sociology, mathematics, economics, history," offering Marxist philosophy "as an integral theoretical whole."⁹¹ This integral approach is noticeable in Nowiński as well, who directly collaborated with Piaget, biologists, and psychologists, and repeatedly insisted that dialectics can be developed only in dialogue with the history of science. Ultimately, however, due to the increasing specialization and fragmentation of knowledge, it was a project doomed to fall short. Therefore, while such a synthetic project seems still needed, any revival of it would require rethinking the relationship between science and the division of labor.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the project "Philosophy in Late Socialist Europe: Theoretical Practices in the Face of Polycrisis" funded by European Union—NextgenerationEU and Romanian Government, under National Recovery and Resilience Plan for Romania, contract no. 760044//23.05.2023, cod PNRR-C9-I8-CF104/15.11.2022, through the Romanian Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within Component 9, Investment I8.

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⁹⁰ See especially Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004): 225–48.

⁹¹ Kazimierz Wiliński, "Filozofia matematyki" [Philosophy of mathematics], *Człowiek i Światopogląd* 10 (1969): 115.

4. Open-Minded Determinism: The Life and Ideas of Rudolf Šíma

Ondřej Holub

Abstract: This chapter explores the career and intellectual development of the Slovak Marxist, philosopher, theorist of Marxist determinism, and social scientist Rudolf Šíma. It analyzes defining elements of continuity in his thought from the outset of his philosophical career in the late 1950s, during the wake of the post-Stalinist period, to the era of so-called late socialism in the 1980s. The study aims to highlight the heterogeneous, yet holistic character of Šíma's thought within the context of the development of Czechoslovak Marxist philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century, and to point out the Šíma's unorthodox approach to Leninism.

Keywords: Czechoslovak Marxism; historical determinism; Marxist humanism; philosophy of freedom; intellectual biography; post-Stalinist Marxist thought

The Czechoslovak intellectual scene left a substantial imprint on the development of Marxist thought in the twentieth century.¹ While being ranked as one of the most socio-economically and industrially developed countries,² state-socialist Czechoslovakia entered the 1960s with a full-scale potential

¹ For further reading on the topic, see, among others, Jan Mervart and Jiří Růžička, *„Rehabilitovat Marxe!“: československá stranická inteligence a myšlení post-stalinské modernity* [“Rehabilitate Marx!”: Czechoslovak party intelligentsia and thinking post-Stalinist modernity] (Prague: NLN, 2020); Roman Kanda, *Český literárněvědný marxismus: kapitoly z moderního projektu* [Czech Marxist literary criticism: Chapters from a modern project] (Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2021); Vladimir V. Kusin, *The Intellectual Origin of the Prague Spring: The Development of Reformist Ideas in the Czechoslovakia 1956–1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

² Michal Reiman, “Boj KSČ za tvůrčí aplikaci závěrů XX. sjezdu KSSS” [The struggle for the creative application of the conclusions of the 20th Party Congress of the CPSU], in *O politice KSČ*

for augmenting not only socialist culture in general but Marxist theory and philosophy in particular. The institutional basis for all ambitions that the socialist cultural revolution could possibly embrace was in fact laid down in the Stalinist period: the Czech Academy of Sciences was founded in 1952 and the Slovak Academy of Sciences one year later.³ This provided the organizational structure that during the 1960s ushered in a new qualitative phase in Marxist theory and philosophy. Notable revisionist, groundbreaking works of Marxist theory, such as Karel Kosík's *Dialectics of the Concrete* (1963),⁴ would not have seen the light of day without a complex socio-cultural shift towards a highly developed socialist society, a major and yet contradictory transformation that occupied the space of East-Central Europe since 1945.

After 1956, the ambiguous ideological legacy of the Stalinist era, as well as the attempt to get to the very essence of Marxism-Leninism and to determine the role it should play in an advanced socialist society, were the key aspects that, together with the advent of globalization and the growing role of the mass media, defined the field of Marxist thought as a pluralistic and polycentric system in which novel combinations of ideas emerged and which tended to confront and interpenetrate various trends of thought, theses, and positions. Although the relations, collisions, and transitions between the positions of Marxist orthodoxy and heterodoxy were, to a great extent, characteristic features of the revisionist spiritual climate of the 1960s in East-Central Europe more generally, aspirations, hopes, and even some unexpected turns of the Marxist project were far from exhausted by the end of the decade. The attempt to holistically perceive the history of Marxist philosophy—namely from the perspective of the metapolitical framework of the history of thought—allows us to look beyond the horizon of the often-dramatic course of political events, such as the violent suppression of the so-called “Prague Spring” in August 1968. Instead, it reveals the possible features of continuity of thought, the persistence of key themes and problems that Marxist philosophy was coming to within the framework of the transformations of industrial and post-industrial modernity, which it confronted across the various decades and phases of post-Stalinist and late socialism.

při dovršování socialistické výstavby [On the policy of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in completing socialist construction] (Prague: SNPL, 1962), 22.

3 Václav Melichar, *Světová socialistická soustava v 50. Letech* [The world socialist sphere in the 1950s] (Prague: Academia, 1982), 115–16.

4 Karel Kosík, *Dialektika konkrétního: studie o problematice člověka a světa* [Dialectics of the concrete: A study on problems of man and world] (Prague: Nakladatelství Československé akademie věd, 1963).

Such a condition applied to Marxist thought across Europe, and Czechoslovak Marxism was no exception. Unfortunately, as in many other areas of Czechoslovak public life, Marxist thought has too often been framed as primarily Czech thought, with its center in Prague, while autonomous Slovak philosophical thought was at best included without much analytical distinction in a common Czechoslovak framework, and at worst relegated to the very periphery of Czechoslovak philosophy as its local and second-rate variant. This reduction is all the more unfortunate insofar as the effort to achieve political and cultural autonomy for Slovakia was one of the defining leitmotifs and milestones of Czechoslovak history in the twentieth century. Slovak Marxist intellectuals were anything but epigones of their Czech counterparts. Rather, they were a heterogeneous collective, who, within the Czechoslovak state and academia, formed an alternative sphere of thought, unencumbered and unbound by the consciousness of Czech historical and cultural tradition and relatively distant from the Prague intellectual scene. This fact enabled Slovak Marxists to adopt the often novel, avant-garde positions that were brought about by rapidly developing modernity, which from the 1960s, entered the era of cosmic discoveries and the scientific and technological revolution.

This chapter aims to present the main outlines of the intellectual development and some of the core ideas of the Slovak Marxist author Rudolf Šíma. Šíma was a theorist of dialectical materialism, the scientific-technical revolution, and prognostics, and a representative of Marxist social science in Slovakia. He formulated some of the key positions of Slovak and Czechoslovak Marxist philosophy during the 1960s and 1980s, especially on the problem of humanism and human potential in the context of the scientific-technical revolution. Although Šíma was not among the few Central European Marxists who achieved international recognition, his intellectual legacy is not devoid of value; on the contrary, as I will try to demonstrate, the scientific thought of Rudolf Šíma shows elements of synthesis between, on the one hand, the ideological positions of Marxist orthodoxy and traditional Marxist dialectics, which Šíma embraced at the very beginning of his career, and, on the other hand, the heterodox perspective of certain strands of Marxist revisionism, Marxist futurology, and philosophical anthropology, which he adopted in the late 1960s and which he continued to develop and critically reflect upon in relation to Marxist orthodoxy in the 1970s and 1980s.

The overall scheme of Šíma's thought thus represents an intellectual universe layered by several ideological "poles of Marxism" into a configuration of interrelated and intercommunicating spheres, which together refer to the possibilities of continuity and transformation of Marxist thought in the

period of highly developed and late socialism. Marxist humanism—arguably the central problem of Marxism as such—stands out here in the tangle of the mutual clash and influence of these poles of opinion as a problem that cannot be solved through a simple opposition of pluralism and orthodoxy, but which, on the contrary, presupposes at least a partial mutual integration and a new synthesis of both approaches and points of view. It is this aspect of synthesis that can be observed as a specific movement of thought in Rudolf Šíma.

Formative years of war and revolution: Rudolf Šíma's youth and the rise of Marxist-Leninist thought in Slovakia

Rudolf Šíma was born on May 22, 1930, into a very humble Slovak rural family in the small town of Svatoplukovo in southern Slovakia, at a time when the worst economic crisis in history had just hit the world. By that time, the Slovak Marxist journal *DAV* (alias “The Crowd”) had already been published for six years: since 1924, a vivid, avantgarde community of young Slovak Marxist intellectuals had been challenging mainstream standards and provoking bourgeois elitism, while introducing innovative principles of Marxist analyses in the field of sociology, philosophy, politics, and literary theory.⁵ Among those who critically addressed the political and cultural events in contemporary Czechoslovakia was Šíma's later teacher and intellectual mentor, sociologist and philosopher Andrej Sirácky (1920–88),⁶ then a pioneer of Marxist thought in Slovakia and one of its most prolific figures in the twentieth century. In the debates that concerned the general focus and intentions of *DAV*, Sirácky fiercely held the view that it should be the press organ of a “new socialist generation,” and therefore should be profiled exclusively as a Marxist periodical.⁷

Being just an infant at a time when *DAV* had already ruffled the feathers of literary and social critique in interwar Czechoslovakia for years, Šíma could barely have known any of this. Instead, he had quickly become all too familiar with the harsh, class-divided, and underdeveloped social reality

5 Ján Rozner, *Davisté a jejich doba* [The “DAV” generation and its era] (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1966), 7–9.

6 “Andrej Sirácky,” in *Antologie z dějin českého a slovenského filozofického myšlení: od roku 1848 do roku 1948* [Anthology of the history of Czech and Slovak philosophical thought: From 1848 to 1948], eds. Miroslav Pauza and Dalimír Hajko (Prague: Svoboda, 1985), 781–83.

7 Miroslav Šiška, *Komunistický novinář Eduard Urx* [The communist journalist Eduard Urx] (Prague: Novinář, 1987), 54.

of rural Slovakia. The son of an unskilled agricultural laborer, he had seven other siblings, three of whom died in infancy, most probably due to the severe hardship the family endured. Šíma became a worker himself: in 1949, at the age of 19, he joined a shoe factory in the Slovak town of Partizánske. Soon after he took his first step towards a philosophical education as a cultural officer of the socialist trade union, the so-called Revolutionary Trade Union Movement (ROH), the only trade union allowed in the country after the establishment of the communist regime in February 1948. Šíma held this position between 1949 and 1953,⁸ i.e., during the initial, very radical phase of the socialist transformation of society, and at the same time when Sovietization and Stalinism were at their peak in East Central Europe. For Šíma's native Slovakia, this period marked a radical and versatile, but also contradictory turn. The hitherto predominantly agrarian, economically underdeveloped country was embarking on a path of rapid industrial modernization. At the same time, however, the strongly centralist governance suppressed any efforts at Slovak political or cultural autonomy. The trial against the so-called "Slovak bourgeois nationalism" (1954) was a demonstrative example of such a policy, being one of the last—and at the same time the harshest—Stalinist trial in communist Czechoslovakia.⁹

Rudolf Šíma belonged to a generation that was severely affected by the economic crisis, fascism, and war, and which in the early 1950s seized all the chances that the Stalinist social revolution offered. In predominantly agrarian Slovakia, with its patriarchal social patterns and the traditionally strong position of the Catholic Church, the modernizing ethos of Stalinism had a much stronger impact than in the neighboring Czech lands. These had been shaped since the beginning of the twentieth century by a pluralist liberal media and parliamentary culture, associated mainly with urban public space, and by the substantial rise of interwar social liberalism and various forms of democratic left. This had led to the emergence of a

8 The Comenian University Archive, Bratislava, Slovakia, personal fund of Rudolf Šíma—*osobný spis* (henceforth: Rudolf Šíma—*osobný spis*), "Návrh na uvoľnenie profesora Katedry marxisticko-leninskej filozofie Filozofickej fakulty Univerzity Komenského v Bratislave" [Proposal for the release of a professor at the department of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University], 1.

9 In April 1954, a group of leading Slovakian politicians and intellectuals, including some notable founders of DAV and later General Secretary and state president Gustáv Husák, stood trial accused of so-called "bourgeois nationalism." The trial was meant to suppress any possible intention to achieve more Slovak autonomy. Although the whole trial took place after Stalin's death, its scheme was still predominantly orchestrated according to Stalinist repressive justice. The sentences were astonishingly high: Husák himself was sentenced to life-imprisonment, being rehabilitated at the end of 1950s.

distinctive type of modernity that originated in a genuine tradition of social progressivism, and as such was rather ambivalent towards the Stalinist vision of modernization. Discussions about a particular “Czechoslovak road to socialism” that would adopt national progressive and democratic traditions originated as early as the summer of 1945, and persisted to the very end of the 1940s,¹⁰ when they were suppressed (while not eradicated) by the imported “trend of Sovietization”¹¹ that affected all aspects of the economy and public life.

Rudolf Šíma, however, faced no such contradictions. As the son of an impoverished Slovak peasant, he was one of the thousands of young Slovaks for whom the Stalinist revolution opened the door to a major social ascent, elevating them into the ranks of the party and state apparatus. The young revolutionary generation embodied the aspirations of the communist regime, to which they also attached their idea of newly acquired education, qualifications, and material abundance, and to which they were—or rather should have been—loyal. The very question of loyalty, however, soon proved to be a potential weak point. A generation of young Slovak cadres took up positions and worked on their careers and education, but with their growing qualifications and self-confidence could hardly remain indifferent to the manifestly unfair position that the Prague power establishment had long taken on the question of Slovak autonomy.

Šíma joined the Communist Party in 1951, and in 1952–53 he attended a preparatory course for studying at university.¹² He was about to enroll at Comenius University in Bratislava, where Andrej Siráky, then a leading figure of Slovak Marxist thought, was appointed rector.¹³ Šíma and Siráky had much in common. Although they belonged to different generations, they nevertheless faced similar hardships of ill-fated childhoods in impoverished

¹⁰ “Projev místopředsedy ÚAV NF a předsedy AV ČSS ministra techniky prof. Dr. Inž. Emanuela Šlechty na slavnostním zasedání ÚAV NF v Obecním domě v Praze 27. února 1949” [A speech by vice-chairman of the Central Action Committee of the National Front, chairman of the Action Committee of the Czechoslovak Socialist Party and Minister for Technology, prof. Emanuel Šlechta at the ceremonial meeting of the Central Action Committee of the National Front at Obecní dům, Prague, February, 27, 1949], in *První výročí únorového vítězství: sborník projevů a dokumentů* [The first anniversary of the February Victory: Collection of essays and documents] (Prague: ÚAV NF, 1949), 79–82.

¹¹ Vladislav Moulis, Jaroslav Valenta, and Jiří P. Vykoukal, *Vznik, krize a rozpad sovětského bloku v Evropě 1944–1989* [The origin, crisis, and dissolution of the Soviet bloc in Europe 1944–89] (Ostrava: Amosium Servis, 1991), 44.

¹² Rudolf Šíma—osobní spis, 2.

¹³ Miroslav Šiška, *Publicista Andrej Siráky: monografie s ukázkami díla* [Publicist Andrej Siráky: Monograph and selection of works] (Prague: Novinář, 1986), 200.

families.¹⁴ The Stalinist revolution of the late 1940s and early 1950s decisively marked their outstanding rise into the ranks of the state socialist intelligentsia. After three years at the helm of Comenius University (1953–56), Siráky was furthermore appointed chair of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (1955). If anybody had set a bar for Marxist thought and the development of dialectical materialism in Slovakia during Rudolf Šíma's formative years, it was undoubtedly "batiushka Siráky,"¹⁵ whose reputation and importance profoundly influenced the young and promising Marxist Šíma. Between 1953–58, Šíma studied physics and philosophy at Comenius University,¹⁶ and from 1960, he continued his studies at the same university as a candidate of science (i.e., a doctoral student). After three years, he graduated with his dissertation "On the Definition of the Essence of Freedom," written and defended in 1963. Siráky played a substantial part at an early stage of Šíma's academic career. As Šíma himself noted in the introduction to his dissertation thesis, some notable parts of Siráky's contemporary work helped him formulate the dissertation's key arguments.¹⁷

At the time, the young Šíma entered the field of Slovak Marxist thought as someone who fiercely defended and advanced the intellectual position of Marxist determinism, a current of Marxist thought that he had already embraced at the end of the 1950s. Šíma's article "Philosophy and life" ("Filozofia a život"), published in 1959 in the journal *Předvoj*, represented a profound Marxist critique of "subjective idealism" and actually illustrated the very essence of Marxist determinism: "It is, perhaps, necessary, to acquire the fundamentals of a true materialistic worldview to such an extent that all the life choices we must make for our own are always as true, correct and scientific as the character and magnitude of the burdens of our lives require,"¹⁸ asserted Šíma, thus confirming the inherent dependence of a free human on the objective natural and historical laws.

In his dissertation, Šíma took his critique of subjectivism and idealism even further, polemizing against some of the contemporary attempts of Western philosophy to interpret the essence of human freedom.¹⁹ In

14 O. Zápotocná, D. Kováč, "Psychologie u nás a jinde: K 80-tinám akademika Andreja Siráckeho" [Psychology in our country and abroad], *Československá psychologie* 15 (1981): 60.

15 Boris Zala, email correspondence with the author, January 15, 2025.

16 Rudolf Šíma—osobný spis, "Ustavenie za riadného profesora" [Appointment as full professor], 1.

17 Rudolf Šíma, *K vymedzeniu podstaty slobody* [On the definition of the essence of freedom] (Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského, 1963), 3.

18 Rudolf Šíma, "Filozofia a život" [Philosophy and life], *Předvoj* 3 (1959): 1–2.

19 Šíma, *K vymedzeniu podstaty slobody*, 8.

particular, he was critical of the work of *The Capitalist Manifesto* (1958) by American economist Louis O. Kelso and philosopher Mortimer J. Adler, whose position he judged to be “neoliberal” and antithetical to the notion of freedom in Marxist dialectics.²⁰ Adler’s philosophy of freedom was criticized by Šíma as an example of American neo-Thomism, which based its whole conception of freedom on Judeo-Christian spirituality and Aristotelian metaphysics, but which, according to Šíma, failed to determine what was supposed to be the “essence of freedom in a concrete sense,” that is, in the reality of social, class relations.²¹

Šíma’s dissertation is permeated by the noticeable influence of Yanagida Kenjuro, a Japanese Marxist, whose *Philosophy of Freedom* was published in Slovak translation at the very beginning of the 1960s.²² This was a unique editorial feat of its kind, as no other book by Kenjuro was ever published in Czechoslovakia thereafter. Such an episodic impact of Japanese Marxism on Czechoslovak academia was an outcome of the new qualitative phase of socialist internationalism and polycentrism that emerged in the Khrushchev period. Thus, Kenjuro was presented to Czech and Slovak readers not only as a “prominent Japanese publicist,” but above all as a representative of Marxist determinism,²³ a principle of Marxist thought which understood the concepts of progress and freedom as inseparably linked to the objective laws of history and nature.

Early 1960s: Šíma confronts the anthropological turn

Šíma repeatedly referred to Kenjuro’s work in the first half of the 1960s. Quoting him in his 1963 essay “Towards a Marxist conception of the nature of freedom,”²⁴ Šíma accepted Kenjuro’s assertion that “freedom, which is a mere idea but lacks a material basis, resembles a flower without a root,” and understood human freedom in the sense of Marxist determinism as intrinsically linked to the objective materiality of human existence.²⁵

²⁰ Šíma, *K vymedzeniu podstaty slobody*, 38.

²¹ Šíma, *K vymedzeniu podstaty slobody*, 22.

²² Yamagida Kenjuro, *Filozofia slobody* [Philosophy of freedom] (Bratislava: Osveta, 1960).

²³ Ján Pašiak, a biographical note to Yamagida Kenjuro, in *Filozofia slobody* (Bratislava: Osveta, 1960), 192.

²⁴ Rudolf Šíma, “K marxistickému ponatiu podstaty slobody” [Towards a Marxist conception of the notion of freedom], *Philosophica. Zborník Filozofickej fakulty Univerzity Komenského* 12 (1963): 171–227.

²⁵ Šíma, “K marxistickému ponatiu,” 221.

Marxist determinism, with its scientific and material emphasis on objective knowledge of natural laws, constituted a fundamental noetic basis for the scientific triumphalism of the Khrushchev era. This trend had a substantial influence on Šíma's early work, as is apparent in some of his articles from the early 1960s, where he elaborated some theoretical notions and aspects of the transition to developed communist society in a spirit of scientific triumphalism that marked the whole era.²⁶ In the 1960s, however, many alternative interpretations of Marxism entered the stage, which the young, ambitious philosopher Rudolf Šíma could hardly avoid.

From about 1963, Šíma's approach to Marxism developed significantly. Like many of his colleagues, he now paid close attention to studying Marx's earliest works. In his article "Towards a dialectic of subject and object" from 1964, Šíma argued that the research of Marx's *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts* was necessary for understanding the role of the human individual in history.²⁷ While reflecting on Marx's *Manuscripts*, Šíma considered the actual status of the citizen and the role of citizenship in a socialist society. He revised, in some respects, his earlier views on the nature of freedom, and warned that its one-sided reduction to class inevitably led to an increase in feelings of anxiety, fear, and meaninglessness.²⁸ Šíma warned that such a reductive approach for the "great cause" of the revolution forgets the "subject in its specific diversity, with all its everyday problems and needs."²⁹ While at the very beginning of the 1960s Šíma saw the demand for a higher degree of individual freedom as justified only if it was organically linked to the collective struggle of the working class, which is more or less a stance of Marxist orthodoxy, he now abandoned this position in the name of practice as the source of authentic and concrete, lived and everyday human experience.

What probably influenced him the most in the mid-1960s was the anthology of texts *Človek, kdo si?* (Man, who are you?), a printed collection of conference papers from the 13th International Philosophical Congress in Mexico City (1963), published in Bratislava in 1965. The conference highlighted the role of philosophical anthropology as a current trend in social sciences, and the delegates agreed on its potential to become a unifying principle of the humanities. On the broadest theoretical basis, the latter would analyze the situation of the human being in modern society and at

²⁶ Rudolf Šíma, "Všeobecný rozvoj osobnosti a deľba práce" [The universal development of human personality and the division of labor], *Otázky marxistickej filozofie* 17 (1962): 193–206.

²⁷ Rudolf Šíma, "K dialekтике subjektu a objektu v dejinách" [Towards a dialectic of subject and object], *Otázky marxistickej filozofie* 19 (1964): 416.

²⁸ Šíma, "K dialekтике subjektu a objektu v dejinách," 428.

²⁹ Šíma, "K dialekтике subjektu a objektu v dejinách," 428.

the same time would be able to overcome the existing particularism and one-sided empiricism of the social sciences. The Yugoslav Marxist Veljko Korać, for instance, proposed philosophical anthropology as a synthesis of all social sciences.³⁰ Argentinian philosopher Miguel Ángel Virasoro defined philosophical anthropology in terms of a “comprehensive theory of man,” which, as such, could not evade the issue of the profound transcendence that provides human beings with the experience of the meaning of existence.³¹

From his Marxist position, Rudolf Šíma soon embraced the contemporary enthusiasm for philosophical anthropology.³² For him, Marxist anthropology was both a theory and a method intended to connect the macro sphere of human society—with such categories as state or class—with the microsphere of the intimate world of the human individual. The purpose of Marxist philosophical anthropology, as Šíma perceived it, was to reach a symbiosis between the interests of the state and the interests of individuals and of small-scale human communities.³³ It is in this context that the influence of Immanuel Kant's thought on post-Stalinist Marxism is particularly evident. Kant was even perceived as the “spiritual father” of philosophical anthropology, a fact that was pointed out by Czech Marxist Karel Kosík in his *Dialectic of the Concrete*.³⁴ Although the relationship of Eastern European Marxists to Kant's intellectual legacy was complex and contradictory, various Kantian inspirations nevertheless played a key role in the “post-Stalinist search for authenticity,”³⁵ both in the field of theory and political practice.

Šíma, too, recognized the spirit of Kant in the contours of philosophical anthropology, but he attempted to revise it in a Marxist sense. According to him, in a society where the idea of socialist humanism reaches its full potential, the freedom of the individual is no longer limited in a negative sense, as is typical of the liberal order, but rather is made possible by the reciprocity and intersections of human perspectives within the new qualitative state

30 Veljko Korać, “Za filozofickú antropológiu” [For a philosophical anthropology], in *Človek, kto si?* [Man, who are you?] (Bratislava: Obzor, 1986), 102–3.

31 Miguel Ángel Virasoro, “Základy filozofickej antropológie ako exaktnej vedy a nová koncepcia človeka” [The foundation of philosophical anthropology as the exact science and the new conception of man], in *Človek, kto si?*, 91.

32 Rudolf Šíma, “K niektorým otázkám marxistickej koncepcie človeka” [Towards some issues of the Marxist conception of man], *Philosophica. Zborník Filozofickej Fakulty Univerzity Komenského* 16 (1966): 234.

33 Šíma, “K niektorým otázkám,” 233.

34 Karel Kosík, *Dialektika konkrétního* [Dialectic of the concrete] (Prague: CSAV, 1963), 170.

35 Pavel Kolář, *Soudruzi a jejich svět. Sociálně myšlenková tvářnost komunismu* [Comrades and their world: The social and intellectual character of communism] (Prague: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2019), 50.

of a socialist civil society.³⁶ Within this state of human relations, man is no longer just a “possibility for himself”—he is, predominantly, a possibility for others. Egoism and particularism disappear, and species and collective interests become the mutual agenda of each human being.³⁷ Such a vision of humanism brought to fruition and actualized the issue of the essentiality of freedom, its possibilities, and limits in a given, determined order of being. The questions of whether “there is a place for free action in this world” and what are the boundaries between necessary determinism and the individual will of the human being became the task of Marxist anthropology at a time when the pluralist path to socialism was under discussion.

Šíma also addressed these questions in his work. In an article on “The freedom of exchange of opinions,”³⁸ he argued that public debate was a key principle of socialist democracy. This involved an elementary right to be informed, but also an obligation to provide information, in all circumstances. As a form of governance, socialist democracy rejected all forms of high-level politics and assumed that the popular masses should and must be informed under the condition of the authority of truth, the actual basis for the integrity of thought and action.³⁹ In his 1964 study “On the essence of bureaucratism,” Šíma further argued that “socialist democracy can only exist and fulfill its historical role if it ensures the factual participation of the popular masses in public life.”⁴⁰ Only in this way, he claimed, would the individual be free and develop their full potential. The search for a symbiosis between the interests of society and the interests of individual citizens also led Šíma to reflect on the particular legislative tools of democratic control. He based his argument on Rousseau’s social contract theory and its principle that the people are the sovereign creators of the social order. He then considered the referendum to be an appropriate tool of broad democratic control “from below.”⁴¹

This selection of Šíma’s studies from 1964–66 demonstrates that he reflected on the issue of the legitimacy of socialist power, the position of the citizen in socialist society, and on the extent and scope of individual human freedom based on Marxist philosophical anthropology. In this

36 Šíma “K niektorým otázkám marxistickej koncepcie človeka,” 217.

37 Šíma, “K niektorým otázkám marxistickej koncepcie človeka,” 217.

38 Rudolf Šíma, “Sloboda výmeny názorov” [The freedom of exchange of opinions], *Predvoj* 26 (1965): 10–11.

39 Šíma, “Sloboda výmeny názorov,” 10–11.

40 Rudolf Šíma, “O podstate byrokratizmu” [On the essence of bureaucratism], *Otázky marxistickej filozofie* 19 (1964): 41–56.

41 Rudolf Šíma, “Občianská Sloboda a legitimnosť socialistickej moci” [The civic freedom and the legitimacy of a socialist power], *Filozofia, Časopis Filozofického ústavu SAV* 21 (1966): 461–75.

way he, too, contributed to the intellectual climate that resulted in the reform communism movement of the 1960s, specifically on the issues of democratization and socialist pluralism. However, this was not Šíma's only area of philosophical interest and activity. He was no less concerned with philosophical problems of an ontological nature, related to the very essence of human existence.

“The man and the world”: Rudolf Šíma and his path towards a Marxist humanist eschatology

In May 1967, Šíma habilitated as an associate professor of Marxist-Leninist philosophy. On this occasion, his publications and teaching activities were evaluated as a valuable contribution to the development of Marxist philosophical anthropology.⁴² Šíma was well aware, however, that the totality of human existence was far from being exhausted by the categories of politics and law, which he had been working on up until then. He therefore directed his research towards the most fundamental questions of human existence—namely, the problem of ontology. His most important monograph, *Človek a svet* (The man and the world), should be understood in this light.

Človek a svet is the most comprehensive work in which Šíma addressed the ontological dimension of Marxist philosophical anthropology. “To be human is not to be what I am, but what I can and ought to be,”⁴³ he prefaced his work, thus subscribing to a revised tradition of Marxist humanism from the 1960s. Above all, Šíma stated, man should strain all of their creative powers to be something more than just a subordinate component of the world,⁴⁴ a tiny part in its complicated mechanism. However, according to him the contradictory relationship between man and the world was neither random nor at the mercy of blind fate. Instead, it could be interpreted on the basis of certain models or schemes of existence, and it was their critical analysis that Šíma was most concerned with in his work. He was particularly interested in the humanist potential of the dialectical-materialist model of the relationship between man and the world.

42 Rudolf Šíma—osobný spis, “Návrh na menovanie a ustanovenie PhDr. Rudolfa Šímu, CSc. docentom pre obor Filozofia—špecializácia: historický materializmus” [Proposal for appointment of PhD Rudolf Šíma, CSc. as Associate Professor in the field of philosophy—specialization: Historical materialism], 3.

43 Rudolf Šíma, *Človek a svet* [The man and the world] (Bratislava: Epochá, 1969), 6–7.

44 Šíma, *Človek a svet*, 7.

That Šíma did not take such a task lightly is apparent from a cursory list of the names to which he referred in his work: Gramsci, Jaspers, Fromm, Kant, Garaudy, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre, together with Teilhard de Chardin, Max Scheler, and others.⁴⁵ He also quoted M. A. Virasor's lecture from the anthology *Človek, kdo si?*⁴⁶ The list of names reveals that Šíma's own conception of Marxism, in line with the pluralist orientation of the 1960s, became much more open to dialogue with several non-Marxist schools of thought, such as phenomenology and existentialism, and with some parallel strands of contemporary Marxism, such as the Frankfurt School. In line with the tendency of the time, he also conceived of Marxism primarily as a philosophy of practice, which for him was the basic form of human relation to the world—the way people dealt with it.⁴⁷ Šíma's general tendency towards pluralism indicates that he perceived the whole dimension of human ontology as a complex task that needed to be answered not by a single doctrine, but by the entire global human civilization with all its multitude of ideas and opinions. According to him, the modern era was defined by ever-strengthening ontological ties of individuals to each other,⁴⁸ which resulted in international dialogue and the transfer of ideas.

In spite of this, Šíma did not abandon the position of Marxist determinism, to which he organically linked several other ideas and theses, but which nevertheless remained the theoretical foundation of his thought. This is evident in the passages from *Človek a svět* where Šíma warned against the "hypertrophy of human subjectivity"⁴⁹ as manifested in some contemporary philosophical trends, particularly in phenomenology. He consistently distinguished the "real" humanism of Marx from other utopian ideas, and devoted a substantial part of his work to defining it more closely and clarifying its contribution to the humanistic perspective of the world.⁵⁰ According to Šíma, the evolution of humanity was heading toward Marx's total individual, the sole and supreme creator of their own history, in a dynamic and dialectical relationship with the world.⁵¹ This Marxist model overcame the one-sided dogmas of scientism and idealism in order to clarify "the meaning and goal of human endeavor and life in general."⁵² It acquired the features of a specific,

45 Šíma, *Človek a svět*, 216–17.

46 Šíma, *Človek a svět*, 217.

47 Šíma, *Človek a svět*, 8.

48 Šíma, *Človek a svět*, 139.

49 Šíma, *Človek a svět*, 35.

50 Šíma, *Človek a svět*, 139.

51 Šíma, *Človek a svět*, 167.

52 Šíma, *Človek a svět*, 208–9.

dialectically based “hoministic eschatology” (*hoministická eschatológia*).⁵³ The eschatological moment is revealed to the human being when it brings them to the understanding of the “cosmic dimension” of their own existence, to the adoption of “universal, cosmocentric attitudes and senses” that overcome the quality of mere geocentric senses.⁵⁴ To illustrate what he meant by a cosmocentric sense of being, Šíma pointed to the spiritual climate of Asia: in India, for instance, people were able to maintain a certain sort of a “cosmic dimension” of consciousness, therefore, as Šíma assumed, they were not suffering from the feeling of isolation and solitude to the extent that Europeans did.⁵⁵ The dialectical-materialist Marxist scheme of human existence offered humanity a platform for theory and practice, where scientific realism, altruism, and eschatology could be unified in a new sort of universal, cosmic dimension, a hope for all mankind.⁵⁶

In the process of encountering this cosmocentric sense, one nevertheless needed to take into account “various surprises, which at first may appear improbable and absurd.”⁵⁷ One would touch on secrets, strange, extrasensory, and illogical realities, even parapsychological ones, but which could not be rejected simply because they lay outside the realm of our geocentric experience.⁵⁸ According to Šíma, “the universe can only become human for those with developed human cosmic senses, which cannot be reduced to just the traditional five senses and our well-known logical thinking.”⁵⁹ Here, Šíma admitted the possibility of parapsychological experience. He assumed that the experience of the sixth sense, which until then had only been the subject of mythical, parapsychological, and religious views, would become a common part of human life and practice in the future. In Šíma’s view, the cosmocentric perspective thus became the ultimate goal of Marxist humanism in the post-industrial era—an idea of a future when a person would truly “feel like the master of the house in his own house” and, free of illusions and shackles, would be completely sure of his lived human experience.⁶⁰

At the time when *Človek a svet* was published in August 1969, Rudolf Šíma had already been a fellow at the University of Frankfurt am Main, where he conducted research, funded by the Alexander Humboldt Institute, and where

53 Šíma, *Človek a svet*, 208.

54 Šíma, *Človek a svet*, 169.

55 Šíma, *Človek a svet*, 88–89.

56 Šíma, *Človek a svet*, 212–13.

57 Šíma, *Človek a svet*, 169.

58 Šíma, *Človek a svet*, 170.

59 Šíma, *Človek a svet*, 170.

60 Šíma, *Človek a svet*, 213.

he remained until February 28, 1970.⁶¹ In Germany, Šíma intensively studied the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, while his homeland struggled with the upcoming “normalization” and a wave of political repressions as consequences of the military occupation of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. The possibility for public dialogue and negotiation between different positions of Marxist and non-Marxist thought was rapidly narrowing, limited by repressive statist power in the form of a consolidated socialist dictatorship. However, Šíma quickly adapted to the new conditions after his return, and in the summer of 1971, he started teaching at Comenius University in Bratislava.⁶² As his further theoretical work in the field of Marxist philosophy was to show, his anchoring in Marxist determinism played an essential role in this adaptation.

The objectivist turn? On some oddities and contradictions in Šíma's Marxist thought in the late socialist period

In 1976, Šíma published *Kritická teória frankurtskej školy a jej vplyv v Československu* (The critical theory of the Frankfurt School and its influence in Czechoslovakia),⁶³ which demonstrates his adaptation to the radical transformation of the sociopolitical and intellectual context in which Marxist anthropology could now be developed. The polycentric, pluralistic, and heterodox metanarrative of Marxist thought, once typical of the post-Stalinist period of the 1960s, was now significantly reduced to only a selected range of topics that followed the “archetypal” patterns and schemes of socialist modernity (such as the historical-materialist analysis of the dialectical relationship between man and nature or the Marxist-Leninist theory of the scientific-technical revolution). At the same time, issues such as the relationship between Marxist humanism, human rights, freedoms, and the legal or human responsibility of the individual in the socialist system of institutions were effectively excluded from public and academic discourse.

The development of Czechoslovak Marxist philosophy and theory in the 1970s and 1980s shifted toward a strongly technical, “analytical-synthetic”

61 Rudolf Šíma—osobný spis, “Návrh na výnimku, dopis Alexander von Humboldt Institut” [Proposal for exemption, a letter to the Alexander von Humboldt Institute].

62 Rudolf Šíma—osobný spis, “Dopis děkana FF UK Rektorátu UK ze dne 10. 5. 1971” [Letter from the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University to the Rector's Office at the Comenius University].

63 Rudolf Šíma, *Kritická teória Frankurtskej školy a jej vplyv v Československu* [The critical theory of the Frankfurt School and its influence in Czechoslovakia] (Bratislava: Pravda, 1976).

analysis of the “real” socioeconomic and material conditions of the transition to communist society.⁶⁴ By contrast, the eschatological side of Marxist humanism along with various social-ethical and political practices of socialist pluralism that emanated from it were altogether marginalized as a possible source of undesirable ideological and political conflict. Even without straightforward repressive pressures, the whole trend was further strengthened by the continuously growing and global influence of technocratic elites and the tendency to quantify and statistically and empirically frame social hypotheses. These were increasingly evaluated through the lens of system management with its emphasis on immediate effectiveness and proportionality of goals.⁶⁵

The optimistic emancipatory vision focused on utopian and cosmic horizons, which resonated with the ideological climate of the 1950s and 1960s, gradually acquired increasingly stronger features of sociotechnology during the following decades of the late socialist period. Party and state elites ascribed to the contemporary Marxist thought mainly one social function—to provide orienting predictions and forecasts in the scheme of quantitative and empirical research, enabling them to face the socio-economic challenges of the very near future.⁶⁶ While the humanist aspirations of Marxist thought still legitimized the general discourse of social sciences, the actual register of theory, methods, and terms for development of Marxist humanist thought was reduced solely to its empirical basis. The fact that Šíma, despite his occasional excursions into Marxist revisionism, remained essentially a Marxist determinist, proved extremely valuable for his intellectual development and professional career in the late 1970s and 1980s. While based in a paradigm of Marxist orthodoxy and determinism, Šíma later adjusted his own approach to the increasingly pluralist character of the Marxist thought in the 1960s and adapted to the objectified canon of empirical, non-political science, embedded in the hegemonic foundations of the officially acclaimed Marxism-Leninism and the so called “real socialism” of the 1970s.

Although *Kritická teória* was not published until 1976, Šíma stated that he “basically wrote it already in 1970,” yet his involvement “in solving socio-political problems during the period of consolidation of society” made it

64 Tomáš Pardel and Rudolf Šíma, *Osobnosť a jej rozvoj v socialistickej spoločnosti* [Human personality and its development in a socialist society] (Bratislava: Pravda, 1983), 245.

65 Andrzej A. Koźmiński, *Systémové řízení* [Systemic management] (Prague: Svoboda, 1975), 12.

66 Michal Kopeček, “Kritika, řízení, byznys. Sociální výzkum a sociologie jako nástrojevládnutí v Československu po roce 1969” [Criticism, management, business: Social research and sociology as tools of governance in Czechoslovakia after 1969], in *Architekti dlouhé změny: expertní kořeny postsocialismu v Československu* [Architects of long, systemic change: The expert roots of postsocialism in Czechoslovakia], ed. Michal Kopeček (Prague: Argo, 2019), 224.

impossible for him to publish it earlier.⁶⁷ Šíma's analysis of the Frankfurt School was founded not only on his knowledge of the already published works but also on personal meetings and interviews with some representatives of the Frankfurt School and the radical German left.⁶⁸ For instance, Šíma was allegedly supposed to meet Rudi Dutschke, a well-known leader of the German "new left"—an encounter which, along with Šíma's similar contacts with representatives of the Frankfurt School, reportedly triggered a certain resentment in the Politburo of the Slovak Communist Party and led to some criticism of Šíma.⁶⁹ This might have played a role in the strategic and selective choice of arguments that Šíma used in his criticism of the Frankfurt School.

Šíma rejected the overall concept of the Frankfurt School as eclectic, consisting of various influences from existentialism, Freudianism, phenomenology, and "anthropology" (i.e., those influences on which he himself had drawn not long before), and categorically declared that the only "real Marxism of the twentieth century is Leninism," under the patronage of the Soviet Union, the embodiment of a revolutionary avant-garde.⁷⁰ Šíma also claimed that the whole ideological concept of the Frankfurt School as such was erroneously directed towards the "subjectivization and mystification of practice," to its complete separation from "objective, material nature."⁷¹ According to him, intellectuals of the Frankfurt School "overestimate ideas," by which he referred both to the utopian radical and liberal ones. The necessary consequence of their attitude was the "denaturalization of society" and a one-sided orientation towards philosophical anthropology, which, however, in this situation could only be an "illusory solution."⁷² Šíma concluded by asserting that the fight for real humanism was only possible on the "class platform of the proletariat," and therefore it was necessary to put aside various "anthropological masks" and return to the positions of Marxist-Leninism, the real, practical, and revolutionary humanism.⁷³

In *Kritická teória*, Šíma in fact dealt with the whole spiritual climate of the 1960s and everything that was so typical of the era: its intellectual elitism, accompanied, of course, by the courage for pluralism and change,

⁶⁷ Šíma, *Kritická teória*, 5.

⁶⁸ Šíma, *Kritická teória*, 17.

⁶⁹ Boris Zala, *Nedokončené revolúcie 1968–1989 a kontúry novej epochy: esej o boji spiatočníctva a pokroku* [The unfinished revolutions of 1968–1989 and the contours of a new era: An essay on the confrontation between reaction and progress] (Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2022), 165.

⁷⁰ Šíma, *Kritická teória*, 13–17.

⁷¹ Šíma, *Kritická teória*, 51.

⁷² Šíma, *Kritická teória*, 51–55.

⁷³ Šíma, *Kritická teória*, 283–85.

as well as its utopianism and radicalism that transcended the boundaries of power blocks and social classes and was heterodox in its very essence—but, on the other hand, sometimes abandoned the positions of Marxism and ventured towards unknown horizons of thought. Above all, then, Šíma engaged with the idea of praxis, which was appraised by Marxist revisionists of the 1960s as the driving force of humanism and democracy, but which determinists like himself could hardly accept, since it swung the pendulum of dialectics too much to the side of the human subject and their will, while the objective criteria of a determined nature were put aside. The path for a further academic career was now open for Šíma. In 1978, he was appointed professor of Marxism-Leninism at Comenius University in Bratislava, and shortly thereafter he even received the state award “for excellent work.”⁷⁴ In November 1983, he was appointed director of the Institute of Social Development and Work and in this position participated in the elaboration of social prognostics.⁷⁵ He reached the peak of his professional career at the cost of adapting his concepts and his philosophical hypotheses to the scientific and socio-political discourse of the time.

But did Rudolf Šíma really accept the objectivist and empirical discourse of the late socialist era as his own, completely unchallenged and without any further reservations? Was he really such an opportunist as one could suggest according to major shifts in his views and intellectual positions? Some recollections of Šíma’s former colleague and leading member of his scientific team at the Institute of Social Development, academic Boris Zala, suggest a different scenario. As the appointed chief of the department for the research of social development at Comenius University, Zala was responsible for some major tasks and stood quite close to Šíma, his supervisor.⁷⁶ In his quasi-memoir, the essay “Unfinished Revolutions” (“Nedokončené revolúcie”), Zala actually depicted Šíma as an “open-minded” communist.⁷⁷ The description might be suitable considering Šíma’s role in the late 1980s. As soon as perestroika began in the Soviet Union, both Šíma and Zala swiftly joined the ranks of its decisive supporters. As Šíma stated already in 1986, when Gorbachev’s reform course was only at the beginning: “It is now evident to us [...] that a whole dynamization of our social progress is not like accelerating the train that still stays on a same old track while carrying the same cargo,

⁷⁴ Rudolf Šíma—osobný spis, “Rozvazanie pracovného pomeru. Doplnenie” [Termination of employment. Addendum].

⁷⁵ Rudolf Šíma—osobný spis, “Rozvazanie pracovného pomeru. Doplnenie.”

⁷⁶ Zala, *Nedokončené revolúcie 1968–1989*, 149.

⁷⁷ Zala, *Nedokončené revolúcie*, 165.

the same equipment, and even the same crew of engine drivers. Significant changes are awaiting us right ahead.”⁷⁸

The contradictory scheme of Šíma’s intellectual character and the shifts in his approach to Marxism might easily come as a surprise to anybody who has read carefully his previous statements on the Frankfurt School. He who had once founded his intellectual stance on post-Stalinist Marxist determinism, only to then approach the anthropological and revisionist challenges of the 1960s, and who later embraced the empirical and objectified canon of real existing socialism, now seemed to be making another Copernican turn, as socialist modernity was faced with a systemic crisis towards the end of the 1980s. Again, Boris Zala’s personal perspective on Šíma can shed more light on his intellectual journey:

He has never been a mere interpreter of the ‘classics,’ nor somebody who would stay just on the shallow surface of Marxist thought. He was not an imitator and certainly never parroted any party resolutions [...], he held a belief in the profound scientificity of Marxism, as well as in the necessity of its progressive evolution. This approach actually determined his performance as a head of the institute. He created an extensive scientific background for innovative mindsets and defended standards of scientific expertise in those cases when party hard-liners interfered in matters of social research. Under his leadership, the institute transformed into a sort of community workshop, and he even took many of those “68ers” under his protective wings.⁷⁹

On Šíma’s complex affiliation with the communist party, Zala commented: “To his last days, he was a staunch communist. He always sustained a positive approach to the party as an institution which he perceived in a genuinely Leninist sense, thus as the avantgarde of the proletariat and progress—his confrontations with dogmatics were actually based on this very notion he stood for.”⁸⁰ According to Zala, Šíma recognized himself as a “revolutionary humanist”—somebody who sought a deeper meaning in contemporary Marxist philosophy.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Rudolf Šíma, “Sociálno-ludské aspekty organizácie práce v podmienkach vedecko-technické revolúcie” [The social-human aspects of organization of labor under conditions of scientific-technical revolution], *Ekonomika práce* 5 (1986): 10.

⁷⁹ Boris Zala, email correspondence with the author, January 15, 2025 (translation from Slovak). For the translation into English, some parts of this citation were slightly edited.

⁸⁰ Zala, email correspondence with the author, January 15, 2025 (translation). For the translation into English, some parts of this citation were slightly edited.

⁸¹ Zala, email correspondence with the author, January 15, 2025 (translation).

The revolutionary humanism of Rudolf Šíma actually was intended to have a genuine theoretical foundation—Boris Zala asserts that over the long term, Šíma drew his own approach from the extensive work of Czech social scientist Radovan Richta, the leading scholar in the field of scientific-technical revolution and its theory since the 1960s.⁸² “He [Šíma] did not conceive Richta’s concept of scientific-technical revolution in its merely technicist sense, but rather as a key factor in the transformation of social relations—and therefore as a true driving force of their humanization. Through his reflection on Richta’s theory, Šíma legitimized his own stand against dogmatism—while he saw himself as a progressive communist.”⁸³

Zala’s memories of Šíma provide a valuable insight into the course of Šíma’s thought. Some of his suggestions even lead beyond the pervasive bias of anticommunist narratives that most probably would portray Šíma as a classic prototype of a communist intellectual cadre, someone who followed the designated party line without hesitation. Instead, his position was much more complex: on the one hand, Šíma promoted a progressive revolutionary humanism of a Leninist form and effectively based this position on a paradigm of Marxist determinism. On the other hand, this exact position could have allowed him to gather different currents of Marxist thought in a heterogenous, yet somehow still compact ideological stream that was both scientific, Marxist, and progressive but evaded the polarization between dogmatism and revisionism. The oddity of Šíma’s case lies, despite all its contradictions, in the recognition that ideological barriers and seemingly clear-cut distinctions between orthodox “Soviet-style” Leninism and unorthodox, heterogeneous, utopian, and humanist currents of Marxism were not all that well-defined. Rather it appears that the notions of progress, revolution, and modernity, almost archetypal in Marxist thought, often enabled some remarkable intellectual configurations that transcended the boundaries of dogmatism, revisionism, and other concepts through which we perceive the history of Marxism.

Conclusion

While he was once a prolific figure in Slovak Marxist thought and social sciences, Rudolf Šíma is barely recognized today and his intellectual legacy is

⁸² Radovan Richta, *Civilizace na rozcestí: společenské a lidské souvislosti vědeckotechnické revoluce* [Civilization at the crossroads: The social and human context of the scientific-technical revolution] (Prague: Svoboda, 1966).

⁸³ Boris Zala, email correspondence with the author, January 18, 2025 (translation).

mostly forgotten. However, such a fate is almost symptomatic. After all, Šíma's life and professional career reflect all the complexity of Marxist thought in the twentieth century, its contradictory nature, its turns and oddities. Once a son of a severely impoverished rural family, Šíma embraced the ethos of Stalinist revolution in the early 1950s to become a promising young cadre of the new postwar generation of Marxist intelligentsia. Through his initial and, as it turned out, decisive position of Marxist determinism, so distinctive of the triumphalist phase of the Khruschev era, Šíma evolved his reflection on contemporary Marxism towards the revisionist, humanist turn of the 1960, only to adopt the "real socialist" hegemonic discourse of empiricism and objectivism in the late 1970. Yet this too did not last long—since the mid 1980s, Šíma was among those who promoted the discourse of perestroika. Having his professional career framed by Stalin and Gorbachev, Rudolf Šíma embraced all the different currents of Marxism throughout his life, thus leaving much space for oddities, twists, and unexpected turns: but as an "open-minded determinist" and a "revolutionary humanist" Šíma always approached Marxism as an unfinished intellectual project, within which the aspects of orthodoxy and revisionism, empiricism and utopia, intertwined. Their configurations ultimately reached beyond ideological concepts of dogmatism or revisionism, thus opening a new space for reconsideration of the character of Marxist thought in the postwar era.

Acknowledgement

This chapter is an edited and expanded upon version of Ondřej Holub, "Za šestým smyslem marxistické filosofie. Ideový vývoj Rudolfa Šímy jako reflexe perspektiv a mantinelů československé marxistické filosofické antropologie 60. let" [Looking for the sixth sense of Marxist philosophy: The intellectual development of Rudolf Šíma as a reflection of the potential and limits of Czechoslovak Marxist Humanism in the 1960s], *Kontradikce. Časopis pro kritické myšlení* 5, no. 1 (2021): 45–68.

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Part II

Global Issues, Socialist Concerns

5. From Ecological Crisis to Ecological Revolution: Marxist Reflections on *The Limits to Growth* in Romania

Christian Ferencz-Flatz and Adela Hîncu

Abstract: When *The Limits to Growth* was published in 1971, socialist Eastern Europe reacted to the main conclusions of the report on the future of the planetary ecosystem commissioned by the Club of Rome—that rates of development were unsustainable, would lead to ecological catastrophe, and required immediate downturn. In the case of socialist Romania, this chapter reconstructs the immediate reflections that the report elicited on the topics of capitalism and development, global and national concerns, and the role of ideology. Authors inspired by Marxist humanist concerns as well as a growing interest in the Global South also proposed alternative concepts such as the “triple revolution” or “innovative learning,” sketching future scenarios in which development would not necessarily lead to ecological catastrophe.

Keywords: Marxism and ecology; theories of development; Marxist humanism; environmental crisis; critique of economic growth; political economy of nature

To say that the philosophical discourse in state socialist Romania holds surprising new insights for rethinking the ecological problem today would be an overstatement. We will not be making that claim in this chapter. Instead, what interests us in the following pages is to look at some of the debates that originated with the reception of the environmental issue within the framework of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, from the combined perspective of a philosopher—interested in the complex tissue of arguments

and concepts that ties philosophical reasoning to what is termed in German *Zeitdiagnosis* (a diagnostics of the present time)—and of a historian of really existing socialism, concerned with the social and political stakes of these discussions on their own terms as well as genealogically, in a longer intellectual history perspective.

The starting point for this analysis is the hefty debate stirred internationally by the so-called “Meadows report”, commissioned by the Club of Rome in 1972. Published under the provocative title *The Limits to Growth*, the report condensed the findings of a system-analytic model developed by a team of researchers at MIT, who computed several future scenarios for technological development, demographic growth, the exhaustion of non-renewable energy resources, and the impact of all these factors on the planetary ecosystem. The report famously concluded that sustaining the given rhythm of development would lead to unavoidable ecological catastrophe, which could only be averted by an immediate collective effort to hold down industrial, technological, and demographic growth, allowing humanity to veer into a “sustainability scenario.” With these stark claims, the report drew an alarm that brought the ecological problem, for the short but intense period of the first half of the 1970s, to the forefront of theoretical debates across the entire spectrum of Western philosophy and into public discussion more generally. As studies of the report’s reception in Western Europe and South America show, the reactions to *The Limits to Growth* were mixed, with criticism of the model focusing on its “computer fetishism,” flawed economic assumptions, disregard for developing countries, especially in the Global South, or underestimation of socio-cultural and political variables and the human potential for development.¹ Within the field of future studies more generally, the debates over *The Limits to Growth* illustrated contradictory visions of modernity and globality.²

It is within this complex field of contestation that spanned a range of disciplines as well as political and intellectual positions that the reception of *The Limits to Growth* in socialist Eastern Europe should be considered. These positions are remarkably convergent despite some variations throughout the Eastern bloc, as recent studies on Poland and the GDR have shown. Contrary to Czechoslovakia, where the translation of the report was withheld

¹ Elke Seefried, “Towards *The Limits to Growth?* The Book and Its Reception in West Germany and Britain 1972–73,” *German Historical Institute London Bulletin* 33, no. 1 (2011): 3–37; Luigi Piccioni, “Forty Years Later: The Reception of the Limits to Growth in Italy, 1971–74,” Fondazione Luigi Micheletti, 2012.

² Jenny Andersson, *The Future of the World: Futurology, Futurists, and the Struggle for the Post–Cold War Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 184–88.

for internal use within the scientific community, and to socialist Romania, where it was not translated at all, in Poland, *The Limits to Growth* was published promptly and openly. Moreover, it even became the object of some consistent debates, as Weronika Parfianowicz has revealed, documenting the conferences in Katowice in 1973 and Jabłonna in 1975, as well as the ensuing discussions.³ Nonetheless, the predominant tendency was, here as well, one of rejection, despite some feeble voices supporting the report from a socialist humanist perspective. In the case of the GDR, this is even more evident, since strong voices raised in the local philosophical milieu, reflecting on the deeper consequences of the findings of the Meadows report—such as Wolfgang Harich, Rudolf Bahro, or Robert Havemann—were marginalized and even forced into political migration on account of their dissenting views.⁴ While the Romanian case presented in what follows lacks such heated disputes, it is nonetheless illustrative for highlighting the background and ramifications of the arguments that came to play in this context.

Sergiu Tămaș, one of the young philosophers of the 1970s with a persistent focus on system analysis, who engaged with the report in *Revista de filozofie*, the main journal of the Institute for Philosophy, wrote unequivocally: “Marxist researchers held almost without reserve that the ideas put forth in *The Limits to Growth* are unacceptable for the popular masses in capitalist countries as well as for the economically poorly developed countries and even more so for the socialist countries.”⁵ The argument was political, in the sense that any zero-growth policy, advocated by the authors of the report as a precondition for the sustainability option, would automatically also suspend the fight against economic inequality globally, as this was championed officially at the time by state socialist countries. It is also clear that, in pursuing this argument, Romanian authors like Tămaș were responding not just to the report itself, within a narrow East–West, socialist–capitalist logic, but to broader debates surrounding it, especially with respect to the issue of underdevelopment in the Global South.

Sociologists Dan Grindea and Nicolae Racoveanu, who also reviewed the book in 1972, located it in the larger field of contemporary future studies, as

3 Weronika Parfianowicz, “Limits to Socialist Growth: The Question of Economic Growth and Environmental Crisis in Polish Discussions of the 1970s,” *Contradictions* 6, no. 2 (2022): 41–66.

4 See for this Alexander Amberger, *Dissident Marxism and Utopian Eco-Socialism in the German Democratic Republic: The Intellectual Legacies of Rudolf Bahro, Wolfgang Harich, and Robert Havemann* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2023).

5 Sergiu Tămaș, “Marxismul și ecologia politică” [Marxism and political ecology], *Revista de filozofie*, no. 7 (1973): 769.

well as in a long-term genealogy of Malthusian thinking. Unlike Tămaș, who criticized the report's interpretation and conclusions, but not necessarily its empirical basis, Grindea and Racoveanu challenged the model on account of its basic assumption that social systems were invariable, and asked: how would the model look like if it also considered as a possible scenario the abolition of capitalism? They also noted the very limited importance given in the model to social factors, and in particular to the adaptability of contemporary societies to the scientific-technological revolution. Finally, they highlighted the model's ignorance of the spatial heterogeneity of the main variables it considered—thus pointing to the issue of global inequalities between developed and developing societies. The authors argued, along similar lines as Tămaș, that:

[t]o propose under these conditions a balanced growth worldwide is a.) a utopia, because decision makers in the two groups of countries should satisfy completely opposite interests than those of the social classes they represent; b.) it achieves a fake “global equilibrium” [...] that would in fact perpetuate on the very long term [...] the existing inequalities, which clearly goes against the aspirations of the broad masses to escape misery and scarcity.⁶

All in all, however, they saw an “indisputable positive value” in *The Limits to Growth*, among other reasons because it alerted (critical readers) to ecological problems, could mobilize public opinion to reevaluate consumption, argued for the rationalization of economic growth and the need to decrease the gap between industrialized and underdeveloped countries, and finally invited reconsideration of the existing structural options for development (including through radical transformations) while pointing out the incompatibility between narrow capitalist interest and the common problems of humanity.⁷

As these two examples show, the challenge put forth by *The Limits to Growth* brought up economic, ecological, political, and ideological arguments. In the first part of the chapter, we analyze the complex ideological implications of the ecological critique of capitalism and the positioning of state socialism on the issue of economic growth. In the second part, we look at the productive engagement between revisionist Marxism and ecological topics, and at the resulting articulations of alternatives to the “limits to

⁶ Dan Grindea and Nicolae Racoveanu, “Limitele creșterii și alternativele existenței umane” [*The Limits to Growth* and the alternatives of human existence], *Viitorul Social* 1, no. 1 (1972): 1340.

⁷ Grindea and Racoveanu, “Limitele creșterii,” 1343.

growth" model, from theorizing the ecological revolution to amending Marxist economics to include environmental concerns.

Ecology, capitalism, and ideology

When writing about the ecological crisis, authors from socialist Romania generally identified capitalism as the main culprit. However, this did not mean that state socialist countries were altogether exempt from responsibility. As Valter Roman wrote in one of his articles from the early 1970s in *Revista de filozofie*: "To hold that socialism is by its essence shielded from the negative effects of the technical-scientific revolution, from the consequences of the ecological crisis, would be an unjustifiable mistake."⁸ Nonetheless, the ecological problem was understood primarily as a product of capitalism from a genealogical perspective. As the Meadows report ostensibly showed, the environmental problem traced back to a harmful form of economic growth, which favors profit over the fate of humanity itself. Moreover, some of the authors writing in this vein argued that if socialist industry ultimately proved just as harmful to the environment as the capitalist system, this only pointed back to its economic interconnectedness with the West. Here is how Sergiu Tămaș again framed the issue in another paper from 1972, responding to *The Limits to Growth*:

In our day and age, when socialist countries coexist with capitalist countries, developing commercial relations between entirely different social systems, it is inevitable that certain difficulties arise: on the one hand, the technology acquired from highly developed capitalist countries poses complex problems when it comes to protecting the environment; on the other hand, since the products of socialist industry must confront the products of capitalist industry on the international market at competitive prices, this again raises obstacles to devising efficient measures for environmental protection. Due to these specific conditions under which socialism is currently developing, certain unwanted ecological effects were bound to appear within the context of the new social order as well.⁹

8 Valter Roman. "Prin poarta științei sau a infernului? Exigențe, răspunderi, obligații" [Through the gate of science or of hell? Exigencies, responsibilities, obligations], *Revista de filozofie*, no. 5 (1975): 560.

9 Sergiu Tămaș, "Politică, prognoză, ecologie" [Politics, prognosis, ecology], *Revista de filozofie*, no. 10 (1972): 1193.

Thus, insofar as socialism was, to some extent, also responsible for damaging the environment, this was only the case because of its unavoidable ties to the capitalist world, which led to policies that ultimately followed a capitalist logic themselves. Instead, the argument ran, it was precisely this logic that ultimately needed to be broken in order to efficiently fight the ecological crisis. In other words: the solution was not to curb growth *per se*, but to no longer allow it to be driven by profit, and this would only be the case in a socialist system, as long as it did not allow itself to be integrated into a capitalist world economy that would still impose on it a capitalist dynamic.

Secondly, and as a consequence of this, the ecological crisis was not just seen as a simple product of capitalism, which needed to be fought on its own terms regardless of the political and economic regime, but instead it was interpreted also as something that could only be ultimately uprooted by overcoming capitalism altogether. Although some authors writing in *RdF* articulated this argument as if it were a matter of undisputed self-evidence, others nonetheless tried to substantiate it in one of two important ways: on the one hand, they critically observed that, in the hands of capitalism, ecological concerns tended to become a business in themselves, serving as an alibi for an ongoing exploitative relation to nature. As such, ecology pursued under capitalism could ultimately only lead to making the ecological problem worse. On the other hand, capitalism was seen as unable to handle the ecological crisis because it was a system that structurally allowed for the particular interest in profit to prevail over the general interest, which in this case was the survival of mankind, while the latter only came to reign free under state socialism.¹⁰ However, this latter argument appears particularly paradoxical if one follows the concrete treatment of the environmental issue within the ideological framework of Marxist-Leninist philosophy.

Philosophers who engaged with the ecological issue in socialist Romania did not question its general compatibility with the Marxist perspective. On the contrary, this was usually plainly taken for granted, or swiftly resolved by reference to a few frequently repeated quotes from Marx and Engels, which mainly addressed the devastating effects of capitalist exploitation on the natural environment. Implicitly, it was presupposed that, on the contrary, a society organized according to Marxist principles would avoid such pitfalls. Yet, this was hardly self-understood, as the lengthy disputes carried out especially among Anglo-Saxon interpreters of Marx during

¹⁰ See for this especially Tămaş, "Politică, prognoză, ecologie"; and Angela Botez: "Concepții contemporane asupra revoluției tehnico-științifice" [Contemporary conceptions of the technoscientific revolution], *Revista de filozofie*, no. 4 (1976): 501–6.

the 1980s and 1990s around the possibility of harmonizing Marxism and ecological thinking vividly show.¹¹ While some of the authors involved in these debates (most notably Howard Parsons) defend Marx as an ecological thinker *avant la lettre* in stressing his criticism of production for the sake of production also in view of its ecologically destructive effects, several eco-feminists and social ecologists (Ariel Salleh, Murray Bookchin, and others), by contrast, saw Marx as indebted to the same productivist perspective, ultimately only advocating for a somewhat more rational exploitation of nature. In other words, Marx's understanding of nature was seen as still utilitarian in its scope and hardly capable of setting our relationship to the environment on an entirely different basis, as called for by contemporary ecologists, which is why Bookchin even went so far as to call Marx a "bourgeois sociologist" altogether in terms of his views on the natural environment. Thus, when seen in view of these debates, Marx's own references to nature and the environment, which come up as quotes in the articles of the Romanian philosophers mentioned above, are at best equivocal, as is the case for instance with his famous definition of nature in the Paris Manuscripts as "man's inorganic body." Indeed, this elliptic phrase suggests some relationship of intimate kinship between the human body and nature, but it also sees the latter solely as an instrumental extension of our bodily capacities, defining their exchanges on a strictly utilitarian basis. However, while this entire line of questioning was of no particular concern for the Romanian philosophers, their reflections took a different path to problematize the issue, particularly focusing on the relationship between national and supranational interests, and the role ideology played in this regard.

On the one hand, the environmental crisis was understood as a global catastrophe: pollution, the destruction of natural landscapes, massive deforestation, the gradual disappearance of endangered species, or concerns related to climate change were from the outset issues that could not be pinned down locally and tied solely to capitalist countries. Instead, they had consequences that ran across political borders, and as such, they required from the beginning a global perspective to address them. On the other hand, however, assuming such a globalist perspective, which was frequently termed "environmental consciousness" in the philosophical debates of the 1970s, posed at least two major difficulties for Romanian Marxist-Leninist philosophers at the time.

¹¹ See for this especially John P. Clark, "Marx's Inorganic Body," *Environmental Ethics*, no. 11 (1989): 243–58.

For one, it raised a political problem, since with Stalin's turn away from internationalism and towards "socialism in one country," the national communism of Eastern bloc countries may have been subservient in many ways to the Soviet Union, but still fiercely defended the principles of national sovereignty in rejecting all transnational attempts to supersede it. This tendency proved most acute in the case of socialist Romania,¹² coming to the fore visibly, for instance, at the most trivial institutional level in discussions among representatives of the philosophical institutes of state socialist countries, which frequently led to situations where Soviet proposals for tightening institutional ties were met by Romanian delegates with firm resistance and regularly got stuck in some irrelevant details. Along a similar line, following the issue of "mondialization" in the Romanian philosophical journals of the 1970s, while a wide set of problems were acknowledged to exceed national frontiers—problems like: food supplies or the interdependencies caused by material resources, the ecological issue, or the perils of thermonuclear destruction—a philosopher like Ion Florea, for instance, nonetheless stressed the need to confront such global provocations while still upholding the principles of independent, sovereign nations.

Under these circumstances, calls for collective action and international efforts regarding the environmental crisis in particular were hardly ever advocated straightforwardly in the philosophical articles that picked up on the topic, but instead tended to result in contorted defensive arguments.¹³ For example, Sergiu Tămaș's reflections on the possibilities of an ecological politics within Marxism ultimately culminated in a list of four principles, which included the idea that "the ecological politics of a nation must strengthen and not weaken that nation's potential," or that all countries "have the sovereign right to exploit their national resources" without any external interference in their internal affairs. One could hardly imagine the work it would have required to establish something like the Paris Agreements across these complex ideological divides.

¹² As argued recently, especially by Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Stalin's isolationism was merely a passing tactic, enforced by the world crisis of the 1930s, and had already been dropped by the time Romania was becoming communist. In this perspective, the Romanian emphasis on sovereignty was rather unique, as shown by its staunch opposition to the integration of COMECON, which other countries of the Eastern bloc mostly supported.

¹³ Ion Florea, "Raportul dintre 'mondial' și 'național' în dezvoltarea istorică" [The relationship between "global" and "national" in historical development], *Revista de filozofie* 24, no. 2 (1978): 147–55.

The other issue at stake was aptly highlighted in an article by Soviet philosopher M[ihail] I. Iovciuk, originally presented at the World Congress for Philosophy in Varna in 1973 and translated and published in *Revista de filozofie*. Under the intricate title: "The Future of Scientific Philosophy in Relation to Social Development and Technical-Scientific Progress in the Final Third of the Twentieth Century," Iovciuk engaged in a vigorous criticism of some contemporary trends in non-Marxist philosophy, which according to him associated the fate of philosophy at the time with a move towards "de-ideologization." This move could obviously take various shapes, and while Iovciuk made a brief inventory of some versions of the argument, he found their key common element in the separation between scientific research proper and the sphere of human and spiritual values. In contrast to such a separation, which in his view characterized non-Marxist philosophy, he saw the main merit of Marxist philosophy in having successfully integrated both. Iovciuk explicitly identified the ecological problem as one of the main contemporary guises of this de-ideologizing tendency. Thus, in his view, philosophers advocating ecological concerns ultimately only pleaded for the need to adopt a unitary consciousness of mankind that made the contrast between capitalist and socialist nations pale in significance by comparison: "They justify the necessity and the possibility of working out a unique worldview, a unique planetary consciousness, conceived as the only viable philosophy of the future, by referring to the consequences of a so-called ecological revolution and the new existential situation it presently creates for man."¹⁴ Iovciuk, however, was suspicious of this argument, which he considered to be very popular among non-Marxist philosophers attending the Varna Congress. He recognized its own ideological underpinnings, which resided, in brief, in its core intention to sideline Marxism-Leninism and the issues it raised from the contemporary philosophical debate, by arbitrarily setting a common agenda for all mankind, which dispensed with the difference between socialism and capitalism altogether.

This perspective largely corresponds to how Romanian philosophers synthesized the debates at the Varna Congress as well. The last issue of *Revista de filozofie* for 1973 thus contained an extended dossier on the World Philosophy Congress, including several important accounts of the main debates that ensued. To be sure, these were not neutral and objective reports,

¹⁴ M. I. Iovciuk, "Viitorul filozofiei științifice în raport cu dezvoltarea socială și cu progresul științific-tehnic în ultima treime a secolului al XX-lea" [The future of scientific philosophy in relation to social development and technical-scientific progress in the last third of the twentieth century], *Revista de filozofie* 21, no. 3 (1975): 328.

as one of the articles plainly proclaimed the overt triumph of the Marxist philosophers regarding most of the contemporary hot topics under discussion:

This explains why, at the Varna Congress, Marxist philosophical thinking showed its superiority, by reclaiming the respect of its most fierce adversaries (as are the neothomists), for instance regarding peace and understanding among nations, avoiding a thermonuclear war, the fight against the pollution of the natural environment, or the ecological perils that arose with the technical-scientific revolution.¹⁵

When sifting through the proceedings of the Varna Congress, one hardly finds any direct and consistent discussion of ecological issues by socialist philosophers. The topic was instead constantly in the background, especially during the debates following the lengthy panel on “the future of philosophy,” which a collective of authors writing for *Revista de filozofie* (Ludwig Grünberg, Ion Tudosescu, Al. Tănase) summarize along similar lines as Iovciuk as follows:

Insofar as some representatives of non-Marxist philosophy (even among those who were receptive to Marxist methodologies like Paul Ricoeur) declared that, given the new circumstances, the opposition between Marxist and non-Marxist philosophy, between materialism and idealism, and even (as proposed by the Swiss philosopher Mercier, the general secretary of F.I.S.P.) between capitalism and socialism are overcome, the Congress proved how illusionary this idea of an ideological “respite” is, and that we have to give an active sense to the dialog with other philosophical currents, which amounts to an ideological struggle. In this struggle, Marxism is able—due to the force of its arguments—to prove its superiority, its capacity to offer the only strategy of battle for freeing and humanizing contemporary man.¹⁶

Of course, the reference to Ricoeur comes as somewhat of a surprise here, given that his presentation in Varna, on “Ethics and culture,” merely

¹⁵ Ion Tudosescu, “Umanismul și condiția tehnico-științifică a omului contemporan” [Humanism and the technical-scientific condition of contemporary man], *Revista de filozofie* 19, no. 12 (1973): 1468.

¹⁶ L. Grünberg, Ion Tudosescu, and Al. Tănase, “Un tablou succint al principalelor orientări filozofice care s-au confruntat la cel de-al XV-lea Congres Mondial de Filozofie” [A summary picture of the main philosophical orientations that confronted at the 15th World Congress of Philosophy], *Revista de filozofie* 19, no. 12 (1973): 1490.

reconstituted the methodological dispute between Habermas and Gadamer, opposing the critique of ideology to hermeneutics. Although, in siding with Gadamer here, Ricoeur may be seen to advocate a certain de-ideologization of philosophy, he certainly did not refer to the ecological problem in this context at all, a topic that only entered his thought at the beginning of the 1990s with his reception of Hans Jonas's philosophy of life, when Ricoeur indeed began to sketch what his interpreters called an "eco-hermeneutics" centered on an analysis of bodily "dwelling" in the environment.

Be this as it may, however, for Iovciuk himself it was in any case certain that all "current attempts to ecologize philosophy, which only constitute the latest version of the famous conception of de-ideologization, very eloquently express the intensification of the ideological class struggle, the tendency of bourgeois theorists to (once again) bury the Marxist-Leninist doctrine by dissolving it into a unique, global, ecological philosophy."¹⁷ The main paradox of this stance is that, while Marxist philosophers, on the one hand, defended the superiority of a socialist approach to the ecological crisis by claiming that it alone could put the general interest of mankind above the particular interest in profit, they were at the same time wary of the fact that speaking in the name of a global interest of mankind only served a de-ideologizing agenda, which intended to ultimately sideline Marxism-Leninism and make its ideological position irrelevant while clashing with the national emphasis of local socialisms.

Revisionist Marxism and the ecological challenge

Beyond the bottom-line reduction to fundamental incompatibilities between Marxist-Leninism and bourgeois ecology in the specific geopolitical context of the 1970s, Romanian authors who sought to offer specifically Marxist takes on the issues brought forth by *The Limits to Growth* generally tapped into the positive revisionist Marxist tropes that had been developed from the 1960s: humanist Marxism; a basic trust in scientific and technological development; and more generally, a belief in the creative potential of mankind under un-alienated socioeconomic conditions. Thus, Al. Tănase, a philosopher of culture writing extensively on the topic of Marxist humanism, reflected on the ecological crisis in several articles published in the cultural magazine *Contemporanul* at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. Like others, he restated the origin of the ecological crisis in the rise of capitalism

¹⁷ M. I. Iovciuk, "Viitorul filozofiei științifice," 328.

and its profit-driven development of the means of production. At the same time, he refuted the idea that the ecological crisis was either an inevitable effect of the scientific-technological revolution or that science alone could solve it. With reference to the main debates on the post-industrial society, convergence theory, and the future, Tănase admonished

on the one hand, a mystifying technological optimism that camouflages the fact that the only goal of production is profit accumulation and not the rational satisfaction of needs—a vision which establishes a mechanical, necessary, and sufficient relationship between the development of knowledge and wellbeing; and on the other hand, at the opposite pole, the organized discrediting of scientific knowledge, of any rational knowledge.¹⁸

A Marxist humanist vision of social and scientific development was in this sense meant to be a voice of somber optimism, in that it upheld the value of science for the benefit of humanity, but still specifically under socialist socioeconomic conditions. Reviewing Berry Commoner's *The Closing Circle* (1972) in the same magazine a year later, when the book appeared in Romanian translation,¹⁹ Tănase saw in Commoner's insistence on the social causes of the ecological crisis a vindication of optimism about its social solutions and the human capacity to reestablish a balance with nature (of economic and ecological cycles), end environmental degradation, and avoid ecological catastrophe.²⁰ This type of analysis from the perspective of humanist Marxism thus professed to offer a philosophical answer to the looming danger of ecological crisis, taking a universalist approach and only indirectly criticizing the realities of socialism.

Much more explicit in his criticism was Valter Roman. As one of the main Marxist theorists of the “scientific-technological revolution” in socialist Romania, in the mid-1970s Roman went a step further and argued for the need to theorize a “triple revolution”—not just scientific, but also social and ecological. According to Roman, this brought into question quantitative growth, or what he called the “fetishism of quantity”; it required international scientific cooperation despite socio-political differences; and, as formulated

¹⁸ Al. Tănase, “Civilizația contemporană și criza ecologică” [Contemporary civilization and ecological crisis], *Contemporanul*, no. 39 (1979): 4.

¹⁹ Barry Commoner, *Cercul care se închide* [The closing circle] (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1980).

²⁰ Al. Tănase, “Criza ecologică și supraviețuirea civilizației” [Ecological crisis and the survival of civilization], *Contemporanul*, no. 30 (1980): 4.

by Bertrand de Jouvenel, it aimed to shift focus from political economy to political ecology in order to articulate an ecological approach to economic growth.²¹ Roman continued to reflect on these topics for the rest of the 1970s and until his death in 1983. His view of revolutionary change is best illustrated by the formulation “limits or turning point,” by which, in direct reference to *The Limits to Growth*, Roman emphasized the revolutionary potential implicit in the ecological crisis. Following centuries of quantitative economic growth based on industrialization, Roman argued, society had reached “an irreducible antagonism with nature itself.”²² Consequently, the existing model should be turned upside down, with the focus being not on production for its own sake, but on the desirable goals toward which society should strive. Roman also emphasized that although resources might be limited, the limits of the human mind were more generous, and this made it possible to think of the existing crisis as a turning point towards a new model of qualitative growth. By this he meant that the future belonged to science, technological development, and artificial intelligence, but he also insisted on the ethics of scientific development. In terms of Marxist theory, Roman was steadfast about recognizing science (including the social sciences) as a productive force. And although he considered socialism to have an advantage in tackling the social, political, and institutional obstacles ahead (which, Roman noted, economist Wassily Leontieff had identified as the main concern beyond just the natural ones), he saw the ecological crisis (and the inner crisis of identity it triggered in people living through it) as a common, global concern of all mankind, and a possible turning point for capitalist and socialist societies alike.²³

Romanian authors also reflected on the various alternative models proposed in response to *The Limits to Growth*, especially within the field of future studies. The Third World Future Studies Conference organized in Bucharest in 1972 brought together some of the most important names in the field of futurology to discuss “the common future of humanity.” As argued by Peder Anker, in the wake of the publication of *The Limits to Growth* and in the particular context of socialist Romania, the conference was dominated by what he called “a ‘shallow’ technocratic analysis of the environmental

²¹ Valter Roman, “Corelația societate-natură în condițiile revoluției științifice și tehnice (Revoluția științifică-tehnică și revoluția ecologică)” [The correlation between society and nature under conditions of the scientific and technical revolution (The technical-scientific revolution and the ecological revolution)], *Viitorul social* 4, no. 1 (1975): 51.

²² Valter Roman, “Limite sau cotitură” [Limits or turning point], in *Limite sau cotitură* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1981), 212.

²³ Roman, “Limite sau cotitură,” 218, 220–21, 224–26, 231–34.

situation," which focused on technological instead of societal solutions and which Johan Galtung criticized in his intervention at the conference as "an 'ideology of the middle class' [...] that was 'politically blind' to the interests of the poor."²⁴ Strong proposals to go beyond this technocratic approach, such as what Anker identified as the first formulation by Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss of the "deep ecology movement" and his argument to replace ecology in its existing form with "ecosophy" or "a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium,"²⁵ remained without resonance in Romania. Yet although socialist thinkers were generally optimistic about the potential of science and of technological solutions to ecological challenges, they also addressed important philosophical questions about the future of mankind that clearly also required societal and political change.

Pavel Apostol, who was intensely engaged in the field of futurology in the 1970s and 1980s, reviewed the Forrester-Meadows model, the Mesarovic-Pestel report to the Club of Rome,²⁶ and the Latin American world model, also known as the Bariloche model.²⁷ While *The Limits to Growth* was never translated into Romanian, the latter two were.²⁸ Collected under the heading "global alternatives" in his volume *Viitorul* (The future), these texts testify to a close engagement with the evolving international debate in the field of futurology.²⁹ Apostol recognized the heuristic value of global modeling as

24 Peder Anker, "Deep Ecology in Bucharest," *The Trumpeter* 24, no. 1 (2008): 57–58.

25 Arne Næss, "Mișcarea ecologică superficială și profundă" [The superficial and deep ecological movement], in *Viitorul comun al oamenilor* [The common future of humanity] (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1976), 275–83. Translated and introduced in Anker, "Deep Ecology in Bucharest."

26 Mihajlo Mesarovic and Eduard Pestel, *Mankind at the Turning Point* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1974). In Romanian: *Omenirea la răspântie: Al doilea raport către Clubul de la Roma*, trans. Florin Ionescu (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1975).

27 Amílcar Oscar Herrera et al., *Catastrophe or New Society? A Latin American World Model* (Ottawa: International Development Research Center, 1976). In Romanian: *Catastrofă sau o nouă societate? Un model latino-american al lumii*, trans. Radu Chiculescu and Virgil Goian (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1981).

28 Both were published in the series "Idei contemporane" (Contemporary ideas) of the main publishing house, Editura Politică, which was led by Valter Roman between 1957–83. The series published a host of important authors in the field of critical theory, cybernetics, and future studies, such as Norbert Wiener, Alvin Toffler, Radovan Richta, Edouard Bonnefous, Berry Commoner, Jan Tinbergen, Bertrand de Jouvenel, Wolf Hafele, etc.

29 The global models proposed in the 1970s were also reviewed by Constantin Vlad, who focused on the values they espoused. Vlad also staged a dialog between a proponent of economic growth and a proponent of limiting growth in which issues such as controlled growth, the valuation and control of new technology, delayed innovation, the place of efficiency and equity as values under capitalism and socialism, and work and the fulfillment of needs in socialism and capitalism were presented in a more accessible way. Vlad emphasized the necessity of continued economic growth under socialism (and in underdeveloped societies) for the fulfillment of people's

proposed for the first time in *The Limits to Growth*, but also identified its main limitations. Like others, he maintained that leaving socio-political and economic variables out (in terms of global decision-making) resulted in skewed diagnoses, alternatives for development, and proposed measures. Secondly, he commented on the model's lack of consideration of the heterogeneity of the world system, both in terms of different forms of cooperation and in terms of the understanding of development at a global level. Finally, Apostol faulted the model for assuming that conflicts between and within states could and would be resolved peacefully, thus eliminating the possibility of revolutionary change. Apostol saw this as an essential alternative that could only be articulated from a Marxist perspective, and indeed argued that *The Limits to Growth* had made that possible by inadvertently substantiating Marx's finding that economic growth does not necessarily translate into social progress but rather results in exploitation and alienation that needs to be challenged by way of revolution.³⁰

For these reasons, Apostol saw the second report to the Club of Rome, *Mankind at the Turning Point*, by Mihajlo Mesarovic and Eduard Pestel, as a step forward in terms of acknowledging the need for social and political, not just technical solutions, and of taking a differentiated approach to regional development that would be harmonized into a vision of "organic growth" of the whole of mankind, while nevertheless continuing to advocate for the moderate reform of the capitalist system rather than revolutionary socio-economic transformation.³¹ Finally, Apostol saw the Bariloche model, with its focus on the satisfaction of fundamental needs, quality of life, and "socialist" equity, rather than on the limits to growth (which it assumed were possible to overcome), as closest to the ethos of socialism, or at least as the most politically explicit of the global models at the time (by this he meant that the others merely feigned apoliticism by not reflecting on the political assumptions embedded in their models). What these models were lacking, however, according to Apostol, was a conception of "the systems' ability to be instructed (through their own experience, through scientific information, etc.)."³² On this point, the most elaborate demonstration was

needs. Constantin Vlad, *Creștere și valori* [Growth and values] (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1980).

³⁰ Pavel Apostol, "Despre Limitele creșterii," in *Vîitorul* [The Future] (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1977), 166–84, here 178–84.

³¹ Pavel Apostol, "De la 'limitele creșterii' la 'creșterea organică'" [From "the limits to growth" to "organic growth"], in *Vîitorul*, 185–203.

³² Pavel Apostol, "Nevoile omenirii și 'minimul social'" [Mankind's needs and the "social minimum"], in *Vîitorul*, 249.

formulated in the Club of Rome report *No Limits to Learning: Bridging the Human Gap*, to which Romanian futurologists contributed directly.³³

Published in 1979, *No Limits to Learning* offered an alternative model to that of physical resource scarcity, from the combined perspective of socialist, Global South, and Western researchers. The socialist team was led by Mircea Malița, who served as Minister of Education in 1970–72 and was closely involved in the institutionalization and internationalization of prognosis and future studies in Romania.³⁴ He worked with researchers from the Center of Methodological Research of the World Future Studies Federation, which functioned in Bucharest between 1974 and 1977.³⁵ The report resulting from their combined efforts with the research teams in Cambridge and Rabat observed that over a decade of intense engagement with global issues, the discussion was shifting beyond considering these to be “manifestations of physical problems in the life-support system, and towards an acceptance of the preeminent importance of the human side of these issues. This human side of the global problematic or what is called the *human element*, encompasses both the problems caused by human vulnerabilities as well as the opportunities created by human potential.”³⁶ The authors saw this reflected in the gradual loss of optimism about merely technological solutions, the increased interest globally in non-material issues such as culture, equality, human rights, and the growing use of human and social indicators for understanding development.

The report diagnosed a “human gap,” described as the “dichotomy between a growing complexity of our own making and lagging behind of our own capacities,”³⁷ and proposed as a solution “innovative learning.” Unlike maintenance learning, concerned with addressing recurring issues in predictable ways, innovative learning was defined as a combination of anticipation—or learning from the future (e.g., projecting alternative future scenarios)—and participation, which would develop the capacity to collectively tackle future global issues before shock situations, such as the global oil crises of the

³³ James W. Botkin, Haddi Elmandjra, and Mircea Malița, *No Limits to Learning: Bridging the Human Gap* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979). In Romanian: *Orizontul fără limite al învățării: Lichidarea decalajului uman*, trans. Tatiana Malița (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1981).

³⁴ Ana-Maria Cătănuș, “Official and Unofficial Futures of the Communist System: Romanian Futures Studies between Control and Dissidence,” in Jenny Andersson and Eglė Rindzevičiutė, eds., *The Struggle for the Long-Term in Transnational Science and Politics: Forging the Future* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 172–75, 178.

³⁵ Andersson, *The Future of the World*, 148.

³⁶ Botkin, Elmandjara, and Malița, *No Limits to Learning*, 4.

³⁷ Botkin, Elmandjara, and Malița, *No Limits to Learning*, 7.

1970s. In this perspective it was essential to properly account not just for the physical limitations of the planet, but also for the human potential for learning and growth, all of this in a very unequal world.³⁸ When the report tackled specific issues, however, such as the need to generate new sources of energy, the application of the innovative learning concept was rather limited—e.g., the authors recognized the limitations of the old patterns of problem-solving but also acknowledged that participation and anticipation alone could not be the entire answer. Their conclusion was that there was a need for not just technological solutions but also society's preparation for a future in which both the sources of energy and the ways of living would be different from the present and in harmony.³⁹

Whereas the approach in *No Limits to Learning* resonated with revisionist Marxist claims about the human potential for creative transformation, it also occasionally appeared to put the responsibility for structural change on individuals themselves. Notably, this was the case in the authors' discussion of the "fifth world" (by which they meant the fifth of the global population that was illiterate), where, according to the report, the emphasis on material redistribution that was essential when it came to the "fourth world" (the economically poorest countries) was to be replaced by a focus on "the development of the inner capacities of the people themselves" or "self-help." The report consequently advocated for a global literacy program that was not motivated by immediate economic considerations but instead sought to break the cycle of poverty by "increasing human dignity."⁴⁰

For all the discussions in the field of ecology,⁴¹ there had been limited consideration of what the economics of environmental protection would actually look like. Economists in socialist Romania formulated critiques of *The Limits to Growth* almost as soon as the report was published. Tiberius Schatelles, for example, raised objections regarding the study's method, but acknowledged that there was a real lack of models that considered the variables included in the Meadows report, especially those concerning natural resources. To the report's conclusion that economic growth should be limited, Schatelles retorted that a non-capitalist mode of consumption,

³⁸ Similar arguments about the human potential for progress and the role of education were formulated by Ioniță Olteanu, for example in *Limitele progresului și progresele limitelor* [The limits of progress and the progress of limits] (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1981).

³⁹ Botkin, Elmandjara, and Malița, *No Limits to Learning*, 107–8.

⁴⁰ Botkin, Elmandjara, and Malița, *No Limits to Learning*, 91.

⁴¹ See also, for an overview, Aristide Cioabă, Aurelian Moise, and Ilie Fonta, "Ecologia în dezbaterea ideologică actuală" [Ecology in the current ideological debate], *Vîitorul social* 6, no. 3 (1977): 546–52.

and especially ensuring a longer life for consumer products—thus reducing industrial activity while maintaining economic growth and continuing to increase material welfare—would allow enough time to find new solutions to the problems of resource scarcity and pollution. The very concepts of welfare and of economic growth based on GDP, he argued, had to be rethought, under capitalism and socialism alike, after decades of using them as a measurement in the competition between the two, while “zero growth” was not an option for the countries still working to achieve “reasonable welfare.”⁴²

In 1976, economist N. N. Constantinescu published a volume on the economics of environmental protection, a work that was singular in the scholarship of the time in Romania. It addressed in detail the issues stemming from the debates that followed *The Limits to Growth*, especially the limitations of natural resources, pollution, environmental degradation, scientific and technological progress, and international cooperation, and proposed a Marxist economic approach to environmental protection. Constantinescu laid out its premise as the contradiction between man and nature that underscored the history of humanity. Capitalism, in this analysis, was at fault for exploiting both man and nature, but socialism had to grapple with this contradiction as well. What mitigated it under socialism, argued Constantinescu, was the common ownership of the means of production, the planned economy, economic democratism, the focus on welfare rather than profit, the preoccupation for peace, and the raising of the scientific and cultural level of the population, thus enabling their participation.⁴³

Like Schatelles, Constantinescu also considered the ways in which the consumption of natural resources could be rationalized under socialism, including through a politics of savings, increasing product quality, and better forecasting and planning.⁴⁴ He went further to argue that the costs of environmental protection should be considered costs of production, not merely expenditures from the national revenue, but themselves producing value. Consequently, according to Constantinescu the very theory of expanded reproduction proposed by Marx had to be amended in a socialist economy, so as to include the reproduction of the natural environment (both protection and improvement) alongside the reproduction of the total social

⁴² Tiberiu Schatteles, “Limitele creșterii” examinate de un economist” [*The Limits to Growth* examined by an economist], in “*Limitele creșterii*” în cîmpul dezbatelii critice [*The Limits to Growth* in the field of critical debate] (Bucharest: Centrul de informare și documentare în științele sociale și politice, 1973), 59–75.

⁴³ N. N. Constantinescu, *Economia protecției mediului înconjurător* [The economics of environmental protection] (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1976), 40–41.

⁴⁴ Constantinescu, *Economia protecției mediului înconjurător*, 58–61.

product, the forces of production, and the production relations. Then, the value of the social product would include the value of the means of production used, the cost of preventing or improving the resulting environmental degradation, workers' pay, and the net revenue. In this way, Constantinescu placed environmental considerations at the center of economic planning, the pursuit of rationalization, and the definition of economic efficiency, rather than as an afterthought to economic development.⁴⁵ Others, like Maria D. Popescu, followed suit in proposing new concepts to account for the role of the environment in economic processes. Popescu elaborated, starting at the end of the 1970s, the concept of the "active circular process." This concerned changing the relationship between man–technology–nature–society, harmonizing production and natural cycles, and the reintroduction of residues from production and consumption into new production cycles.⁴⁶

Conclusions

The debates raised by *The Limits to Growth* in Romania vividly illustrate the difficulties of theoretically adapting the Marxist-Leninist framework to a topic that clashed with it in several respects. On the one hand, the global nature of the ecological crisis, transcending national and ideological frontiers, conflicted with the emphasis on national sovereignty that characterized local Marxist-Leninist philosophies as a direct expression of their local state politics. On the other hand, the looming ecological catastrophe also confronted the socialist optimism towards technical-scientific progress with an awareness of the dangers dormant in it. One solution was to shift emphasis from the risks of scientific, technological, and societal development per se to the political conditions shaping it. This move is also relevant in that it reframed the entire discussion concerning the ecological problem anticipating more recent discussions of the "capitalocene" as a new way of relating ecology to the criticism of capitalism. To be sure, Marxist philosophers did not invent the notion of "political ecology," which was already in use by the end of the 1950s. Instead, the concept acquired an entirely different meaning in their vocabulary as it no longer just advocated for a heightened regulation of capitalist economic and societal development in view of their

45 Constantinescu, *Economia protecției mediului înconjurător*, 114–15.

46 Maria D. Popescu, "Economie și ecologie: abordări paralele sau interdisciplinare?" [Economy and ecology: Parallel or interdisciplinary approaches?], in *Problemele globale și viitorul omenirii* [Global problems and the future of humanity] (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1982), 469–87.

environmental implications—and the ways in which these concerns should be tackled in a liberal political system—but rather, in the Marxist-Leninist framework, the notion was used as a plea for expanding the scope of the planned economy in order to also include the dialectics of the relationship between man and nature. While the concrete implications of this move for the socialist political economy are not worked out in detail, they nonetheless bring further complexity to the mutual relationship between politics and ecology, which could be interesting to explore in relation to more recent forays into the field of political ecology, such as in the works of authors like Bruno Latour or Anna Tsing.

For all the contradictions brought forth by *The Limits to Growth*, Romanian authors also sought to elaborate Marxist theoretical alternatives to those of “capitalist ecologies.” These drew on the impulses of revisionist Marxism in an attempt to respond creatively to the ecological challenge. As much as the socialist revolution was posited as the solution to the ecological crisis that capitalist analyses eluded because of their tendency to downplay the social and political aspects of the crisis, the Marxist concept of revolution itself was expanded to include not just the social and scientific-technological revolution, but also the ecological revolution. Crises were seen as an opportunity for conceptual change and socio-economic transformation, as a turning point in Marxist-Leninist theorizing as well as in the practice of socialism. This ethos carried over to a human-centered approach to the global predicaments of humanity, which went beyond technological optimism to identify the human potential for growth, both in terms of anticipating and of participating in the construction of the future. This future, authors reflected repeatedly, was also the future of deep global inequalities between the North and South and the West and East. Any approach to the environmental crisis that did not account for these inequalities, as *The Limits to Growth* was often criticized for, produced unrealistic expectations about limiting economic growth.

As restated by socialist authors, the issue at stake was to reframe economic growth altogether, from a measure of postwar competition between capitalist and socialist societies into a measure of social wellbeing and environmental responsibility. This also cut to the core of Marxist economics, which had to be amended in response to the ecological challenge, accounting for the costs of environmental protection as an essential element of social reproduction. The Marxist alternatives proposed in socialist Romania resonate with important themes of the environmental debate today, while insisting on the interdependence of the politics of economic growth, the economic calculations of environmental protection, and social wellbeing in configurations that were both bound by Marxism-Leninism and aptly

reworking it to account for the realities of the 1970s. The calls to increase the life of consumer products, reintroduce residues into new production cycles, acknowledge the cost of environmental degradation and protection, and educate citizens to actively participate in anticipating consequences and constructing desirable futures, marginal as they ultimately were in the economy of state socialism, nevertheless speak to a real engagement with the ecological crisis from non-capitalist positions.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS–UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2020-0707, within PNCDI III.

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6. Global Studies and Late Socialist Czechoslovakia

Jan Mervart

Abstract: This chapter examines the emergence of late socialist globalism in Czechoslovakia, focusing on how Marxist-Leninist thinkers framed global issues such as ecological crises, disarmament, and problems of economic development. Drawing on conferences, scholarly discourse, and contemporary texts, the study reveals a vision of socialism as a superior civilization capable of managing planetary challenges through science, technology, plan, and forecasting. The chapter highlights how concepts like the noosphere and anthropo-ecological complex were used to project a socialist-designed global future. While the discourse of late socialist globalism was eventually marginalized, it offers valuable insights into the intellectual strategies of actually existing socialism and its utopian ambitions amid late Cold War dynamics.

Keywords: Czechoslovak Marxism; Cold War globalism; knowledge circulation; intellectual exchange; Marxist-Leninist utopianism; socialist global futures

“Progressive, realistically humanist, freedom-oriented thinking is only possible today as a moment of active life, aimed at solving tasks that are characterized by the intertwining, convergence, and fusion of social class, global, and ecological problems. Putting our hand to work in solving these problems today is a way of continuing the noble work of the workers’ revolutionaries who pioneered the socialist revolutionary reconstruction of society in our country and around the world.” Jindřich Zelený, *O pravdivém a poctivém myšlení*, 1988.

With this statement, the internationally renowned Czech Marxist and expert on Hegel's work, Jindřich Zelený, ended a popular book on dialectical thinking and reason. A few lines later, he even called for the creation of a new socialist political thought that would respond adequately to the current social situation and differ from previous ideas of socialism based on the extensiveness of production and economic growth.¹ Zelený was naturally influenced by the atmosphere of Russian perestroika, but his conclusions reflect at least one other characteristic of the era. Despite our perceptions of the ideological emptiness of late socialism, historical sources show that at least some scholars during this period regarded actually existing socialism as the most advanced stage of civilization and the only force capable of solving contemporary planetary problems. Similar to the socialist conception of human rights applied especially in Global South countries,² a fairly coherent discourse of socialist globalism was then taking shape. Such a scientific-ideological conglomerate was intended to put forward a socialist approach to framing and addressing global issues. The formation of this discourse was taking place during the period of the late Cold War, which negatively influenced, among other things, scientific diplomacy on ecological issues.³ Regardless of its own problems in the form of the ecological catastrophe of the heavily polluted areas in the GDR and Czechoslovakia or the Chernobyl accident, within socialist globalist discourse the Eastern bloc presented as meeting all the prerequisites for the success of "unification" and "saving" humankind from nuclear and ecological catastrophe, as well as from the shortage of energy and food resources.

A historical genealogy of the discourse of socialist globalism, global issues, or global problems has not been thoroughly examined so far. However, this text does not claim such a role for itself. Eglė Rindzevičiūtė explains that in different Soviet discourses the term "global" had different connotations. For example, in the field of international relations "globalism" had a pejorative meaning, as it referred to the hegemonic influence of the United States in the world economy. At the same time, the author notes that, in contrast,

¹ Jindřich Zelený, *O pravdivém a poctivém myšlení. Úvahy o dialektice moderního vývojového myšlení* [On true and honest thinking: Reflections on the dialectics of modern developmental thought] (Prague: Svoboda, 1988), 88–89. Opening citation at 87.

² Paul Betts, "Rights," in *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonisation*, eds. James Mark and Paul Betts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 180–220.

³ Giulia Rispoli and Doubravka Olšáková, "Science and Diplomacy around the Earth: From the Man and Biosphere Programme to the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme," *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences*, no. 4 (2020): 456–81.

the term “global” was commonly used in Soviet geophysical sciences and suggests “that it was through computer modeling that this geophysical notion of ‘global’ eventually migrated into Soviet economic and, at a later stage, political discourses.”⁴ Referring to period publications in *Voprosy Filosofii*, Rindzevičiūtė notes that the peak of Soviet global thinking was in 1985, “when the notion of ‘global problems’ was used for the first time to describe world issues in the official documents of the Congress of the Communist Party.”⁵ This observation overlaps completely with the temporal focus of this chapter, suggesting that these must have been documents for the upcoming 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which Mikhail Gorbachev presided over as General Secretary of the Party in February–March 1986.⁶

At the same time, contemporaries point to the role of the Prague-based international journal *Problemy mira i socializma* (Problems of peace and socialism), published between 1958 and 1990, in which a discourse on “pan-humanity” and “universality” had been developing since the 1960s. Although the latter functioned in parallel with the label “global,” it undoubtedly contributed to the formation of globalist discourse. As Miroslav Soukup, one of the most involved Czech participants in the debates on globalism of the time, pointed out, not only the many articles published in the journal, but also the international series of conferences devoted to Marxism-Leninism, such as “Marxism and Democracy” (January 1963) or “Politics and Ecology” (1973), contributed to the development of global themes.⁷ In the 1980s, the

4 Eglė Rindzevičiūtė, *The Power of Systems: How Policy Sciences Opened Up the Cold War World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 132.

5 The description as well as both citations, see Rindzevičiūtė, *The Power of Systems*, 132 (citation) and 177. Rindzevičiūtė directly refers to Viktor Los’, “Global’nye problem kak predmet kompleksnykh nauchnykh issledovanii (Nekotorye itogi izucheniiia global’nykh protsessov mirovogo razvitiia)” [Global problems as a subject of complex scientific investigations (Some issues of investigating global issues of peace development)], *Voprosy filosofii*, no. 12 (1985): 3–17; and to Vadim Zagladin, “Programmnye tseli KPSS i global’nye problemy” [Program goals of CPSU and global problems], *Voprosy filosofii*, no. 2 (1986): 3–15.

6 To the same party congress referred to Frolov’s book on global problems of civilization. See Ivan T. Frolov, *Globale probleme der Zivilization: Sozialismus und Fortschritt der Menscheheit* [Global problems of civilization: Socialism and the progress of humankind] (Düsseldorf: Edition Marxistische Blätter, 1988).

7 A good overview of the activities of the journal as well as its seminars in 1958–66 is given in the CIA report: “Problems of Peace and Socialism (The Monthly Journal of the International Communist Movement): An Investigative Aid,” <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-02646R000500340001-5.pdf>. In addition to the above, let us mention, for example, the seminar “The Socialist World System of Economy and the Laws Governing Its Development” organized in Prague in the region of 1964.

same author spoke of the notion of “global” in the sense that its solution, for the sake of humankind’s survival, requires international cooperation, regardless of power bloc affiliation.⁸ Indeed, at least two later major actors of Soviet globalism, Edvard A. Arab-Ogly and Vadim Zagladin, served on the editorial board of the journal from its inception.

This chapter aims to reconstruct the discourse of socialist globalism in late socialist Czechoslovakia. Although many publications have dealt with official environmental issues in Czechoslovakia, or the entry and participation of Soviet scientists in global scientific networks, including the penetration of global issues into Soviet scientific discourse,⁹ the specific approach to global issues in late socialist Czechoslovakia has not yet been described in detail. This chapter will analyze the theoretical foundation of this research in contemporary Marxist-Leninist theory and discuss the discourse of the “new cosmic stage” of humankind which was supposed to be mediated by the new quality of the scientific and technological revolution and by socialist cooperation. Despite all possible objections that this was merely part of the propaganda struggle in the US–USSR rivalry at the end of the Cold War, I am convinced that the reconstruction of such discourses is valuable not only for its actual content (ecology, global issues), but also because it can tell us a lot about the way in which state socialism presented and perceived itself in its closing times.

The conference “Socialism and Global Problems of Today”

As part of the aftermath of the Czechoslovak Spring of 1968, the Philosophy and Sociology Institutes of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences were merged in 1970. This created one large academic institute, from the ranks of which all active advocates of democratic socialism were excluded as part of the “restoration of order.”¹⁰ After a process of self-criticism and a willingness to liquidate “politically unreliable” elements, Radovan Richta,

⁸ Miroslav Soukup, “Socialistické společenství a komplex globálních problémů lidstva” [Socialist community and the complex global problems of humankind], in *Socialismus a globální problémy současnosti* [Socialism and global problems of today], vol. 2 (Prague: Ústav pro filosofii a sociologii ČSAV–Odbor vědy a VTR, 1986): 143–44 and 153–54.

⁹ Petr Jemelka, *Reflexe environmentální problematiky v dějinách české a slovenské filosofie* [Reflection of environmental problems in the history of Czech and Slovak philosophy] (Prague: Filosofia, 2016); Rindzevičiūtė, *The Power of Systems*; Rispoli and Olšáková, “Science and Diplomacy around the Earth.”

¹⁰ See “Zpráva o splnění usnesení vlády ČSSR č. 202/1970 v Ústavu pro filosofii a sociologii ČSAV” [Report on the implementation of the resolution of the government of the Czechoslovak

a leading promoter of the concept of the scientific and technological revolution (STR), became director. As the historian Vítězslav Sommer aptly noted, Richta, the original author of the phrase “socialism with a human face,” sacrificed both personal friendship and a large part of the STR project, which he did not hesitate to strip of any “revisionist” overtones (especially humanism) and subordinate to the technocratic needs of the then actually existing socialism.¹¹ It was no coincidence that in the newly established institute, alongside the philosophical and sociological sections, a section on the scientific and technological revolution was also created. Sommer convincingly describes the extent to which this academic institution was involved in the creation of socialist planning and forecasting,¹² with which the issue of global problems was closely related.

After an initial struggle with “revisionist” tendencies in philosophy and sociology and with so-called bourgeois ideology, the second half of the 1970s witnessed the gradual formation of a socialist theory of humanities and social sciences, which, while sharply defined in contrast to earlier ones, was also oriented towards developing its own theoretical and methodological apparatus. This moment concerned both forecasting and global issues, which, among other things, gradually began to establish itself as one of the most important research topics under the influence of Soviet globalism. However, it seems that Radovan Richta (1924–83), as the director of the Institute, never vehemently supported this research trend; he rather emphasized the connection of STR with the development of actually existing socialism and probably did not want to fragment the Institute’s resources or disturb the balance of internal power dynamics. Despite general proclamations, this did not lead to the establishment of a separate interdisciplinary working group dedicated to the long-term anticipation of social and global processes. However, it is clear that this issue was already part of the research agenda of individual academics in the late 1970s and early 1980s.¹³ It was then

Socialist Republic], Masarykův ústav—Archiv AV ČR v.v.i., f. Ústav pro filosofii a sociologii, kr. 4.

¹¹ Vítězslav Sommer, “Are We Still Behaving as Revolutionaries?: Radovan Richta, Theory of Revolution and Dilemmas of Reform Communism in Czechoslovakia,” *Studies in East European Thought* 69, no. 1 (2017): 93–110.

¹² Vítězslav Sommer et al., *Řídit socialismus jakofirmu: technokratické vládnutí v Československu 1956–1989* [Run socialism like a business: Technocratic governance in Czechoslovakia 1956–1989] (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, v.v.i., 2019), 67–82.

¹³ In the collection of the Institute for Philosophy and Sociology there are a number of reports on this topic, where Jaroslav Jirásek tried to establish a permanent seminar and working group for research on long-term development problems of a social and global nature. The research of this group was to be based primarily on cooperation with the Institute of Systems Research in

definitively established in the first half of the 1980s, when the number of international conferences within the socialist bloc increased,¹⁴ and when independent monographs devoted to economic, civilizational, or political science topics of a global dimension began to appear in Czechoslovakia.¹⁵

Moscow. According to one report, Radovan Richta was to conclude preliminary arrangements with the Deputy Director, N. I. Lapin, and in late November and early December 1979 a joint meeting was to be held in Moscow and an agreement on mutual scientific cooperation was to be signed. One of the collaborators at the Moscow Institute was to be one of the pioneers of the systems approach, Dzhermen Gvishiani. See Masarykův ústav—Archiv AV ČR v.v.i., f. Ústav pro filosofii a sociologii, kr. 63, 72. It is not clear why the planned collaboration was eventually abandoned. In any case, Richta worked out with Lapin a chapter for the book *Different Theories of Development*, which presented a kind of alphabet of real socialism combined with the scientific and technological revolution. See Radovan Richta and Nikolai Lapin, "Developed Socialism as a Real Society Centered on Human Welfare," in *Different Theories and Practices of Development* (Paris: Unesco, 1982), 163–210.

14 The genealogy of international conferences is roughly as follows. In December 1973, one of the first conferences on the subject in the Eastern bloc was held in Prague under the title "Global Problems of Contemporary Civilization." It was organized by the International Peace Institute in cooperation with the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and the Institute of International Relations and was attended by representatives of the Club of Rome, including its co-founder, the Italian industrialist Aurelio Peccei. See Soukup, "Socialistické společenství a komplex globálních problémů lidstva," 154. Rindzevičiūtė draws attention to the Tallinn conference initiated by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) in Vienna within the framework of Conference on Science and Technology for Development—outputs published as Jermen Gvishiani, ed., *Science, Technology, and Global Problems: Trends and Perspectives in Development of Science and Technology and Their Impact on Temporary Global Problems* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1979). See Rindzevičiūtė, *The Power of Systems*, 106, 243f36. In 1983, the first All-Union Conference on Global Problems was held in Moscow on June 16–17 in the presence of East German, Bulgarian, and Hungarian delegations, entitled "Marxism-Leninism and the Global Problems of the Present in the Light of the Conclusions of the XXVI Congress of the CPSU." The conference was organized by the Section of Global Problems and Scientific and Technical Revolution of the Scientific Council of Philosophical and Social Problems of Science and Technology under the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences in cooperation with the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the USSR Academy of Sciences. See Günter Klimaszewsky, "Globale Probleme—ein internationales und interdisziplinäres Forschungsvorhaben" [Global problems: An international and interdisciplinary research project], *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, no. 1 (1984): 70–78. In the same year, Prague hosted the international gathering "For Peace and Life, Against Nuclear War," which included the scientific symposium "Science between War and Peace" (June 24–25). The 14th World Congress of the International Association for Mass Communication Research on "Social Communication and the Global Problems of Humanity" took place in Prague on August 27–September 1.

15 See Stanislav Adam, *Kritika světovládné strategie USA a globální problémy lidstva* [Critique of US world government strategy and global problems of humankind] (Prague: Melantrich, 1981); Antonín Chyba, *Globální problémy lidstva a světová ekonomika* [Global problems of humankind and world economy] (Prague: Academia, 1987); Jaromír Sedlák, *Globální problémy lidstva. Ke konstituování a perspektivám marxisticko-leninské a ke kritice nemarxistické globalistiky* [Global problems of humankind: Towards the constitution and perspectives of Marxist-Leninist and

The peak of Czechoslovak global studies was, similarly to Eglé Rindzevičiūtė's conclusions,¹⁶ the conference "Socialism and Global Problems of Today," which was held in Prague on June 4–6, 1985, by the Institute for Philosophy and Sociology. In addition to representatives from virtually all Eastern bloc countries, it was also attended by representatives of scientific institutions from Western Europe and Canada.¹⁷ On the Soviet side, the conference was attended by Ivan T. Frolov, former editor-in-chief of the journal *Voprosy Filosofii* (Questions of Philosophy) and later Gorbachev's advisor, who, together with Vadim Zagladin, was considered in the Soviet context to be one of the leading authors on global issues.¹⁸ In Prague, both authors also delivered one of the key note lectures, "Socialism and the Global Problems of Civilization."¹⁹ In addition to Frolov and Zagladin, the Soviet mathematician and one of the authors of the post-nuclear conflict analysis Nikita Moiseev attended the conference. Some of the papers were published in a monothematic issue of *Filosofický časopis* (Philosophical Journal),²⁰ conference proceedings were then published by the organizing

criticism of non-Marxist globalism] (Prague: Svoboda, 1985); Miroslav Soukup, *Strategie rozvoje zemské civilizace. Reprodukce globálního antropoekologického komplexu v procesu sebeorganizace lidstva* [Strategies for the development of Earth's civilization: Reproduction of the global anthropo-ecological complex in the process of self-organization of humankind] (Prague: Svoboda, 1984). This also included an edited volume: Zdeněk Masopust and Václav Mezřícký, eds., *Současné globální problémy a vědy o státu a právu* [Contemporary global problems and the state and law scholarship] (Prague: Ústav státní správy, 1982).

16 See footnote 5 in this chapter.

17 E.g., P. Medow (Canada), G. Quaranta and P. Bisogno (Italy), M. Marois (France).

18 See, e.g., Ivan Timofeevic Frolov and Vadim Zagladin, *Global'nye problemy sovremennosti: nauchnyj i sotsial'nyj aspekty* [Global problems of today: Scientific and social aspects] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1981); Ivan Timofeevic Frolov, *Global Problems and the Future of Mankind* (Moscow: Progress, 1982).

19 Ivan Timofeevic Frolov and Vadim Zagladin, "Socialismus a globální problémy civilizace" [Socialism and the global problems of civilization], *Filosofický časopis*, no. 6 (1985): 785–99.

20 See "Mezinárodní konference 'Socialismus a globální problémy současnosti'" [International Conference "Socialism and Global Problems of the Present"], *Filosofický časopis*, no. 6 (1985): 771–72; Jaroslav Pecen, "Věda a globální problémy současnosti" [Science and global problems of the present], *Filosofický časopis*, no. 6 (1985): 773–84; E. A. Arab-Ogly, "Globální problémy naší epochy a jejich demografický aspect" [Global problems of our epoch and their demographic aspect], *Filosofický časopis*, no. 6 (1985): 800–809; Jaroslav Jirásek, "Střídání technologického způsobu výroby jako globální činitel" [Alternation of technological mode of production as a global factor], *Filosofický časopis*, no. 6 (1985): 810–16; Bohumil Ryšavý, "Ekosystémy a chemická válka" [Ecosystems and chemical warfare], *Filosofický časopis*, no. 6 (1985): 817–20; Miroslav Kopecký, "Mezinárodní program 'Geosféra—biosféra—globální změny' jako řetězení otázek globálního životního prostředí lidstva" [The international program "Geosphere—Biosphere—Global Change" as a chaining of global environmental issues for humankind], *Filosofický časopis*, no. 6 (1985): 821–22.

institute.²¹ The conference was reported very favorably by the professional and party press of the time.²²

According to the official Marxist-Leninist template, the basic starting point of the approach to the global problems was the recognition of the current situation and the proper drawing of conclusions. This was also how the individual papers were structured. Their authors dealt with various issues such as armaments and disarmament, demographic problems of the developing world, problems of energy resources, food and water shortages, the ecological crisis, the role of science and technology in the global context, the development of the economy in relation to global problems, and so on. The general concept was based on the then popular systems approach, which sought the internal logic of the various manifestations of global problems. This resulted in two interrelated metanarratives that established an unquestionable pattern of analysis and outlined consequent solutions. First and foremost, there was the basic framing of announcing an agenda for international cooperation against a backdrop of intensified global competition. The aim, according to the prevailing belief of the theorists of actually existing socialism, was to manage in the future those planetary processes that would ultimately lead to the elimination of global problems.²³ Hand in hand with this, it was explicitly stated that although global problems affected all the inhabitants of the planet, regardless of the socio-economic system in question, only a Marxist-Leninist approach was capable of naming, structuring, and ultimately solving them. Socialism thus presented itself not only as a savior but also as the only possible force capable of saving human civilization from self-destruction. Closely related to such a belief was the conviction of socialist own maturity and, above all, its superiority.

²¹ *Filosofický časopis*, no. 6 (1985); *Socialismus a globální problémy současnosti* [Socialism and the global problems of today], vol. 1 & 2 (Prague: Ústav pro filosofii a sociologii ČSAV-Odbor vědy a VTR, 1986).

²² Horst Strüwing and Günter Klimaszewsky, "Realer Sozialismus und globale Probleme" [Real socialism and global problems], *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, no. 11 (1986): 1037–43; M. Pittner and P. Pavlík, "Mezinárodní konference 'Socialismus a globální problémy současnosti'" [International Conference "Socialism and Global Problems of Today"], *Sociologický Časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, no. 2 (1986): 193–96; Jiří Putník, "Socialismus a globální problém současnosti" [Socialism and the global problems of today], *Nová mysl*, no. 9 (1986): 144–46.

²³ See, e.g., Jaroslav Pecen, "Věda a globální problémy současnosti" [Science and global problems of today], in *Socialismus a globální problémy současnosti*, vol. 1, 24; "Závěry konference" [Conclusions of the conference], in *Socialismus a globální problémy současnosti*, vol. 2, 220.

The superiority of socialism and the bet on STR

The unconditional perception of socialism as a superior, more rational, and therefore also more advanced civilization was based on the deep conviction of the theorists of historical materialism according to whom history moved in a linear curve from primitive communal society towards communism. While the latter goal had not yet been achieved, and communism appeared only rarely on the horizon of period literature in the 1970s and 1980s, actually existing socialism itself was its worthy precursor. The Soviet philosopher Alexander Zinoviev, in a brilliant autobiographical and satirical treatise on Marxism-Leninism, aptly described it as "The Radiant Future."²⁴ The communist future no longer appeared here as a condition for which the present had to be sacrificed in order to build (Stalinism), but as a gradual merging with the present, without any serious rupture. At the same time, capitalism has always meant a lower stage of development, whose evolution has been subjected to permanently recurring crises due to its insoluble intrinsic contradictions. While capitalism may have dominated in sub-areas, such as technology, in general terms the famous statement by G. Lukács that "the worst socialism is better than the best capitalism"²⁵ was considered doubly true by the theorists of actually existing socialism. Same was with the Marxist-Leninist approach. The Western science of the time, for example sociology or ecology, may have provided important empirical data, but it was set in the wrong context of capitalist society or was based on flawed assumptions and premises. After all, according to the previous logic, Western science was considered less valuable because it was still within the horizon of an already surpassed historical epoch, capitalism. Bourgeois science was subjected to isolated political or arbitrary market interests and was seen as incapable of coordination or of an adequate approach to and grasp of a given reality. As Jaroslav Pecen, the incoming director of the Institute for Philosophy and Sociology after Radovan Richta, stated in the opening paper of the conference, socialist science not only possessed a more advanced type of rationality, but in combination with socialist values it raised the original calculable rationality to a higher qualitative level.²⁶

²⁴ Alexander Zinoviev, *Svetloe budushchее* [The radiant future] (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1978).

²⁵ G. Lukács, "An interview with Lukacs," *Australian Left Review*, no. 3 (1968): 70. This was a shortened version of the original interview conducted with Lukács by members of the editorial staff of *Nepszabadság*, the daily paper of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.

²⁶ Jaroslav Pecen, "Věda a globální problémy současnosti," 17–24.

Most of the papers thus began with an analysis of Western approaches to global issues, which was at best critically appreciative, and ended with a categorical interpretation of the correct approach based on Marxism-Leninism. Some scholars spoke of good empiricism and lame theory tending towards unrealistic solutions.²⁷ Thus, the US report "The Global 2000," produced at the instigation of the Jimmy Carter administration, was, like the various Club of Rome reports, evaluated as a positive but inconsistent attempt based on an American world view or on capitalist-reformist—and therefore necessarily erroneous—ideas.²⁸ "Even after diligent searching, however, we find in the Club of Rome theory nothing but a speculatively mutable, critical-reformist, but qualitatively untransformed and constantly contradictory structure of bourgeois society in the 1970s," one speaker eloquently remarked.²⁹

The conviction of its own correctness led, as in other cases of socialist theory, to boundless self-affirming optimism. Bourgeois science is pessimistic because it cannot transcend its own internal contradictions and the realities of capitalism, so its proposals are at best utopian. Socialist science, by contrast, properly frames its empirical findings with a social-class analysis that necessarily implies that the existence of the capitalist order is the main cause of negative global processes and that the only way out is the consistent application of Marxist-Leninist theory.³⁰ It is useful to mention that the Marxist-Leninist critique of Western science and technology did not usually dismiss its content, specific rationality, or its empirical or technological foundations, but most predominantly its social

²⁷ E. A. Arrab-Ogly, "Globální problémy naší epochy a jejich demografický aspect" [Global problems of our era and their demographic aspect], in *Socialismus a globální problémy současnosti*, vol. 1, 67.

²⁸ Ivan Timofeevic Frolov and Vadim Zagladin, "Socialismus a globální problémy civilizace" [Socialism and global problems of civilization], in *Socialismus a globální problémy současnosti*, vol. 1, 39.

²⁹ Pavel Baran, "Od 'rovnovážného stavu' k novým hodnotovým systémům? Ke kritice koncepcí Římského klubu" [From "steady state" to new value systems? A critique of the Club of Rome concepts], in *Socialismus a globální problémy současnosti*, vol. 1, 92. See also Alfréd Böhmisch, "Aktuální vývojové tendenze buržoazního výzkumu budoucnosti" [Current developments in bourgeois research on the future], in *Socialismus a globální problémy současnosti*, vol. 1, 152–59; Jiří Chlumský, "Reformismus a globální problémy" [Reformism and global problems], in *Socialismus a globální problémy současnosti*, vol. 1, 185–89. On the critique of *The Limits to Growth* in the Romanian case, see Christian Ferencz-Flatz and Adela Híncu in this volume.

³⁰ On this discourse of critique of Western science in the context of ecology, see Petr Jemelka's chapter, "Peripetie problému prostředí v období tzv. Normalizace" [Peripeteia of the environmental problem in the period of the so-called normalization], in *Reflexe environmentální problematiky v dějinách české a slovenské filosofie*, 154–207.

framing—namely, the capitalist formation that envelops them. This is visible in the usual Marxist-Leninist critique of system theory, futurology, management, or marketing—Western theories and instruments that are accepted as valid and useful in themselves, but corrupted by their capitalist grounding. Their useful rationality would only manifest itself in a properly planned and organized socialist society.³¹ At the same time, the theorists of actually existing socialism were convinced that what could be planned could also be controlled. If, therefore, a planned economy with a proper involvement of foresight was to be the most advanced model, this should also be the case, by analogy, for socialist science dealing with global issues. Only a planned and coordinated science could properly recognize and grasp, but also consistently predict, direct, and control. The totality of issues of a global nature was spoken of as a system in which there must be a basic delineation of the hierarchy of problems, a distinction between progressive (peace initiatives) and regressive (armaments) tendencies of development,³² recognition of inter-causal relationships, and the determination of appropriate predictions. Futurism, based on taking into account “objective fields of possibilities,” identifying relative goals, alternatives in the way the human population behaves and thinks, as well as developing strategies for possible changes in global development, was one of the main principles of the socialist approach to global issues.³³

Related to the aforementioned optimism of socialist solutions to global problems was the critique of the Heideggerian *Zivilisationkritik*: the negative relationship to science and technology was opposed by the scientific and technological revolution as a transformative force transforming not only the forces of production but also global processes. Science and technology could not be the cause of negative civilizational development insofar as they were used correctly, i.e., in the name of socialism. According to the theorists of state socialism, even the greatest technological advances could backfire if they were used in isolation within capitalist society, i.e., primarily

³¹ I am grateful to Alex Cistelecan as he formulated these two sentences in his comment to the manuscript of this text.

³² Jiří Dvořák, “Systémový přístup k problému globálního a regionálního rozvoje” [A system approach to the problem of global and regional development], in *Socialismus a globální problémy současnosti*, vol. 1, 160–66.

³³ Gerhard Banse, “Globální problémy vývoje lidstva—jejich hierarchie a principy jejich řešení” [Global problems of human development: Their hierarchy and principles of their solution], in *Socialismus a globální problémy současnosti*, vol. 1, 82. In addition, the East German scholar Banse considered other generally shared principles to be crucial: historicism, globalism, operationalism, evolutionism, and optimism (81–83).

to maximize financial profit. The socialist solution, in comparison, assumed the use of science and technology not only in particularistic areas (efficiency of production, specific innovations) but above all within a society-wide framework. Thus, in contrast to critical voices regarding the role of technology and science in the West and East,³⁴ these theorists of state socialism did not criticize technological progress or economic growth, but instead relied on science and technology, since “the solution of ecological problems is only possible on the basis of a significant development of science and technology,”³⁵ including the peaceful (energy) use of nuclear energy.³⁶

The superiority of the socialist approach, combined with the application of science and technology, led Marxists from socialist countries to imagine their own civilizing mission, aimed at advancing the world to a stage of development in which planetary problems would cease to exist. Just as Western environmentalism has been criticized for its alleged rejection of technology, theorists of actually existing socialism have rejected the mere protection of nature and the environment based on notions of minimal human interference. Instead, in line with the original postulates of Marxist orthodoxy, they spoke of a “humane transformation” of nature.³⁷ This

34 Unlike Czechoslovakia, where the role of science and technology was part of the rejected revisionism of the 1960s, in Poland, for example, a relatively strong critique of the “deification” of technology and science was flourishing. For this, see Weronika Parfionowicz’s study, especially the subchapter “Limits of Science.” Weronika Parfianowicz, “Limits to Socialist Growth: The Question of Economic Growth and Environmental Crisis in Polish Discussions of the 1970s,” *Contradictions. A Journal for Critical Thought: Ecosocialism*, no. 2 (2022): 41–66.

35 H. Horstmann, “Sociálně-ekonomické příčiny a socialistické cesty řešení globálních problémů” [Socio-economic causes and socialist ways of solving global problems], in *Socialismus a globální problémy současnosti*, vol. 1, 181.

36 Late socialist writers also relied on the atom as a source of energy, as Martin Babička shows in his study analyzing late socialist literary discourse in Czechoslovakia, which combined a romantic turn to nature with techno-optimism. Martin Babička, “A ‘Right to Sadness’: Late Socialist Environmentalism between Technocracy and Romanticism and the Czech Nature Writer Jaromír Tomeček,” *Contradictions. A Journal for Critical Thought: Ecosocialism*, no. 2 (2022): 67–90. On the uncritical pro-atomic discourse in Czechoslovakia, see also Michaela Kůželová, “Příroda na prahu atomového věku. Obraz jaderné energetiky a životního prostředí v publicistice socialistického Československa” [Nature on the threshold of the atomic age: The image of nuclear energy and the environment in the journalism of Socialist Czechoslovakia], *Soudobé dějiny*, no. 1–2 (2017): 102–26.

37 Martin Babička comes to a similar conclusion: “the discourse of ecological techno-optimism was in no way supposed to be a ‘return to nature’ in the conservationist sense but rather a ‘re-creation of nature’ that would keep the progressive temporal orientation of socialist modernity.” Babička, “A ‘Right to Sadness,’” 85–86.

“extended” and “guided” reproduction of nature³⁸ was at the same time supposed to mark a new age for humankind and the planet as a whole.

New age of humankind

As with socialist internationalism, which was presented as support for the countries of the global south,³⁹ humankind was supposed to side with the more advanced civilization in its self-preservation. For socialism was by its very nature capable not only of solving problems of a global nature, but even of “raising the social development of humankind to a new level of civility.”⁴⁰

This new stage of civilization was closely related to the above-mentioned ideas about the controllability of human society and natural processes. It was no longer about the original “subjugation” of nature as had been envisioned by the Stalinist project, but about control and guidance.⁴¹ Based on Vladimir Vernadsky’s (1863–1945) conception of the biosphere as the earthly sphere of life in constant and intertwined interaction with humans and their actions,⁴² it was a step from the elemental nature of biological evolutionary processes (biogenesis) to “evolution guided by human consciousness (noogenesis).”⁴³ Such a transition, taking into account the

38 Banse, “Globální problémy vývoje lidstva—jejich hierarchie a principy jejich řešení,” 78.

39 Mark and Betts eds., *Socialism Goes Global*.

40 Frolov and Zagladin, “Socialismus a globální problémy civilizace,” 47. Even the East German Marxist dissident Wolfgang Harich did not doubt that socialism was the only alternative for a global solution to the planetary crisis in the context of the Club of Rome’s *The Limits to Growth* report. See Wolfgang Harich, “World Revolution Now: On the Latest Publication of the Club of Rome,” introduced by Andreas Heyer, *Contradictions. A Journal for Critical Thought: Ecosocialism*, no. 2 (2022): 113–24.

41 Eglé Rindzevičiūtė notes this moment, especially on the basis of Moiseev’s works, when she says that “the old trope of Soviet modernity as a progress where the man conquers nature was redefined: mastery no longer meant conquering nature, but a conscious use of planetary resources in a way that ensured coevolution, using the techniques drawn from cybernetics and the systems approach at that.” Rindzevičiūtė, *The Power of Systems*, 180. In doing so, the author speaks of two conflicting approaches within the Soviet discourse: control (*upravlenie*) and guidance (*napravlenie*). In doing so, she speaks of Moiseev as representing a discourse of guidance that went beyond the field of control concerning the sub-spheres of controllability. As much as I agree with the author in many respects and find her argument consistent, it seems to me more appropriate to speak of the complementarity of guidance and control rather than a mutual clash.

42 More on Vernadsky’s concept of biosphere and its political and science diplomatic consequences see Rispoli and Olšáková, “Science and Diplomacy around the Earth,” 465–69.

43 Vlastimil Baruš, “Globální ekologická strategie je evoluce biosféry k noosféře” [Global ecological strategy is the evolution of the biosphere to the noosphere], in *Socialismus a globální*

appropriate socio-economic conditions, was naturally to be realized within the framework of socialism, which thus reached the era of the noosphere. This concept was based on Vernadsky's challenge that humankind would one day have to accept responsibility for the biosphere in order to preserve itself, and to enter into its chaotic evolution on the basis of its own knowledge. Socialism was not only to be a convenient condition, but, given the notion of self-organization, also a necessity to reach a state where the social development of the biosphere and of human beings would be harmonized. The resulting process was spoken of as a planetary self-organization of matter.⁴⁴ In order to achieve such a state, it was necessary to determine the limits of human action on the biosphere, to find out how far it was possible to go, to realize the "limits of the forbidden."⁴⁵ These consisted primarily in the possibility of nuclear conflict and the consequent devastation of the biosphere, including human society.⁴⁶ However, it was not only about this possibility, but also about other ecological consequences of human actions, which were to be prevented on the basis of qualified knowledge of natural and social sciences (prognosis). Thus, many spoke of the convergence of natural and social sciences, the Russian mathematician Nikita Moiseev even spoke of the fulfillment of Marx's predictions and the creation of one general science, the science of man.⁴⁷ In the same vein, the Slovak Marxist Ladislav Hohoš declared that the noosphere signifies "the progress of mankind and the further evolution of the Earth," which "is determined by the human intellect" and in which "the development of man will become the 'measure of all things' and the self-purpose of history."⁴⁸

problémy současnosti, vol. 1, 100. Other authors have called this principle a conscious transition to "biosphere-human coevolution." See N. N. Mojsejev, "Teorie noosféry a socialismus" [Noosphere theory and socialism], in *Socialismus a globální problémy současnosti*, vol. 2, 44–53.

44 Mojsejev, "Teorie noosféry a socialismus," 44–53.

45 Mojsejev, "Teorie noosféry a socialismus," 48.

46 To this end, a number of models were developed on the basis of computer science and forecasting to describe and predict various scenarios within and after a nuclear conflict. See especially the whole chapter entitled "From Nuclear Winter to Anthropocene," in Rindzevičiūtė, *The Power of Systems*, 150–80. Incidentally, the author makes a causal connection between the Soviet debate on post-nuclear conflict analysis and the new principles of governmentality of society and nature (noosphere), the former opening up space for the latter. However, this persuasive observation is contradicted by some Czech sources of earlier date, which do refer to the Soviet debates, but which discuss the principles of new forms of control of nature and society earlier or in parallel with the Soviet debate.

47 Mojsejev, "Teorie noosféry a socialismus," 53.

48 Ladislav Hohoš, *Vedeckotechnická revolúcia a budúcnosť ľudstva* [The scientific-technological revolution and the future of humankind] (Bratislava: Pravda, 1985), 207. Quoted from Petr Jemelka, *Reflexe environmentální problematiky v dějinách české a slovenské filosofie*, 174.

Human beings and the human species were thus not placed outside nature, as an interfering element with devastating effects, but as a conscious subject who both changes and controls nature, and who, on the basis of scientific knowledge, transforms the planet into a laboratory. One of the leading Czechoslovak scholars working on global issues, Miroslav Soukup, spoke in this context of the “anthropo-ecological complex,” which “means the emergence of a qualitatively new system functioning and developing according to its own specific laws.”⁴⁹

As Eglė Rindzevičiūtė observes, Soviet theorists (originally, in fact, Vernadsky already in his 1924 treatise on the biosphere,⁵⁰ and since the 1960s especially Moiseev), borrowed Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s (1881–1955) notion of the noosphere for the purpose of defining a new era of human input into natural processes.⁵¹ This concept clashes quite strongly with the widespread historiographical assessment of the instrumental emptiness of socialist rhetoric, allegedly lacking a utopian character. At least in some of the papers proposing solutions to global problems it was exactly the opposite. Here, actually existing socialism was no longer presented only as a reality of the present, but also projected strongly into the future. In the introduction to his book, eloquently titled *Strategies for the Development of Earth’s Civilization: Reproduction of the Global Anthropo-Ecological Complex in the Process of Self-organization of Humankind*, Soukup developed perspectives of the noosphere, which—he thought—had previously appeared only in social utopias or fantasy novels, as the unleashing of new complexes of natural forces in favor of the rational development of humankind. These, according to him, could not even be “approximately foreseen by the science of the time; and yet they can form the material basis of fundamentally new forms of sociocultural systems.”⁵² One could hardly look for a better example of the openness of actually existing socialism to the prospects of future development. In line with the aforementioned postulates of knowability and controllability, Soukup went on to speak of the need for “the creation of a highly efficient guidance system of earthly civilization.” And since, as was inherent in the whole approach of actually existing socialism, such an

49 Miroslav Soukup, “Anthropo-Ecological Complex, Militarism, and Peaceful Cooperation,” in *XIIth International Political Science Association World Congress: Czechoslovak Contributions* (Prague: Czechoslovak Political Sciences Association-Academia, 1982), 72. See Soukup, “Socialistické společenství a komplex globálních problémů lidstva.”

50 Rindzevičiūtė, *The Power of Systems*, 178.

51 See, e.g., his considerations of noosphere in selected essays, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man* (New York: Image Books, 2004).

52 Miroslav Soukup, *Strategie rozvoje zemské civilizace*, 5.

idea could not move outside an adequate socio-economic order, humankind had to be “guided at a certain stage of development by the governing bodies of a global socialist organization.”⁵³ These “will be formed” at an admittedly unspecified but historically inevitable “stage of integration of the social organization of humankind,”⁵⁴ which also presupposed new principles of morality.⁵⁵

Here it was no longer about existing socialism as the best possible world, or about socialism in one country, but about a new, qualitatively more advanced phase grounded in the future noosphere and based on planetary integration in the sense of setting development priorities to be managed globally under the banner of socialism. The emergence of the new order essentially corresponded to the popular Hegelian trinomial: the possibilities of self-destruction would first be negated in the framework of cooperation and disarmament, technologies capable of destruction would be used for the benefit of the entire planet, whereupon a new interconnected planetary whole of socialist humanity and the living world would emerge, with human being consciously and rationally (based on scientific data) using nature for their development and equally influencing the development of nature. Such a determination of the future of socialism on a global scale carried with it an almost de Chardinian eschatological dimension—a kind of exalted end to planetary history.

Conclusions

From a historical point of view, an excursion into the socialist globalism of the time helps us to convey the intellectual world of a defunct socio-economic order that was convinced of its infallibility and maturity until the end—despite the multiplying crises—of its own establishment. It is almost fascinating to observe the unwavering desire of the theorists of actually existing socialism to hold a holistic point of view in the face of postmodern skepticism, which, while naming many partial problems, was programmatically reluctant to accept any holistic grasp, and spoke rather of the possibilities of fragmentary insights and partial understandings. In a way, but even more acutely, the situation of the late 1960s, which Jiří Růžička and I described in the conclusions of our treatise on Czechoslovak

53 Miroslav Soukup, *Strategie rozvoje zemské civilizace*, 273.

54 Miroslav Soukup, *Strategie rozvoje zemské civilizace*, 273.

55 Mojsejov, “Teorie noosféry a socialismus,” 53.

post-Stalinist Marxism, was repeated. In it, we spoke of the split between Eastern European Marxism on the one hand and Western critical thought on the other, and we also named some of the negative symptoms which, despite the unquestionable efforts of the intellectuals of the time, manifested themselves, among other things, in the claimed civilizational superiority of their own project of democratic socialism.⁵⁶ Twenty years later, the Marxism of actually existing socialism considered itself undoubtedly the only possible approach worthy of the label “scientific.” While at the same time late socialist Marxists did not hesitate to describe their own socio-economic model as so advanced that it was to be the only feasible guiding principle of a future united humankind.

The similarities with the 1960s do not end here. In the limited conditions of institutionalized theory of actually existing socialism, this discourse contained a certain critical potential towards the official political thought of the time and in a way became a precursor of perestroika. Although the critique was nowhere near as sharp and deservedly direct as that developed by independent and dissenting ecological initiatives across the Eastern bloc in late socialism,⁵⁷ many spoke of the specific shortcomings of actually existing socialism. Thus, in the spirit of Jindřich Zelený’s opening quote, Frolov and Zagladin, for example, pointed out that “far from everything that is necessary, let alone possible, is being done in the direction of greening industrial production” and that there was a lack of foresight as well as concrete implementation in “waste utilization, land reclamation, biological purification of used water, etc.”⁵⁸ The insufficient level of technological implementation in socialist production was also criticized,⁵⁹ which had not only economic but also ecological impacts.

Socialist globalism naturally disappeared along with the project of so-called actually existing socialism. While many contemporary scholars see continuity with the post-transformation period of the 1990s in many other aspects of

⁵⁶ Jan Mervart and Jiří Růžička, *Rehabilitate Marx!: The Czechoslovak Party Intelligentsia and Post-Stalinist Modernity* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2025).

⁵⁷ Dissent in this sense also includes Marxist critique of the official political thought of actually existing socialism. See Alexander Amberger, “Post-growth Utopias from the GDR: The Ecosocialist Alternatives of SED Critics Wolfgang Harich, Rudolf Bahro, and Robert Havemann from the 1970s,” *Contradictions. A Journal for Critical Thought*, no. 2 (2021): 15–30; Alexander Amberger, *Bahro—Harich—Havemann: Marxistische Systemkritik und politische Utopie in der DDR* [Bahro—Harich—Havemann: Marxist system critique and political utopia in the GDR] (Paderborn: Schoeningh Ferdinand, 2014); Dirk Mathias Dalberg, ed., “Miroslav Kusý, To Be a Marxist in Czechoslovakia,” *Contradictions. A Journal for Critical Thought*, no. 2 (2021): 159–82.

⁵⁸ Frolov and Zagladin, “Socialismus a globální problémy civilizace,” 46.

⁵⁹ Jirásek, “Střídání technologického způsobu života jako globální činitel,” 231.

late socialism,⁶⁰ the discourse of socialist globalism is entirely discontinuous. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, we can indeed observe the penetration of former prognostic scholars into early transformation politics (especially in the Czech or Estonian case), but the discourse of socialist globalism was, for understandable reasons, completely displaced from the political thought of the time, and in a way it was also displaced from historical memory. If we read today the inward-looking reasoning of the analyzed authors, we would tend to say that from an intellectual point of view this erasure was justified. However, I believe that if we do not want to be subject to aestheticizing criteria of likability, we must include such discourses in the intellectual history of state socialism. Despite its rootedness in Marxist-Leninist theory some moments of late socialist globalism can still be inspiring today. What might have seemed old-fashioned in the face of postmodern epistemological skepticism for its holistic approach in the late 1980s or in the 1990s is extremely relevant in the globalized world of late capitalism. It is not only for the climate crisis that a planetary solution seems to be the only possible one.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the project “Philosophy in Late Socialist Europe: Theoretical Practices in the Face of Polycrisis” funded by European Union—NextgenerationEU and Romanian Government, under National Recovery and Resilience Plan for Romania, contract no. 760044//23.05.2023, cod PNRR-C9-I8-CF104/15.11.2022, through the Romanian Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within Component 9, Investment I8.

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⁶⁰ For the Czechoslovak example, see especially Michal Kopeček ed., *Architekti dlouhé změny: expertní kořeny postsocialismu v Československu* [Architects of long change: The expert roots of postsocialism in Czechoslovakia] (Prague: Argo, 2019); Vítězslav Sommer et al., *Řídit socialismus jako firmu*.

7. Romanian Communist Futurology as Diamat without Dialectics

Stefan Baghiu and Alex Cistelecan

Abstract: This study explores the rise and fall of Romanian communist futurology between 1960s–1980s, highlighting its unique development as a state-endorsed, cybernetics-driven science of prediction. Romanian futurology emerged at the intersection of global ideological trends and Ceaușescu's sovereigntist policies, blending managerial discourse, cybernetics, and Marxist revisionism. While inheriting the all-encompassing and supreme science pretensions of 1950s dialectical materialism, Romanian futurology was largely abstract, mathematical, and devoid of dialectical content, functioning as a sort of "Diamat without dialectics." Its decline in the 1980s mirrored Romania's economic collapse and political isolation, as pragmatic Realpolitik overtook utopian planning. Romanian futurology, though rooted in Marxist aspirations, abandoned dialectics and historical materialism in favor of a technocratic vision of indefinite, knowledge-based progress.

Keywords: Romanian futurology; state socialism; cybernetics; Cold War science; technological utopianism; Marxist materialism

Between September 3–10, 1972, Bucharest hosted an important international scientific event—the third World Conference on Future Research, with the topic "The Common Future of Mankind." The conference was held "under the patronage of the Chairman of the State Council of the Socialist Republic of Romania, Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu [...], under the auspices of the Standing Committee of the World Future Research Conferences and the Romanian National Organizing Committee," and chaired by Manea Mănescu, President of the Economic Council of the Socialist Republic of Romania, Miron Constantinescu, President of the Academy of Social and Political

Sciences, and Mircea Malița, Minister of Education. In his opening speech to the congress, Nicolae Ceaușescu highlighted the direct link between the promise of futurology and Romania's own chance and right to develop an independent, national path towards socialism: "The prospection of the future raises to the fore the imperative need to establish on our planet new relations between nations, based on the principles of full equality of all peoples, mutual respect for national independence and sovereignty, [...] respect for the sacred right of each nation to determine its own path of development without any outside interference."¹

There were, thus, good strategic reasons for futurology's adoption at the highest levels of the Romanian communist state: this rather unexpected strategic link between futurology and Romania's sovereigntist stance in foreign politics will be the focus of the second half of this chapter. But before discussing these unusual, strategic uses that futurology embraced in communist Romania—in which it can be seen as a technical instrument and ideological expression of the latter—we would like first to dwell on the more general appeal, and influence, that futurology enjoyed in the socialist bloc in the 1960s–70s. There are several reasons for futurology's eager adoption as both scientific discourse and instrument for administrative planning in communist Romania and other East-European socialist states at that time. They range from the most encompassing historical contexts to the most specific developments in the realm of ideology and knowledge production.

On the one hand, at the most general historical level, this was, one could say, simply the way of the world, or the *Zeitgeist*, pressing, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, on many levels and from various locations. At the global political level, there was the advent of "peaceful coexistence" in the East and of the *Ostpolitik* in the West, which for a short period seemed to de-escalate some of the Cold War tension and brought about a horizon of predictable and hopefully reasonable peace at world level—in spite of, or perhaps all the more urgently in light of, occasional interimperialist or intraimperialist military adventures like Vietnam or Prague. At the same time, this period marked the culmination, but also the crisis of *les trente glorieuses*, the developmentalist model in both East and West, of sustained postwar economic growth and social progress through rational planning or at least strong state support, industrialization, and massive technological upgrades.

¹ Agerpres, "A treia conferință mondială de cercetare a viitorului cu tema: 'Viitorul comun al oamenilor'" [The third world conference for the research of the future with topic: The Common Future of Men], *Scînteia*, June 28, 1972, 5. The magazine references are available on the *Ziarele Arcanum* archive, online at <https://adt.arcanum.com/>.

At the more specific level of political and administrative praxis, one of the preconditions for futurology was the “managerial revolution,” again in both East and West, with management seen as the “science of leadership” (in Romanian: “știința conducerii”) in which purely administrative, apolitical scientific knowledge fuses with power in a happily Foucauldian way. At the same time, there was the advent and massive success, in the West, of marketing, belatedly yet eagerly adopted in the communist East as well because it was considered—in contrast to its popular and contemporary advertising, where it appears as the natural auxiliary of the free market—as the instrument for reining in and rationally taming the unpredictability of the economy.²

Thus, futurology was flourishing at a time when management as “the science of leadership” was itself booming, announcing the age of financial and corporate capitalism in the West, but also the series of transformations of late socialist societies and then post-socialist regimes in the East—great late socialist and post-socialist transformations in which managers and a certain practice of management played a crucial role, as shown by Besnik Pula, for the whole Eastern bloc, or Vladimir Pasti, for the Romanian case.³ This intersection derives from that between futurology and marketing. Communist states have always projected futurology as a socialist science, since the knowledge of the future could only be coherent in a state-planned economy. Prognosis, prospective, and planning were key terms through which communist societies engaged this leadership trend—they were all marketing instruments deployed to rein in the irreducible uncertainties of the centrally planned, yet globally integrated, national economy.

At the ideological level there were several crucial developments, certainly overlapping or mutually resonating, which created the conceptual

² An article in *Viitorul social*, discussing the marketing panel from the Third World Future Research Conference that took place in Bucharest in September 1972, defined marketing as a “new economic perspective, aimed at the optimal adjustment of the integrated system of production-consumption in order to achieve a maximum global efficiency,” noting thus its deep affinities with futurology. Mihai C. Botez et al., “Marketing și prospectivă” [Marketing and prospective studies], *Viitorul social* 2, no. 1 (1973): 155–60.

³ Besnik Pula, *Globalization under and after Socialism: The Evolution of Transnational Capital in Central and Eastern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018); Vladimir Pasti, *Noul capitalism românesc* [The new Romanian capitalism] (Iași: Polirom, 2006); see also Cornel Ban, *Dependență și dezvoltare. Economia politică a capitalismului românesc* [Dependency and development: The political economy of Romanian capitalism] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Tact, 2014). This second intersection between management and futurology continues to make headlines nowadays, especially in debates on Chinese state communist planning vs. Western sciences of management, as well as in Marxist discussions on contemporary capitalism in terms of “asset management capital” or “political capitalism.”

framework and theoretical foundation for futurology. Daniel Bell's theory of "post-industrialism" argued that both political systems were converging towards a similar configuration of managerial technocracy replacing both political bureaucracy and private capital thanks to its unique ability of long-term planning. "Modernization theories" emphasized the converging world tendencies towards a transition in the economic production of value, from physical labor to intellectual labor, together with the shift in class composition and political life that this evolution entailed. The "technical-scientific revolution" appeared in all its shades—as a utopian promise of human fulfillment and liberation from toil, as a menacing technology overcoming and overpowering man, or as the material and epistemic condition for administrative long-term planning and enlightened dirigisme. And, finally, directly related to this latter development, the advent and success of cybernetics and system theories, with their claim to quantify, anticipate, and thus possibly control complex and dynamic systems with multiple sets of factors and variables.

At the same time, the idea of communist futurology always had a focus on relative socialist welfare, since its introduction and official adoption coincided with the development of another field of research—the inquiries into "quality of life." The research on the quality of life based its methodological frame on futurology. For example, as Adela Hîncu recently discussed, Pavel Apostol, one of the chief futurologists in Romania, shifted from the science of the future to "the issue of quality of life." Although coming from a communist frame of thought, Apostol tried to use individual social indicators in the methodology of analysis, which were refused by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, but accepted by the working group of the Fourth World Future Studies Conference in Rome:

Apostol argued that while planning for the quality of life should be the main aim of social development, it should not be limited to projecting into the future the existing structure of social indicators; it should ensure the future freedom to choose and prioritize indicators for the people themselves. Echoing his analysis of the Marxist structure of the future, Apostol maintained that the study of quality of life should in fact be a study of the structure that could guarantee such freedom for members of a future society.⁴

⁴ Adela Hîncu, "Academic Mobility and Epistemological Change in State Socialist Romania: Three Generations of Sociologists, Western Social Science, and Quality of Life Research," *Serendipities* 5, no. 1 (2020): 8.

These are, then, the major trends in global or regional geopolitics, ideology, administrative and epistemic practices, that contributed to the development of futurology in the 1960s. As for the opening salvos of this process, the first global conference on futurology hosted scientists from both the Western and Eastern blocs in Oslo in 1967, and “[b]etween 1967 and 1972 the transnational activity in this field was enormous, with seminars and conferences, a flood of publications in the *International Social Science Journal*, the new journals *Futures* and *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, and several edited volumes of translations on both sides of the Iron Curtain.”⁵ As Jenny Andersson shows, in 1966, the Czechoslovak philosopher Radovan Richta led and published the results of *Civilizace na rozcestí* (Civilization at the Crossroads), where futurology directly fed humanist and revisionist Marxism. Here, the idea of an open future, with multiple possibilities stemming from human praxis, was at home. Furthermore, in 1968, Ossip Flechtheim’s *Futurology* was conceived as a “third way” in the middle of the Cold War. These were the first major instances of a decade-long, sustained institutional effort in building futurology and future research—in both East and West, and frequently at a transnational, inter-bloc level. If these initial manifestations led indeed to the articulation of two distinct schools, or types, of futurology—the communist and the Western one, as Jenny Andersson claims—its *distinguo* does not seem to be the one she identifies, namely the pluralism of Western futurology vs. the dogmatism, predeterminism of communist futurology. From the perspective of pluralism, as will be shown below, Romanian futurology—even if one of the most “official,” state-inspired versions of the discipline futurology in the whole bloc—was as Western, or as pluralistic as it gets. Its peculiarity lay elsewhere.

The beginnings of Romanian futurology—embracing prediction and forecasting

As Adela Hîncu and Alex Cistelecan recently showed, “futurology made its way into Romania at the turn of the 1960s, arriving with a slight delay compared to other countries in the socialist bloc, such as Poland and Czechoslovakia,” yet “benefitting from stronger institutional support from the authorities.”⁶ This institutional support emerged through two main channels.

5 Jenny Andersson, *The Future of the World: Futurology, Futurologists and the Struggle for the Post–Cold War Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 123.

6 Adela Hîncu and Alex Cistelecan, “Pavel Apostol—Marx și structura stocastică a viitorului” [Pavel Apostol—Marx and the stochastic structure of the future], *Vatra*, no. 5–6 (2024): 90–95.

First, it was the institutional background of the promoters themselves, as both the early discussants in the press, such as Valter Roman and Octav Onicescu, and the main developers, Pavel Apostol and Mircea Malița, were heads of Romanian institutions or prominent members of the Academy of the People's Republic of Romania. Additionally, it was the Communist Party that wholeheartedly adopted futurology as the core of its scientific outlook on the future of socialist Romania.

As an article in *Viața Economică* [Economic Life] noted in 1967, Romanian journals and magazines had rarely debated the topic before: "In France's specialized press, the term 'futurology' is increasingly being used to define an emerging science dedicated to the 'study of future methodologies.' Through this new field, which involves researching the research process itself, the aim is to foresee future scientific discoveries."⁷ That same year, Ștefan Bârsănescu, a member of the Romanian Academy specializing in psychology and pedagogy, gave an interview in which he highlighted that

[t]he sciences and pedagogy taught in schools must consider not just what will happen in one or two years but should look at least two decades ahead. This observation forms the basis of current discussions in the West about the need for a new science, provisionally called the science of foresight (*Zukunft Logos*—Futurology). This is not envisioned as a prophetic science, but rather one that, based on precise scientific data, aims to accurately approximate the sciences of tomorrow, considering that evolution is driven not by individuals but by society.⁸

However, starting in 1968, the term became more and more familiar on the Romanian academic and intellectual scenes. Octav Onicescu—also a member of the Academy, who worked in statistics, information theory, and informational econometrics⁹—quoted Ossip K. Flechtheim, the godfather of futurology and the author of the 1945 essay *Teaching the Future*, in order

<https://revistavatra.org/2023/07/24/pavel-apostol-marx-si-structura-stocastica-a-viitorului/>. See also Ana Maria Cătănuș, "Official and Unofficial Futures of the Communism System: Romanian Futures Studies Between Control and Dissidence," in *The Struggle for the Long-term in Transnational Science and Politics*, eds. Jenny Andersson and Eglé Rindzevičiūtė (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 169–94.

⁷ "Curier," *Viața Românească*, no. 30, July 1967, 11.

⁸ Ștefan Bârsănescu, "O nouă disciplină: știința viitorului" [A new discipline: The science of the future], *Cronica*, no. 42 (1967): 10.

⁹ See a description of his work in Marius Iosifescu, "Octav Onicescu, 1892–1893," *International Statistical Review/Revue Internationale de Statistique* 54, no. 1 (1986): 97–108.

to introduce the Romanian public to the “science of the future.” Onicescu opened his introduction to futurology with Flechtheim’s words from a conference in Stuttgart and concluded with a statement from Robert Jungk, the author of the 1952 book *Die Zukunft hat schon begonnen* (translated as *Tomorrow is Already Here* in 1954). The origins of futurology in Romania are thus not only stemming from the Romanian Academy and Party-approved sources, but also influenced by German revisionist futurologists, including Robert Jungk. The latter, according to Jenny Andersson, had “set futurology at the heart of the West German New Left with the book *Deutschland ohne Konzeption. Am Beginn einer neuen Epoche*.” This is particularly of interest here because, as Jenny Andersson shows, in the works of German revisionists, “futurology should not be expected to provide absolutely precise knowledge, just as psychology or sociology are not held to that standard,”¹⁰ thus allowing deviations from a very technical or scientifically driven perspective on the future.

The next figure to introduce the science of the future to Romanian audiences was Valter Roman, who, in a 1968 article, associated futurology not with German revisionists but with American and Canadian scientists such as Hermann Kahn, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Daniel Bell. Roman published in the literary magazine *Contemporanul* one of the first in-depth essays on futurology in Communist Romania. He was a prominent communist figure of the time and had already authored several studies on military strategy and warfare in the 1940s and 1950s. However, by the late 1950s, his growing interest in science and society led him to publish works on modern physics, atomic energy, the role of science and technology in the transition from capitalism to communism, and, notably, the significance of the industrial revolution. Roman approached futurology in a distinctly cosmopolitan manner:

There are three emerging sciences: the science of leadership, the science of the future, and the science of sciences—all closely interconnected—the shared mission of which is to accelerate the major contemporary processes that elevate society to new levels of development. Unfortunately, we must acknowledge that, to this day, no serious theoretical studies have been conducted in any of these fields. There are, however, a significant number of valuable studies (such as those by American professor Hermann Kahn, economist John Kenneth Galbraith—*The New Industrial State*, Daniel Bell—*The Reforming of General Education*, French journalist Jean-Jacques

¹⁰ Andersson, *The Future of the World*, 46.

Servan-Schreiber—*The American Challenge*, as well as many other studies from various industrialized countries) that offer important insights and commendable attempts to forecast the evolution of human society up to the end of this century, and in some cases, even beyond.¹¹

However, Roman noticed that many studies from the West tended to become fatalistic projections due to the capitalist environment in which they were developed. He stated that “[t]o accept the thesis of the impossibility of prediction and to elevate helplessness to the status of an inexorable law of history, especially in our times, is, in itself, a true form of helplessness,” and that the pessimistic perspectives fit perfectly “with Marx’s observation about those who confuse their own powerlessness with the supposed powerlessness of nature.”¹²

Although Soviet influence on local sciences was strong during the 1950s, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw a growing interest in other approaches to futurology and the sciences of the future. The more dogmatic aspects of these fields were likely confined to translated texts written by Soviet officials—such as the 1968 “Intersecția prognoză-planificare” [The Prognosis-Planning Intersection] translated from Russian and originally authored by Lev Glazer who mostly quoted politicians and economists such as Alexei Nikolayevich Kosygin and Vasily Sergeyevich Nemchinov.¹³ Moreover, central figures of the Romanian literary and cultural scene embraced the concept. In the same 1968 issue of *Contemporanul* magazine where Valter Roman published his pioneering article, Mircea Malița contributed a series of articles titled “Cronica anului 2000” [The chronicle of the year 2000], later published as a book, where he discussed the transformations in the realms of information and technology. Malița described how “space technology will advance to the point where it will be easy to receive broadcasts, no matter how far away,” how “a few fixed-location satellites will provide the points for a universal relay,” and that “broadcast towers will disappear, replaced by these powerful shared antennas placed in various locations, to which subscribers will be connected by wires.”¹⁴ These speculations and observations would

¹¹ Valter Roman, “Știința viitorului și viitorul științei” [The science of the future and the future of science], *Contemporanul*, no. 5, February 2, 1968, 1.

¹² Roman, “Știința viitorului și viitorul științei,” 8.

¹³ Lev Glazer, “Intersecția prognoză-planificare” [The intersection of forecasting and planning], *Viața Economică*, no. 25, June 21, 1968, 18.

¹⁴ Mircea Malița, “Cronica anului 2000. Spațiul informațional” [The chronicle of the year 2000: The informational space], *Contemporanul*, no. 5, February 2, 1968, 8. See also Mircea Malița, *Cronica anului 2000* [The chronicle of the year 2000] (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1969).

form the foundation of his 1969 book with the same title, one of the most intriguing and speculative works of socialist futurology in Romania—often mistaken for fiction.¹⁵ The book sparked interest in various journals in the early 1970s, with fields ranging from agriculture to sports and culture, as everyone became fascinated by the near future leading up to the turn of the millennium.

Malița's celebration of fictitious prediction built on the seminal work of Herman Kahn and Anthony J. Wiener, *The Year 2000: A Framework for Speculation on the Next Thirty-Three Years*, which appeared in 1967 and was introduced by Daniel Bell.¹⁶ Kahn and Wiener had identified the great threats of the future in political and social developments, growth and resources (echoing or synchronizing their worries with the early phase of the Club of Rome, before the release of *The Limits to Growth* in 1972), and the evolution of technology. Malița fully embraced the idea of an open future, writing in perfect harmony with Western futurology but offering a more optimistic perspective. In his writing, socialism appeared to provide the foundation for alternative and positive technological advancements.

Mircea Malița's biography is crucial here, as it highlights the pluralist nature of the discussions on futurology even at their highest institutional levels. Malița became a university assistant professor in 1949 at a very young age and continued teaching at the Faculty of Mathematics at the University of Bucharest. He also had an impressive diplomatic career, serving as the director of the Library of the Academy between 1950 and 1955. With the support of Romanian writer Mihail Sadoveanu,¹⁷ Malița became a counselor

¹⁵ After all, *Contemporanul* was mainly a literary magazine, taking its name from the nineteenth-century Marxist thinker Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, who advocated for materialist readings of Romanian literature. Many of the reviews of the book and interviews talk about Malița as a "writer" and "literary man," since he also published some literary works, the most relevant for his approach being his 1977 hybrid philosophical and literary essays *Zidul și iedera* [The wall and the ivy]. In January 1968 he published his first fragment, "Anul 2000" [The year 2000], where he started his adventure in futurology with mythological references. See Mircea Malița, "Anul 2000," *Contemporanul*, no. 1, January 5, 1968, 1.

¹⁶ The article which announced the book was Herman Kahn and Anthony J. Wiener, "The Next Thirty-Three Years: A Framework for Speculation," *Daedalus* 96, no. 3 (1967): 705–32. See also Herman Kahn and Anthony J. Wiener, *The Year 2000: A Framework for Speculation on the Next Thirty-Three Years* (New York: MacMillan, 1967).

¹⁷ Mihail Sadoveanu is one of the most influential intellectual figures of early Communist Romania, often described as a "literary monopolist," so that his help has been crucial for Malița. See Rossen Djavalov, "Literary Monopolists and the Forging of the Post–World War II People's Republic of Letters," in *Socialist Realism in Central and Eastern European Literatures under Stalin: Institutions, Dynamics, Discourses*, eds. Evgeny Dobrenko and Natalia Jonsson-Skradol (London: Anthem Press, 2018), 25–38.

for the World Peace Council and later became the director of the Cultural Department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From 1970 to 1972, he served as the Minister of Education in Socialist Romania—and those were the years when Romanian futurology became not only central at a national level, but also the topic of a cluster of international debates. During the 1970s, he held various positions within the state and party apparatus, and in the 1980s he served as an ambassador to Bern, Geneva, and Washington. He also became a member of the Academy in 1974.¹⁸ In the early 1970s, Malița also started a course on “Logics and artificial intelligence,” and his interest in prognosis and mathematics from the perspective of futurology increased. The three fields in which he was active—mathematics and forecasting, diplomacy, and the sociology of life—can all be unified by his deep interest in futurology. His 1968 *Programarea pătratică* (Quadratic programming), 1971 *Matematica organizării* (The mathematics of organizing), and 1972 *Programarea neliniară* (Non-linear programming) were all published in collaboration with great Romanian mathematicians of the period (Mihai Dragomirescu and Cornelius Zidăroiu), and his works on planning and sociology of life management like the 1976 *Hrana, problema vitală a omenirii* (Food, the vital problem of humankind) and the 1979 *No Limits to Learning: Bridging the Human Gap* were highly acclaimed both at the national level and internationally.¹⁹

Another key figure of Romanian futurology, Pavel Apostol—who is at the center of Jenny Andersson’s analysis of the the World Futures Study Federation—was head of the philosophy department at the Victor Babeș University of Cluj-Napoca from 1951, but after his arrest between 1952–55 in a wave of party purges, he was relegated to a position as researcher at the Academy of the Romanian People’s Republic. By the late 1960s, he had become one of the prominent figures among rehabilitated intellectuals who had suffered under the excesses of Romanian Stalinism. In a period often associated with “liberalization” and the “thaw” in the official ideology of the Communist Party, Pavel Apostol emerged as a leading intellectual in Romanian philosophy and the social sciences. It was during this time that he became interested

¹⁸ See Paul Cernat, “Malița, Mircea,” in *Dicționarul general al literaturii române M/O* [The general dictionary of Romanian literature, M–O], second edition, edited by Eugen Simion (Bucharest: Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2019), 83–85.

¹⁹ See Mihai Dragomirescu and Mircea Malița, *Programarea pătratică* [Quadratic programming] (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1968); Mircea Malița and Cornelius Zidăroiu, *Matematica organizării* [The mathematics of organization] (Bucharest: Editura Tehnică, 1971); Mihai Dragomirescu and Mircea Malița, *Programarea neliniară* [Nonlinear programming] (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1972); James W. Botkin, Mahdi Elmandjra, and Mircea Malita, *No Limits to Learning: Bridging the Human Gap, A Report to the Club of Rome* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979).

in futurology, as the science of the future began to enter Romanian public debates. Ana Maria Cătănuș has theorized the development of futurology in Romania in terms of the binary tension between “tight regime control” and “dissidence.”²⁰ In her conclusions about futurology in Eastern Europe more generally, Jenny Andersson understood the discipline as caught between an internationalist humanism and the local strictures of the Marxist-Leninist “prescription of the future as a singular and law-driven entity.”²¹ Yet, as Adela Hîncu has argued, this tension was “in fact actively negotiated, resulting in the formulation of a Marxist humanist approach to the future that sought to integrate global and local approaches to social development in the 1970s and redefine quality of life as a measure of people’s freedom.”²²

Pavel Apostol’s interventions in 1972 are crucial here for the understanding of Romanian socialist futurology.²³ He argued that certain preconceived notions about Marxism—such as the idea that it posits a strictly predetermined future—led to a false opposition between Marxism and modern future studies. Instead, Marxism offered, for Apostol, a probabilistic view of history, where multiple potential futures could arise from human action, rather than a single predetermined outcome. Here, Apostol also questioned the foundations of Western futurology. In his view, this opposition had been supported both by the founder of futurology, Ossip Flechtheim, and by orthodox thinkers from the socialist bloc, who dismissed futurology as a bourgeois pursuit. For him, a return to Marx meant a return to the idea that the future is shaped by active social forces rather than a metaphysical unfolding of history—thus opening futurology to the revisionist Marxist tendencies focused on the centrality of praxis. He claimed that socialist science must overcome these oppositions—between Marxism and futurology, as well as between political blocs—precisely because the future of humanity depended on the interaction and balance of forces among the three historical blocs: the capitalist, the socialist, and the Third World. Apostol’s article predates the birth of the Center for Methodological Research in Bucharest in 1974, which

was intended to be the heart of management studies in Romania, and the center of a developing axis with the Third World. The Center worked with

²⁰ Ana-Maria Cătănuș, “Official and Unofficial Futures.”

²¹ Andersson, *The Future of the World*, 126.

²² Hîncu, “Academic Mobility and Epistemological Change,” 9.

²³ See especially his piece in English, Pavel Apostol, “Marxism and the Structure of the Future,” *Futures* 4, no. 3 (1972): 201–10.

the National Institute for Science Technology and Development Studies in India and the Center for Economic and Social Research for the Third World in Mexico, both of which were important sites for developing forecasting, technological assessment, and reflections on socio-economic models for the developing nations.²⁴

For Pavel Apostol, Marx's vision of the future is a pluralistic one, aligned with the existence of unique paths for each state in building socialism—a perspective, as we will see below, very much in line with Ceaușescu's sovereigntist, anti-Soviet stance, which insisted on the right of each country to develop its own path towards socialism. Thus, this pluralism should not be seen as a marker of internal democracy, but rather as a reflection of state sovereignty: the pluralism on the international stage is the reverse of the internal monolithic structure of sovereignty.

As Jenny Andersson showed, in 1971 "forecasting as a tool for the comprehensive planning of science and technology was declared an object of cooperation between the USSR, GDR, Bulgaria, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary."²⁵ This emergence of forecasting as futurology in the service of socialism was accompanied by a very serious "mathematization" of futurology itself. Also discussed by Jenny Andersson, Pavel Apostol's 1972 "Marxism and the Structure of the Future" put a lot of effort into creating a Marxist interpretation of futurology that also avoided adopting the positions of official Soviet forecasting, represented for instance by Igor Bestuzhev Lada, the President of the Soviet Forecasting Association. He had famously advanced the official position of Soviet futurology in 1976 by declaring that "In Russian the word 'future' exists only in the singular."²⁶ Andersson uses Michal Kopeček's concept of "consolidation regimes"²⁷ in order to show how the forging of state power was tied to the conversion of social sciences into "governmental policy expertise." In regard to the transformations of Marxist-Leninist doctrines of the time and forecasting, she explains that while "Some Polish and Czech forecasters, producing empirical, economic, and statistical work presented as consistent with Marxism Leninism could remain in transnational circles," the complications of the Soviet and East European relations, especially after 1968, made possible that "the Eastern

²⁴ Andersson, *The Future of the World*, 148.

²⁵ Andersson, *The Future of the World*, 139.

²⁶ Andersson, *The Future of the World*, 139.

²⁷ Michal Kopeček, "The Rise and Fall of Czech Post-Dissident Liberalism after 1989," *East European Politics and Societies* 25, no. 2 (2011): 244–71.

European presence became dominated overall by Soviet future researchers of the Soviet Forecasting Association.²⁸ The main figure dominating this discussion was that of Igor Bestuzhev Lada, alongside Gennadev Dobrov.²⁹ However, they both remained outsiders to Romanian futurology as such. While Dobrov was frequently published from 1974 to 1977 in economics magazines and journals (mainly for defining the problems of science and socialism³⁰ or “possible futures” in the study of the future), he was never seen as a dominant figure but was instead integrated in the discussion alongside Western authors such as Patrick Suppes, Jay Wright Forrester, and C. West Churchman.³¹

In this respect, in 1976—a year before taking a dissident stance—Mihai Botez wrote on the possible futures of futurology in a very cosmopolitan and non-aligned manner, diverging from Soviet mainstream ideas. To respond to the question “what are the actual methodological innovations?,” Botez started from the observation that the stronger connections between forecasting and system cybernetics “have facilitated the integration of a ‘shock troop’ of contemporary science into the forecasting movement: the Soviet school of systems cybernetics, represented by figures such as V. Glushkov, G. Dobrov, V. Siforov, and others.”³² However, the Soviets were not alone or dominant here. First, Botez noticed that “the vision of a trend-based future is now complemented by a model of both trend-based and event-based futures. Cross-impact models allow for the identification of interrelations between continuous process-continuous process, event-event, and continuous process-event interactions”³³ (quoting the works of Patrick Suppes in a very positive manner). Second, he claimed that “progress in the simulation of hierarchical systems (M. Mesarovic and collaborators) has been confirmed by the Second Report to the Club of Rome, published in our country under the title *Mankind at the Turning Point*”³⁴ (adding a comparison between the report and the results of Forrester and Churchman). Third, he qualified as “of great promise” the “attempt to move beyond equilibrium models in system dynamics (for instance, E. László’s ‘world homeostat’) and to develop

²⁸ Andersson, *The Future of the World*, 140.

²⁹ Andersson, *The Future of the World*, 140.

³⁰ See Radu Negru, “Ştiinţa economică şi economia știinţei” [Economic science and the economics of science], *Revista Economică*, no. 19 (1974): 16–17.

³¹ Mihai Botez, “Viitorii posibili ai cercetării viitorului” [Possible futures of future research], *Revista Economică*, no. 52 (1976): 27–28.

³² Botez, “Viitorii posibili,” 28.

³³ Botez, “Viitorii posibili,” 28.

³⁴ Botez, “Viitorii posibili,” 28.

evolutionary models" (where "the thermodynamics of systems far from equilibrium, as well as dissipative structures introduced and studied by I. Prigogine and his school, seem to provide the most favorable framework for this new approach to social modelling").³⁵ Confirming this cosmopolitan outlook, the 1977 international conference held in Bucharest, titled "Viitorul Europei—stadiul cercetărilor" (The future of Europe—the state of research) had a very glamorous international opening, in the presence of Bertrand de Jouvenel and Roger E. Kanet. Of course, many participants emphasized the connection between the renewal of international relations and social transformations, with Igor Bestuzhev-Lada claiming that "Europe is a social phenomenon."³⁶

In this section, we have passed through the main representatives and manifestations of Romanian communist futurology, highlighting their institutional and peer networks, theoretical influences, and contributions. In what follows, we will attempt to look at Romanian communist futurology more globally, as a specific and distinct phenomenon, and thus return to the initial question of the explanation of its peculiarity by grounding it in the specific geopolitical strategy of the Romanian communist regime.

A world without dialectics: national path and international chaos

After this cross-over through the most significant expressions of communist Romanian futurology, what—we can ask again—is the specificity of this branch? The emerging political, organizational, and ideological contexts, discussed in the opening section, created the conditions for futurology's emergence and popularity in both East and West, and provide some of the reasons why communist Romania adopted and institutionally supported futurological research—just like other socialist countries from the bloc did, more or less at the same time. However, they do not explain why Romania excelled, at least for a period, in its state-led institutional support for futurology—hosting the World Conference in 1972, opening the Institute for Future Research in 1974—just as they do not explain the specific kind of futurology that was most practiced in Romania. This was a very cybernetic, abstract, and equational futurology, quite at odds with, for example, the more philosophical, speculative, and humanist

35 Botez, "Viitori posibili," 28.

36 Gabriela Dolgu, "Prospectarea viitorului Europei" [Prospecting the Future of Europe], *Contemporanul*, no. 36, September 9, 1977, 12.

futurology developed in Czechoslovakia (Richta's school) or in Poland (by the group *Polska 2000*). That mathematical modelling was the defining trait of Romanian communist futurology has been already established by Jenny Andersson and Ana-Maria Cătănuș.³⁷ However, this local mathematical penchant was perhaps not only due, as Andersson and Cătănuș argue, to political pressure—in the sense that imagining concrete rational futures could have been seen as an oblique critique of existing society and central planning, and hence scholars and scientists preferred to take refuge in the abstract safety of numbers and algorithms. It also cannot be explained simply as the reflection of the social scientists' own politics and interests, whereby they hoped to achieve, through the scientific aridity of their futurologic prose, the recognition of their epistemic autonomy and of their authority in administrative matters.

The reason for the success and institutional support for futurology in communist Romania, and the explanation of its specific, mathematical brand of “future studies” also has to do, we argue, with another aspect, related to communist Romania's own realignment in world politics and its perceived place in contemporary history. The 1960s were, for communist Romania, a time of major shifts in its foreign policy and general worldview: on the one hand, Romania was stubbornly resisting and actively sabotaging the attempts at regional integration (COMECON) of the socialist bloc, which, as is well known, would have allocated Romania a backward position as a foodstuff provider in the division of labor among socialist states.³⁸ At the same time, Romania was desperately trying to outmaneuver the European Community's own decisive push towards the economic integration of its members, which, at the turn of the 1970s, barred all bilateral agreements between the latter and the outside world, thus forcing socialist states to negotiate—and first of all recognize—from an unequal position with the whole Western Community as such.³⁹ This pushed communist Romania towards courting the Global South, whose own attempt of integration into the nonaligned movement—and reasonable success, at least until the second oil crisis—again forced Bucharest into a disadvantageous position of dealing, as a single, isolated nation-state, with a potential political bloc

³⁷ Andersson, *The Future of the World*; Ana-Maria Cătănuș, “Official and Unofficial Futures.”

³⁸ Elena Dragomir, “Breaking the CMEA Hold: Romania in Search of a ‘Strategy’ towards the European Economic Community, 1958–1974,” *European Review of History* 27, no. 4 (2020): 494–526.

³⁹ Suvi Kansikas, “Acknowledging Economic Realities: The CMEA Policy Change vis-à-vis the European Community 1970–1973,” *European Review of History* 21, no. 2 (2014): 311–28; Angela Romano, “Untying Cold War Knots: The EEC and Eastern Europe in the Long 1970s,” *Cold War History* 14, no. 2 (2013): 153–73.

spanning three continents.⁴⁰ All these menacing developments explain the inflated and alarmist rhetoric of “national sovereignty” produced by communist Romania in this period, and which, initially, and at least in its outward perspectives, emphasized rather the sovereignty aspect, and only later, and for internal use, developed the corresponding nationalist cultural baggage. National sovereignty as the supreme principle in world politics was Romania’s attempt to oppose to the creeping processes of regional integration the old dying dream of a community of free and equal national states—free both as to their internal affairs, from any external interference, and free in their ability to strike pragmatic, post-ideological bilateral deals with any other given state.

This major shift in world politics and of Romania’s self-perceived, or imposed, place in it naturally led to a major shift in the official ideology and its epistemic tools. Thus, an argument can be made that, somehow logically, even if perhaps surprisingly, as communist Romania embraced both internally and internationally a nationalist and sovereigntist stance, ever further from bloc allegiance and communist orthodoxy, futurology—and especially cybernetics-inspired futurology—naturally replaced Diamat and Marxism in general as its ruling paradigm and supreme science. In this interpretation, the world and its future were no longer to be deciphered through the lens of class struggle and capitalism’s contradictions, or as an ethically charged opposition between two antagonistic blocs, but rather as an open scene in which equal, yet different actors—called national sovereign states—strike freely bilateral deals in the shadow of creeping supranational integration. This world truly resembles more a cybernetic equation of future, complex, and unstable probabilities, than the inherent and predictable tendency of capitalist crisis and/or inter-imperialist terminal war. In other words, if history loses its sustaining metanarrative of communist progress, if it is no longer a battle between good and evil, the dark past and the luminous future, but only the outcome of an endless multitude of independent factors interacting in various given contexts under particular, specific laws, then cybernetics-based futurology is the way to read it. Thus, if 1970s futurology

40 Larry L. Watts, “The Third World as Strategic Option: Romania’s Relation with Developing States,” in *Warsaw Pact Intervention in the Third World: Aid and Influence in the Cold War*, edited by Philip Muehlenbeck and Natalia Telepneva (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 95–121. For the cultural strategies of this courting see also Stefan Baghiu, “Translating Hemispheres: Eastern Europe and the Global South connection through translationscapes of poverty,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 56, no. 3 (2019): 487–503; Stefan Baghiu, “Geocritique: Siting, Poverty, and the Global Southeast,” in *Theory in the “Post” Era: A Vocabulary for the 21st-century Conceptual Commons*, eds. Christian Moraru, Andrei Terian, and Alexandru Matei (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021), 235–50.

inherits the totalizing and paradigmatic ambitions of the 1950s Diamat, it must also be pointed out that it voids the latter of its last remnants of Marxist dialectics. Futurology is thus the equation of a world deprived of dialectical meaning and progress, the Diamat of a world without dialectics.

This also elucidates another two aspects. Firstly, the fact that Romanian communist futurology operates usually at two distinct levels or scales of analysis, either at the national level, or at the global level, thus bypassing any regional or political-ideological mediation. And secondly, the existence of two different types of futurology—somehow overlapping with this national/global divide: on the one hand futurology as planning, as the ability to shape and predetermine the desired future in a hermetically sealed system; on the other hand, futurology as forecast and prognosis, which, in a global world with endless independent variables, merely hopes to anticipate the most probable outcome of an extremely complex situation. If futurology in general is at the same time the hope of rationally integrating society into a functional whole, thanks to the development of science and technology, but also the fear of chaos and of the overcomplexity of the modern world, then communist Romania's futurology seems to integrate both aspects, while pointing them in opposite directions: the hope of progress and rationality towards the interior; and the chaos, the ungovernable state of nature, outward to the planetary scene of Realpolitik.

However, in both directions and in both of its guises, Romanian futurology remained just as algebraic and algorithmic. Somehow paradoxically, with all the official enthusiasm in importing futurology to communist Romania, local futurology was, with few exceptions, hopelessly unenthusiastic, dull, and abstract, devoid of any social and historical content, all in all a sort of algebra in prose. This was probably due, on the one hand, to the fact that the most important Romanian futurologists were coming from either mathematics (Botez and Malița) or highly abstract, Hegelian philosophy (Apostol), and not from any fields (sociology, economy, political theory, historiography, etc.) that could have provided the missing content, the flesh for the otherwise empty logical and formulaic skeleton of their prose. But, on the other hand, it is precisely their logical-mathematical prose, their purely cybernetic futurology that allows us a glimpse into the possible uses of mathematical cybernetics for the socio-historical domains.⁴¹ Thus, one can unearth the ideological presuppositions, political implications, but also

⁴¹ For a similar employment of cybernetics in the field of aesthetics see Stefan Baghiu and Christian Ferencz-Flatz, "Communist Cyberaesthetics: Theories of Computer Assisted Art and Criticism in Socialist Romania," *Slavonic and East European Review* 103, no. 2 (2025): 195–221.

epistemic limitations of this cybernetic brand of futurology by looking, for example, at some of the graphical schemas provided by Apostol in his major treatise on futurology.

A quick glance at these figures⁴² shows how they are merely more and more elaborate formulas or representations for the tautological equation [present inputs → future outputs]. From the first, simplest figures to the more complex ones, the only thing that changes is that the abstract inputs each receive a name, but these names remain just as abstract, inasmuch as their precise influence and the combinations between them remain undetermined, other than by the magical arrow of time passing from past and present to the future. From the simplest to the most complex figures, the dynamic of the whole process remains always in a black box, a convergence of arrows resulting inscrutably in another arrow or combination of arrows ("futures"). Apostol writes as if one really needed highly elaborate mathematics to know that the future is a combination of all the known and unknown present factors, or, as in figure 4, that the future consequences are the result of a certain combination between goals, ends, means, known options, and the objective situation.

Hence, the reason why futurological discourses are, in communist Romania, overwhelmingly meta-level discussions, about method, with very few actually taking the risk of imagining future scenarios at the global or social-totality level (the most notable exception being Mircea Malita's *Cronica anului 2000*) is not because the method is too complicated, but because it is too simple, and hence inapplicable except in an analytically *a priori* way. The cybernetic model of future projection—inputs-outputs—is, almost tautologically, a correct schema for future projection, but as such it is no schema at all, since it leaves the important part, the engine of the whole process—the transformation of present factors into future outputs—in a black box. In its thrust for accuracy, it can merely factor in more and more relevant variables, and thus hope to refine the anticipated outputs, but it cannot formulate a method—besides the tautological movement from inputs to outputs and back again—for the concrete processes involved. As such then, this cybernetic futurology, after inheriting the totalizing and paradigmatic ambitions of the 1950s Diamat, rightfully ends up in the same deadlock:⁴³ as a general schema for history and evolution, it is a mere

⁴² Pavel Apostol, *Viitorul* [The future] (Bucharest: Editura științifică și enciclopedică, 1977), 22, 29, 33, 60, 149, 158, 171.

⁴³ Not coincidentally, these debates concerning the relation between dialectical materialism as supreme and unifying paradigm (theory & method), and the particular sciences took place

formal tautology, even if apparently much more complex than the good old laws of dialectics. If, instead, it tries to become less abstract and take into account the specificity of each factor and process it counts in, as well as the combinations between them, then it dissolves all the way into the particular disciplines of historiography, sociology, and political economy, which, as such, are impossible to totalize and at the same time distill in an overruling formula and method for future prediction.

This attempt to overcome the cumbersome, ideological corset of dialectical materialism, while preserving its totalizing and paradigmatic ambitions—and thus also its constraints on plausibility—is, finally, also visible in another aspect, related not to the prevalent and omnipresent discourse on abstract models and method in communist futurology. Instead, this relates to its content, or more precisely, to its most cherished topic and the most determining variable in all of its future projections: knowledge—both as science, information, technology, and as their instrumentalization in the administrative and managerial integration of society. The most substantial trend of large-scale inquiries and projections in Romanian communist futurology—in Pavel Apostol's *Vîitorul* and *Omul anului 2000* (The human of the year 2000), Malița's three volume series of essays *Aurul cenușiu* (Grey gold), and especially the collective Club of Rome manifesto, published in both Romanian and English, *No Limits to Learning: Bridging the Human Gap*⁴⁴—envisioned the knowledge-based society as the answer and the solution for transcending the material limits, ecological but also productive, of endless growth—material limits that, at that time, were being highlighted in the West in the famous 1972 report *The Limits to Growth*.⁴⁵ Knowledge—and rationally socialized knowledge—was to be the instrument for breaking the shackles of history or the limits of a material world. But if the future is, ultimately, unlimited and undetermined other than as a factor of knowledge

in the first half of the 1960s, practically just before the local import of futurology. See Alex Cistelecan's chapter in this volume. See also Alex Cistelecan, "Materialism dialectic și istoric în comunismul românesc (I)" [Dialectical and historical materialism in Romanian communism (I)], *Transilvania*, no. 6–7 (2021): 12–24; Alex Cistelecan, "Materialism dialectic și istoric în comunismul românesc (II)" [Dialectical and historical materialism in Romanian communism (II)], *Transilvania*, no. 12 (2022): 14–23.

44 Pavel Apostol, *Vîitorul*; Pavel Apostol, *Omul anului 2000* (Iași: Junimea, 1972); Mircea Malița, *Aurul cenușiu*, 3 vol. (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1971, 1972, 1973); Botkin, Elmandjra, and Malita, *No Limits to Learning*.

45 For a more detailed discussion, see the chapter by Christian Ferencz-Flatz and Adela Hîncu in this volume. See also Adela Hîncu, Alex Cistelecan, Christian Ferencz-Flatz, Stefan Baghiu, "Filozofia din România comunistă. Introducere" [Philosophy in communist Romania: Introduction], *Vatra*, no. 5–6 (2023): 40–46.

and rational innovation—which by itself can bypass social (class) determinations and material (ecological) limitations—then the future is eminently mathematizable, that is quantifiable and infinite, a sort of cybernetically mediated cybernetics. Thus, if from the perspective of form or laws of history, futurology is a sort of Diamat without dialectics, from the perspective of content it appears as a Histomat—unending progress—with historical determination or material limitation. Unfortunately, all this doesn't bode well for the aesthetic pleasures one could hope to derive from this once strategic, operational literature, now that it has become mere literature.

Logically, Diamat without dialectics and Histomat without historicity imply also a reversal from Hegel to Kant. Romanian communist futurology was inherently Kantian in at least three senses: it projected a “compatibilist” picture, in that it assumed both a deterministic view of historical evolution and also the complete subjectivization of history—it is man and humanity who build history, and who lately, thanks to the techno-scientific revolution, know no material limits any longer. Secondly, it is Kantian in the sense of the enlightened enthusiasm that sustains it—futurology as a genuine project for perpetual peace and as “man’s emergence from his self-imposed nonage.” But, finally, it also falls into the transcendental trap, the self-avowed limit of the Kantian critique—that “hidden art” of the “schematism of imagination,” by which abstract concepts are meant to fuse with concrete sense impressions. As in futurology, the hidden art, the “method” that almost all texts try to square is the black box in which inputs are converted into outputs, concrete past and present into scientific, deductible future—yet this precious art remains, as in Kant’s *Critique*, implacably hidden.⁴⁶

The 1980s—no (more) future

If Romanian communist futurology was so intrinsically and structurally tied to the political, ideological, and economic vagaries of the regime, its sudden collapse in the 1980s makes perfect sense. In a way, the 1980s context, with Romania’s growing international isolation, the severity of its foreign debt crisis and the brutality of Ceaușescu’s austerity policies constituted, to paraphrase Marx, an instance in which the tradition of all the past economic and political strategic decisions weighed like a nightmare on the brains of

⁴⁶ For the more general Kant reception in state socialist Europe, see the special issue of *Studies in East European Thought* on “Kant in State Socialist Europe,” edited by Christian Ferencz-Flatz and Alexandru Cistelecan.

the living—and on the penchant for any future projections. The past and the immediate present simply engulfed the future.

Thus, in the 1980s, the science of the future became more and more skeptical of the ability of prognosis and long-term planning, while industrial policy massively embraced replacing and recycling for industrial development—thus metaphorically building the future as a recycling of the past. It was as if the promoters and discussants of futurology became increasingly aware of their idealism, in a context in which the material constraints and blind necessities mattered the most, as economic production and social life were all geared to fit Ceaușescu's plans to pay off Romania's foreign debt. Technically, the main arguments for this newfound skepticism were related to the recent developments in industrial technology, mainly the "variability of substitution," where the possibilities of finding replacements to old materials became endless and unpredictable. In this sense, in 1980, I. Aurel could point to the failure of Western futurologists, such as Malthus, Forrester, Meadows, and especially W. S. Jevons—who had predicted a ten times larger coal consumption in the UK than it actually was in 1961.⁴⁷ Another significant factor in the decline of futurology was the increasing recognition that making long-term forecasts was impossible due to the constraints of five-year planning. If futurology once operated as "dialectical materialism without dialectics" in the balance between planning and forecasting, the absence of forecasting meant that dialectics was entirely absorbed by planning—rendering it no longer dialectical and thus eliminating futurology's role altogether. As Henri H. Stahl, a prominent figure in Romanian sociology, noted in a 1981 interview, navigating this tension demanded a substantial amount of Realpolitik, to the point of declaring futurology itself unnecessary. Stahl commented on research in urban growth and development, stating that long-term planning in future studies was flawed:

Some, imitating Western futurologists, have started making all kinds of long-term predictions, forgetting that we live in a country where the state plans everything. And the state says: in the next five-year plan, I have the capacity to build this many factories, invest this much in agriculture, health, education, and so on. So, what is the role of the sociologist in this case? It is to investigate and reveal the consequences, down to the last

⁴⁷ I. Aurel, "Stimularea unei alternative: înlocuitorii" [Stimulating an alternative: The replacements], *Revista Economică*, no. 52, December 26, 1980, 20.

detail. We too engage in futurology, but not speculative forecasts spanning a hundred years—rather, we plan for five-year intervals.⁴⁸

Ultimately, of course, even this modest prospect of a short, five-year, predictable future appeared to be rather too optimistic. In the closing years of the regime, the references to futurology all but disappeared, and the few remaining ones talked about it as a distant literary hobby or distraction.⁴⁹ Tellingly, the Center for future studies was disbanded already in late 1970s, after only three years of functioning, and merged with the Department for Systems Study at the University of Bucharest.⁵⁰ On the other hand, those same years witnessed the expression of such solitary efforts as Bruno Würtz's trilogy *Filosofia anticipării* (The philosophy of anticipation), which, tellingly, constructed a critique of Ernst Bloch's "principle of hope" and Adam Schaff's utopia of a postwork society, liberated from toil thanks to microelectronics and genetic engineering. In place of this rosy future, Würtz's sober anticipation predicted the irreducibility of toil and labor: "As long as there is an ecosystem, solar influx, and humans on Earth, there will be work."⁵¹ This, at least, was quite accurate in its prediction, as it highlighted the main continuity between the brutal 1980s and the differently, yet no less ruthless 1990s: the squeezing of labor and surplus value, this time in a primitive, yet all the more pristine capitalist context of layoffs, closures, privatizations, and mass emigration. In this regard, the immediate local future was to be indeed a recycling of the universal, eternal past.

48 Henri H. Stahl, "Sociologul e dator să se ocupe de problemele fundamentale ale epocii" [The sociologist has a duty to address the fundamental issues of the era], interview by Mircea Bunea, *Flacăra*, no. 48, November 26, 1981. Stahl was also a key figure in the shaping of international World Systems Analysis, directly influencing the writings of Immanuel Wallerstein. See also Ștefan Guga, *Sociologia istorică a lui Henri H. Stahl* [The historical sociology of Henri H. Stahl] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Tact, 2015); Mirela-Luminița Murgescu and Bogdan Murgescu, "Transition, Transitions: The Conceptualization of Change in Romanian Culture," in *Key Concepts of Romanian History: Alternative Approaches to Socio-Political Languages*, eds. Victor Neumann and Armin Heinen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 423; Manuela Boatcă, "Second Slavery vs. Second Serfdom: Local Labor Regimes of the Global Periphery," in *Social Theory and Regional Studies in the Global Age*, ed. Saïd Amir Arjomand (New York: State University of New York Press, 2014), 386.

49 In *Steaua*, no. 8, 1988, in a review of Saramago; in *Ateneu*, no. 3, 1989, in a short anniversary note on Asimov.

50 Ana-Maria Cătănuș, "Official and Unofficial Futures," 178.

51 Bruno Würtz, *Filosofia anticipării. Vol. 3. Sfîrșitul "rațiunii burghaze" și viitorologia marxistă* [The philosophy of anticipation: The end of "bourgeois reason" and Marxist futurology] (Timișoara: Tipografia Universității din Timișoara, 1988), 17.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS–UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2020-0707, within PNCDI III.

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8. (Un)orthodoxy of the Human Rights in Yugoslavia: Genealogy and Contestations

Una Blagojević

Abstract: This chapter looks at the contested genealogy of human rights in socialist Yugoslavia through the lens of Marxist humanism. Drawing on personalism, existentialism, and early Marxist texts, *Praxis* philosophers redefined humanism as central to socialism but eventually moved away from Marxist frameworks. The chapter shows the contrasting views on human rights and humanism in Yugoslavia. While the Party acknowledged the importance of the human being for Marxist theory and practice in its version of socialist self-management, intellectuals around the journal *Praxis* pushed for a more radical human-centered approach that placed the individual as a starting point of all political and economic matters.

Keywords: Marxist humanism; Cold War human rights discourses; *Praxis* philosophy; socialist jurisprudence; intellectual dissent

In 1982, *Praxis International* published an article by the British political and social theorist Steven Lukes, “Can a Marxist Believe in Human Rights?” Lukes asked whether it was possible for Marxists to also “... believe in human rights and remain consistent with central doctrines essential to the Marxist canon—by which I mean the ideas of Marx, Engels, and their major followers, including Lenin and Trotsky, in the Marxist tradition?”¹ He agreed that formulating the question in such a way raised further controversial questions

¹ Steven Lukes, “Can a Marxist Believe in Human Rights?,” *Praxis International* 1, no. 4 (1982): 334.

about how “the Marxist tradition” could be identified and interpreted properly, or who were the “true Marxists.”² In answering this question, albeit belatedly, this contribution looks at the (un)orthodox Marxist approach to human rights discourses in socialist Yugoslavia.

As historians Ned Richardson Little, Hella Dietz, and James Mark show, recent years have seen historiography on human rights move beyond Western-centered narratives, to include the role of Eastern European state socialism, although still marginally. A growing number of historians have started to argue that the Eastern Bloc was not simply a region that was passively absorbing the idea of human rights from the West, but a “site where human rights ideas were articulated and internationalized as well as contested.”³ That is, while the region was not simply a passive recipient of the triumph of what Michael Ignatieff called “one global human rights culture,” and as more scholars have begun complicating the picture of Western-imposed human rights norms, the scholarship on human rights still privileges “the perspective of Western diplomats and activist networks while eliding socialist human rights claims or downplaying their relevance.”⁴

In his book, *The Human Rights Dictatorship: Socialism, Global Solidarity and Revolution in East Germany*, Ned Richardson-Little shows that human rights were used rhetorically in East Germany by both state and civil society actors even before the 1970s (and the Helsinki Accords). Indeed, as he claims, the ruling Socialist Unity Party used them as a propaganda tool against West Germany and as a means to build international legitimacy, while East German citizens invoked human rights to demand freedom of movement, expression, and religion.⁵ Richardson-Little further explains that historians, instead of approaching the history of human rights solely as the universal struggle for individual freedom, have begun to rediscover “social and political movements that have challenged or contradicted liberal conceptions of rights.”⁶ The conclusion of such more recent perspectives is that while human rights “acted as the ‘lingua franca of global moral thought’ in the late twentieth century, it was a language with many—not all of which were mutually intelligible.”⁷ In looking at the case of the GDR, he argued

2 Lukes, “Can a Marxist Believe in Human Rights?,” 334.

3 Ned Richardson Little, Hella Dietz, and James Mark, “New Perspectives on Socialism and Human Rights in East Central Europe since 1945,” *East Central Europe* 46, no. 2–3 (2019): 169.

4 Richardson Little, Dietz, and Mark, “New Perspectives on Socialism and Human Rights,” 169.

5 Ned Richardson Little, *The Human Rights Dictatorship: Socialism, Global Solidarity and Revolution in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

6 Richardson Little, *The Human Rights Dictatorship*, 11.

7 Richardson Little, *The Human Rights Dictatorship*, 11.

that before the 1970s, human rights were much more closely connected with the “establishment of national power and the assertion of state sovereignty as part of Afro-Asian demands for decolonization and self-determination.”⁸ Therefore, as Michal Kopeček claims, during the Cold War the socialist countries joined “forces with third world liberation movements,” and “actively promoted a critique of racism, colonial and segregationist regimes, and the anti-social exploitation of labor by capital.”⁹

Building on this scholarship, this chapter joins the history of Marxist revisionism with the history of human rights by focusing primarily on the case of the *Praxis* circle in Yugoslavia. The motivation behind this initial research is to see the ways in which discourses of human rights themselves contain a potential dualism—being both universalist and particularist (in the case of *Praxis*, ethnonationalist). I aim to explain the existence of two competing languages of human rights that emerged in Yugoslavia in the aftermath of the Tito–Stalin split of 1948—one being a left-liberal approach (that of *Praxis*), and the other a Marxist approach (that of the League of the Communists of Yugoslavia). For the sake of clarity and in order to emphasize the influences of Western, non-Marxist ideas on the intellectuals of the *Praxis* circle, I will use the notion of “new left” as employed by philosopher Fuad Muhić (1941–92) from Sarajevo, who wrote about the distinction between the old and the new left in Yugoslavia.¹⁰ Briefly put, the new left as defined by Muhić could not be reduced to a specific current of thought. Instead, it was defined by its anti-institutional and anti-ideological positions.¹¹ By contrast, the old left maintained its faith in the “all-encompassing power of institutions” and “in the power of one and only ideology—dogmatically understood Marxism and Leninism which cannot be questioned.”¹² The *Praxis* circle questioned the “orthodoxy” of the League of the Communists of Yugoslavia. In their view, while the Party positioned itself as the main critic of Stalinism, it still grounded itself on the “orthodox” understanding of Marxist theory.

Without being reductive or pitting one discourse against the other, my aim in this chapter is to highlight that human rights discourses existed in

8 Richardson Little, *The Human Rights Dictatorship*, 29.

9 Michal Kopeček, “Human Rights between Political Identity and Historical Category: Czechoslovakia and East Central Europe in a Global Context,” *Czech Journal of Contemporary History*, 4 (2016): 9.

10 Fuad Muhić, *SKJ i kulturno stvaralaštvo* [SKJ and cultural creativity] (Belgrade: Mladost, 1975).

11 Muhić, *SKJ i kulturno stvaralaštvo*, 89.

12 Muhić, *SKJ i kulturno stvaralaštvo*, 89.

socialist Yugoslavia, and not in a monolithic form. In the first part of the chapter, I focus on the development of a human rights language in Yugoslavia alongside the Yugoslav path to socialism—self-management. In the second part, I explore the language of humanism and its genealogy rooted in Marxist revisionism. Through this, I sketch out the possible directions of research that could help us explain the swift turn of universalist and humanist-orientated philosophers towards ethnonationalist positions.

Socialist human rights in Yugoslavia

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was voted in December 1948, and among the fifty-eight voting countries, none voted against it. Eight of these countries abstained and two failed to vote or abstain.¹³ Yugoslavia was one of the countries that abstained. However, this is not to say that Yugoslavia, just like other socialist countries, did not have a concept of human rights. As Richardson Little, Dietz, and Mark explain:

Although the emerging socialist Bloc was not yet able to present a clear and distinctive socialist conception of human rights when the United Nations debated the creation of the UDHR, the terms of subsequent debates became already clear during its drafting: the socialist Bloc strived—albeit in part surely motivated by strategic considerations in the context of early Cold War—for an alternative that rejected liberal individualism and viewed self-determination, the indivisibility of political and social rights, gender and racial equality, and peace as primary focal points.¹⁴

Similarly to the notion of “democracy,” the socialist countries employed the concept of the rights of human beings by distinguishing their understanding from that of the liberal conception of human rights.

The Yugoslav Communist Party’s expulsion from Cominform did not only change the Yugoslav foreign policy—marked by its comparatively early and increasing opening to the West from the 1950s, as well as the establishment of the “Third Way” and NAM—but also greatly challenged the ideological unity of the Party. As explained in 1969 by Milovan Djilas, a high-ranking communist politician and theorist who would be expelled from the party

¹³ Out of the forty-eight countries that voted for the declaration, thirty-four were non-Western countries.

¹⁴ Richardson Little, Dietz, and Mark, “New Perspectives on Socialism and Human Rights,” 5.

in the late 1950s for criticizing Tito and the CPY: "The Yugoslav Communist Party was not only as ideologically unified as the Soviet, but faithfulness to Soviet leadership was one of the essential elements of its development and its activity. Stalin was not only the undisputed leader of genius, but he was also the incarnation of the very idea and dream of the new society."¹⁵ Djilas wished to emphasize the deep influences of the Soviet Party on the Yugoslav Party cadres—a point that would be raised by the members of the *Praxis* circle as well during as part of their criticism. The underlying claim was that "Titoism" was also a kind of "orthodoxy," a reformed version of Stalinism, or as Svetozar Stojanović argued, "Stalinist anti-Stalinism."¹⁶

In defending itself against the Soviet accusations of revisionism, the Yugoslav Party stressed that there could be only one kind of socialism, but that there were different paths to socialism. Following this logic, Yugoslavia's path to socialism was to be workers' self-managing socialism. In legitimizing the break with Soviet practice and the theory of Marxism and socialism, the Party elite argued that because economic, political, and social circumstances were different from country to country depending on its history and paths of development, a different approach was necessary—building socialism in one country. The Yugoslavs, according to Gordon Skilling, viewed communism as pluralistic; as "a house of many mansions."¹⁷ Yet, from the Soviet Union's perspective, Yugoslavia was exaggerating the particularities of the Yugoslav nation, which led to accusations of departing from the universal Marxist-Leninist way of socialist revolution. As a part of the general criticism of the previously inherited ideas and practices from the Stalinist interpretation of Marxism, the Yugoslav Communist Party established in 1948 the Institute of Social Sciences (Institut za društvene nauke) in Belgrade, where new generations of intellectuals were supposed to rethink and reformulate adopted ideas of Marxism-Leninism.

The members of this Institute actively participated in the theoretical transformations in Yugoslavia—this was particularly evident in the discussions concerning the theory of the state and rights published by the journal *Pogledi* (Views). During a meeting on the topic of the theory of state and law organized by the journal in 1953, the experts, such as Radomir Lukić (1914–99), jurist and philosopher of law, or Jože Goričar (1907–85), lawyer,

¹⁵ Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1962), 11.

¹⁶ Svetozar Stojanović, "Varieties of Stalinism in Light of the Yugoslav Case," in *Stalinism Revisited: The Establishment of Communist Regimes in East-Central Europe*, ed. Vladimir Tismaneanu (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009), 390.

¹⁷ Gordon H. Skilling, *Communism National and International: Eastern Europe after Stalin* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 8.

philosopher, and sociologist from Ljubljana and a mentor to Ljubomir Tadić (one of the members from the *Praxis* circle), among others, concluded that the legal studies and studies about the state in Yugoslavia were one-sided and undialectical. This was a general critique concerning the remnants of the Stalinist approach to socialist practice. The theory of the state and rights, according to these experts, had been “uncritically taken” from the Soviet books, and for that reason the Yugoslavs were now tasked with developing their own theory.¹⁸ As pointed out by Berislav Perić (1921–2009), a lawyer and professor of law at the University of Zagreb, from 1948 the Yugoslav theory of state and law was also experiencing a “period of liberation from the dogmatic and vulgar ideas.” As Perić highlighted, social sciences shared the same fate as the theory of state: “after the period of uncritical imitation started to express themselves independently.”¹⁹

These theoretical discussions concerning the theory of state and rights were part of the official rethinking of Yugoslav socialism, self-determination, and self-government. The official narrative relied on the idea of (national) self-determination, which meant not simply “political independence but also [...] the capacity of people to choose their own paths to economic and social development.”²⁰ This notion would play an essential role in the idea of the Non-Aligned Movement, which had its inception already in the 1950s. The NAM, in the official narrative, was also a logical outcome of Yugoslav foreign and internal policy, as it was reinforced by Tito’s speech in Ljubljana in 1945, when he stressed that “we want that everyone is a master (gospodar) in one’s own home. Why are our people seen as being malicious for their wish to be independent and why is this independence being limited or disputed? We do not want to be dependent on anyone ...”²¹ Furthermore, in his exposé given to the People’s Assembly in April 1950, Tito expressed that the main aspects of Yugoslav politics were directly shaped by the country’s self-government and independence. This included cooperation with countries that were “struggling to strengthen peace,” and

¹⁸ Berislav Perić, “O savjetovanju nastavnika teorije države i prava održanom 17. i 18. aprila u Zagrebu” [On the meeting of teachers of theory of state and law which took place on April 17–18 in Zagreb], *Pogledi*, no. 8 (1953): 586.

¹⁹ “O savjetovanju nastavnika teorije države i prava držanom 17. i 18. aprila u Zagrebu,” 586.

²⁰ Bonny Ibhawoh, “Seeking the Political Kingdom: Universal Human Rights and the Anti-Colonial Movement in Africa,” in *Human Rights, Empires, and their Ends: The New History of Human Rights and Decolonization*, eds. Roland Burke, Marco Duranti, and A. Dirk Moses (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 35.

²¹ Olivera Bogetic and Dragan Bogetic, *Nastanak i razvoj pokreta nesvrstanosti* [The appearance and development of the non-aligned movement] (Belgrade: Export-Press, 1981), 15. Cites *Tito: govor i clanci, knjiga I* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1959), 302–3.

at the same time included Yugoslavia's support of the countries fighting for their independence. As Tito highlighted, Yugoslavia would "defend in front of the United Nations the right of small and colonial peoples for freedom and independence, so that they can decide independently about their destiny."²²

When it comes to the legal aspects, the new General Law on People's Committees of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was passed on June 24, 1949. While not explicitly discussing human rights, according to politicians and lawyers the General Law on People's Committees, which was a reformulation of the 1946 law, represented an essentially new law that indicated the importance of "care about the human being" (*staranje o čoveku*). The law stipulated that "the development of the material base of a socialist country and socialist culture must proceed alongside the care about a human being, about the worker."²³ Implicitly, this meant that while economic progress and material base were crucial aspects of the development of socialism, for socialist development to be genuinely democratic, it ought to take into consideration the human being. Thus, already in the law, at least in its language, humanism or care of human beings was supposed to be applied at every phase of the building of socialism in Yugoslavia.²⁴ This can also be seen in Article 25 of the law, which ensured the application of the constitutionally granted rights of the citizens by defending their free voting rights and freedom of assembly, press, and manifestations. Next to that, the law guaranteed the equality of women with men in all fields of social-political, economic, and cultural life.²⁵

The Association of Lawyers of Yugoslavia elaborated further on this new law by also discussing the specific Yugoslav version of self-government, which was, as they highlighted, not only a better version of "socialism" in contrast to the Soviet Union, "but it was also a better version of the bourgeois conceptions of self-government."²⁶ According to the Association, bourgeois self-governing was illusory, a "self-standing realm of activity."²⁷ The Yugoslav self-governing system, by comparison, was a system of genuine democratic decision-making, which indeed granted to all Yugoslav citizens the right to decide and participate in governing, notwithstanding one's background

²² Olivera Bogetić and Dragan Bogetić, *Nastanak i razvoj pokreta nesvrstanosti*, 16.

²³ Jovan Đorđević, *Naši narodni odbori: lokalni organi državne vlasti socijalističke države* [Our people's councils: The local organs of the state power of a socialist state] (Belgrade: Udruženje pravnika Narodne Republike Srbije, 1949), 34.

²⁴ Đorđević, *Naši narodni odbori: lokalni organi državne vlasti socijalističke države*, 34.

²⁵ Đorđević, *Naši narodni odbori: lokalni organi državne vlasti socijalističke države*, 41.

²⁶ Đorđević, *Naši narodni odbori: lokalni organi državne vlasti socijalističke države*, 43.

²⁷ Đorđević, *Naši narodni odbori: lokalni organi državne vlasti socijalističke države*, 43.

and material position. The Yugoslav socialist democracy was therefore a better version of both liberal democracy and socialist democracy of the Soviet type. These democracies, while giving formal rights to people, failed to place the human being at their center.

The famous 1950 Law on self-management was proclaimed by officials as one of the most democratic laws in the history of socialist Yugoslavia.²⁸ Among other things, this law guaranteed the working class protection from “bureaucratism and particularism.”²⁹ In order to distance itself from the Soviet model, which, according to the officials, represented a “bureaucratic caste” that monopolized the socialist idea and the interpretation of Marxism, the law was supposed to be a guarantee of the protection of Yugoslav citizens against bureaucratism—which they saw as analogous to a capitalist state in which the decision-making was done only within a group of politicians. As Edvard Kardelj, a Slovenian communist and one of the prominent ideologues of self-managing socialism, explained, society in the Soviet Union was only an executor of the political and economic ideas of this specific “caste,” the Communist Party.³⁰ Yugoslav communist theoreticians like Kardelj, but also Milovan Djilas, Boris Ziherl, and others, argued that self-management had a democratizing and decentralizing effect, as the direct opposite of interwar integral Yugoslavism that ignored the cultural and local specificities of the Yugoslav peoples.³¹

Self-management had essentially a humanist character. The Yugoslav communists believed that through workers’ collectives, the process of gradual emancipation of human beings could finally begin. As Jovan Đorđević—a lawyer and a leading theoretician on self-management, who received his doctorate in political and legal sciences in Paris in 1935, and later taught at the Faculty of Law in Belgrade—explained, the main condition for a human

²⁸ “Iz govora druga Tita u Narodnoj Skupštini FNRJ povodom predloga osnovnog zakona o upravljanju državnim privrednim preduzećima i višim privrednim udruženjima od strane radnih kolektiva 26. juna 1950” [From the speech of comrade Tito in the People’s Assembly of FPRY regarding the proposal of the basic law of the governing of state companies and higher economic associations given by the workers’ councils on June 26, 1950], *Komunist*, no. 4–5 (1950): 70.

²⁹ Particularism was used by the officials to mainly refer to nationalism, chauvinism, and localism. Particularistic tendencies also referred to any groupings along specific and particular characteristics—i.e., bureaucracy could also be a particularistic tendency.

³⁰ Edvard Kardelj, “Uloga i zadaci socijalističkog saveza radnog naroda Jugoslavije u borbi za socijalizam” [The role and tasks of socialist league of the working people of Yugoslavia in their fight for socialism], *Komunist* 5, no. 2–3 (1953): 66.

³¹ Andrew Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 134.

being to be fully human was the achievement of freedom.³² In referencing Hegel, he argued that through a socialist self-managing system a human being “becomes freedom—when he is nothing else but that what he is, and he can become [freedom], as Marx had taught us, when he stops being a tool of property or government of others—that is, when he becomes the only subject of all relations, activities, and ‘rights’ in a society.”³³ We can see that non-Marxist philosophy, and specifically the Hegelian philosophy previously deemed as idealistic, was reconciled with Marxist, materialist philosophy in these early years by the party intellectuals. Đorđević’s insight was not an isolated one, as Hegelian ideas were also advocated by Marxist philosophers holding important positions, including Dušan Nedeljković (1899–1984), who served as rector at the University of Belgrade and later a professor of philosophy.

Many future Marxist revisionists around the circle of *Praxis* started their careers in the context of critical rethinking of Marxist theory and practice, which they saw as being “undialectical” in its application to Yugoslav social realities. In bringing in the ideas of German idealist philosophy, leading Yugoslav Marxists—like Nedeljković—initiated critical positions towards the classics of Marxism as well. The “crisis of Marxist philosophy” announced by philosophers in this period meant that intellectuals were supposed to offer solutions to this crisis—solutions offered by intellectuals around the *Praxis* circle went as far as to leave behind the basic tenets of Marxism and describe themselves as Marxists only insofar as being a Marxist implies a “radical critique of everything existing.” Overall, the official discourse of socialist human rights, through the above-mentioned laws, among others, resulted in Yugoslav socialism integrating a “humanist” approach, which was defined predominantly by reference to the ideas of “young” Marx and his “Hegelian” phase.

A turn to “new” humanism in the 1953 Constitution

The new Constitution of 1953 was indeed an expression of the new humanist principles in Yugoslavia. While the law of self-management put Yugoslavia officially on its own path to socialism, giving “the factories to the workers”

³² Jovan Đorđević, *Državno uređenje Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije* [State organization of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia] (Belgrade: Izdanje udruženja pravnika Jugoslavije, 1954), 10.

³³ Đorđević, *Državno uređenje Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije*, 10.

as Tito famously announced, and started the decentralization from the state towards local governments, the new Constitution specifically spelled out the rights of Yugoslav citizens and, as it will be seen, combined the language of universal human rights with Marxist terminology. The new Constitution was grounded in the teachings of the classics of Marxism, but at the same time it adopted the heritage of the American and French Revolutions, thus creating a link with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The new Constitution grounded itself on the ideas and heritage of the American, French, and October Revolutions, as well as that of the Paris Commune.³⁴ According to its authors, it represented a synthesis of all the progressive and democratic forces in human history.

Additionally, the new Constitution radically differed from the previous one (a copy of the Soviet Union's Constitution) in that it established the principle of self-government of the working people as the cornerstone of Yugoslavia's political, social, economic, and cultural life. With this principle, as Jovan Đorđević explained, etatism had been defeated in all crucial aspects of social life in Yugoslavia, such that the "entire character of the political establishment is changed."³⁵ The Constitution highlighted that "the self-governing of working people cannot be genuine as long as a human being [čovjek] and citizen [gradanin] is not feeling free and does not have civil rights."³⁶ Đorđević, who participated in the drafting of the Constitution, highlighted that the "basic human rights," which were not included in the old Constitution, were included in the new one.³⁷

What were the main humanist principles of the new Yugoslav Constitution? The equality of all people before the law, notwithstanding their nationality (*narodnost*), race, and religion, was firmly asserted. Citizens' right to vote was also guaranteed, and the secrecy of the voting system was protected.³⁸ Furthermore, Article 24 guaranteed the equality of women with men in all fields of social, economic, political, and social life. Women had the right to equal pay and received specific protection in their working

³⁴ *Novi Ustav Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije—ustavni zakon od 13.1.1953, i Ustav od 31.1.1946 (dijelovi koji nisu ukinuti), sa pogovorom dr Jovana Đorđevića* [New Constitution of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia—constitutional law from 13.1.1953 and Constitution from 31.1.1946 (parts which were not canceled), with the afterward of Dr. Jovan Đorđević] (Belgrade: Izdanie službenog lista FNRJ, 1953), 126.

³⁵ Jovan Đorđević, "Pogovor" [Afterward], in *Novi Ustav Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije*, 94.

³⁶ Đorđević, "Pogovor," 94.

³⁷ Đorđević, "Pogovor," 95.

³⁸ *Novi Ustav Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije*, 57.

environment. Article 25 guaranteed the freedom of conscience and freedom of religion and confession. The constitution guaranteed the right to personal inviolability, with Article 28 emphasizing that no citizen could be exiled from Yugoslavia. The Constitution also ensured freedom of scientific and artistic work.³⁹

The new Constitution relied on the humanist ideas drawn from the early writings of Marx. According to Đorđević: "On the basis of these new individual democratic rights begins the process which young Marx marked as 'a return of human nature to producer and citizen,' human nature which was alienated by private and state capitalist property, by the economic and political centralism and bureaucratism of the old state."⁴⁰ Individual human rights (the right to personal freedom, inviolability of the person, equality before the law, freedom of conscience and religion) were already ensured by the 1946 Constitution. But what was newly added were the personal liberties of human beings—that is, under the new Constitution one was to be considered innocent until he or she was proven guilty in front of the law. Thus, the principle of *habeas corpus* prohibited coercion against "the individuality and soul of man."⁴¹ Next to personal rights, the Constitution guaranteed the "classical rights of citizens, or the political rights (freedom of thought, expression, press and information, freedom of assembly)."⁴²

Yugoslav socialist democracy thus relied on these rights and rules which protected individual liberties and freedoms, yet Đorđević saw these as separate from humanism, which was a necessary ingredient of Yugoslav socialist democracy. As he claimed, these constitutionally guaranteed rights, or classical rights alone were not sufficient to create the conditions for the actual liberation and emancipation of human beings. What was needed, and what Yugoslav socialism with a human face provided, was precisely a new humanism. This was mainly traced to Marx's early writings on human liberation and alienation. As Đorđević explained, "Every democracy must start from humanism, or it is no more democracy."⁴³ Thus, humanism was a necessary ingredient of Yugoslav socialism and something that radically distinguished it from the Soviet type of socialism, which, in the eyes of the Party and critical intellectuals did not provide care for the man but instead placed the state apparatus as its goal. Party intellectuals like the

39 *Novi Ustav Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije*, 61.

40 Đorđević, *Državno uređenje Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije*, 31.

41 Đorđević, *Državno uređenje Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije*, 29.

42 Đorđević, *Državno uređenje Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije*, 30.

43 Đorđević, *Državno uređenje Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije*, 32.

Slovenian philosopher Boris Ziherl discussed the importance of humanism in Yugoslavia, relying primarily on the readings of the young Marx.⁴⁴ Therefore, humanism as a term and socialist humanism were introduced in Yugoslavia by the Party, in the context of CPY's critique of Stalinism. What made socialist democracy humanist in the case of Yugoslavia was that the political system was directed towards the "withering away of the state."⁴⁵ Thus, the Yugoslav, or as Dejan Jović writes, the "Kardeljist" interpretation of Marxism which saw Soviet socialism as revisionism, "linked elements of the national tradition with a strict implementation of the Marxist notion of the withering away of the state."⁴⁶ Đorđević claimed, citing Marx, that communism is nothing else but the realization of humanism, "a final realization of a human being, a society in which he or she will be him or herself, will be a human being, [and thus] the person will become the only 'right'."⁴⁷

This analysis of the new Constitution shows that Marxist humanism in the 1950s was part of the general turn of Yugoslavia's communist leadership toward self-managing socialism. In such a setting, Yugoslav intellectuals and politicians identified with the humanist perspectives of Marxism and advocated for a relatively open intellectual life.⁴⁸ Next to the above-mentioned Institute for Social Sciences, between 1951 and 1957 in Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina philosophers and sociologists reestablished or established interwar philosophical societies, which also facilitated discussions in Marxist philosophy and humanism.⁴⁹ These institutions gathered intellectuals, some of whom would become part of the *Praxis* circle. Their theoretical engagement, which was inspired by the introduction of humanist principles in socialist Yugoslavia, and the general criticism of the Marxist theory that was adopted from the Soviet Union, would gradually move from the criticism of Stalinism towards a criticism of the Yugoslav implementation of Marxism.

The period between 1950 and 1960 was marked by the "Yugoslav return to Marxism," whereby the official discourse relied on the writings of Marx,

44 Boris Ziherl, *O Humanizmu in socializmu* [On humanism and socialism] (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1965).

45 See Dejan Jović, *Yugoslavia: A State that Withered Away* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2009).

46 Jović, *Yugoslavia: A State that Withered Away*, 4.

47 Đorđević, *Državno uredenje Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije*, 32.

48 Veselin Golubović, *S Marksom protiv Staljina: jugoslovenska kritika staljinizma, 1950–1960* [With Marx against Stalin: Yugoslav critique of Stalinism, 1950–60] (Zagreb: Globus, 1985), 18.

49 Agustín Cosovschi, *Les sciences sociales face à la crise. Une histoire intellectuelle de la dissolution yougoslave (1980–1995)* [The social sciences in the face of crisis: An intellectual history of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, 1980–95] (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2022), 35.

Engels, and Lenin, but also on those Marxist philosophers ignored by Stalin, like Karl Korsch, Georg Lukács, Rosa Luxemburg, and others who were anathematized Marxists.⁵⁰ However, in their analyses of the problems of the human being, freedom, alienation, technology, and praxis, the *Praxis* philosophers furthered their humanist philosophical orientation that mainly included personalist and existentialist approaches. *Praxis* philosophers adopted Henri Lefebvre's claim:

Marxian thought is not alone sufficient, but it is indispensable for understanding the present-day world. In our view, it is the starting point for any such understanding, though its basic concepts have to be elaborated, refined, and complemented by other concepts where necessary. It is part of the modern world, an important, original, fruitful, and irreplaceable element in our present-day situation.⁵¹

While theoretically elaborating these concepts and gathering at their summer school intellectuals that criticized Western capitalist countries as well as what they saw as the bureaucratic and oppressive socialist countries, *Praxis* philosophers also developed a political critique of the LCY leadership. By 1971, they vocally demanded a "struggle of opinion." Only through dialogue and debate, according to them, could Marxist thought be rendered in terms of a critical reflection and not a positivist accumulation of knowledge.⁵² Writing in 1971, that is, after the student movements in Yugoslavia, the invasion of Prague by the Warsaw Pact armies, and in the midst of the Croatian national uprising, the Korčula School organizers addressed their readers maintaining that Marxism devoid of confrontation inevitably leads socialism into a dead-end, even more "than the failed economic reforms."⁵³ While not naming the explicit cause, it is fair to say that this concerned primarily

⁵⁰ Miloje Petrović, *Savremena jugoslovenska filozofija: filozofske teme I filozofska situacija 1945–1970* [Contemporary Yugoslav philosophy: Philosophical topics and philosophical situation 1945–70] (Subotica: Radnički univerzitet "Veljko Vlahović," 1979), 22.

⁵¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Sociology of Marx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982 [1966]), 341–42.

⁵² Enabling a "struggle of opinions" as a guarantee of progress was also put forward by Branko Horvat in his text on the Association for Yugoslav Democratic Initiative, translated by Dejan Djokić and published in his edited volume *Yugoslavism: History of a Failed Idea 1918–1992* (London: Hurst & Company, 2003). The Association was founded in 1989 by the former-Yugoslav anti-nationalist intellectual elite. Branko Horvat was the President of the Council of the UJDI (Association for Yugoslav Democratic Initiative).

⁵³ "Information about the aims and work of the Korčula Summer School," *Praxis*, no. 2 (1971): 302.

their assessment of the situation in Yugoslavia at the time—they openly claimed that the experiment of self-management was already in crisis.⁵⁴

Furthermore, in looking at the impact of personalism in Western Europe and the consequent European integration, Benedetto Zaccaria argues that the turning point of the 1968 movements implied also a debate on the “crisis of democracy,” “which paved the way for the re-emergence of ‘third-way’ ideas which echoed the tenets of personalism.”⁵⁵ The topics that occupied the Western intellectuals—as well as *Praxis* philosophers—included the prevailing sense of moral decline, youth revolt, and alienation, in the context of the so-called technological civilization.⁵⁶

Marxist revisionists’ personalist approaches to the human being (*čovjek*)

Before coming to the topic of personalism and its relevance for *Praxis* philosophers who argued for a “third way” by increasingly advocating the view of Yugoslav socialism as just reformed state socialism of the Soviet kind, it is important to recapitulate the context in which their intellectual activity started. Intellectuals in Yugoslavia welcomed the resolution adopted at the VI Congress of CPY in 1952 that expressed the need to further the democratization of schools and scientific institutions. The resolution highlighted that such democratization went hand in hand with the “progressive tendencies of economic, democratic, and social development in Yugoslavia.”⁵⁷ It also stipulated the utmost importance of the “struggle of opinion” necessary for the progress and development of sciences and culture in Yugoslavia. According to its definition in the resolution, the “struggle of opinion” was a democratic practice, which would “give equal rights to those who have diverging opinions.”⁵⁸ The plurality of ideas was thus to be tolerated

⁵⁴ See Una Blagojević, “The Cunning of Crisis and the Yugoslav Marxist Revisionists,” in *East Central European Crisis Discourses in the Twentieth Century: A Never-Ending Story?*, eds. Balázs Trencsényi, Lucija Balikić, Una Blagojević, and Isidora Grubački (New York and London: Routledge, 2024), 243–70.

⁵⁵ Benedetto Zaccaria, “Personalism and European Integration: Jacques Delors and the Legacy of the 1930s,” *Contemporary European History* 33, no. 3 (2024): 988.

⁵⁶ Zaccaria, “Personalism and European Integration,” 988.

⁵⁷ “Iz rezolucije VI Kongresa KPJ o zadacima i ulozi Saveza Komunista Jugoslavije: u pogledu škola i naučnih ustanova” [From the resolution of the VI Congress of the CPY on the task and role of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia: Concerning schools and scientific institutions], *Pogledi*, no. 2 (1953): 65.

⁵⁸ “Iz rezolucije VI Kongresa KPJ o zadacima i ulozi Saveza Komunista Jugoslavije,” 65.

and in fact, was needed for the development of Marxism and socialism in Yugoslavia. Yet, the plurality also existed within the shared framework of socialist values—that is, the starting position for everyone engaged in a dialogue was to be “a struggle for socialism and socialist democracy, for the brotherhood and unity of the peoples of Yugoslavia, for their independence, unhindered international development.”⁵⁹

However, as early as 1953, Rudi Supek (1913–93), a Croatian sociologist and philosopher and one of the main founders of the journal *Praxis* in the 1960s, criticized the insufficient implementation of the principle of “struggle of opinion.” In defending this principle, Supek argued for the full autonomy of the cultural workers in Yugoslavia, who would not be sanctioned for their opinions. In his criticism, however, it is possible to see that Supek argued not simply for the existence of a multiplicity of ideas and opinions in Yugoslav society, but for a plurality of ideological positions. Referencing one of the founders of the social-democratic movement in Russia, Georgi Plekhanov (1856–1918), Supek claimed that what was crucial for a healthy political and cultural development was that “freedom of thought is necessarily supplemented with the freedom of mutual convergence and divergence [*zbližavanje i razilaženje*.]”⁶⁰ For Plekhanov and Supek the actual freedom of thought could only be expressed in a situation in which “an idea brings people together, but also in the situation in which people are allowed to part in their way of seeing.”⁶¹ Implicitly, Supek spoke about the formation of different ideological positions, so that the freedom of thought in fact means freedom of gathering and parting for ideological reasons. In such a context in which freedom of thought essentially means freedom to argue for different ideological positions, there will be no danger of uniform thinking (*jedinstveno mišljenje*).⁶² Supek thus advocated for the right to engage in the struggle of opinion proper, which was, according to him, a struggle on the level of “ideological fronts.” While he did not express it openly, this meant involving different ideologies, not only Marxism. What came to define “struggle of opinion” in Yugoslavia, according to Supek, in fact led to “sclerosis” and “stagnation” because there were, in fact, no independent struggles regarding specific theoretical problems. Instead, he argued for a democratic elaboration and struggle of opinion, which would involve

59 “Iz rezolucije VI Kongresa KPJ o zadacima i ulozi Saveza Komunista Jugoslavije,” 65.

60 Rudi Supek, “Zašto kod nas nema borbe mišljenja?” [Why is there no struggle of opinion in Yugoslavia?], *Pogledi*, no. 12 (1953): 906.

61 Supek, “Zašto kod nas nema borbe mišljenja?,” 906.

62 Supek, “Zašto kod nas nema borbe mišljenja?,” 906.

different ideologies that do not put the unity of revolution in question. Supek maintained that the “achievement of the major social goals” in Yugoslavia ought not to be a hindrance to cultural differentiation and confrontation, which at the same time, to him, was the only way towards the achievement of these goals.⁶³ While not entirely opposing the Party, Supek’s discussion of the freedom to one’s opinion could be read as a proxy for the importance of the right to engage in a free and open dialogue.

The philosophical references of these intellectuals were eclectic—and involved also those thinkers, like Plekhanov, who were previously discredited by the official discourse of Marxism-Leninism—yet on the issue of human rights, personalism in particular served as a framework (next to existentialism) in which the meaning of humanism was defined and contested. The engagement with these philosophies occurred in the early 1950s, as a result of the comparatively early de-Stalinization in Yugoslavia, and the general turn towards Marxist humanism initiated by the Party leadership through its program, laws, and policies. In this initial period, the “official” interpretation of Marxism and the interpretation of Marxism by those intellectuals who would, in the late 1960s and 1970s, come to an open conflict with the Party leadership did not differ in terms of language: they all viewed Marxism as humanism and adhered to its basic principles, adopting a concept of alienation as an important aspect of Marxist theory. Thus, the human being (*čovjek*, translated to man) epitomized by the worker was to be at the center of Marxist and socialist analyses. However, connected to the human rights discourse, the term “humanism” was an umbrella concept and was not only given a traditional meaning of a “humanist” or “naturalistic” position, which argues that human rights are pre-institutional claims that individuals have as a way to protect themselves against various forms of oppression and domination.⁶⁴ Therefore, humanism was an interchangeable concept with human rights that was developed alongside the official discourse and then as an opposition to it.

The philosophical and theoretical disagreement on the type of humanism acceptable to Marxist interpretations can be found in the fact that the intellectuals argued for a more pronounced diversification of Marxist thought which would synthesize the insights of those theories not seen as Marxist in a classical sense. Therefore, in employing the concept of the crisis of Marxist thought, which had been announced in Yugoslavia in the 1950s, they

63 Supek, “Zašto kod nas nema borbe mišljenja?,” 906.

64 Pablo Gilabert, “Humanist and Political Perspectives on Human Rights,” *Political Theory* 39, no. 4 (2011): 439–67.

argued for the more radical inclusion of non-Marxist thinkers. Especially important for them were personalism and existentialism, which brings us back to the issue of how their development of the language of human rights was different from the official socialist human rights discourse, which was entrenched in a Marxist reading of human beings. The main point of divergence was their approach to the concept of a person or a human being, that was seen as a starting point—the development of the philosophy of man (or human being), was at the forefront of their philosophical endeavors, which resulted in distancing themselves from the materialist understandings of history and other basic principles of Marxist philosophy. In discussing the intellectual origins of human rights discourse, Samuel Moyn brings personalism close to the history of human rights, precisely because it linked “spiritualism and humanism, and not infrequently to European identity” and as such “meant a repudiation of the rival materialisms of liberalism and communism.”⁶⁵ Emmanuel Mounier, one of the main representatives of personalism, was not by chance an implied reference to these Marxist humanists—as “he proposed going back to where modernity started out in the Renaissance and trying again with a genuine humanism that freed Europe of the secular and liberal mistake of individualism.”⁶⁶ Historically, as an intellectual movement in 1930s, personalism advocated a “third way” between liberalism and socialism, but as Benedetto Zaccaria shows, it also influenced the process of European integration.⁶⁷

The intellectuals around the *Praxis* circle would also stress the achievements of European history—arguing for the need to bring the heritage of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution back into Marxist discourse, a heritage they saw as being destroyed by the Bolsheviks.⁶⁸ Increasingly, and especially following the 1968 student movements in Belgrade, in which the intellectuals themselves participated, they saw the Yugoslav Party in terms of a Bolshevik type of party that did not succeed in reforming itself according to the humanist principles claimed to uphold. Another *Praxis* intellectual, Svetozar Stojanović, also noted that the conditions under which a party operates create monolithism, discipline, hierarchy, and duty, pushing away

65 Samuel Moyn, “Personalism, Community, and the Origins of Human Rights,” in *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 88.

66 Moyn, “Personalism, Community, and the Origins of Human Rights,” 88.

67 Zaccaria, “Personalism and European Integration: Jacques Delors and the Legacy of the 1930s.”

68 Mihailo Marković, “Savremeni zapadni filozofi o Marksizmu” [Contemporary Western philosophers about Marxism], *Književne novine*, no. 52 (1953): 2.

any possibility of democratic participation, individual rights, and personal choice.⁶⁹ Tracing the diverse intellectual references of the new left(s) in his *New Lefts: The Making of a Radical Tradition*, Terence Renaud explains that the French personalist thinkers “rejected the authoritarian state that they believed Marxism required in favor of ‘decentralization, federation of enterprises, and cooperative movements on the syndicalist model.’”⁷⁰

The reception of personalism in Yugoslavia in the 1950s corresponded to the general humanist turn in Marxist interpretations. Dragan Jeremić, an assistant to Nedeljković, published an article on “Personalism or One Philosophy at the Crossroads” in 1955,⁷¹ while Zagorka Pešić-Golubović, a future *Praxis* member, discussed the personalism of Emmanuel Mounier in an article published by the main outlet of the Serbian Philosophical Society in 1960.⁷² At the newly formed Korčula Summer School in 1964, Vladimir Filipović, a philosopher from Zagreb, aimed to bring personalism and socialism closer together in his presentation. He argued that in the very theory of personalism, one can find the meaning of socialism—but not in the “idea of an abstract, aristocratic, individualistic personalism.”⁷³ He aimed to establish the very importance of personalism, emphasizing that an “individual that discovers and realizes the spiritual values, either in the field of science, or in the field of arts, or in the sphere of moral activity or philosophy, does this not only for oneself but for everyone [za sve ljudi].”⁷⁴ It was the goal of socialism, according to Filipović, to “achieve the ideas of socialist personalism, in its universal, and that would mean real, actual meaning.”⁷⁵ While the framework of his thinking was influenced by materialist and dialectical perspectives, Filipović also gave primacy to the universal approach to human beings. He argued that socialism’s goal was to remove all forms of exploitation, thus liberating humans from “necessity in

⁶⁹ Svetozar Stojanović, *Izmedju ideala i stvarnosti* [Between ideals and reality] (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1969).

⁷⁰ Terence Renauld, *New Lefts: The Making of a Radical Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), 87. Renaud also adds that the historian John Hellman has correctly labeled Mounier’s experiment a New Catholic Left.

⁷¹ Dragan Jeremić, “Personalizam ili jedna filozofija na raskrsnici” [Personalism or one philosophy at the crossroads], *Savremenik: mesečni časopis* 1, no. 6 (1955): 744–57.

⁷² Zagorka Pešić-Golubović, *Personalizam Emanuela Mouniera* [The personalism of Emmanuel Mounier] (Belgrade: Srpsko filozofsko društvo, 1960).

⁷³ Vladimir Filipović, “Socijalizam i personalizam” [Socialism and personalism], in *Smisao i perspektive socijalizma* [The meaning and perspectives of socialism], eds. Danilo Pejović and Gajo Petrović (Zagreb: Hrvatsko filozofsko društvo, 1965), 51.

⁷⁴ Filipović, “Socijalizam i personalizam,” 51–52.

⁷⁵ Filipović, “Socijalizam i personalizam,” 52.

the sphere of material goods, and creat[ing] conditions for the freedom of everyone.” For Filipović, freedom in the “sphere of humanity, that is to say, in the sphere of the spirit, is a sphere which is beyond subject and universal.”⁷⁶

Zagorka Pešić-Golubović, Filipović, and other *Praxis* philosophers took similar positions towards Marxism and created syntheses of their approach by taking some of the critical aspects of philosophers of existentialism and personalism, as well as from Critical Theory, to support their criticism of the Yugoslav political system in the mid-1960s. Their references did not include only French personalists, but also figures such as the Russian philosopher, theologian, and Christian existentialist, Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948). Referencing Berdyaev, a staunch critic of the Soviet Union, *Praxis* philosopher Mihailo Marković showed that Berdyaev nevertheless also developed a critique of Western democratic systems in which “democracy” and “rights” are nothing but a façade. Moreover, in contextualizing his ideas, Marković characterized Berdyaev mainly as a personalist—and as someone for whom “the sacred is neither the society, state, nor a nation—but a human being.”⁷⁷ Berdyaev saw Marxism and other types of materialism as reifying human beings into things. Then, according to Berdyaev, the human being is but a “necessary brick for the construction of the communist society, the human being is just a tool.”⁷⁸ Marković also challenged the personalist critique of Berdyaev as it started from “arbitrary premises, and thus, it misses a point” of Marx, as Marx never wished to entrench totalitarianism as an ideal of the future society. As Marković explained, Marx saw the relationship between individual and society in a dialectical way of mutual conditioning—which was different from “the personalist-anarchistic primacy of personality, and also different from Stalinist totalitarianism, in which a human-individual is a tiny, insignificant particle faced with one ‘absolute value’ in front of which everything falls—the bureaucratic state.”⁷⁹

The approach of *Praxis* philosophers to Marxism and the themes they were engaging are reflected in their main references—from Berdyaev, Mounier, Bertrand Russell,⁸⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, Erich Fromm, and others—in their critique of Marxism in the name “of personhood [*ličnost*],

⁷⁶ Filipović, “Socijalizam i personalizam,” 52.

⁷⁷ Marković, “Savremeni zapadni filozofi o Marksizmu,” 3.

⁷⁸ Marković, “Savremeni zapadni filozofi o Marksizmu,” 3.

⁷⁹ Marković, “Savremeni zapadni filozofi o Marksizmu,” 3.

⁸⁰ For Marković, for instance, Russell was important insofar as he was a humanist. While disagreeing on some interpretations of Marxism, *Praxis* philosophers would nevertheless use Russell’s arguments also to speak about the League of Communists of Yugoslavia as an essentially Bolshevik type of party.

in the name of human being [čovjek], human being's spiritual values, and absolute freedom.”⁸¹ While Marković in his text would question some of these intellectuals' positions for being overly individualist and subjectivist, nevertheless, he agreed with them in their defense of the human being. In their criticism of Soviet totalitarianism, existentialists and personalists put forward the question of personhood and personality, human being's existence, destiny in the world, freedom, and dignity.

Non-Marxist understanding of humanism: Concluding remarks

In her article titled “Socialism and Humanism” published in *Praxis* in 1965, Zagorka Golubović asked, “How are we today to define socialism for it to represent a more humane society in contrast to other social systems?”⁸² This question was crucial to her, due to the large-scale transformations of capitalist society, which in the 1960s did not at all resemble what Marx had described it in the nineteenth century. Posing such a question was important also because Stalinist practices “brought in a confusion in the idea of socialism, creating from a socialist system a monstrous machinery for the stifling of personal freedoms and of the individuality of human beings [čovjek] ...”⁸³

As this chapter has shown, the Yugoslav Party acknowledged the importance of the human being for Marxist theory and practice and expressed this acknowledgment in its version of socialist self-management. They combined classical human rights with economic and social ones. The philosophers from the *Praxis* circle, while inspired by this early adoption of humanist language in Yugoslavia, further expanded the theoretical primacy of a human being for socialist practice by arguing that it ought to be a starting and central point of all political and economic matters. In a way, they contributed to a reorientation of the Yugoslav socialist human rights. Instead of starting from Marxist materialist positions, they advanced an abstract human being, through their personalist readings, and the perspectives of similar philosophies that focused on anthropological and psychological aspects of the human being. As a result, they moved away from the Marxist humanism promoted by the official discourse of the Party, and away from the economic

81 Marković, “Savremeni zapadni filozofi o Marksizmu,” 2.

82 Zagorka Golubović, “Socijalizam i humanizam” [Socialism and humanism], *Praxis*, no. 1 (1965): 3.

83 Golubović, “Socijalizam i humanizam,” 3.

and political spheres. Instead, as Zagorka Golubović argued in her essay, what was needed according to the *Praxis* intellectuals was to challenge and rethink the “principles of humanist positions, upon which our version of socialist society is based.”⁸⁴ However, their critical position towards everything existing also led them to embrace an “abstractly understood freedom,” as philosopher Fuad Muhić argued.⁸⁵ As a consequence of that, *Praxis* intellectuals, while previously being left-oriented, in the 1980s would support other non-leftist platforms. In the most extreme case, some of these intellectuals adopted an ethnonationalist position, all the while using the language of human rights to justify their claims.

Given that humanism was the central concept in the official Yugoslav interpretation of Marxism-Leninism, framed by economic and political aspects that were expressed in the practice of self-management, the very content of the human rights discourses advanced by the Party was implicitly challenged by these intellectuals. Disregarding the economic and political spheres as the starting and main conditions for “true” humanism but also being characterized by anti-institutionalist and anti-ideological positions, the *Praxis* intellectuals’ development of a human rights language evolved in opposition to the official discourse of human rights, characterized by Marxist interpretations. The personalist positions allowed for a larger spectrum of interpretations of human rights which would also include ethnonationalist positions, something which was not the case with “orthodox” Marxism. Inquiries into “orthodox” and “nonorthodox” Marxist interpretations of human rights can help challenge the narratives of the “indiscriminate idolization of human rights” in the discourses of socialist transformations.⁸⁶ By this we avoid turning human rights into, as Michal Kopeček writes, “untouchable fetish ... losing all credibility in the process.”⁸⁷

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the project “Philosophy in Late Socialist Europe: Theoretical Practices in the Face of Polycrisis” funded by European Union—NextgenerationEU and Romanian Government, under National Recovery and Resilience Plan for Romania, contract no. 760044//23.05.2023, cod

⁸⁴ Golubović, “Socijalizam i humanizam,” 3.

⁸⁵ Muhić, *SKJ i kulturno stvaralaštvo*, 92.

⁸⁶ Kopeček, “Human Rights between Political Identity and Historical Category,” 7.

⁸⁷ Kopeček, “Human Rights between Political Identity and Historical Category,” 7.

PNRR-C9-I8-CF104/15.11.2022, through the Romanian Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within Component 9, Investment I8.

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PART III

Marxist Resignifications

9. The Making of a Western Socialist Scholar: J. D. Bernal in Eastern Europe

Jan Surman

Abstract: This article examines the translation and appropriation of J. D. Bernal's work in socialist Eastern Europe, focusing on Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Poland and the Soviet Union. Considering the nature of intellectual transfer, it explores how paratexts, especially prefaces and editorial framing, constructed Bernal as a paradigmatic scholar-activist whose scientific authority legitimised Marxist science and planning. Rather than examining what was transferred, the analysis centres on how transfer operated, demonstrating how Bernal's persona and texts were strategically utilised within socialist publishing cultures. Through this lens, the article highlights the interplay between translation, ideology and scholarly personas in the production of Cold War knowledge.

Keywords: knowledge translation; scholarly personae; socialist science; history of Cold War knowledge; paratexts; history of science

The 50th anniversary of John Desmond Bernal's *The Social Function of Science*, which was first published in London in 1939, was a fascinating global event. Forty-four authors from four continents and from a wide range of disciplines, including six Nobel laureates, contributed to a multilingual volume (in English, French, German, and Russian) that addressed the trajectories of Bernal's thought in different regions and the current state of the science of science, a discipline Bernal helped shape. As grandiose as the book project was, it eventually faded into obscurity, as did the events of the "Bernal year" of 1989.¹ Indeed, the same can be said for Bernal, whose prominence gradu-

¹ Helmut Steiner, *Wissenschaft für die Gesellschaft: Leben und Werk des Enzyklopädisten John Desmond Bernal in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts* [Science for society: The life

Hîncu, Adela, Stefan Baghiu, Alex Cistelecan, and Christian Ferencz-Flatz, eds. *Situated Marxism: Theoretical Practices in State Socialist Europe*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press/Central European University Press, 2026.
DOI 10.5117/9789633868737_CH09

ally declined, except among a small group of admirers and, more recently, historians specializing in the history of science.² However, until his death in 1971, Bernal was an exemplary scholar, who traveled the world on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Similarly, in his various fields, from the history of science and science studies to peace activism through his initial disciplines, crystallography and molecular biology, his ideas were highly mobile and adaptable to different cultural and political environments. This chapter examines this mobility, particularly in relation to the socialist countries of Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Poland, and the Soviet Union, which is represented here primarily by Soviet Russia.

This analysis starts from the assumption that the mobility of ideas cannot be understood without taking into account the media in which they are presented. While the study of the mediality of intellectual and scientific transfer has a long history, it is only recently that the discipline of translation studies, which focuses on this very question, has been engaged in a more intense dialogue with the history of science and the history of ideas.³ An important result of this dialogue—already noted in the history of knowledge⁴—is the impact of translation and the translator on the process of

and work of encyclopedist John Desmond in the first half of the twentieth century] (Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, 2003), 7.

2 See a still very current assessment in Helena M. Sheehan, "J. D. Bernal: Philosophy, Politics and the Science of Science," *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, no. 57 (2007): 29–39.

3 E.g., Maeve Olohan and Myriam Salama-Carr, "Translating Science," *The Translator* 17, no. 2 (2011): 179–88; Maeve Olohan, "History of Science and History of Translation: Disciplinary Commensurability?," *The Translator* 20, no. 1 (2014): 9–25; Maeve Olohan, "Translating Cultures of Science," in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Culture*, eds. Sue-Ann Harding and Ovidi Carbonell Cortés (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 501–16; Rafael Schögler, *Die Politik der Buchübersetzung: Entwicklungslinien in den Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften nach 1945* [The politics of book translation: Developments in the humanities and social sciences after 1945] (Frankfurt: Campus, 2023); Rafael Schögler, ed., *Circulation of Academic Thought: Rethinking Translation in the Academic Field* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019); Philipp Hofeneder, "Eine Kartografie der Translation: imperiale Kommunikation und ihre sozial-räumliche Verortung am Beispiel translatorischer Vorgänge im Zarenreich in der 1. Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts" [A cartography of translation: Imperial communication and its socio-spatial location on the example of translation processes in the Tsarist Empire in the first half of the nineteenth century], Habilitation Thesis, University of Graz, 2021; Irina Pohlan, *Translation in den Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften zwischen Russland und Deutschland: Akteure, Diskurse, Texte* [Translation in the humanities and social sciences between Russia and Germany: Actors, discourses, and texts] (Berlin: Frank & Timme, Verlag für wissenschaftliche Literatur, 2019); Rocío G. Sumillera, Jan Surman, and Katharina Kühn, eds., *Translation in Knowledge, Knowledge in Translation* (Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2020).

4 David N. Livingstone, "Science, Text and Space: Thoughts on the Geography of Reading," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30, no. 4 (2005): 391–401; James A. Secord,

knowledge appropriation, which shifts the agency to the “recipient,” a subject who has previously been described, if not as passive, then at least as a secondary actor in the process of knowledge movement. As a result, new important questions have thus focused on how the transfer worked rather than on what was transferred. This chapter will focus on the how, not the what, of Bernal’s translations and appropriations.

John Desmond Bernal is an excellent subject for exploring the importance of translation, because the variety of contexts in which his work has been appropriated extends well beyond the nineteen countries from which the authors of the 1989 commemorative publication came. Importantly, as a British Marxist scholar, Bernal was highly regarded in both East and West. Although he was initially revered for his Marxism, by the mid-1960s his writings were less ideologically oriented. According to historian of science and sociologist Aant Elzinga, by that time Bernal’s core Marxism and call for socio-economic revolution had even been forgotten “by Bernal himself,” and what remained was the “urging of planning, programming, money, and equipment for efficient growth”—something compatible with the political and ideological prerogatives of both sides during the Cold War.⁵

While Bernal is known as a pioneer of the science of science, and thus one of the forefathers of science planning and scientometrics, his influence is much broader, spanning several disciplines and many countries.⁶ Some of these disciplines followed Bernal’s trajectory of initial success and subsequent descent into obscurity. Arguably the most prominent amongst them was the research field of Scientific and Technological Revolution (STR). Having emerged in the socialist countries in the late 1950s, it examined the effects of the growing scientification and technologization of society, and it had much in common with work on the knowledge society.⁷ The central premise of STR was the understanding of science as a productive force that

⁵ “Knowledge in Transit,” *Isis* 95, no. 4 (2004): 654–72; Peter Burke, *What Is the History of Knowledge?* (Cambridge, UK & Malden, MA: Polity, 2016).

⁶ Aant Elzinga, “From Criticism to Evaluation,” in *The Sociology of the Sciences*, eds. Klaus Taschwer and Helga Nowotny, vol. 2 (Cheltenham Brookfield: E. Elgar, 1996), 224.

⁷ Cf., in general, Helmut Steiner, ed., *J.D. Bernal’s The Social Function of Science, 1939–1989* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989); Yong Zhao, Jian Du, and Yishan Wu, “The Impact of J. D. Bernal’s Thoughts in the Science of Science upon China: Implications for Today’s Quantitative Studies of Science,” *Quantitative Science Studies* 1, no. 3 (2020): 959–68.

⁷ E.g., Stefan Guth, “One Future Only: The Soviet Union in the Age of the Scientific-Technical Revolution,” *Journal of Modern European History* 13, no. 3 (2015): 355–76; Vítězslav Sommer, “Scientists of the World, Unite! Radovan Richta’s Theory of Scientific and Technological Revolution,” in *Science Studies during the Cold War and Beyond: Paradigms Defected*, eds. Elena Aronova and Simone Turchetti (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 177–204.

belonged not to the superstructure but to the base, with all the consequences that this entailed, including those of a political nature. While Bernal wrote about this as early as 1939, it did not enter mainstream Marxism until the late 1950s, in connection with the publication and popularization of Karl Marx's hitherto unknown text, *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* (*Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*), in which this idea was also to be found.⁸ Finally, in 1961, the Soviet leadership officially declared science a key direct productive force.⁹ This lent legitimacy to the term STR, which was used from the mid-1950s as a synonym for "scientific and technological progress" and became a key concept in social, economic, and scientific policy from the 1960s onward.¹⁰ Scholars who worked on this topic, such as Radovan Richta in Prague, whose thinking was influenced by Bernal, became socialist scientific celebrities, which made Bernal's STR idea fashionable.¹¹

In order to analyze the appropriation of Bernal in the Eastern bloc, I will focus on the paratexts that accompanied the translations of the scholar's works into four Eastern bloc languages. According to the canonical writings of Gérard Genette, paratexts are various elements that provide readers of a given text with a "guiding set of directions."¹² Genette distinguishes between peritexts—which are textual elements contained in the text (e.g., prefaces or explanatory notes)—and epitexts, which are outside the

8 Günter Kröber, *50 Jahre Bernals "Die soziale Funktion der Wissenschaft": Programm, Probleme, Perspektiven* [50 years of Bernal's *The Social Function of Science*: Program, problems, perspectives] (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1990), 5; Hubert Laitko, "Der lange Weg zum Kröber-Institut" [The long road to the Kröber Institute], in *Wissenschaftsforschung in Deutschland: Die 1970er und 1980er Jahre* [Science studies in Germany: The 1970s and 1980s], eds. Wolfgang Girnus and Klaus Meier (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag GmbH, 2018), 33–35.

9 Laitko, "Der lange Weg zum Kröber-Institut," 37; Paul R. Josephson, "Science and Ideology in the Soviet Union: The Transformation of Science into a Direct Productive Force," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 8, no. 1 (1981): 180–82.

10 Eglé Rindzevičiūtė, *The Power of Systems: How Policy Sciences Opened Up the Cold War World* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2016), 27–33; Laitko, "Der lange Weg zum Kröber-Institut," 37, 68–69.

11 On the road from Bernal to Richta, see Mikuláš Teich, "J. D. Bernal the Historian and the Scientific-Technical Revolution," *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 33, no. 2 (2008): 137–40; Jiří Hoppe and Vítězslav Sommer, "How the 'Richta Team' Was Born: The Scientific and Technological Revolution and Political Decision-Making in Czechoslovak Reform Communism," *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung / Journal of East Central European Studies* 69, no. 4 (2020): 495–518; Karel Müller, "The Social Function of Science and Social Goals for Science—Bernal's Ideas after Fifty Years," in *J.D. Bernal's The Social Function of Science, 1939–1989*, ed. Helmut Steiner (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1989), 375–91.

12 Gérard Genette, Richard Macksey, and Jane E. Lewin, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2.

text (interviews, book presentations, etc.).¹³ Paratexts are thresholds that facilitate understanding of the text and are mediated spaces between the author and the publisher. While Genette defined paratexts in terms of authorial intent, other translation scholars have gone beyond this to include, for example, book reviews or editorial comments.¹⁴ Although they are poor indicators of what translators intended because of their embeddedness in discourse conventions,¹⁵ they do bring into play a variety of actors such as editors and reviewers. Paratexts also serve various functions beyond framing and explaining the text. For example, long prefaces could also substitute for censorship and serve as means of “legalizing” publications,¹⁶ although this has to be relativized according to different text genres. In the Soviet and GDR academic book markets, introductions by academic editors played an important role in framing the text in terms of Marxism-Leninism or its currently legitimized variant. This function continued in a modified form after 1991. At that point, editors explained how the “originals” were situated in the intellectual traditions of their original contexts, thus helping readers to see how various books—and thus theories and approaches—corresponded with each other. This was necessary because in post-Soviet Russia the translations of sixty years of Western humanities took place in the space of a decade.¹⁷ Thus, within the framework of translation, paratexts help to transcend not only space, but also time.

The study of Bernal and paratexts is not new. In a recent study, Hanna Blum examined the 1986 East German translation of *The Social Function of Science* and the way in which the editor, Helmut Steiner, framed the text for both readers and censors by means of a lengthy preface. Blum argues

¹³ Genette, Macksey, and Lewin, *Paratexts*, 4–5.

¹⁴ Kathryn Batchelor, *Translation and Paratexts* (London & New York: Routledge, 2018), 28–49; Richard Pleijel and Malin Podlevskikh Carlström, “Introduction,” in *Paratexts in Translation: Nordic Perspectives*, eds. Richard Pleijel and Malin Podlevskikh Carlström (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2022), 12–14; Schögler, *Die Politik der Buchübersetzung*, 248–51.

¹⁵ Alexandra Lopes, “Under the Sign of Janus: Reflections on Authorship as Liminality in Translated Literature,” *Anglo Saxonica* 3, no. 3 (2012): 130.

¹⁶ Gaby Thomson-Wohlgemuth, *Translation under State Control: Books for Young People in the German Democratic Republic* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 116; Andrei Terian, “Legalized Translations: The Ideological Filtering of Literary Criticism Works Translated into Romanian during National-Communism (1965–1989),” in *Preklad a kultúra* 4, eds. Edita Gromova and Maria Kusa (Bratislava and Nitra: Ústav svetovej literatúry SAV & Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa, Filozofická fakulta, 2012), 240–49.

¹⁷ Irina Savelieva, “An (Imagined) Community: The Translation Project in the Social Sciences and Its Impact on the Scientific Community in Post-Soviet Russia,” in *Translation in Knowledge, Knowledge in Translation*, eds. Rocío G. Sumillera, Jan Surman, and Katharina Kühn (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2020), 262.

that Steiner presented the work as a political writing, in line with Marxist thought, which allowed it to evade censorship and also allowed him to promote the book and his own position.¹⁸ The authors of the late 1980s also noted that Steiner's activities outside the book (epitexts) had made Bernal compatible with the current scholarly landscape, specifically, through a series of articles in the German scholarly press and, probably less important for the translation itself, the edited volume introduced at the very beginning of this article.¹⁹ Steiner was clearly an experienced and savvy player in the market of socialist scholarship, and he knew how to use a variety of paratexts to advance his agenda.

Bernal was an important author for socialist publishers, and translations of his books were prepared with great care. By 1969, eight of his books had been translated into the four languages analyzed here (three into Czech, three into Russian, five into German, and six into Polish), along with two collections of articles (Russian and Polish), and two booklets with fragments of books (in Slovak) (see table 1). Above all, it was the translation of Bernal's preeminent and monumental publication *Science in History* (*SiH*; first edition published in 1954) that occupied several translators and additional editors specialized in science and the history of science. The Russian edition notes that several chapters were also read by scientists who specialized in individual disciplines.²⁰ The book was revised to include some information from the second English edition, which the editors had received from Bernal before it went to press. A special discussion of the book was organized in Moscow, with Bernal invited to attend. Few Western authors enjoyed such acclaim in the Soviet Union.

In the text that follows, I will first briefly describe Bernal's background and activities and the way in which he was involved in Eastern-bloc propaganda. I will then discuss how his work was framed by paratexts—especially peritexts—that were written by Bernal and others involved in the production of his books for the socialist and Soviet book markets. I argue that these paratexts portrayed Bernal as a new kind of scholarly persona: a scholar-activist whose excellence in science led to the recognition of the importance of excellence in Marxist science and socialist scientific

¹⁸ Hanna Blum, "Paratexts as Patronage: The Case of John Desmond Bernal and The Social Function of Science in the GDR," in *Circulation of Academic Thought: Rethinking Translation in the Academic Field*, ed. Rafael Y. Schögler (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019), 125–41.

¹⁹ Kröber, *50 Jahre Bernals "Die soziale Funktion der Wissenschaft"*, 18f8.

²⁰ J. D. Bernal, *Nauka v istorii obshchestva* [Science in the history of society], eds. Bonifatij Michajlovic Kedrov and Ivan Vasil'jevich Kuznecov, trans. Jevgenij G. Panfilov, A. M. Vjaz'mina, and N. M. Makarova (Moskow: Izdatel'stvo inostrannoj literatury, 1956), e.g., 460f1.

planning.²¹ This reinforced the idea of inevitable progress, in which the best scientists recognized Marxist values for the good of humanity.

The sage of science

John Desmond Bernal was born in 1901 in Nenagh, County Tipperary, Ireland, and grew up on his father's farm. His mother was a journalist with a degree from Stanford University. After spending his teenage years in boarding schools, Bernal attended Emmanuel College, Cambridge, on a scholarship. Around 1920, he received the nickname "sage," a sobriquet that stuck with him throughout his career.²² At Cambridge, he conducted pioneering crystallographic research on organic molecules, and in 1937 he was appointed professor at Birkbeck College and elected a fellow of the Royal Society. During this time, he was also a peace activist and ardent supporter of the use of science in the anti-fascist struggle, beginning with the Spanish Civil War. During the Second World War, he worked in various ministries and was involved in the scientific planning of war strategies. In addition, he also published works in the humanities, first with the scientific prediction book *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* (1929), and later more prominently with *The Social Function of Science* (1939), which demonstrated the importance of science for society and argued for the coordinated support of scholars and scientists. In his vision of science, which he developed more rigorously after the war, the individual research process would be replaced by collective forms of research, a concept very much in line with Soviet ideas.²³ After 1945, Bernal published his monumental *SiH* and became increasingly involved in peace activism, publishing numerous pamphlets and articles that combined the history and sociology of science, scientific activism, and Marxism. Since 1923 he had been a member of the Communist Party and an avid supporter of the Soviet Union, and he actively supported Soviet peace initiatives after

²¹ On scholarly personae, see Lorraine Daston and H. Otto Sibum, "Introduction: Scientific Personae and Their Histories," *Science in Context* 16, no. 1–2 (2003): 1–8; Herman Paul, ed., *How to Be a Historian: Scholarly Personae in Historical Studies, 1800–2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019); on changes of scholarly personae in the 1950s USSR, see Ivan Boldyrev and Till Düppe, "Programming the USSR: Leonid V. Kantorovich in Context," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 53, no. 2 (2020): 255–78.

²² For the nickname story, see Maurice Goldsmith, *Sage: A Life of J.D. Bernal* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 27.

²³ Gordon Barrett and Doubravka Olšáková, "World Federation of Scientific Workers," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Non-State Actors in East–West Relations*, eds. Péter Marton et al. (Cham: Springer, 2024), 541–54.

the Second World War.²⁴ From the early 1960s his health deteriorated, and from 1965 he was paralyzed on one side after a stroke. He retired from teaching and activism in 1966 and died five years later.

As a pro-Soviet activist, Bernal maintained close contacts with Russia and Eastern Europe. He first visited Moscow in 1931 at the invitation of Bukharin, whom he met at the epochal Second International Congress of the History of Science in London. Before the Second World War, Bernal was published in Russian (in translation, as he neither read nor spoke Russian) and repeatedly visited the country.²⁵ However, his popularity grew considerably after the war, when he became a peace activist with a pronounced pro-Soviet and anti-American stance. He participated in the World Congress of Intellectuals in Defense of Peace in Wrocław in 1948 and was one of the leaders of the World Peace Council (WPC), serving as its president in the years 1959–65. He was also punished for his stance, as he was denied a visa for a world peace conference in New York in 1949, and later removed from the Council of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, as British associations were then seeking to distance themselves from the USSR. He headed the World Federation of Scientific Workers (WFSW), a pro-Soviet scientific organization founded in 1946 to facilitate East–West cooperation and promote the peace agenda.²⁶ All this shaped the way Bernal was portrayed in the Eastern bloc media.

From newspapers to encyclopedias: Socialist epitexts

Bernal's participation in the WPC and WFSW, whose congresses and statements were reported in the Soviet and socialist daily and weekly press, gave him prominence as a peace activist. He was widely published and quoted in the major newspapers of the four countries analyzed in this article, especially during the 1950s.²⁷ He frequently visited the Eastern bloc as an activist and

²⁴ On Bernal, Marxism, and the Soviet Union, see, more recently, Helena Sheehan, "John Desmond Bernal, Marxism, and the Scientific Revolution," *Jacobin*, April 25, 2021, <https://jacobin.com/2021/04/john-desmond-jd-bernal-marxism-scientific-revolution>; Daniele Cozzoli, "John Desmond Bernal and 'Bernalism,'" in *Handbook for the Historiography of Science*, eds. Mauro L. Condé and Marlon Salomon (Cham: Springer, 2023), 101–19.

²⁵ Steiner, *Wissenschaft für die Gesellschaft*.

²⁶ Barrett and Olšáková, "World Federation of Scientific Workers."

²⁷ Based on research in the electronic catalogues of digital libraries with in-text search. The last peak of Bernal's prominence was around the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. "Prominence" here means both authorship and mentions of his name in reports.

as a scholar to promote scientific planning. As an activist, he also received the prestigious Stalin Peace Prize (1953). At the same time, his fame grew as a scientist, and he was a foreign member of several Eastern bloc academies of sciences (Poland 1954, USSR 1958, Czechoslovakia 1960, GDR 1969 [corresponding member since 1962]). Nevertheless, perhaps his most widely read work in Eastern Europe was neither that of a scholar nor of an activist, but of a journalist. This relates to the time Bernal interviewed Khrushchev in September 1954, when he visited him as a recent recipient of the Stalin Peace Prize in Moscow. This was not only the first interview of Khrushchev by a foreigner to be printed,²⁸ but it happened in the midst of the power struggle between him and Malenkov for the leadership of the Party. When it was published on December 24 in the party newspaper *Pravda*, and in most major newspapers of the USSR in the days that followed (with shorter versions appearing abroad),²⁹ it could be clearly seen as a piece in the puzzle of Khrushchev's quest for power, which he attained shortly after.³⁰ In Czechoslovakia, in addition to the frequent articles and translations of Bernal's contributions to Soviet newspapers, he also became publicly visible in connection with the 1959 Symposium on Scientific Planning.³¹

Book reviews were another way of providing guidance to readers. They were published not only in the scientific media and aimed at a scientific readership, but also in the influential and popular daily newspapers. For example, on September 12, 1953, *Pravda* ran a review by the director of the Institute of Biochemistry of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and professor of biochemistry at Moscow State University, Alexandre Oparin (1894–1980), of the recently published translation of *Science in Society*. In the lengthy review, Oparin began by describing Bernal as a "leading scientist" (*peredovoi uchenyi*, a common phrase used to refer to Bernal in Soviet literature),

28 According to Dautova Rezida Vagizovna, "N. S. Khrushchev i zarubezhnaia zhurnalistika" [N. S. Khrushchev and foreign journalism], *Vestnik Udmurtskogo Universiteta. Seriya "Istoriia i Filologiya"*, no. 1 (2011): 116–23. Khrushchev's first interviews with foreign journalists date from 1955.

29 "Beseda Tov. N. S. Khrushcheva s angliiskim uchenym i obshchestvennym deiatelem Dzhonom Bernalom" [Conversation between comrade N. S. Khrushchev and the English scientist and public figure John Bernal], *Znamia Kommunizma*, December 26, 1954. All other Russian versions available to me were exact reprints of the whole interview, while the socialist press published an abridged version, but referred to the interview frequently over the next months.

30 Andrew Brown, *J.D. Bernal: The Sage of Science* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 389–91.

31 "VÉDA + plán = cedoucnost člověka. [Mezinárodní symposium o plánování ve vědě, Praha.] Přisp. G. Kosel, J. Kožešník, P. L. Kapica, J. D. Bernal, Ivan Málek, F. C. Powell, J. de Castro" [Science + Plan = future of the mankind (International symposium on planning in science)], *Kultura* 3, no. 38 (1959): 3.

who understood that science should serve not capital but the people. He contrasted him with other scientists who continued to serve capital and US imperialism, which was another frequent topic in texts about the British scientist. Much of the review was taken up by how Bernal had demonstrated in the book that the USSR had recognized how science should be managed and had thus become a utopia for its proper development. The only criticism expressed by Oparin referred to minor inaccuracies in Bernal's description of modern science.³²

Other reviews also alternated between focusing on Bernal and focusing on his work. In Poland, Bohdan Suchodolski reviewed *SiH*. At that time he was already a prominent historian and theorist of science, poised to become a key player in the Polish humanities of the second half of the twentieth century.³³ In Czechoslovakia, the reviewer was Albina Dratvová, a philosopher who after the communist takeover in 1948 was initially excluded from the mainstream but was soon officially recognized by the Soviets as an exemplary socialist scholar, although she did not manage to retain her previous influence.³⁴ Dissatisfied with the way Dratvová had portrayed Bernal, Mikuláš Teich wrote another review. Although, with Bernal's support, Teich later became a prominent historian of science in Great Britain, at that time he was just beginning his career and was also a frequent writer in the major Czechoslovak socialist newspapers.³⁵ While emphasizing different parts of Bernal's books, all the reviewers agreed that he presented a new science and a new scientific persona required by that science. Bernal was portrayed as a brilliant scientist who had recognized that science should follow the socialist example and had thus decided to become the laureate of progress, despite the consequences he might suffer (a point particularly stressed by Dratvová, who had also recently suffered for her convictions). All three reviews described *SiH* as groundbreaking, although Dratvová pointed out that his work was more useful for Western scientists, as socialist scientists were already living according to Bernal's ideas of future science.

32 A. I. Oparin, "Za mir i peredovuiu nauku. K vykhodu v svet knigi Dzh. D. Bernala 'Nauka i obshchestvo'" [For peace and advanced science: On the publication of J. D. Bernal's "Science and society"], *Pravda*, September 12, 1953.

33 Bohdan Suchodolski, "Nauka a rozwój społeczeństwa" [Science and the development of society], *Nauka Polska* 3, no. 1 (1955): 154–67; on Suchodolski: Irena Wojnar, "Bogdan Suchodolski: 1903–92," *Prospects* 24, no. 3–4 (1994): 573–90.

34 Doubravka Olšáková, "Sisyfovska kariéra" [The Sisyphean career], *Literární Noviny* 25, no. 2 (2014): 8; Albína Dratvová, "Science in History [Review of: J.D. Bernal, *Science in History*]," *Filosofický Časopis* 5, no. 2 (1957): 284–86.

35 Mikuláš Teich, "J.D. Bernal *Science in History*," *Československý Časopis Historický* 6, no. 1 (1958): 73–78.

A reviewer indicated by the initials E. O., who was most likely the prominent historian of technology and Polish STR pioneer Eugeniusz Olszewski, noted another form of framing Bernal for socialist scholars, specifically, authoritative book discussions.³⁶ In this case, it was a joint meeting of the National Association of Historians of Natural Sciences and Technology (Nacional'noe ob'edinenie istorikov estestvennyh nauk i tekhniki) and the Institute of History of Natural Sciences and Technology (Institut istorii estestvoznanija i tekhniki) of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union on November 11 and 12, 1957, in Moscow. At this event, various Russian scholars discussed the new translation of *SiH* in the presence of Bernal. Although this happened as part of a gathering where more than 400 Soviet scholars were reportedly present, not much is known about the rest of the proceedings, so the Bernal discussion seems to have played the central role in the event.³⁷ Twenty-three shorter and three longer commentaries were subsequently published. Bernal's main critic was Arnošt/Ernst Kolman, a Czechoslovak-Russian philosopher who had been persecuted in Czechoslovakia for criticizing the state and was rehabilitated after Stalin's death. Kolman questioned several points in the book, specifically its unclear definition of science, its relation to technology and, above all, the elevation of the natural sciences to a productive force. In response, Bernal explained his ideas and also reflected on issues related to the translation of his key terms, such as science and technology. The organizers of the meeting also solicited further comments, although none were printed in future issues.

There are two important features of this meeting and Olszewski's mention of it. The first is that these kinds of discussions were not only about how the book should be read, but they were also intended to influence the future of the book, since their recommendations were to be implemented in new editions (although the first edition remained the only edition of *SiH* in Russian. There were further editions of the book in English and German). The second feature is that scholars from outside the Soviet Union were aware of these meetings and considered their recommendations important for translations into languages other than Russian. This meant that for socialist scholars such discussions served as expert guidelines on how to read and write about books—although it is not clear to what extent they were actually followed.

³⁶ E. O., “[Review of J. D. Bernal, Nauka w Dziejach, and Dż. Bernal, Nauka w Istorii Obszczestwa],” *Kwartalnik Historii Nauki i Techniki* 3, no. 1 (1958): 173–75.

³⁷ Ivan P. Bardin, “Vstupitelnoe slovo” [Introductory words], *Voprosy istorii estestvoznanija a tekhniki* 6 (1958): 73–74.

The final medium that served as an epitext was the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*—mentioned here as an example of the plethora of socialist encyclopedias that fulfilled a similar purpose in their respective localities. Its second edition, which was published in the early 1950s, included an entry on Bernal,³⁸ elements of which were repeatedly referred to in paratexts.³⁹ One such element was that Bernal had demonstrated that science as a social factor can be most beneficial to society when it serves the nation, i.e., the Soviet Union. Another was that Bernal was suppressed in the Anglo-American world because of his peace activities and his open sympathy for the Soviet Union, with the example of 1949; although Bernal suffered other consequences, 1949 was the year most often mentioned in socialist texts until his death.

Epitexts were one aspect of Bernal's framing aimed at both expert and lay audiences. They created and disseminated the persona of an intellectual whose activism and scholarly excellence were intertwined. As the final example shows, non-Soviet texts in the Eastern bloc were influenced by the way Bernal was portrayed in Moscow, perpetuating existing political power relations. The next part will examine peritexts authored by Bernal and others—in order to show how this framing played out within the covers of the translated books.

Peritexts between self-fashioning and socialist propaganda

During his lifetime, eight of Bernal's books were translated into Czech, German, Polish, and Russian (see table 1). Of these, only his magnum opus *SiH* was translated into all four languages. Bernal's acclaimed prewar publication, *The Social Function of Science* from 1939, was translated only in the aforementioned version by Steiner and therefore is not included in this analysis. The translations are representative of Bernal's oeuvre, which includes scientific, scholarly, and publicist writings. Two collections of essays, *Nauka i obshchestvo* (Science and Society) in Russian, and *Nauka w służbie pokoju* (Science in the Service of Peace) in Polish, were compiled by their

³⁸ Sergei Ivanovich Vavilov, ed., *Bol'shaja Sovetskaia Entsiklopedija: V 50 t. T.5. Berezna–Botokudy*. [The Great Soviet Encyclopedia. In 50 volumes, vol. 5, Berezna–Botokudy] (Moscow: Sovetskaja entsiklopedija, 1950), 43.

³⁹ Dratovová, "Science in History [Review of: J.D. Bernal, *Science in History*]"; Ryszard Wróblewski, "Wstęp do wydania polskiego" [Introduction to the Polish edition], in John Desmond Bernal, *Materialne podłożę życia* [The material basis of life], trans. Krystyna Zaćwilichowska (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1954), 15–16.

respective publishers and tailored specifically for local audiences. *Nauka w służbie pokoju*, for example, included two articles praising recent developments in Russian science and apologetic articles about Lenin and Stalin. Since Bernal was an authority associated with the “West” and traditionally held in high esteem in Poland, the collection was clearly intended as a statement in the ongoing process of Sovietizing Polish academia.

Even the titles of the translations are important peritexts, and here we observe remarkable differences. The East German title of *SiH, Die Wissenschaft in der Geschichte* (Science in History), suggests the non-internalist vision of science and a unified science, whereas the later West German title, *Sozialgeschichte der Wissenschaften* (Social History of the Sciences), expresses the need to study the history of sciences (in plural) with historical methods, as science does not actively influence the historical process.⁴⁰ The Russian version, on the other hand, was translated as *Nauka v istorii obshchestva* (Science in the History of Society), emphasizing society in the singular, thus evoking the unidirectional development that Bernal advocated.

Bernal was involved in the process of translating his books and was most likely consulted on title changes. As the 1957 discussion shows, he was also happy to participate in events related to the translations of his books. In *Nauka w służbie pokoju*, he was consulted about shortening his contribution from *Science for Peace and Socialism* and removing its “less up-to-date passages.”⁴¹ In the Russian version of *SiH*, some passages were edited according to the second English edition, which had not yet been published and which the publishing house had received from Bernal in manuscript form.⁴² The German and Russian versions of *World without War* (*WwW*) contain newly written texts by Bernal, as do the German, Polish,

⁴⁰ Hubert Laitko, “The Social Function of Science,’ ‘Science in History’ und die Folgen. John Desmond Bernals Beitrag zum Brückenschlag zwischen Wissenschaftsgeschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft” [“The Social Function of Science,” “Science in History,” and the consequences: John Desmond Bernal’s contribution to bridging the gap between the history of science and historical studies], in *Wissenschaftsgeschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft: Aspekte einer Problematischen Beziehung: Wolfgang Küttler zum 65. Geburtstag* [History of science and general history: Aspects of a problematic relationship; for the 65th birthday of Wolfgang Küttler], eds. Stefan Jordan and Peter T. Walther (Waltrop: Spenner, 2002), 119.

⁴¹ “Posłowie” [Afterword], in John Desmond Bernal, *Nauka w służbie pokoju: zbiór artykułów i przemówień* [Science in the service of peace: collection of articles and talks] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1953), 117.

⁴² J. D. Bernal, “Predislovie k russkomu izdaniu” [Foreword to the Russian edition], in J. D. Bernal, *Nauka v istorii obshchestva* [Science in the history of society], ed. Bonifatij Michajlovič Kedrov and Ivan Vasil’jevich Kuznecov, trans. Jevgenij G. Panfilov, A. M. Vjaz’mina, and N. M. Makarova (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo inostrannoj literatury, 1956), 4.

and Russian versions of *SiH*. The additions to *WwW* were updates of the text, including supplementary information on the progress of China and the Iranian revolution (the latter only in the Russian version). Bernal used these texts as forewords to new editions of his books in English, with his comments on how the world had changed since he wrote the original texts and how it affected his main theses. The foreword to the Russian version of *WwW* also noted in a rather propagandistic tone that Russian science was working towards demilitarization and not towards the creation of weapons of mass destruction as Anglo-American science was. Bernal also emphasized the role of Khrushchev's policy of demilitarization, which in his view was "already having an effect."⁴³

The prefaces to *SiH* were similarly strategically used to highlight each nation's contribution to the history of science, which, as Bernal repeatedly noted, the text sometimes did not do justice to. In the Polish version, he explicitly mentioned the medieval astronomer Copernicus and the chemist Maria Skłodowska-Curie. He also expressed his hope that Poland had finally "left behind the sad times of oppression and darkness, and that its future now depends on the energy and intelligence of its citizens"; while the greatest task of the present was to "profoundly revise the relationship between man and nature, and to finally break with beliefs and attitudes that stem from the class division of society, the genius of the Polish nation will surely make a contribution to these fields, a contribution that, as in the past, will become the pride not only of Poland, but of the whole world."⁴⁴ Similarly, the German version emphasized the fact that Marx and Engels were Germans and that "today new efforts are being made to revive German science. But the best of the old traditions can only be incorporated if the shackles of war preparation and private profit are thrown off."⁴⁵ It is worth noting that the German versions of Bernal's prefaces were the least ideologized in all cases. The GDR translations were often prepared with the idea that they might be sold in the FRG, as it would provide an important source of hard currency for the state, and it is therefore possible that this might

43 J. D. Bernal, "Predislovie k russkomu izdaniu" [Foreword to the Russian edition], in J. D. Bernal, *Mir bez vojny* [World without war], trans. I. Z. Romanov and V. M. Francov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo inostrannoj literatury, 1960), 5.

44 John Desmond Bernal, "Przedmowa do wydania polskiego" [Foreword to the Polish edition], in *Nauka w dziejach* [Science in history], trans. Stefan Garczyński et al. (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1957), 5.

45 J. D. Bernal, "Vorwort zur 1. deutschen Ausgabe [1960]" [Foreword to the first German edition (1960)], in *Die Wissenschaft in der Geschichte* [Science in history], trans. Ludwig Boll, 3rd ed. (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1967), xxiv.

have influenced the writing of the prefaces.⁴⁶ Most Bernal translations were published in both German states with the same prefaces, including *SiH*. In the Russian version, published in 1956, Bernal not only emphasized the importance of Russian science, but also declared himself indebted to it. A former Stalin eulogist, in this version Bernal was far more reserved about Stalin's rule than he had once been. He wrote that while this period and "Stalin's methods of government" could not be omitted from history, as this would "stain the whole historical map of the development of the present world," new information was emerging that might change his portrayal of it in the book.⁴⁷ In general, this preface was also very optimistic about the future of civilization compared to those written a few years later, which expressed more concern.

The few prefaces that were not written by Bernal were mostly short texts by either the editors or the publisher. In two cases, additional scholars were invited to contribute, namely, the Polish biologist Ryszard Wróblewski, who wrote a long foreword to the Polish version of *The Physical Basis of Life*, and the prominent Soviet philosopher Mikhail Iovchuk, who wrote a foreword to the Russian collection of articles entitled *Science and Society*.⁴⁸ The Czech version of *SiH* also included short passages written by Russian biochemist Alexandre Oparin as inserted snippets. In general, the Czech translations contained the fewest paratexts, and even in Bernal's most prominent book, *SiH*, there were no supplementary prefaces.

The prefaces and afterwords were very similar in content and included, in varying proportions, biographical information about Bernal and his position in the scientific community, a description of his ideas about ideal science and its relation to society, and brief information about the contents of the book, or rather, how the contents of the book should be properly interpreted. While notes on politics, activism, and Bernal's vision of science were written with an affective vocabulary, those on science were more measured and descriptive. The final preface included in this analysis—the 1969 Russian

⁴⁶ See Julia Frohn, "Der DDR-Buchhandel und der Blick nach drüben—eine asymmetrisch verflochtene Parallelgeschichte" [The GDR book trade and the view to the other side: An asymmetrically interwoven parallel history], in *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* [History of the German book trade in the 19th and 20th centuries], vol. DDR, Part 1 *Institutionen, Verlage* [Institutions, publishers], ed. Christoph Links, Siegfried Lokatis, and Klaus G. Saur (Göttingen: De Gruyter, 2022), 150–52.

⁴⁷ Bernal, "Predislovie k russkomu izdaniu," 1956, 3.

⁴⁸ Wróblewski, "Wstęp do wydania polskiego" [Introduction to the Polish edition]; Mikhail Iovchuk, "Predislovie" [Preface], in J. D. Bernal, *Nauka i obshchestvo: sbornik statej i vystuplenij: perevod s anglijskogo* [Science and society: A collection of articles and speeches; translated from English] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo inostrannoj literatury, 1953), iii–xiii.

version of *The Origin of Life*—was the least political. This was probably due to the nature of the topic and the target audience—specialists and lay people interested in biology—and the fact that Bernal was less prominent as an activist in the late 1960s. The only reminder of his activist past was a brief mention of his Peace Prize, which by that time was named after Lenin, not Stalin.

In the prefaces and afterwords, two strategies were employed to frame Bernal as a scientist. The first was to present him as an eminent scientist whose excellence had led him to recognize the shortcomings of Western science and the preeminence of socialist science. This followed a developmental line in which his arrival at an activist, pro-Soviet scientific position was, in a sense, the crowning achievement of Bernal's life. The second more frequent narrative was to highlight Bernal's pro-peace activism, with only brief remarks on his scholarly achievements. He was included in the pantheon of scholar-activists along with Joliot-Curie, Guo Moruo, W. E. B. Du Bois, "and other heroic and noble defenders of world/peace."⁴⁹ In both narratives, peace activism was described as the defining part of Bernal's life. This was largely consistent with the way Bernal was portrayed in epitexts, which, as shown above, focused on this very aspect. Both narratives also frequently referred to his place of birth and his experiences of conflicts between farm owners and farm workers, although they conveniently omitted Bernal's wealthy family background and privileged education. While there was no discernible change over time, by the 1960s there were occasional comments that Bernal was not completely accurate in his scientific descriptions. This was due not only to Bernal's enormous productivity in many fields, and thus occasional inaccuracies, but also to the delays inherent in translation, as evidenced by various footnotes explaining the development of science that had taken place between the writing of the original text and the translation.⁵⁰

This very activism-centered narrative continued with the next most frequent element, the description of how Bernal had portrayed science in his own narrative, and what kind of science it opposed. Here, Iovchuk's preface to *Science and Society* is very characteristic. According to the Russian philosopher, Bernal had demonstrated in his work how important science was for society, especially for socialist society, and how science could best serve society.

49 Iovchuk, "Predislovie," iii. In Russian *mir* can mean both peace and the world.

50 Especially in the German version of *SiH*, J. D. Bernal, *Die Wissenschaft in der Geschichte* [Science in history], trans. Ludwig Boll, 2nd edition (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1957); occasional footnotes have been added in further editions.

The contemporary reactionary bourgeoisie is leading science in the capitalist world into a dead end (*tupik*). In the countries of the imperialist, anti-democratic world, science serves the purpose of ensuring maximum profit for monopoly capital, the criminal anti-people (*antinarodni*) policy of preparation for a new war, the arms race, and the militarization and fascistization of all aspects of social life.⁵¹

In connection with the idea of progressive scientists becoming pro-Soviet, according to Iovchuk, Bernal's articles revealed the decline of science in the capitalist countries and its flourishing in the USSR.

The works of Bernal are a clear example of the fact that more and more top representatives of contemporary science are becoming convinced of the truth and irresistibility of Marxism and are decisively breaking with their former convictions and adopting the position of the only scientific world view—Marxism-Leninism.⁵²

In non-Russian paratexts, the notion that Bernal had demonstrated that it was the science of the Soviets that should be followed was clearly expressed, but not without reservations. As a threshold figure between Western and Soviet science, Bernal himself was used as an example in the Polish collection of articles, *Science in the Service of Peace* (1953). Echoing the traditional Western orientation of Polish science, the preface emphasized that while Poland was increasingly cooperating with the USSR and other socialist states, it was also open to knowledge from the “progressive traditions of other countries.”⁵³

Both versions of the paratexts distinguished the science that Bernal professed and practiced from the science that he was surrounded by in British universities. They claimed that Anglo-Saxon science was increasingly serving American corporations and working to prepare for the new war—often in the same sentence. Bernal's science was oriented towards society and the people, responding to their needs and interests. This was not only because of the way in which he described his ideal of science, usually as something belonging to the future, but also, or above all, because of the way he practiced it. As both a crystallographer and a humanist, he was also the embodiment of a new unified science that united the natural

⁵¹ Iovchuk, “Predislovie,” iii.

⁵² Iovchuk, “Predislovie,” xii.

⁵³ “Posłowie,” 117.

and social sciences, transcending “all the artificial barriers erected by reactionary scholars.”⁵⁴

References to certain personalities in the paratexts also had a clearly political function. Unsurprisingly, Marx, Engels, and Lenin were the most prominent. Stalin was mentioned until (and including in) 1953, and Bernal’s eulogy to Stalin appeared in the Polish collection *Science in the Service of Peace*. While Bernal was constructed as a thinker who built on the ideas of the three aforementioned classics, Stalin was cited as a leader under whose guidance science had advanced in a way that Bernal had envisioned. The second category of scholars who were mentioned were Bernal’s opponents—most notably Norman Pirie, who criticized Bernal’s biochemical ideas and in 1957 co-founded the non-aligned organization the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which was a counter organization to the pro-Soviet World Peace Council closely associated with Bernal. This served to contrast Bernal with bourgeois scholars, although they were mostly not named, and went hand in hand with the positive portrayal of Bernal’s fellow activists—mostly unnamed and described as “progressive” or “Marxist” intellectuals.

In the period under study, Bernal and his editors and translators incorporated the scholar, his biography, and the science he preached into the ideals of the socialist states. In this way, Bernal’s books became part of the effort to build a new socialist science and were therefore much more significant than they were for readers in the West, where, as mentioned in the introduction, his post-Stalin books were more part of an effort to establish the science of science and various modes of scientific planning. In the Eastern bloc, however, they remained political, although the degree of their politicization gradually diminished over time.

Conclusions

In the languages studied in this chapter, paratexts were crucial modes of framing Bernal and his thought for potential readers. Only in Czechoslovakia did his books appear with minimal or no paratexts.⁵⁵ Bernal, along with his editors and translators, were aware of the use of paratexts and shaped them to construct a specific scholarly persona combining scholarship and

54 “Od redakcji” [From the editors], in John Desmond Bernal, *Marx a nauka* [Marx and science], trans. by Halina Suwała (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1953), 4.

55 Similarly, few paratexts can be found in translations of Bernal’s works into Hungarian and Romanian, although they are not analyzed in this chapter.

activism. If we agree with Iovchuk that Bernal was “well known to the Soviet people,”⁵⁶ or with the editors of *Nauka w stuzbie pokoju* that he was “well known and close to Polish society,”⁵⁷ then it was always a very specific Bernal, more a peace activist than a scholar, and an atypical “Westerner,” who, because of the difficulties he (supposedly) experienced as an Irishman in England, realized that only socialist science could serve the well-being of global society. This is clearly not the Bernal invented by his biographers, but a possible version of how Bernal saw himself.

Through his writings and actions, Bernal legitimized this socialist version of his persona in many ways. Some have been included here as epitexts, since they clearly informed the editorial vision in peritexts. Thus, even if we abandon the focus on authorial intent that Genette saw as crucial for paratexts, here it trickles down to texts that Bernal did not write, although it cannot be said with certainty that they were written without consulting him.

Importantly, Bernal used peritexts not only to fashion an image of himself and his texts, but also to discuss how they were embedded in their time. By discussing how global developments had confirmed, refuted, or changed his theses, he made his writing rather vulnerable and, at the same time, refuted the ideal of the omniscient scholar. Just as the science he described was always in relation to the societies of the time—and not the result of the ideas of geniuses who stood apart from everyday struggles—so his own historiographical work could not stand apart from current events. Peritexts were a way of grounding the otherwise elusive character of books and making the reader consider the temporal and specific characteristics of the text.

Paratexts also allow us to observe the power relations in the Eastern bloc book market. More resources were devoted to the preparation of the Russian edition of *SiH* than the other translations, and although Bernal was clearly in contact with the editors of other editions, and sometimes modified the text for translation, he was more involved in the process of translating the Russian version, for example, by sending the editors the yet-to-be-published second version. From the way the books were reported in the reviews, it was clear that the Russian translations were very important and were read by scholars throughout socialist Eastern Europe.

Finally, the examination of paratexts reveals that the translations were not exclusively bound to the national languages. Although Bernal was translated into Polish and Russian concurrently, his texts—and persona—were

56 Iovchuk, “Predislovie,” iii.

57 “Posłowie.”

translated into socialist language and ideology that transcended the boundaries of the individual national languages. This gives rise to new questions relating to the functioning of the Eastern bloc as an ideological space and the extent to which ideological commonalities interacted with national divergences. Eastern and East Central Europe is an intriguing case study for such investigations, as the socialist space was preceded by analogous multilingual imperial spaces in which imperial culture coexisted with nascent national ones.

Table 1 J. D. Bernal's books in Czech, German, Polish, Slovak, and Russian ↗
translation. (For German, the first edition in the GDR is taken into account.)

Title of the original (year of publication of the 1st edition) * publications without one-to-one original	Language of translation (Title of translation)	Year of translation
<i>The Social Function of Science</i> (1939)	German (<i>Die Soziale Funktion der Wissenschaft</i>)	1986
<i>The Physical Basis of Life</i> (1949)	Czech (<i>Fyzikální podstata života</i>)	1955
	Polish (<i>Materialne podłożę życia</i>)	1954
<i>Science for Peace and Socialism</i> (1949)	Czech (<i>Věda v boji za mír a socialismus</i>)	1950
	German (<i>Die Wissenschaft im Kampf um Frieden und Sozialismus</i>)	1953
	Polish (<i>Fragments in Nauka w służbie pokoju</i> [Science in the Service of Peace])	1953
<i>The Freedom of Necessity</i> (1949)	Polish (<i>Wybór artykułów</i>)—abridged	1951
<i>Marx and Science</i> (1952)	Polish (<i>Marks a nauka</i>)	1953
	German (<i>Marx und die Wissenschaft</i>)	1953
<i>Science and Society</i> *	Russian (<i>Nauka i obshchestvo: Statii i rechi</i>)—collection of articles	1953
<i>Science in the Service of Peace</i> *	Polish (<i>Nauka w służbie pokoju: zbiór artykułów i przemówień</i>)—collection of articles	1953
<i>Science in History</i> (1954)	Russian (<i>Nauka v istorii obshchestva</i>)	1956
	Polish (<i>Nauka w dziejach</i>)	1957
	Czech (<i>Věda v dějinách</i>)	1960
	German (East): <i>Die Wissenschaft in der Geschichte</i> (West): <i>Sozialgeschichte der Wissenschaften</i>	(East) 1961, (West) 1978
<i>Biological Sciences in 20th Century</i> *	Slovak (<i>Biologické vedy v 20. storočí</i>)—fragments of <i>SiH</i>	1960
<i>Physical Sciences in the 20th Century</i> *	Slovak (<i>Fyzikálne vedy v dvadsiatom storočí</i>)—fragments of <i>SiH</i>	1960

Title of the original (year of publication of the 1st edition) * publications without one-to-one original	Language of translation (Title of translation)	Year of translation
<i>World without War</i> (1958)	Polish (<i>Świat bez wojny</i>)	1960
	German (<i>Welt ohne Krieg</i>)	1960
	Russian (<i>Mir bez vojny</i>)	1960
<i>A Prospect of Peace</i> (1960)	German (<i>Perspektiven des Weltfriedens</i>)	1961
<i>Origin of Life</i> (1967)	Russian (<i>Vozniknovenie zhizni</i>)	1969
	Polish (<i>Materialne podłożę życia</i>)	

Acknowledgement

This chapter was prepared within the framework of the Czech Science Foundation project “Czechoslovak-Polish Scholarly Entanglements in the Cold War: Between High Politics and Individual Strategies” (GA ČR 21-45624L). I am indebted to Lukas Becht and Hanna Blum, as well as members of the above-mentioned project, for their comments. I thank also Andrei Ilin, Anastasia Fedotova, and Ella Rossman for their help in obtaining the Russian-language materials used in this article. Finally, I am indebted to Annina Gagyiova and Adela Híncu for information about Bernal in Hungarian and Romanian, respectively.

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10. Althusser Goes East: Theoretical (Anti) Humanism, the Lukács School, and the Specter of Stalinism

Ádám Takács

Abstract: The chapter examines the reception of Louis Althusser's ideas in Eastern Europe during the 1960s and 1970s, with particular emphasis on the philosophical and ideological confrontation between Althusser's theoretical anti-humanism and the prevailing humanist orientation of Eastern European Marxism at the time. It pays particular attention to the position of the Lukács school in Hungary, which, amid the ongoing ideological debate between reformist and orthodox Marxist trends, responded with marked sensitivity to the ideological import of Althusserian ideas. With this context in mind, the chapter also explores how Althusser's ideas were often interpreted as a continuation or variant of Stalinism and consider the ideological conditions that ultimately hindered the possibility of meaningful philosophical engagement with his work in the region.

Keywords: Hungarian Marxism; Budapest School; anti-humanism; Stalinist philosophy; knowledge circulation; intellectual exchange

In the flow of recurring canonizations and expulsions, of wild confrontations and unexpected alliances, of individual secessions and cooperative practices that make up the history of Marxism in the twentieth century, the relationship between Eastern and Western European Marxists displays a particularly twisted dynamic. It is not simply that in contrast to the solidified Soviet type of socialism, which became an overarching political and ideological system after 1948, a more freewheeling and experimental revolutionary intellectual work was taking place in the West. To varying degrees and

on different scales, the legacies and general strategies of the Communist Parties imposed similar constraints on the attitudes of many committed Marxists on both sides. In a similar vein, in working out the critical assets of the Marxist tradition, Eastern Bloc reformist thinkers did not fall behind, indeed at times even outstripped their Western counterparts. Therefore, it was rather the ever-present and locally prevailing societal conditions as well as the ideological reactions they triggered that forced the Left in the East and in the West to embrace different theoretical agendas and engage in debate with their comrades on the other side.¹ Figuratively speaking, the differences rooted in the ideological landscape recurrently undermined the desired homogeneity of the ideological zeitgeist. Despite the paternalistic internationalism of the Soviet Union promoting the revolutionary program of proletarian dictatorship and endorsed by many European communists until the 1970s, this situation never failed to challenge the synergy of the two geopolitically divided Marxist camps.

The intellectual climate for rapprochement and cooperation was not a particularly unfavorable one. Indeed, under the spell of the era of de-Stalinization and peaceful coexistence, “dialogue” emerged as a Marxist buzzword, and the incentives and forums for its realization grew sharply from the mid-1960s.² From the summer schools in Korčula in Yugoslavia to philosophical meetings in Italy and France, from regular academic exchanges between East and West to the launch of theoretical journals such as the Yugoslav *Praxis*, the Italian *Aut-Aut* or the American *Telos*, Eastern and Western Marxism interacted on a myriad of platforms. Unsurprisingly, the common language of this dialogical attitude was provided by the topics of Marxist “humanism.” The recourse to this philosophical dialect was prompted not only by the interpretative foregrounding of Marx’s early anthropological writings, or by the ideological shift in existentialism—especially in that of Sartre—to the left during the 1960s, but also, and most notably, by the new social and political issues raised by the construction of an advanced socialist system in the Soviet bloc. In the Eastern European region, de-Stalinization implied above all the “re-humanization” of socialism. It was on this basis that at an international meeting on the questions on socialist

¹ Leszek Kołakowski pointed out these discrepancies between Eastern and Western Left already in the late 1950s. See Leszek Kołakowski, “The Concept of the Left,” in Kołakowski, *Marxism and Beyond: On Historical Understanding and Individual Responsibility*, trans. Jane Zielonko Pee (London: Paladin, 1971), 88–104.

² On this question, see Christian Ferencz-Flatz and Ádám Takács, “From Polemics to Dialogue: Redrawing Genre Boundaries in Eastern European State Socialist Philosophy,” *Studies in East European Thought* (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-025-09717-x>.

humanism organized in 1965 by Erich Fromm, the Czech Ivan Sviták could declare bluntly that “any concept that would exclude from communism the humanistic basis of the young Marx, be it in favor of the mechanics of economic forces, the class struggle, the interest of the ruling class, or the power of the contemporary state, is an antihumanist and anti-Marxist concept, regardless of the phraseology used.”³ This thesis was also echoed, among others, by the French communist Roger Garaudy, who, at about the same time stated with similar vehemence that “the new potentialities created today by the material and intellectual progress of socialism” help to expose one of the most important components of Marxism, “a total and militant humanism.”⁴

However, the emergence of a dialogical spirit and the humanization of Marxism were far from eliminating all ideological divergences, in fact, they even reinforced some of them. In a paper published in 1968, György Márkus, a committed advocate of humanistic Marxism from Georg Lukács’s circle,⁵ systematically took stock of the points of rupture that the current development of Marxism had made apparent.⁶ According to him, the efforts to return to the original letter and spirit of Marx’s thinking revealed and at the same time made untenable the extensive “Diamat” approach to Marxism inherited from the Stalinist period. The latter was committed to anchoring historical and social development on the model of natural laws and to the highly voluntaristic treatment of philosophical issues. In contrast, contemporary Marxism showed a proliferation of different trends—scientific, epistemological, anthropological, and ontological—which were not only philosophically but often “ideologically” opposed.⁷ Márkus welcomed this development as a sign of intellectual maturity and argued that only an intense and genuine debate between these different trends could properly serve the cause of Marxism and its ultimate political goals. To be sure, this sort of pluralist approach was not exclusive to Lukács’s Budapest School. Leszek Kołakowski argued earlier for example that “to speak of a ‘compact and uniform Marxist camp,’ in contradistinction to the rest of the world,

3 Ivan Sviták, “The Sources of Socialist Humanism,” in *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium*, ed. Erich Fromm (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1965), 21.

4 Roger Garaudy, *Karl Marx: The Evolution of His Thought*, trans. Nan Apotheker (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 13.

5 See his paper, “Marxist Humanism,” *Science & Society* 30, no. 3 (1966), 275–87.

6 György Márkus, “Debates and Trends in Marxist Philosophy (1968),” in *Communism and Eastern Europe*, eds. F. Silnitsky, L. Silnitsky, and K. Reyman (New York: Karz Publishers, 1979), 104–32.

7 Márkus, “Debates and Trends,” 121.

defining by its very existence a basic line of division in science, or to proclaim shibboleths about the ‘purity of Marxist doctrine’—all this makes no sense in the intellectual conception of Marxism.”⁸ Similar views surfaced in the writings of the Czech Milan Prucha in this period,⁹ and the very existence of the journal *Praxis* was a case in point for the strongly pluralist commitments of Eastern European Marxism.

It is in this intellectual landscape that Louis Althusser’s ideas emerged during the 1960s in a rather conspicuous way. This development was influenced by a number of factors, but there is hardly any doubt that at its heart was the at once philosophically ambitious and ideologically subversive move by which Althusser radically challenged the main thrusts of the emerging progressive humanist Marxist status quo. More specifically, he challenged the idea that (1) the main principles and values of Marxist thought should be based on a kind of “humanism,” i.e., on motives related to the notion of human essence and agency; (2) that the interpretation of the current state of capitalism and socialism and their struggles must be extrapolated from prevailing empirically given social facts and trends; and (3) that the dominant tendencies in social development should be defined in terms of human practices and the historical alternatives generated by them. Althusser sought to replace all these theses with a “scientifically” grounded approach that turned to an innovative re-reading of Marx’s late texts, especially *Capital*, for addressing the topical questions concerning the current status and revolutionary tasks of Marxist theory. Based on the analysis of the underlying constellations of modes of production and class struggle as well as the ideological implications that can be drawn from them, this project also aimed at a kind of semantic renewal of Marxist theoretical discourse that was as seductive for some as it was alienating for others. The “symptomatic reading” proposed by Althusser in his *Reading Capital* not only reinterpreted Marxian categories in a rather capricious way but also sought to establish a link between the latter and the conceptual toolkit of the various “epistemological” and “structuralist” theses deemed innovative in the period. Lastly, Althusser sought to make all these theoretical innovations part of the ideological agenda of the French Communist Party, that is, to promote his theory not only as dialectical materialist philosophy but also as a politically driven Marxist practical theory.

8 Leszek Kołakowski, “Permanent vs. Transitory Aspects of Marxism,” in Kołakowski, *Marxism and Beyond*, 202.

9 Milan Prucha, “Der Marxismus und die Richtungen in der Philosophie,” *Praxis* (IE), no. 2 (1967): 228–35.

Unsurprisingly, Althusser's theoretical innovations triggered various reactions among the Eastern European Left. While they were seen as a challenge to most Marxist theoreticians with a humanist inclination, the orthodox circles tended to welcome them as a lever to strengthen their own positions. This was particularly noticeable in the philosophical context of the Lukács school in Hungary. In any case, it is fair to say that the kind of theoretical openness and "spirit of dialogue" that progressive Marxism sought to promote mostly failed in this case. Instead, a closer examination of Althusser's reception in Eastern Europe shows that these ideas actually reinvigorated and deepened the confrontation between critical and orthodox Marxist positions, which often acquired strong ideological and political overtones. In this chapter, I examine this intellectual landscape, focusing in particular on the Hungarian case to explore the theoretical, ideological, and political factors that produced this stark episode of disconnection, if not open antagonism, between Eastern and Western Marxist traditions.

Althusser's reception in Eastern Europe: An overview

The intellectual whirlwind generated by Althusser's interventions from the mid-1960s rapidly made its impact felt not only on domestic French or Western Marxist discourses, but also on those unfolding along the East–West axis. However, it is important to stress that the "theoretical revolution" heralded by the texts collected in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* seemed to be in line with the positions of the progressive Eastern left at least on two fronts. On the one hand, Althusser's often emphatically voiced opinion that the viability of Marxism depended largely on its capacity to overcome the detrimental ideological legacy of the Stalinist era was surely in accord with the views of many reformist Eastern European Marxist thinkers. From this perspective, the preface to *For Marx*, entitled "Today" and written in a programmatic tone, could be read as a manifesto for re-arming Marxism with critical resources after the period of dogmatism.¹⁰ On the other hand, there may also have been sympathy for Althusser's insistence on the fact that this renewal was first and foremost a philosophical matter, which required the intervention of ideology and politics only from the background. The demand for reinstating philosophy to its rightful place sounded like the right call in post-Stalinist Eastern Europe. Althusser spared no radicalism in embarking on this path when he claimed that "the end of dogmatism puts us face to

¹⁰ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London & New York: Verso, 2004), 20–39.

face with this reality: that Marxist philosophy, founded by Marx in the very act of founding his theory of history, has still largely to be constituted.”¹¹ A formulation like this could even have been perceived as a battle cry long awaited by the progressive Marxist theorists of the Eastern Bloc. In fact, Althusser’s confrontation with the rather unadventurous leadership of the French Communist Party on these issues, and the FCP Central Committee’s somewhat critical statement on his views in March 1966, was probably one of the first significant cases that made his name more widely known among intellectuals in Eastern Europe.¹²

While Althusser’s reception in Eastern Europe in the 1960s and 1970s did not reach the level of the rapidly proliferating Italian, British, or German commentaries and critical reactions, it was far from negligible. In terms of philosophical interest and ideological involvement, his ideas provoked an uneven but intense echo. Althusser himself expressed a varying but always open interest in the promotion of his work in the Eastern bloc, especially when it involved translations. At the same time, his interest was also marked by significant reservations about the emerging humanist inclinations of the Marxist trends in that region. It is a telling fact that the formation of his critical views on the young Marx owed some inspiration to Eastern European Marxism. His essay “On the Young Marx,” originally written in 1960 and republished in *For Marx*, was a response to studies written by a group of Soviet, East German, and Polish Marxists.¹³ In this text, the Polish Marxist philosopher Adam Schaff is mentioned as a champion of a position that should be rejected on the grounds of its teleological historical vision and its implicit Hegelianism.¹⁴ The two thinkers actually met and discussed in person, which further inspired Althusser to write his highly polemical essay “Marxism and Humanism.”¹⁵

¹¹ Althusser, *For Marx*, 30–31.

¹² In Hungary, for example, the complete material of this debate was published with unusual rapidity: *Ideológiáról, kultúráról. A Francia Kommunista Párt vitájának anyaga* [On ideology, culture: Material from the debate of the French Communist Party] (Budapest: Kossuth, 1966). On this debate and Althusser’s position within the French Communist Party in the 1960s, see G. M. Goshgarian, “Introduction,” in Louis Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings* (1966–67), ed. François Matheron, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London; New York: Verso, 2003), xii–lxii.

¹³ See Althusser, *For Marx*, 51.

¹⁴ Althusser, *For Marx*, 54, 59.

¹⁵ Louis Althusser, “The Humanist Controversy (1967),” in Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy*, 222–25. Schaff himself mentions this critical exchange in his “revisionist” book on the Marxist conception of man, *Marxism and the Human Individual* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 258f22. On Schaff’s role in Polish Marxism and the controversy surrounding his book, see Józef Tischner,

Given its theoretical anti-humanist tendency, Althusser's thinking received a strong critical reaction not only in Poland, but also elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Perhaps the most radical in putting his ideas into critical perspective in this period was Leszek Kołakowski, who, in an essay in 1971, denounced virtually every major thesis of his thinking. Kołakowski went as far as to accuse Althusser's reading of Marx of simultaneously promulgating "common sense banalities," "vague and ambiguous explanations," and "striking historical inexactitudes."¹⁶ Ultimately, his critical approach is framed by the devastating avowal that "in spite of the verbal claims to 'scientificity,'" the whole construction of theoretical anti-humanism "is a gratuitous ideological project intended to preserve a certain traditional model of Marxism typical of Stalinist Communism."¹⁷ Adam Schaff, for his part, was also no stranger to expressing a similar radical criticism of Althusser's views. The longest chapter of his book dealing with the problems of structuralism and Marxism was devoted to confronting almost all of Althusser's important theoretical claims—such as his "anti-humanism," "anti-empiricism," and "anti-historicism"—with Marx's texts and his own views, in order to show their "mystifying" and "obscure" character.¹⁸ Schaff's final conclusion was that Althusser could be considered neither a Marxist nor a structuralist, because his thinking was devoid of any sufficient rigor and his philosophy as a whole was based on pure verbal trickery. Regardless of these criticisms, the 1970s saw a boom in the discussions of Althusser's ideas in Poland, with the abridged version of *Reading Capital* also appearing in translation.¹⁹ These interpretations and debates usually revolved around the problems of structuralism and the questions of its correct Marxist framing. Yet, labeling Althusser's position as "neodogmatist" remained a recurrent trope in the Polish reception.²⁰

In Romania, modeled on the principles of an earlier Hungarian edition, a compilation of Althusser's texts was published in 1970 under the title *Reading Marx*, which essentially brought together essays from *For Marx*,

Marxism and Christianity: The Quarrel and the Dialogue in Poland, trans. M. B. Zaleski and B. Fiore (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1987), 41–43.

¹⁶ Leszek Kołakowski, "Althusser's Marx," *The Socialist Register* 8 (1971): 112.

¹⁷ Kołakowski, "Althusser's Marx," 112.

¹⁸ Adam Schaff, *Structuralism and Marxism* (Oxford; New York: Pergamon Press, 1975), 29–145.

¹⁹ See Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar, *Czytanie "Kapitalu"*, trans. Wiktor Dłuski (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1975). An article by Lech Witkowski gives an overview of the Polish reception of Althusser, "Louis Althusser—Próba nowego Odzyskania Marks'a" [Attempting a new reading of Marx], *Acta Universitas Nicolai Copernici, Filozofia* 10 (1982): 75–86.

²⁰ See Janusz Kuczyński, "Man, Technological Praxis, and Nature in the Perspective of Dialectical Synthesis," *Dialectics and Humanism*, no. 3–4 (1976): 166f2.

some abridged chapters of *Reading Capital*, and other shorter texts like “Lenin and Philosophy.”²¹ This edition—to which Althusser himself was initially to write a preface²²—was generously foreworded by Ion Aluaș, an eminent authority on contemporary French sociology. The fact of this publication foreshadowed the contours of a basically positive and attentive reception, which was also reflected in the fact that Althusser was one of the most referenced Western philosophers, after Heidegger and Sartre, in the leading Romanian philosophical journals of the period.²³ Although Marxist humanism and its increasingly tolerant confrontation with existentialism was a prominent tendency in Romanian philosophy,²⁴ it did not necessarily prevent the emergence of a more or less fertile dialogue with Althusser’s ideas. The Transylvanian scholar and editor Ernő Gáll, for example, stressed that the ideological openness of humanism must include a balanced critical treatment of Marxist positions such as Althusser’s, which sought its principles in the fabric of society and history beyond human agency.²⁵ A selection of Althusser’s texts published in Hungarian in 1977 by the Bucharest-based publishing house Kriterion also sought to stimulate this dialogue by publishing some of the author’s more self-critical writings.²⁶

In contrast to the diverse and rather open-minded Romanian reception, the philosophical discourse in Czechoslovakia adopted an almost total silence with respect to the position of theoretical anti-humanism on Marxist soil. There is no doubt that the political climate of the “socialism with a human face,” and in particular the distinctly existentially driven philosophical orientation of Karel Kosík, which created a strong resonance in France, left little room for a discussion of Althusser’s ideas.²⁷ It is characteristic

²¹ Louis Althusser, *Citindu-l pe Marx* [Reading Marx], trans. Adina Pavel and Pavel Apostol (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1970).

²² A draft of this preface can be found in Althusser’s unpublished material, “Au lecteur roumain” [To the Romanian reader], Archives IMEC, Fonds Althusser, 20ALT/45/39.

²³ Alexandru Cistelecan, “Humanist Redemption and Afterlife: The Frankfurt School in Communist Romania,” *Historical Materialism* 30, no. 2 (2022): 57f3.

²⁴ See Adela Hîncu and Stefan Baghiu, “Existentialism, Existentialists, and Marxism: From Critique to Integration within the Philosophical Establishment in Socialist Romania,” *Studies in East European Thought* 75 (2022): 455–77.

²⁵ Ernő Gáll, *A humanizmus viszontagságai* [The vicissitudes of humanism] (Bucharest: Politikai Könyvkiadó, 1972), 31–32. Romanian edition: *Idealul prometeic* [The Promethean ideal] (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1970).

²⁶ See Louis Althusser, *Olvassuk Marxot* [Reading Marx] (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1977).

²⁷ For a confrontation of the ideas of Kosík and Althusser, see Petr Kužel, “The World of the Pseudoconcrete, Ideology and the Theory of the Subject (Kosík and Althusser),” in eds. Joseph Grim Feinberg, Ivan Landa, Jan Mervart, *Karel Kosík and the Dialectics of the Concrete* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2022), 262–80.

that in his 1968 book, which endeavored to address comprehensively the epistemological and ontological problems of Marx's thought, and within this the role of *Capital*, Jindřich Zelený agreed with Althusser only to the extent that he assumed a shift in the intellectual development of the young Marx.²⁸ But, unlike the French philosopher, Zelený saw precisely the emergence of a "new form of humanism" as Marx's true scientific achievement.²⁹ That said, the fact remains that Czechoslovakia was the only country in the Eastern Bloc where no significant translations or commentaries of Althusser's texts were published during the 1960s–70s.

The challenges surrounding Althusser's reception in Eastern Europe were grippingly framed by the Soviet reactions, which were not without a certain degree of genuine interest, nor free from glaring contradictions. The fact of this interest itself is remarkable, as Soviet philosophy in the 1960s and 1970s seldom made any ideological concessions to Western Marxist currents.³⁰ In this case, however, questions concerning the philosophical status of humanism and the applicability of the structuralist method sparked the attention of Soviet philosophers, though it is also true that some of Althusser's theses, especially the one concerning the strict separation of science and ideology, also provoked sharp criticism. But somewhat surprisingly, as Thomas Nemeth notes in his comprehensive study of the Soviet reception of Althusser, the critics never went as far as to suggest that his ideas harbored Stalinist, let alone anti-Marxist views.³¹ In most cases, as Nemeth points out, the Soviet side found the theses of the French philosopher worthy of further discussion or debate.

The background to this essentially tolerant treatment can be explained by Althusser's coming into closer contact with the upper echelons of official Soviet philosophy. In 1967, he received an invitation by the editor-in-chief of *Voprosy filosofii* (Problems of philosophy), the hard-liner party philosopher M. B. Mitin, to publish an article "based on his own research" in the journal's forthcoming special issue devoted to celebrating the fiftieth

²⁸ Jindřich Zelený, *Die Wissenschaftslogik bei Marx und "Das Kapital"*, trans. from Czech by Peter Bollhagen (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1968). English translation: Jindřich Zelený, *The Logic of Marx*, trans. and edited by Terell Carver (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).

²⁹ Zelený, *The Logic of Marx*, 185.

³⁰ See Thomas Blakeley's comments on the strongly dismissive Soviet treatment of Lukács and the Frankfurt School: Thomas Blakeley, "Lukács and the Frankfurt School in the Soviet Union," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 31, no. 1 (1986): 47–51.

³¹ Thomas Nemeth, "Althusser's Anti-Humanism and Soviet Philosophy," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 21, no. 4 (1980): 381.

anniversary of the October Revolution.³² The reasons for this invitation are unclear, but it is not inconceivable that the Soviet philosophical authorities sought to use Althusser's views to counterbalance the already prevailing humanist Marxist tendencies and perhaps also Evald Ilyenkov's emerging anti-positivist Hegelian approach.³³ Althusser completed his study entitled "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy" with unprecedented speed and zeal, in which he introduced a number of theoretical innovations.³⁴ One of his most important contributions was that, in contrast to his earlier views of philosophy as a theoretical overhaul of scientific and ideological discourses, he defined Marxist philosophy in this text as an "intrinsically political" form of thinking.³⁵ Nevertheless, and perhaps precisely for this reason, the paper never made it into print in the USSR. The Soviet side may have deemed the writing too complex philosophically and too radical ideologically, so they backed out of its publication. Few things capture the complexity of East-West ideological dynamics more clearly than the fact that, despite being rejected by the Soviet Union, an abridged version of this paper was included in the Hungarian and Romanian socialist editions of Althusser's works, where it remained publicly accessible long before its eventual publication in French and English in the 2000s.

Althusser and the Lukács school: From philosophical debates to ideological warfare

There happened to be two trends on the European stage in the 1960s which emphatically asserted the necessity of "returning" to Marx's original ideas as the most vital guarantee for the theoretical renewal of Marxism. Lukács's Budapest School on the one hand, and Althusser and his disciples on the other, both sought to transcend the crisis of Marxism they detected through a radical re-reading of the Marxist corpus.³⁶ No doubt, both schools were

³² On the circumstances and failure of this invitation, see the summary of G. M. Goshgarian in Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy*, 155–59.

³³ Ilyenkov's *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital*, trans. Sergei Kuzyakov (Moscow: Progress Publisher, 1982), appeared in 1960 which, in opposition to the Soviet diamat line, interpreted the philosophical innovations of Marx's *Capital* in the context and contrast of Hegel's logic.

³⁴ See Louis Althusser, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy (1967)," in Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy*, 159–202.

³⁵ Althusser, "The Historical Task," 209.

³⁶ As Alvin W. Gouldner noted in his account of the crisis ridden development of twentieth-century Marxism, "It is particularly notable that Marxists' growing awareness of their internal

convinced that Marx's original ideas could be used not only to overcome left-wing dogmatism but also to address the important questions raised in twentieth-century bourgeois philosophy, such as phenomenology, existentialism, and neo-positivism. A further common trait is that both Lukács and Althusser frequently found themselves at odds with the leadership of their own Communist parties over the ideological implications of their theoretical undertakings.³⁷ However, while the Budapest school, pursuing a predominantly anthropological reading, sought to highlight the importance of Marx's work in terms of the ontological and ethical characteristics of individual and social practices as deployed in historical development,³⁸ Althusser and his circle's epistemological orientation favored an interpretation that aimed at extracting, but not simply deducing, from the structural specificities of modes of production the explanation of the current situation of social classes and the resulting multifarious historical processes manifested in science, ideology, and philosophy. In this way, these two "renaissances" of Marxism occurring at the same time staged two completely opposite realms of philosophical claims and theoretical positions.

In his writings from the 1960s, Althusser made it perfectly clear on which grounds and why he criticized a humanist reading of Marx. For instance, in his text intended originally for *Voprosi Filosofii* and published for the first time in Hungarian in 1968, he reproached the position of what he called "theoretical humanism" for erroneously substituting the ideological notions of "man, alienation, the disalienation of man, the emancipation of man, man's reappropriation of his species-being, 'the whole man,'" for a truly scientific Marxist vocabulary, which is supposed to operate with concepts such as "mode of production, infrastructure (productive forces and relations of production), superstructure (juridico-political and ideological), social class, class."³⁹ A further consequence of the erroneous humanist

crisis is not confined to one particular theoretical tendency; an essentially similar judgement is rendered not only by Scientific Marxists such as Althusser but by their ancient adversaries, Critical Marxists such as George Lukács." Gouldner, *The Two Marxism: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory* (London: MacMillan, 1980), 27.

37 This parallel between the careers of Althusser and Lukács was emphasized by Étienne Balibar in his preface for the Hungarian edition of the *Reading Capital*. E. Balibar, "Lire *lire le Capital*" [Reading *Reading the Capital*], *Revue Période*, https://revueperiode.net/lire-lire-le-capital/#footnote_7_6491.

38 The best summary of this position can be found in György Márkus's book *Marxism and Anthropology*, first published in Hungarian in 1966. English translation: *Marxism and Anthropology: The Concept of "Human Essence" in the Philosophy of Marx*, trans. E. de Laczay and G. Márkus (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1978); 2nd edition (Sidney: Modern Verlag, 2014).

39 Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy*, 186.

approach consisted, according to Althusser, in misrepresenting the concepts of “social relation” and “social practice” as “human” or “intersubjective” relations, as well as interpreting Marx’s idea of man within the framework of a “moral ideology.”⁴⁰ Overall, he labels this position as the “moral-idealistic interpretation of the theoretical foundations of Marxist doctrine.”⁴¹ It is certainly not a coincidence that this denounced conceptual framework covers a large part of the philosophical ideas elaborated by the Budapest School. Humanist Marxists operated within a largely common theoretical matrix, as they sought to reinterpret Marxism as a philosophy of praxis. There is no indication that Althusser was fully familiar with the conceptual fabric of the late Lukács’s anthropologically driven aesthetic and ontological approach. But it is well documented that it was precisely in moving away from Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness* and his interpretation of Hegel in the late 1940s that he developed his understanding of Marx as the theoretician who brought about a radical philosophical break in the history of modern thought.⁴²

This denunciatory attitude is echoed in *For Marx* when Althusser describes Lukács’s thinking as a philosophy “tainted by a guilty Hegelianism,” or when he identifies a “religious’ conception of the proletariat” in *History and Class Consciousness*.⁴³ This latter reproach is also articulated in *Reading the Capital*, in which the Hegelian Marxism of Lukács and Korsch is portrayed as “left-wing’ humanism” which “designated the proletariat as the site and missionary of the human essence.”⁴⁴ Similar motifs dominate a manuscript of Althusser from 1966–67, which, in presenting the historical legacy of the mistakenly adopted “leftism” in Marxism, invokes the concept of “class consciousness” with reference to Lukács, adding that it amounts to “a variety of the philosophical idealist ideology of the primacy of consciousness over being.”⁴⁵ This leads him to condemn in one fell swoop the “voluntarism of ‘leftism’” as a trend that makes “appeal to the ‘conscience,’ appeal to the ‘will,’

40 Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy*, 187.

41 Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy*, 186.

42 It is worth noting that Althusser was present at Lukács’s Hegel lecture in Paris in 1949. On Lukács’s significant role in his early philosophical development, see Jean-Baptiste Vuillerod, *La naissance de l’anti-hégélianisme. Louis Althusser et Michel Foucault, lecteurs de Hegel* [The birth of anti-Hegelianism: Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault, readers of Hegel] (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2022), 119–46.

43 Althusser, *For Marx*, 114f29, 222fi.

44 Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar, et al., *Reading the Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach (London; New York: Verso, 2015), 219.

45 Louis Althusser, *Socialisme idéologique et socialisme scientifique et autres écrits* [Ideological socialism and scientific socialism and other writings] (Paris: PUF, 2022), 99.

hence to ‘freedom,’ so many notions of moral and philosophical ideology summed up in the humanism of proletarian ‘leftism.’”⁴⁶

Without a doubt, this characterization is much closer to the spirit of a generally conceived or imagined Marxist humanism than to the letter of the early Lukács’s Marxism. The notion of “human will,” for example, is not at all part of the conceptual realm adopted in *History and Class Consciousness*. The concept of “freedom” is employed by Lukács but precisely to signal the fact that it “cannot represent a value in itself (any more than socialization). Freedom must serve the rule of the proletariat, not the other way round.”⁴⁷ Surely, this is neither the first nor the last time that Althusser has tended to amalgamate into a single position the spectrum of different humanist Marxists, from Lukács and Gramsci to Sartre and Goldmann.⁴⁸ Quite possibly because he has an ideological goal in mind, namely to demonstrate that the advocacy of humanism is merely a recurring case of falling victim to a fatal sociopolitical conjuncture which prevents Marxism from developing its true revolutionary force. The latter, according to Althusser, is only possible if Marxist thinking is informed by the actual state of the class struggle, rather than by the zeitgeist of changing political situations, and is guided by the scientific rigor of materialist philosophical knowledge.

For the members of the Lukács school, Althusser’s frontal critique of humanism certainly did not go unnoticed, although their silence was often more telling than their public declarations. György Márkus, for example, refrained from taking Althusser’s position into account in his comprehensive 1967 article on contemporary Marxist trends and debates, and merely mentioned in a footnote that for the “well-known French Marxist” philosophy was “essentially a theory of knowledge (epistemology) developing in a given historical setting; to this, he attempts to apply his own ‘structuralist’ ideas.”⁴⁹ Yet, it is quite telling that in the opening page of his book *Marxism and Anthropology*, Márkus put forward the Budapest School’s position in a way that borders on a counter-attack against Althusser’s ideas. As he argued:

46 Althusser, *Socialisme idéologique*, 99.

47 Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1967), 240.

48 Gregory Elliot even speaks of a kind of “travesty” in connection with Althusser’s procedure of typologizing Western Marxism. Gregory Elliot, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 30.

49 Márkus, “Debates and Trends,” 120. Interestingly, Márkus also notes that “ideas, similar to Althusser’s, have also emerged in the mid-fifties in the Soviet Union (e.g., E. V. Ilyenkov).”

If we disconnect the historical materialism of Marx from his philosophical, or if one likes: “anthropological,” conception of human essence (following Georg Lukács we may perhaps call this latter problem-complex in its totality the Marxian social ontology), then we become entangled in unsolvable antinomies which are constantly reproduced in the history of Marx-criticism and Marxist philosophy itself.⁵⁰

The antinomies in question are articulated between the voluntaristic and deterministic readings of Marx. The message is clear and unambiguous, and in the English edition of his book, Márkus states explicitly that he includes among such antinomic solutions the “theoretical ‘anti-humanism’ of L. Althusser and his school,” which he deems “only one of the latest (and undoubtedly one of the most consequent) variants of a very common trend of Marxist thought.”⁵¹ This philosophical detachment clearly underpinned Márkus’s later more radical critical reflections on Althusser’s ideas. According to his view, voiced in his “revisionist” analysis of Marx’s political economy, the assumption of a *coupure épistémologique* taking place between the young and the mature Marx is simply the repetition of an obsolete and orthodox interpretative strategy, insofar as it merely “differs from the usual interpretations of textbook Marxism in the ostentatious circuitousness of presentation, its core idea is the same, and the pseudo-scientific terminological game covers the same methodological arbitrariness.”⁵²

The scattered critical comments of Márkus on Althusser were not organized into a coherent narrative by Lukács or other members of the Budapest School. The fact that Lukács’s late ontology makes no mention of Althusser is not surprising, since he virtually refrains from reflecting on any of the positions of contemporary Marxism. Nonetheless, his social ontological orientation does not leave the Althusserian position unchallenged. First and foremost because it stresses that historical processes can only be understood as “reproductive complexes” that are bound to take the notions of “structure” or “structural change” as their subordinate.⁵³ Under the label of “historical materialism,” Lukács envisages a model of a complex historical genesis in which layers and discontinuities in socio-economic development are

⁵⁰ Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, 1.

⁵¹ Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, 2.

⁵² György Márkus, János Kis, and György Bence, *How Is Critical Economic Theory Possible?*, trans. John Grumley and János Kis (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2022), 238. The book was originally written in 1971–72.

⁵³ Georg Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being. Vol. 2. Marx’s Basic Ontological Principles*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Merlin Press, 1978), 86.

regarded as elements of a larger ontological basis for social development. History has a structure only insofar as it always refers to socially formed complexes of human “positing” (*Setzung*), i.e., collective intentions and actions.⁵⁴ The latter are integrated by the modes of production, organized by class struggle, but never eliminated. To this extent, for Lukács—in contrast to Althusser’s structuralist vision—social and economic dynamics are inconceivable without the involvement of human agency.

Similar considerations are also discussed in the writings of the members of the Budapest School. Their critical treatment of the concept of “structure” can be interpreted as implicitly engaging in a debate with some of the key problems of Althusser’s thought and its anti-humanist design. Ágnes Heller, for example, in her influential work on the central importance of the concept of “needs” in Marx, underlines that this concept is inherently structural and correlated with social relations. But she is also eager to point out that such a structure in no way constitutes an autonomous edifice “suspended above” the members of a class or of a society.⁵⁵ The concept of need as a historically given social complex exists only by virtue of individually given experiences manifested in the acts of knowing and feeling. The social structure is thus, for Heller, who here closely follows Lukács, a product of human agency. From here, she directly goes on to argue that according to Marx, especially in the *Grundrisse*, the recognition by the worker of the alienated character of the capitalist labor process shows, in fact, a “radical need” which reveals both the phenomenon of “alienation” and the human possibility of transcending it.⁵⁶ It is no wonder that from this strong anthropological perspective, as Heller explicitly states in her essay on the Marxist value theory, Althusser’s epistemological position could only be understood as a variant of “scientific sectarianism.”⁵⁷

In addition to these unmistakable philosophical divergences, the Budapest School’s lack of more serious engagement with Althusser’s views seems to have been motivated also by direct ideological reasons. This issue became apparent in the context of the Hungarian edition of the French philosopher’s writings. Indeed, the Hungarian compilation of Althusser’s texts, released in October 1968 in 4,000 copies by the Communist Party’s official publishing

⁵⁴ Lukács unravels this ontological structure from the analysis of the phenomenon of “labor” as a paradigmatic model for social practice. See Georg Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being*. Vol. 3. *Labour*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Merlin Press, 1978), 46–98.

⁵⁵ Ágnes Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx* (London: Allison & Busby, 1976), 71.

⁵⁶ Heller, *The Theory of Need*, 94–95.

⁵⁷ Ágnes Heller, “Towards a Marxist Theory of Value,” trans. Andrew Arato, *Kineses* special issue (1972): 16.

house under the title *Marx—The Revolution of Theory*, represents a unique scholarly achievement.⁵⁸ Not only because, as Althusser explains in his preface written for the Hungarian edition, the author was given free rein to select his own texts, but also because he decided to rework a number of them to better suit the purposes of this edition. Thus, some chapters from *For Marx* were published together with reedited and shortened parts of the chapter “The Object of Capital” from *Reading Capital*, along with the unpublished essay “The Revolutionary Task of Marxist Philosophy” and other shorter texts.⁵⁹ However, this edition is also memorable for the fact that its translator was Ernő Gerő, who served as the second man in the Stalinist communist political leadership all along the 1950s, and who became the first secretary of the Hungarian Workers’ Party between July 1955 and October 1956. Gerő escaped for the Soviet Union in the early days of the 1956 Revolution, only to return in 1960, after which, stripped of all Party functions and mandates, he worked as a freelance Russian and French translator. His work on Althusser’s text was flawless, but his rather unexpected appointment for this job was a poignant indication of the political interests backing the publication of this volume.

Along with Gerő, the editor of the Hungarian Althusser compilation, János Sipos also had an illuminating ideological background. Sipos, as the party secretary of the Institute of Philosophy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, was known for his stubborn hostility to Lukács and his disciples. In an article published in 1968, he vehemently condemned the “subjectivist” interpretations of Marxism, using ideological arguments similar to Althusser’s, making special reference to the intellectual activities of the Budapest School, and urged openly for implementing “political” measures against these trends.⁶⁰ His direct academic supervisor and ideological ally was József Szigeti, who, as a former student of Lukács, had been waging a systematic struggle against his former mentor since the 1950s to bolster a “scientific” dialectical materialist line in Marxist philosophy. It is quite indicative that following the crushing of the Prague Spring, the Hungarian

⁵⁸ Louis Althusser, *Marx—Az elmélet forradalma* [Marx—The revolution of theory], trans. Ernő Gerő (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1968). The release by Kossuth Publishing House indicated that the Communist Party had given its direct blessing to this publication, and that the text had entered the ideologically relevant canon, even if it may have contained controversial theses.

⁵⁹ Some of these reworked texts will form the basis of the Romanian edition of Althusser’s writings a few years later. See footnote 18.

⁶⁰ János Sipos, “A marxista társadalomelmélet magyarországi fejlődésének néhány aktuális problémájáról és a ‘marxizálás’ hatásáról” [On some current problems of the development of Marxist social theory in Hungary and the impact of “Marxization”], *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle*, no. 5 (1968): 907–17.

party leadership decided to take administrative measures against the domestic “revisionist” Marxist tendencies, which targeted primarily the “Lukácsists.” Yet the platform of Szigeti and Sipos was also condemned for its dogmatic “left-wing deviation.” Sipos had been in correspondence with Althusser since 1963,⁶¹ and it appears that he was the catalyst behind the Hungarian edition of his writings. For sure, he conceived this publication as a form of ideological ammunition for his politically driven witch-hunt against Lukács and his school.

There is nothing to suggest that Althusser was fully aware of the political use of his writings in Hungary.⁶² However, it is equally true that he seemed to have done little to avoid such ideological exploitation. Although his foreword for the Hungarian edition discussed at length the importance of eliminating the political and theoretical distortions that originated in the period of the “cult of personality,” he also emphasized that carrying out this task could not justify, nor excuse, the upsurge of any kind of ideological partisanship. In his view, the interpretation of Marxism as humanism fell precisely into the category of unacceptable biases, since, as he put it, “any ‘humanist,’ ‘moral,’ and therefore ‘idealist’ interpretation of Marxism, whatever may be the objective reasons justifying it as a historical reaction or hope, is always in its essence the result of the infusion of petty-bourgeois ideology into Marxism.”⁶³ In opposition to these aspirations, Althusser proposed taking into view the interests of the “masses,” the facts of the “class struggle” and the principles of “materialism,” which revealed his complete insensitivity or ignorance of the prevailing social and political realities in Eastern Europe. In the given situation, however, resorting to such phraseology had connotations that were almost invariably a sop to hardline party philosophers like Sipos and Szigeti. On this premise, they were able to put Althusser on the ideological battle line alongside them. Thus, the Hungarian situation seems to justify Adam Schaff’s critical remark that Althusser’s anti-humanist position could even be considered “politically dangerous” insofar as it “might be used as an argument by those who defend the ideological and political heritage of dogmatism.”⁶⁴ In any case, this

61 Part of this correspondence can be found in IMEC Fonds Althusser, 20ALT/77/36; 20ALT/77/37.

62 According to the personal communication of Étienne Balibar, it is unlikely that Althusser had accurate information about the philosophical and ideological debates and circumstances in Hungary at the time.

63 Althusser, *Marx—Az elmélet forradalma*, 14. The original text of the foreword for the Hungarian edition entitled “Aux lecteurs hongrois” [To the Hungarian readers] can be found at IMEC Fonds Althusser, 20ALT/45/38.

64 Schaff, *Structuralism and Marxism*, 30.

can explain the essentially dismissive attitude towards Althusser by the members of the Lukács school, who, beyond their sporadic philosophical criticisms, responded to his ideological assault with a silence more eloquent than any declaration.

The ideological apparatuses of Stalinism

During the 1960s and early 1970s, forward-looking Marxist movements in both the East and West strove to reestablish philosophical argument and critical debate as central to Marxist theory, rather than relying solely on ideological dogma. Paradoxically, however, these efforts often fell short when it came to critically examining the ideological assumptions embedded in their own positions. In fact, it is quite astonishing that Marxist philosophy in this period entered more easily into dialogue with the protagonists of existentialism, phenomenology, or even Catholic thought than it did when addressing doctrinal disagreements within its own camp. This situation, however, did not seem to fundamentally undermine the viability of the Marxist position as such. Shared beliefs in strategic objectives such as the liberation of the oppressed classes or the transcendence of the conditions of capitalist society remained on the agenda, and the struggle for forms of social equality appeared to be a common platform for most committed Marxists. Therefore, it can be argued that the real controversies within the Left revolved not so much around the principal “truth value” of Marxism but around questions of its actual political positioning and enforcement. This, in turn, explains the harsh prioritizing of ideological issues over theoretical ones, even in situations when purely philosophical matters were at stake.

In this respect, it is quite symptomatic that Althusser himself very seldom engaged in a proper philosophical discussion with the Marxist positions he criticized. Apart from his occasional disputes with the theoreticians of the French Communist Party, such as Roger Garaudy or Lucien Sève, an elaborated theoretical reckoning with the ideas of other contemporary Marxist trends seemed to fall outside the scope of his thinking. A proper critical discussion of the views of Lukács or other Eastern European “humanist” Marxists never really took the stage in his writings, and only with certain theses of Gramsci on “practice” and “hegemony” did he engage in a more in-depth philosophical discussion.⁶⁵ His objections to humanism were

⁶⁵ See, on this question, Vittorio Morfino, “Althusser lecteur de Gramsci” [Althusser reader of Gramsci], *Actuel Marx*, no. 1 (2015): 62–81.

usually articulated within the context of the original Marxian corpus, especially at the level of the rupture between the *Paris Manuscripts* and the *German Ideology*,⁶⁶ or within a more general ideological framework, such as his arguments presented in his *Reply to John Lewis*.⁶⁷ However, when his criticism targeted contemporary Marxist trends, it was usually done in the spirit of fierce ideological dissent and condemnation. Even if at times he showed himself to be lenient towards the particularities of socialist development in Eastern Europe—for example, when he embraced the Czechoslovak attempt at “socialism with a human face”⁶⁸—this did not make him any less averse to humanist tendencies in Marxism.⁶⁹ To put it differently and more precisely, Althusser formulated his theoretical objections within Marxism mainly in political terms, i.e., by arguing that humanist or historicist readings do irreparable damage to the current cause of revolutionary practice, as is clear from this quotation: “Our primary theoretical, ideological and political (I say political) duty today is to rid the domain of Marxist philosophy of all the ‘Humanist’ rubbish that is brazenly being dumped into it. It is an offense to the thought of Marx and an insult to all revolutionary militants.”⁷⁰ His later definition that philosophy, in the last analysis, is “political class struggle,” only made this position more explicit.⁷¹ To be sure, in the eyes of many Eastern European Marxists such declarations made Althusser’s position akin to the ultra-orthodox ideological line represented by Mitin, Gerő, Szigeti, and others. For rightly or wrongly, the impression was created that for him some of the theoretical consequences of de-Stalinization produced more ideologically detrimental effects than the distortions of the Stalinist era itself.

The propagation of Althusser’s image as a Stalinist philosopher undoubtedly owes much to the critical approach of Eastern European Marxists.

66 For an emblematic example of this kind of philosophical reasoning, see, Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy*, 271–98.

67 See Louis Althusser, *Essays in SelfCriticism*, trans. Grahame Lock (London: New Left Books, 1976), 35–77.

68 See Althusser, *Essays in SelfCriticism*, 76–77.

69 See for example his interview in manuscript with a Polish journalist, in which he states that while it is understandable that the “Polish state propagates a humanist ideology in order to overcome certain objective difficulties,” this should not be taken as a position that “moves history forward.” Louis Althusser, “Entretien avec un journaliste polonais. [1974?],” IMEC Fonds Althusser, 20ALT/46/12, p. 4.

70 Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy*, 266.

71 “Everything that happens in philosophy has, in the last instance, not only political consequences in theory, but also political consequences in politics: in the political class struggle.” Althusser, *Essays in SelfCriticism*, 38.

But in contrast to Western critics, such as Henri Lefebvre, who sought to draw parallels between Stalinist dogmatism and Althusser's structuralist "neo-dogmatism,"⁷² or E. P. Thompson's rejection of Althusser's "theoretical Stalinism" on the charge of his ideological self-delusion and mechanistic vision of the historical unfolding of modes of production,⁷³ Eastern Bloc theorists were clearly more concerned with his theoretical "anti-humanism." The Praxis circle frontrunner Gajo Petrović, who was among the first to express his conviction that Althusser was covertly adopting a Stalinist line, argued for example that the postulation of an epistemological break between the young and the mature Marx simply served to reinforce the "radical Stalinist thesis" that "Marx was not a humanist but a representative of a 'theoretical anti-humanism.'"⁷⁴ In a similar vein, Veljko Korać argued that Althusser's *For Marx* was written "with the sole intention of contesting the anthropological and humanistic character of Marx's philosophy, and this in the name of inherited dogmatic Stalinistic schemes."⁷⁵ Claims like these were likely to have influenced the Lukács school's rejection of Althusser's views as a form of 'sectarianism,' and played a decisive role in shaping the strongly dismissive attitudes of Kołakowski and Schaff. At the same time, it is also quite clear that, for the Marxists in Eastern Europe, Althusser's rejection of the humanist position did not remain a purely theoretical matter but meant a blatantly cynical disregard for the political experience of the region after 1945. For them, his view, which gradually emerged and was made explicit in the mid-1970s, that the 20th Soviet Congress had in fact brought with it the restoration of humanism as a "bourgeois ideology," testified to a dogmatism that even the hardliners of the Eastern European communist parties would not all have embraced.⁷⁶ From this point of view, Althusser's ambivalent attitude towards the Stalinist tradition can rightly be contrasted with the mature Lukács's position, who rejected any compromise on this matter and considered Stalinism not simply a "deviation" but a "systematic deformation" within the construction of socialism in Eastern Europe.⁷⁷

⁷² See Henri Lefebvre, *Au-delà du structuralisme* (Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1971), 326.

⁷³ E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory: Or an Orrery of Errors* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), 109–14, 176–91.

⁷⁴ Gajo Petrović, "The Development and Essence of Marx's Thought," *Praxis* (IE), no. 3–4 (1968): 336.

⁷⁵ Veljko Korać, "The Phenomenon of 'Theoretical Anti-Humanism,'" *Praxis* (IE), no. 3–4 (1969): 432.

⁷⁶ See Althusser's text "Note on 'The Critique of the Personality Cult,'" in *Essays in SelfCriticism*, 78–93.

⁷⁷ On Althusser's ambiguous relationship to Stalinism, see Valentino Gerratana, "Althusser and Stalinism," *New Left Review*, no. 101–2 (1977): 110–21, and Gregory Elliott, *The Detour of*

It is quite obvious that this ideological situation is to blame for the fact that Althusser's most innovative philosophical concepts and insights failed to elicit virtually any positive resonance among leading progressive Marxists in Eastern Europe. Althusser's highly original discussion of the problems of Marxist reading and textual interpretation in his *Reading the Capital* was habitually dismissed as superfluous and circuitous "rhetorical" achievements; his analyses concerning the complex and unequal setting of dialectical social development were labeled as "banalities"; and his theses on the multilayered and discontinuous nature of historical time and social formation were interpreted as a form of "denial of history."⁷⁸ In the shadow of this practice of stigmatization, which was not far removed from the habitual dogmatic Marxist condemnation of ideological opponents, it went basically unnoticed that Althusser was in fact trying to break new philosophical grounds. In the drift line of his gifted Marxist analyses, he carried forward some of the theses of a materialist strand in the French epistemological tradition marked by Bachelard and Canguilhem, he initiated a dialogue with the *Annales* school, and had a strong influence on the views in French social theory on "ideology," "subject," and "power." Even his opposition to Hegel, like that of many of his contemporaries in France (Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze), was largely philosophical and not merely ideological.⁷⁹

These novelties fell almost entirely outside the theoretical sensibilities of most Eastern European Marxists. Just as it has been overlooked that Althusser was in fact seeking to liberate Marxism from its own grief-stricken theoretical heritage by opening the way for a different materialist philosophy of concepts, structure, and history. In this sense, in terms of its purely strategic ambitions and style, his enterprise was not so different from the often-vacillating liberatory struggles that animated many of the Marxist humanist trends. That said, there is no doubt that for the

Theory, 225–53. For Lukács's full critique of Stalinism, see his *The Process of Democratisation*, trans. Susanne Bernhardt and Norman Levine (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 93–136, written in 1968 but not published until 1985.

⁷⁸ These elements are all integral parts of Kołakowski's and Schaff's somewhat incongruous critique.

⁷⁹ For a detailed analysis of Althusser's relationship with French historical epistemology and social theory, see Robert Paul Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); on his relation to the *Annales* school, see Pierre Vilar, "Marxist History, a History in the Making: Dialogue with Althusser," *New Left Review*, no. 80 (1973): 65–106; on his critical views on Hegel, see Vuillerod, *La naissance de l'anti-hégélianisme*, 147–215; and on his non-doctrinaire and open-minded philosophical attitude, Clément Rosset, *En ce temps-là. Notes sur Althusser* (Paris: Minuit, 1992).

latter, Althusser's own misinformed and misconceived ideological position about Eastern European socialism fatally obscured his most innovative philosophical findings. This only underscores the extent to which, within Marxist discourse of the period, the potential for a fruitful exchange between Eastern and Western European philosophical traditions was largely stifled by political partisanship fueled by both real and imagined ideological divisions. These views, which may have been legitimate in local ideological struggles, made a more global Marxist theoretical convergence virtually impossible.

“Omnipotent pragmatic politics trades philosophy for ideology; that is, for systematized false consciousness, while powerless critical philosophy vegetates, along with truth, outside the bounds of political reality.”⁸⁰ This remark by Karel Kosík, made during the 1968 Czechoslovak crisis, sheds light in its own bitter way on the intellectual conjuncture of an entire era in Eastern Europe, whilst highlighting some of the poignant contradictions that haunted Marxist thought. Namely, that while Marxist philosophy defined and practiced itself as an attempt to pursue emancipatory social goals, it also exposed itself to the pragmatic interests of dubious ideological and political agendas. Indeed, Kosík's comment leaves open the question of what kind of Marxist “critical philosophy” would be able to assert its truths within the bounds of political reality without falling victim to the “false consciousness” generated by competing ideological conjunctures. But his remark makes it clear that the practical dimension of Marxist philosophy—its relationship to political procedures and concrete social practice—was among the most pressing yet least clarified issues of the period. These tensions became especially pronounced when such questions surfaced at the crossroads of divergent leftist political traditions in East and West, where differing assumptions and priorities often clashed. More than anything else, the fraught reception of Althusser in Eastern Europe underscores how, within the Marxist camp, ideological and tactical imperatives consistently took precedence over the possibility of critical intellectual exchange. But if Lukács was right in claiming that Stalinism amounts to an unqualified preference for “tactics over theory” in concrete situations,⁸¹ then we must acknowledge that the shadow of this ideology extended far more broadly than is often assumed.

⁸⁰ Karel Kosík, *The Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Observations from the 1968 Era*, ed. James H. Satterwhite (Lanham: Roman & Littlefield, 1995), 22.

⁸¹ Lukács, *The Process of Democratisation*, 131.

Acknowledgement

This work was funded by the EU's NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania-Pillar III-C9-I-8, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled "Philosophy in Late Socialist Europe: Theoretical Practices in the Face of Polycrisis" (Babes Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca), code CF104/15.11.2022. I would like to thank Alex Cistelecan and Christian Ferenc-Flatz, whose comments helped this chapter to reach its final form.

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11. Aesthetic Functionalism: A Design Concept for Socialism in the GDR?

Martin Küpper

Abstract: This chapter explores aesthetic functionalism in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), primarily through philosopher Lothar Kühne's ideas. In the shadow of socialist industrialization and mass housing programs, Kühne reimagined functionalism not as a style, but as a political-aesthetic program aimed at reshaping everyday life. Merging Marxist theory with architectural practice, he cast design as a medium of emancipation—where objects, spaces, and users co-evolve in a communist future. His approach challenged both technocratic formalism and decorative nostalgia. By tracing Kühne's theory against the backdrop of 1970s cultural policy, this article shows how aesthetic functionalism embodied a radical, unfinished promise: that design could be both beautiful and politically transformative.

Keywords: socialist aesthetics; design theory; cultural policy; functionalist architecture; industrial modernism; mass housing

In February 1982, the Office for Industrial Design (Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung) in Berlin organized the “Seminar on Functionalism,” which brought together artists, cultural theorists, philosophers, architects, and art historians to discuss the relevance of functionalism. Participants were mainly interested in two questions: first, to what extent was functionalism associated with a principle that could correspond to the living conditions of the proletariat and shape them? Second, to what extent should postmodernism and regionalism in architecture and design be understood as serious counter-movements to functionalism? Many participants believed that, in addition to an elaborate theory and sophisticated method, functionalism

required a broad-based cultural policy aimed at meeting mass needs. Others, however, questioned the desire for a normative design concept. They argued that committing to one concept could unduly restrict the variety of design options and overlook the possibilities of satisfying needs.

The philosopher Lothar Kühne (1931–85) delivered an impactful lecture at the conference. He advocated for functionalism, portraying it as a societal program aligned with communism:

If functionalism is understood as a humanist and poetic principle in its mediating relationship to the liberation struggle of the proletariat, these provisions demand a comprehensive development. The beginnings of such a development can be summarized in the fact that functionalism, in this social directionality, aesthetically reveals the subordination of the economy of production to the needs of human life. Its consequence is the abolition of the antagonistic aesthetic relationship between working conditions and individual living conditions. Functionalism is thus an anticipation of communist realization and ultimately a testimony to its real becoming.¹

This thesis is noteworthy for its unique approach in discussing functionalism. Functionalism is often linked to the art movement of the 1920s, particularly with the Bauhaus. It is commonly used in relation to architecture and design, with both critical and affirmative connotations. The various interpretations of functionalism stem from its close association with the concept of “function.” According to Claude Schnaïdt (1931–2007) and Emmanuelle Gallo (unkown), it’s difficult to clearly define what the concept of “function” is about. Critics argue that functionalism is a formalist, dehumanizing style, emphasizing technology, materials, and productivity. They see it as a utopian seduction.² However, Kühne refutes these criticisms by connecting functionalism with humanism, poetry, and communism, elevating it to a political program. This tension frames my argument that aesthetic functionalism reached a peak during the beginning of the 1980s, which lost its significance with the end of historical socialism. I develop this in four steps. Firstly, I examine Kühne’s definition of architecture as a social practice in the face of industrialization in the German Democratic Republic

¹ Lothar Kühne, “Funktionalismus als zukunftsorientierte Gestaltungskonzeption,” in Lothar Kühne, *Haus und Landschaft* (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1985), 44.

² See Claude Schnaïdt and Emmanuelle Gallo, “Was ist Funktionalismus?,” *form+zweck*, no. 4 (1989): 26–29.

(GDR). Secondly, I explore the favorable environment for the formulation of functionalism in the GDR, especially in the 1970s building industry. The third step addresses the epistemic structure of Kühne's functionalism. Finally, I examine the end of functionalism as a program.

Kühne's redefinition of architecture in the shadow of a socialist industrialization

Kühne was born in 1931 in the small village of Bockwitz near Lauchhammer in Lusatia. At that time, Lusatia was known for mining brown coal. The villages around Lauchhammer were referred to as the "Red Country" from the 1920s onward and were primarily communist and social democratic until National Socialism crushed the local labor movement.

After the war, Kühne sought to take on political responsibilities at an early age. He came from a working-class family and was a member of the Free German Youth (FGY). Starting from 1949, he quickly rose through various roles: he became a full-time functionary of the FGY in Liebenwerda, then in the state leadership of Saxony-Anhalt, and finally in Halle/Saale. There, he studied at the local Workers' and Farmers' Faculty and became the head of the SED base organization. Throughout his university career, he held various political offices, except for the final years of his illness and his expulsion from the SED in 1953 (although he was reinstated in 1958). This happened after he strongly criticized the SED for its political and ideological handling of the uprising on June 17, 1953, in a letter to the newspaper *Neues Deutschland*.

Kühne joined Humboldt University in Berlin in 1952 to study philosophy and art history. Although he briefly taught at Dresden Technical University from 1957 to 1960, he eventually returned to Humboldt University for the rest of his academic career. In 1971, he became a professor of historical and dialectical materialism at the Department of Marxism-Leninism. During his career, he faced insults and hostility from colleagues and ultimately transferred to the Department of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy in 1980. Kühne was diagnosed with schizophrenia in 1979 and tragically took his own life on the anniversary of the October Revolution in 1985. His life typifies the socialist intelligentsia that played a crucial role in the development of the GDR and saw communism as the ultimate objective, goal, and limit of their actions.

Since the early stages of his intellectual development, Kühne had focused on the intersection of communism and architecture. In the 1950s and

1960s, discussions revolved around the concept of socialist architecture and whether architecture should be approached as an art form or from a practical-technical perspective. There was also debate about how to blend national tradition with classicist architecture rather than modern architecture.³

In this debate, Kühne proposed that architecture should be understood as “a space organized for people’s lives” that “actively influences the development of social life.”⁴ Architecture is therefore “neither the mere spatial result of technical and practical considerations” nor an artistic “space for sensual experience.”⁵ Rather, it forms “sensually experienceable spaces for people’s activities.”⁶

Kühne never developed a specific architectural aesthetic, but toward the end of the 1960s, he outlined a framework for one, which was a multi-level systems theory of architecture. He believed that architecture is the “form of practical life itself,” and that it represents “a system of relationships in which something is produced: the lives of people.”⁷ Thus, its content encompasses the “spatial and temporal structure of the lives of people, groups of people, or classes and the connections between them,”⁸ as seen in the design of houses, the type of settlement, or the adaptation to geographical conditions. The architectural system is ultimately based on at least three objective conditions. First, there are the built elements such as houses. Second, there are the “mobile and functional elements through which the spaces created by built forms become usable and their appearances are modified and perfected.”⁹ These can include everyday objects, art, or transport. Third, an architectural system also requires people who appropriate, produce, or remodel this built environment. It remains unclear how these elements relate to each other; rather, they form a methodological framework that initially defines what architectural aesthetics should be about. Kühne’s main goal was to distinguish between architecture, technology, and art. Technology is seen as a system that produces something, such as architecture. Art, on the

³ See Andreas Schätzke, *Zwischen Bauhaus und Stalinallee: Architekturdiskussion im östlichen Deutschland, 1945–1955* (Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag, 2016).

⁴ Lothar Kühne, “Thesen zur Verteidigung der Dissertation A” (1965), in *Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Universitätsarchiv, Personalakten nach 1945, Lothar Kühne*, 1.

⁵ Kühne, *Thesen*, 1.

⁶ Kühne, *Thesen*, 1.

⁷ Lothar Kühne, “Über das Verhältnis von Architektur und Kunst: Kritische Reflexionen,” *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Architektur*, no. 2 (1968): 113.

⁸ Kühne, “Architektur und Kunst,” 113.

⁹ Kühne, “Architektur und Kunst,” 113.

other hand, does not organize real life but serves as a commentary on social life. Society then uses architecture to organize its spatial form. This approach allows for the theoretical understanding of architecture as a “dynamic field of meaning,”¹⁰ as it emerges from technology and can at times become art. If architecture were deemed artistic from the start, it would essentially “declare people to be actors.”¹¹ If it were simply technology, it might deny its potential aesthetic qualities. A combination of both perspectives blurs the view of the social process through which architecture is formed.

Similar ideas were present in the work of theorists from various fields, as discussed at conferences, congresses, and in journals. Sociologist Fred Staufenbiel (1928–2014) distinguished design from applied arts, defining it as a combination of functionality and cultural significance.¹² These developments were not new. Their closeness to the 1920s Soviet Constructivism or the Bauhaus movement is evident. Moisei Ginzburg (1892–1946) developed the “method of functional thinking,”¹³ which Hannes Meyer (1889–1954), the second director of the Bauhaus, also taught in Dessau.¹⁴ This method aimed to document and improve the most common movement patterns of people in buildings. Central to this method is the idea that there is almost no difference between production and life processes. Consequently, aesthetic questions are no longer solely about art, but also about the organization of production and the accompanying life processes. One of the goals of these avant-garde ideas was to break down the division between artistic construction and mass housing construction in architecture and urban design. As a result, architecture and urban design were recognized as a relatively independent domain of society.

In the context of the GDR, these ideas experienced a revival in the late 1950s, as exemplified by the case of Kühne. Specific factors came into play. On the one hand, modernist art forms had been marginalized due to the so-called “formalism debate.” However, some of these forms persisted in the teaching methods at art universities, and many architects who had studied at the Bauhaus or were committed to “Neues Bauen” were involved in the reconstruction program in the GDR after World War II.¹⁵

¹⁰ Kühne, “Architektur und Kunst,” 113.

¹¹ Kühne, “Architektur und Kunst,” 113.

¹² Fred Staufenbiel, *Kultur heute—für morgen: Theoretische Probleme unserer Kultur und ihre Beziehung zur technischen Revolution* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1966).

¹³ Ginzburg in Elke Pistorius, *Der Architektenstreit nach der Revolution* (Basel/Berlin/Boston: Birkhäuser, 1992), 52.

¹⁴ See Philipp Oswalt, ed., *Hannes Meyers neue Bauhauslehre* (Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag, 2019).

¹⁵ Oswalt, *Hannes Meyers neue Bauhauslehre*.

On the other hand, interest in the role of labor and practice in theory and society grew in the 1950s. This was of practical importance for those in charge because the survival of the GDR depended on the restructuring of production and reproduction after the devastating early years of the war. Toward the end of the 1950s, indications of economic problems in the GDR increased, including declining growth rates, stagnating investments, and significant shortages in the production and consumer goods sectors. These crisis symptoms were exacerbated by ongoing high reparation payments to the Soviet Union, resource-consuming restructuring measures such as land reform, shortages of industrially important products like steel, and extensive labor migration from East to West.

The SED tried to counter the crisis with a modernization of the economy supported by socialist industrialization. This was a central concept of political economy and a sociopolitical program. For the GDR, it meant, as economic historian Helga Schultz explains,

accelerated economic growth in the service of military strength and social wealth based on the primacy of the means-of-production industry;// autarky as a means of political and economic independence from the capitalist foreign countries;// concentration and centralization of production and planning based on state ownership and state-controlled cooperatives;// homogenization of society with the dominance of the industrial workforce by reducing social, cultural and regional differences.¹⁶

During the 1950s, there was a change in building policy in the Soviet Union. Initiated by Khrushchev in 1954, it was characterized by the slogan “build faster, cheaper, and better.”¹⁷ This also influenced architecture and urban planning in the GDR. The focus of urban and residential construction during this time was to support the development of heavy industry, which required rapid housing construction to attract the necessary labor force to specific areas. This increased the demand for resources and led to the creation of a self-supporting and stimulating system. As a result, new towns like Eisenhüttenstadt and Hoyerswerda, along with their industrial centers, were planned and constructed to support this development.¹⁸ At the same

¹⁶ Helga Schultz, “Die sozialistische Industrialisierung—toter Hund oder Erkenntnismittel?,” *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 40 (1999): 2.

¹⁷ See Philipp Meuser, *Die Ästhetik der Platte. Wohnungsbau in der Sowjetunion zwischen Stalin und Glasnost* (Berlin: DOM Publishers, 2015).

¹⁸ Christine Hannemann, *Die Platte: Industrialisierter Wohnungsbau in der DDR* (Braunschweig/Wiesbaden: Vieweg, 1996), 54.

time, the construction industry began experimenting with industrialized prefabrication methods, which became more advanced and widespread over time. Builders aimed to move more of the construction process to factories, so that building components could simply be assembled on-site. This shift required reorganizing the construction process to focus on standardization and a modular system. The goal was to develop standardized features that could be used across many different buildings (typification) and apply them to create type-buildings.¹⁹

The dimensions of architectural production in the GDR were focused on designing entire living environments and urban complexes. Two conditions were crucial for this. First, the work process was restructured to be highly specialized and based on the division of labor. This meant:

Central planning of labor requirements with relative responsibility of the companies for the deployment of labor; the education system and territorial bodies are responsible for the mobilization, qualification and 'supply' of labor; basically the possibility of free choice of workplace; individual rights of individuals, for example to form brigades; special (monetary, but also non-monetary) allowances for activity groups in which production should stiffen in favor of economic developments.²⁰

Secondly, a specific institutional structure was established by the end of the 1960s. The transfer of private ownership of the means of production to state ownership, which had already been initiated at the beginning of the GDR, led to the grouping of expropriated enterprises into combines. Whenever possible, a combine was to encompass the entire production process of a specific product. For example, there were construction and assembly combines, as well as housing and civil engineering combines, which brought together companies in which the smallest unit was the brigade, consisting of five to twenty-five members. The brigades were to be organized as independently as possible by the workers. They were not only the place where higher productivity and the development of socialist morals were to be realized, but also provided a space beyond the workplace. They were intended to provide a structure in which non-working time could

¹⁹ See Roman Hillmann, *Moderne Architektur der DDR: Gestaltung, Konstruktion, Denkmalschutz* (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2020).

²⁰ Stefanie Brünenberg, "Arbeits- und Organisationsprinzipien in den Kombinaten, Volkseigenen Betrieben und Brigaden," in *Das Kollektiv—Formen und Vorstellungen gemeinschaftlicher Architekturproduktion in der DDR*, eds. Stefanie Brünenberg et al. (Berlin: urbanophil, 2023), 73.

be organized jointly and under the political influence of the trade union and the SED.²¹

Securing the material-technical basis for the further development of socialism was not only an economic concern, but also aimed to ensure the irreversibility of the socialist revolution. Changes in the core of the economy, such as the construction industry, inevitably extended to artistic production, everyday life, and societal reproduction. To prevent this process from occurring without the involvement of the producers, the SED endeavored to actively influence it and engage the technical and cultural intelligentsia. Therefore, socialist industrialization was intertwined with a socialist cultural revolution. The 1958 resolution of the SED's Fifth Party Congress, for example, stated: "The socialist cultural revolution is a necessary component of the entire socialist revolution, in which mass cultural work is most closely connected with mass political work, with socialist education, and with all measures for increasing socialist production and the productivity of labor."²² Cultural life was to be reorganized and better linked with economic life.

During the period of industrialization and the Cultural Revolution, there were specific consequences for the concept of architecture. While there were strong supporters within the GDR who believed that architecture should be seen as a mixture of art and technology, the idea of architecture being strictly subsumed under art was losing ground. As an alternative, a new perspective emerged during the industrialization of building and the cultural revolution, which viewed architecture as its own aesthetic field and a spatial social practice.²³ Kühne was one of the most important proponents of this view.

Towards the end of the 1960s, the architectural-aesthetic discourse became more diverse. On the one hand, further theorizations were undertaken, particularly in the field of architectural theory, which was taught at technical universities. Examples include the work of Kurt Milde (1932–2007), Kurt Wilde (unknown), and Heidrun Laudel (1941–2014) from the Technical University in Dresden, and that of Olaf Weber (1943–2021) and Gerd Zimmermann (b. 1946) from the College of Architecture and Civil Engineering in Weimar. On the other hand, in the course of the third university reform and as a consequence of the Socialist Cultural Revolution,

²¹ See Brünenberg, *Arbeits- und Organisationsprinzipien*, 74–75.

²² "Protokoll der Verhandlungen des V. Parteitages," in Gerd Dietrich, *Kulturgeschichte der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 811.

²³ Bruno Flierl, "Architektur als bildende Kunst?," in *Architektur und Kunst: Texte 1964–1983* (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1984), 132–48.

aesthetics emerged as an independent academic discipline at Humboldt University in Berlin within the framework of the Aesthetics and Art Studies department, and at the University of Leipzig in the Cultural Studies and German Studies department. In Berlin and Leipzig, the attempt was made to combine aesthetics, cultural studies, and sociology with the arts and philosophy. In addition to training so-called cultural workers for ministries, houses of culture, parties, and mass organizations, the goal was to develop a theory of culture that would meet the challenges of a thoroughly industrial society.²⁴

Kühne was able to capitalize on this development not only because he worked at Humboldt University in Berlin, but also because his area of interest shifted to the representational requirements of aesthetics. This shift was possible because architecture had become so integrated into society that it could be considered a prime example, a physically tangible embodiment of all creative human activities. For Kühne, the industrial production of architecture showcased both the economic potential of socialism and the resulting changes in the roles of technology, art, and everyday objects, which were now widely apparent, for instance, in the construction of entire cities. These changes were reflected in the overall societal transformation of aesthetic conditions.

Kühne recognized the significance of these developments alongside his considerations on architectural aesthetics. In 1968, he emphasized the need for “the practical and theoretical exploration of modernity in design”²⁵ with regard to the aesthetic design of the environment. He believed that incorporating aesthetics into industrial production was essential for the advancement of socialist culture.

In his 1971 doctorate B,²⁶ titled “Das Ästhetische als Faktor der Aneignung und des Eigentums. Zur Bestimmung des gegenständlichen Verhaltens” (The Aesthetic as a Factor of Appropriation and Ownership: On the Determination of Object-related Behavior), Kühne explained that while initially focusing on people’s spatial behavior within architectural theory, he became

²⁴ See Martin Küpper, “The Shattering of the Aura as a Moment of Communist Revolution: Perspectives on Walter Benjamin’s Work in the Scientific Aesthetics of the GDR,” in *Walter Benjamin in the East: Networks, Conflicts, and Reception*, eds. Sophia Buck and Caroline Adler (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

²⁵ Lothar Kühne, “Ästhetische Umweltgestaltung,” in *Im Mittelpunkt—der Mensch. Grundfragen der sozialistischen Leitungstätigkeit*, ed. Helmut Dressler (Leipzig, Jena & Berlin: Urania, 1969), 167.

²⁶ The doctorate B was a higher academic qualification in the GDR. It was modeled on the Soviet Doctor of Sciences.

increasingly interested in objects and their social function. Nonetheless, he underscored the interdependence of objects and space in aesthetic terms and proposed an architectural system that allows for the appropriation and modification of space through human-made objects. In this context, objectivity (*Gegenständlichkeit*) would encompass not only tangible items created and used within social contexts, such as natural objects, tools, and everyday items, but also the role of human subjectivity as an integral component of social practice.²⁷ Kühne asserted that the behavior of humans and their creations constitutes the foundation of spatial behavior. In terms of the life process, it is the objective elements of space, such as walls, that are the form-givers of space. And in turn, objects in space convey human movement, for example through a ladder.²⁸

Renaissance of Bauhaus functionalism

In the early stages of this work, functionalism did not play a positive role, either as a trendy term or as a historical reference point. One reason for this was Kühne's rejection of functionalism, which was still influential. In 1958, he had stated that functionalism was not helpful in the development of socialist towns and villages.²⁹ This stance aligned with the rejection of functionalism that was widespread in socialist countries but began to fade in the mid-1960s. Conversely, the renaissance of the Bauhaus and functionalism gathered momentum in the 1970s, and efforts to acknowledge the legacy of the Bauhaus had been made even earlier. In 1965, Lothar Lang's book *Das Bauhaus 1919–1933. Idee und Wirklichkeit* was published. Karl-Heinz Hüter (1929–2023) completed *Das Bauhaus in Weimar* just one year later, a book characterized by meticulous source research, but which could only be published after ten years due to external reasons.³⁰ The industrial designer Martin Kelm (b. 1930), headed the Office for Industrial Design from 1972. This office was the state authority responsible for the planning, management, and control of design. Kelm was an advocate for the restoration and reopening

²⁷ See Kühne, *Das Ästhetische*, 14.

²⁸ See Lothar Kühne, "Räumliche Organisation des menschlichen Lebensprozesses und Gegenstandsfunktion," *form+zweck*, no. 4 (1981), 14–19.

²⁹ See Lothar Kühne, "Zu Fragen der sozialistischen Baukunst," in *Deutsche Architektur* no. 11 (1958): n. p.

³⁰ See Harald Kegler, "Die Bauhaus-Kolloquien in Weimar (und Dessau)," in *Städtebaudebatten in der DDR—Verborgene Reformdiskurse*, eds. Thomas Flierl et al. (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2012), 163–76.

of the Bauhaus building in Dessau. The building had only undergone a temporary renovation and had been used as a vocational school since the end of the Second World War.³¹ Several initiatives were established on-site, including the International Bauhaus Colloquia and informal and formal networks such as the “Dessau Bauhaus Collection,” which archived and preserved historical objects. Starting from the mid-1970s, the “Galerie am Sachsenplatz” in Leipzig organized exhibitions showcasing works by Bauhaus members, which were purchased from private collections.³²

This renaissance was primarily linked to the revival of the social-theoretical principles of Bauhaus, Neues Bauen, and constructivism.³³ For example, Karin Hirdina (1941–2009) determined that, despite the differences in content and the objective hardships, a focus on social aspects in the design of mass processes was always prevalent at the Bauhaus:

At the Bauhaus, functionalism meant assigning everyday objects to the practical activities of life. The concept of function thus represents a comprehensive classification rule that arises from a social programme and seeks to establish the relationship between social production and the social way of life through the mass, objective relationships of people. Function is a guideline, not an absolute determination of product form.³⁴

The concept of “function” according to Hirdina involves a relationship in which technical, constructive, and material conditions are just as important as the needs of the users. This perspective is considered essential for ensuring freedom in the production process.³⁵ The driving force of production should not be solely profitability, but rather the satisfaction of end users. Both the production process and the design should be controlled by the producers, enabling them to consciously analyze and understand their components. This allows the production process to be recognizable and easily communicated through the design, with the elements revealing their

³¹ See Günter Höhne, *Design Made in GDR: Der Formgestalter Martin Kelm im Gespräch* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2021).

³² See Wolfgang Thöner and Claudia Perren, *Fortschrittliches Bauhauserbe: Zur Entstehung einer ostdeutschen Bauhaussammlung* (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2019).

³³ Heinz Quitsch, “Diskussionen zum Funktionalismus in den 1970er und 1980er Jahren: Erinnerungen an Lothar Kühne,” in *Architektur und Städtebau in südlichen Ostseeraum von 1970 bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Bernfried Lichtnau (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2007), 19–34.

³⁴ Karin Hirdina, “Zur Ästhetik des Bauhausfunktionalismus,” in *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen Weimar*, no. 5–6 (1976): 521.

³⁵ Hirdina, “Zur Ästhetik des Bauhausfunktionalismus,” 522.

supporting function instead of being concealed. This approach also allows for modifications and redesigns to meet the diverse needs of the masses.

The renaissance of the Bauhaus and the re-evaluation of functionalism were influenced by industrialization and the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. However, they gained strong socio-political support with the new consumer policy under Erich Honecker (1912–94) that began in 1971.³⁶ This new policy reversed the economic reforms initiated by Walter Ulbricht (1893–1973) and redirected social resources towards social and consumer policy measures, as well as cultural participation.

The housing construction program was a key part of a new socio-political strategy aimed at addressing a longstanding housing shortage. The goal of building 100,000 flats per year, set in 1955, was never achieved, partially due to housing construction being deprioritized in favor of other political projects.³⁷ This changed when Honecker came into power. In 1973, a proper housing construction program was developed, with specific targets including 2.8 to 3 million new and modernized flats by 1990, promotion of cooperative and individual housing construction, and the creation of kindergartens, schools, shopping, and service facilities through new construction. The focus was on uniting new construction, modernization, and refurbishment. The issue of housing was increasingly being discussed as a social matter, with focus on its social aspects. The discussion ranged from providing equal and high-quality housing for everyone, without favoring any particular social class, to exploring the potential for new forms of appropriation of societal wealth. Since housing construction and management received significant state subsidies, it was hoped that access to housing would no longer be determined by economic factors as in capitalism. This approach aimed to reduce the influence of money on housing and encourage residents to take better care of their living spaces, for example, through subbotnik.³⁸ Rent payments would not go to private landowners, but into a fund for social welfare.³⁹

Kühne recognized the socio-political importance of the housing program, noting that the emphasis on housing meant that architecture could no longer be viewed solely as art. In 1974, he wrote:

³⁶ See Dierk Hoffmann, "Lebensstandard und Konsumpolitik," in *Die zentrale Wirtschaftsverwaltung in der SBZ/DDR: Akteure, Strukturen, Verwaltungspraxis* (Berlin & Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 495ff.

³⁷ Joachim Tesch, *Wohnungsbau in der DDR 1971–1990: Ergebnisse und Defizite eines Programms in kontroversen Sichten* (Berlin: Helle Panke e. V., 2001), 7–9.

³⁸ Subbotnik meant days of volunteer work for the community services.

³⁹ Tesch, *Wohnungsbau*, 11–12.

It has been made clear that architecture is one of the fundamental material conditions of life and that its great aesthetic and ideological impact dimensions must not be intellectually and ultimately also practically reversed in such a way that pictorial work and sculpture replace architectural performance and impact or that the buildings themselves become images and replicas of non-architectural objects.⁴⁰

Although the social aspect of the housing construction program was only partially resolved, this strategy created opportunities for experiments that could potentially facilitate the social integration of individuals within a socialist framework, as part of an egalitarian social policy.

In Rostock in 1970, a pilot project called “Variables Wohnen” (Variable Living) involved forty-five families of various social backgrounds, ranging from young to middle-aged. Each family was given a sixty to seventy square meter living space with an open interior floor plan, located in a large panel system building. Due to technical restrictions, the location of the bathroom was fixed. The families were provided with a cut-out sheet containing various elements, allowing them to design their floor plans. Throughout the design process, the families received guidance from doctors, sociologists, designers, and others. The discussions helped the families become more aware of their needs. After a few weeks, the results of the design process surprised even the experiment supervisors because the designs were mostly focused on the families’ specific needs rather than conventional solutions. As long as the designs were functional, the apartments were built according to the families’ wishes, with an emphasis on the flexibility of the floor plans. About five years later, an analysis was conducted to determine how the participants’ circumstances had changed and their level of satisfaction with the experiment. The results showed that the majority of participants were satisfied, made adjustments to their living spaces based on their evolving needs, and would be willing to participate in a similar experiment in the future.⁴¹

One of the supervisors, the designer Rudolf Horn (b. 1929), summarized the experiences as follows: “As soon as you take away the shackles and encourage people to find themselves, tell them to please think about how you want to live, then something new and unexpected emerges.”⁴² The project could not be

⁴⁰ Lothar Kühne, “Haus und Landschaft: Zu einem Umriß der kommunistischen Kultur des gesellschaftlichen Raumes,” in Kühne, *Haus und Landschaft*, 15.

⁴¹ “Variables Wohnen. Ein Experiment im Plattenbau. Rudolf Horn im Gespräch mit Sabine Kraft,” *Arch+*, no. 12 (2014): 144–52.

⁴² Horn, *Variables Wohnen*, 148.

generalized, as the division of labor between different economic sectors, such as the construction and furniture industries, was not flexible enough. Savings in one economic sector would result in increased expenditure in another, which conflicted with the interests of the sectors and the plan specifications.⁴³ However, the experiment showed that industrial housing construction allowed for more individual design options. Breaking down the system into its elements and recombining them enabled the development of personal living spaces.

Functionalism as a forward-looking design concept

It is unclear whether Kühne was aware of this experiment. Initially, functionalism did not play a role in his thoughts as a design principle of socialism, even though it was already outlined in his work. In the 1970s, Kühne extended his architectural perspective to encompass the overall aesthetic culture in a series of essays on ornamentation, landscape, and ways of life. He sought an aesthetic that was liberated from art-centricity. His criticism targeted ideas that aimed to establish traditional design methods as the cultural doctrine of socialism. For example, some voices in aesthetics sought to elevate ornamentation to a guiding principle, but Kühne viewed these attempts as outdated commodity fetishism, concealing practicality and prioritizing decoration over meeting practical needs, thus fostering resentment against industrial technology. Kühne's perspective did not advocate for the elimination of ornaments in socialism, but rather for expanding aesthetic possibilities beyond the realm of art. Kühne wrote about this in 1977:

The aesthetic relationships of communism can only be grasped and theoretically conveyed through a multi-dimensional aesthetic. This aesthetics, in which the technical, the practical activity of life itself, its objects and its space, and art as a special mediator of the practical were used here, makes it clear that the connection of communist art with life does not consist in the transformation of the material conditions of life and of life itself into art, but in the connection of art with social practice.⁴⁴

The architectural system developed by Kühne is evident here, and it highlights the hierarchy of the system more clearly. The aesthetic aspect

⁴³ See Horn, *Variables Wohnen*, 152.

⁴⁴ Lothar Kühne, "Ornament—'Poesie der Erinnerung' und Ästhetik kommunistischer Praxis," in Kühne, *Haus und Landschaft*, 79.

encompasses the process of human life as a combination of objective conditions and the subjectivity of human beings that arises in the production and reproduction of these conditions. The aesthetic is demonstrated through their activities and objectifications. Art continues to serve as a commentary on social conditions, and technology remains a means to an end. However, aesthetics is now considered a science with aesthetic culture as its focus—the area of the sensual and value-based relationships of individuals to their life expressions and conditions.⁴⁵ As a science, aesthetics should provide the intellectual means to empower people to shape their lives variably using the objective conditions given, and to achieve self-liberation by consciously shaping these conditions.

Kühne only decided to use the term “functionalism” and its program in the late 1970s. This decision was influenced by the growing discussion within academic aesthetics, which started to reflect political changes such as the SED’s consumer policy strategy under Honecker, as well as the outcomes in architecture, urban planning, and industrial design.

In the late 1970s, design theorist Heinz Hirdina (1942–2013), who served as the editor-in-chief of the journal *form+zweck*, developed a five-part conference series called “Aesthetics of Our Environment.” In his concept paper, he emphasized that each person is influenced by their environment and consciously perceives, experiences, and evaluates it to varying degrees. He noted that there is little discussion on the aesthetic aspect of industrial products, homes, and work among the general population, and that these elements are typically viewed solely as functional necessities. Additionally, Hirdina observed a lack of effort by cultural institutions to elevate the cultural understanding of a broad segment of the population regarding these matters. As a result, he advocated for overcoming “visual illiteracy”⁴⁶ and for developing communication methods to bridge the gap between those who create the aesthetic environment and those who use it. Hirdina posed the questions in terms of “functional aesthetics”: “What makes our lives easier? What isolates individuals from each other and what unites them? What burdens our environment and what relieves our senses and our mental and physical capacity? What frees us from routine work and

⁴⁵ Karin Hirdina, “Zum Begriff der ästhetischen Kultur,” *Weimar Beiträge*, no. 2 (1977): 43–65.

⁴⁶ Heinz Hirdina, “Konzeption zur Konferenzreihe ‘Ästhetik unserer Umwelt’ der Zentralen Kommission für die Künste des Präsidialrates und zur ersten Konferenz dieser Reihe: ‘der Gegenstand: Von einer Ästhetik des Handwerks zu einer Ästhetik der Industrie’—Veranstaltung der Zentralen Kommission Bildende Kunst in Zusammenarbeit mit der Bezirksleitung des Kulturbundes Neubrandenburg am 23. und 29. März in Neubrandenburg,” in *Bundesarchiv* Signatur DY 27/9426, 3.

what increases it?"⁴⁷ The main goal was to establish environmental value standards that both producers and consumers could understand and apply in their environments, with the ultimate aim of raising the overall cultural level of society.

The first conference in Neubrandenburg was organized from an interdisciplinary perspective.⁴⁸ Various employees and volunteers from different cultural institutions, political parties, and the state were invited to attend lectures and engage in discussions with the speakers. The lectures were delivered by Hirdina, Clauss Dietel (1934–2022), an artist and vice president of the Association of Visual Artists of the GDR, Hein Köster (b. 1940), who was then the new editor-in-chief of *form+zweck*, and Kühne.

According to the introductory remarks, Kühne was given the task of outlining the programmatic framework for the conference on industrial aesthetics. However, his presentation, which was stenographically recorded and untitled, did not effectively address this task.⁴⁹ He discussed the role of machinery, individuality, and ornamentation, presenting the first part on bourgeois individuality and machinery concisely but losing coherence in the second part. Kühne failed to outline the program of a "functional aesthetics" and struggled to present a coherent argument. As a result, he resorted to a spontaneous speech, discussing ornamentation, typification, and standards in architecture, while critiquing contemporary phenomena such as the opulent cladding panels of the CENTRUM department stores on Berlin's Alexanderplatz, juxtaposed with prevailing economic constraints. Alongside these critiques, however, there were some noteworthy buzzwords. Kühne spoke of the "leitmotif of the development of our aesthetic culture,"⁵⁰ the "development of economic, material-economic, environmental-economic, life-economic behavior" as a "basic condition of the movement of socialism"⁵¹ and as an "ideal of design"⁵² yet to be formulated. None of these terms are specified, but they point to a program to be developed.

⁴⁷ Hirdina, "Konzeption," 3.

⁴⁸ There is evidence that a conference was held, the first in Neubrandenburg (March 28–29, 1980, with the topic "The Object. From an Aesthetics of Arts and Crafts to an Aesthetics of Industry"). Two more were planned in Magdeburg (September 11–12, 1981, with the theme "Housing—Living in Space") and in Dessau (December 9–10, 1983, with the theme "The Bauhaus Dessau and Walter Gropius. From Constructivism to Bauhaus Functionalism"). Archive material on the last two and other conferences has not yet been found.

⁴⁹ Lothar Kühne, untitled presentation, in *Protokoll der Konferenz "Ästhetik unserer Umwelt"* (Bundesarchiv Signatur DY 27/9426).

⁵⁰ Kühne, untitled presentation, 81.

⁵¹ Kühne, untitled presentation, 84.

⁵² Kühne, untitled presentation, 87.

A year later, Kühne revisited this topic in his main work *Object and Space* from 1981, which represents a significant overhaul of his dissertation. He organized his ideas in the chapter titled “Summary and the Concept of Functionalism.” In it, he explains that the “practical-objective behavior of people” is an “essential aspect of their material social being.”⁵³ Consequently, “the development of social relations is reflected in the significance of objects.”⁵⁴ For socialism, it is therefore necessary to develop a program that is committed to the “practicability” of objects on the one hand and to “technical and economic effectiveness” on the other.⁵⁵

Historical Functionalism places less emphasis on art and instead focuses on practical and technical aspects, particularly in the design of living spaces and material goods. It gains legitimacy from the need to address existing deficiencies and from the evolution of human needs, a less alienated relationship with technology, and liberated labor. According to Kühne, this is the starting point, but it does not mean that functionalist designs are unaesthetic, as critics often argue. The aesthetic value of an object should be evident in its form, affirming both its production process and its consumption by the user. This is only possible in a “functional totality of the object or space.”⁵⁶ In *Object and Space*, Kühne emphasizes the importance of objects enabling access to space and the space allowing its use. This involves meeting the emotional and physical needs of individuals while critiquing traditional practices. Through this ongoing learning process, individuals develop new ways of interacting with their living conditions, such as being cautious.⁵⁷ Kühne writes: “The communist relationship of people to their objects is liberated from the pressure of insecurity, from the compulsion to waste them and from the mere concern for their preservation.”⁵⁸ He is also concerned with putting subjects in a position to develop aesthetic behavior that makes evaluations possible. “There are three levels of aesthetic evaluation,” Kühne writes: “The first is the sensual-selective orientation, the second is the practical-aesthetic evaluation, and the third is the aesthetic evaluation through judgments.”⁵⁹ Kühne uses the example of a drinking

⁵³ Lothar Kühne, *Gegenstand und Raum: Zur Historizität des Ästhetischen* (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1985), 69.

⁵⁴ Kühne, *Gegenstand und Raum*, 69.

⁵⁵ Kühne, *Gegenstand und Raum*, 69.

⁵⁶ Kühne, *Gegenstand und Raum*, 74.

⁵⁷ See Kühne, *Gegenstand und Raum*, 252 ff.; and Martin Küpper, “Das Maß der Freiheit. ‘Behutsamkeit’ bei Lothar Kühne,” *Berliner Debatte Initial*, no. 2 (2019): 31–44.

⁵⁸ Kühne, *Gegenstand und Raum*, 252.

⁵⁹ Kühne, *Gegenstand und Raum*, 78–79.

vessel to illustrate the process. Among the many available vessels, one can bring pleasure and demonstrate its aesthetic value when we drink it. Our enjoyment of using it can also be expressed in the form of judgments.⁶⁰ Kühne may have been referring to the Superfest brand, which was produced from 1980 to 1990. The brand's stackable cups were known for being convenient and nearly unbreakable, making them the preferred choice in the service industry. This demonstrates the objectification of practicality, technical, and economic efficiency in terms of manageability, space, and material conservation. The key point is that in a planned economy, the planning, design, and production of objects are no longer solely in the hands of private capitalists but are seen as a task of political and economic importance to society as a whole. When it comes to the housing construction program, criticism arises because Kühne's approach commits politics to promoting functionalist practices, which are intended to become revolutionary and be realized in production. This means that simply addressing the shortage of housing is just one part of the process of emancipation. Politics should establish the necessary conditions for people to "enjoy practical life activities."⁶¹ However, functionalism cannot be developed into a comprehensive design principle if this essential step fails. Projects like "Variable Living" and the stackable vessels of Superfest are only partial realizations of this program. Their widespread implementation is a test for socialism to see if it is progressing towards developing communism.

Obstacles to functionalism

In the realm of "functional aesthetics," Kühne takes a radical position. He believes that the state of the social psyche indicates that socialism, as the first stage of communism, embodies a society filled with contradictions. While social production is already geared towards meeting different needs, it is still influenced by capitalist elements like commodity-money relations. The function of commodity relations, although originating within socialism, has not shed its anti-communist tendencies and continues to shape the social psyche:

In socialism there are still factors which oppose the sensual affirmation of the economy of production in individual living conditions. These are not

60 Kühne, *Gegenstand und Raum*, 78.

61 Kühne, *Gegenstand und Raum*, 75.

only the inadequate supply of modern design products and the experience of monotony and tedium in architectural spaces. In addition to the power of habit and education, the exchange-value standpoint objectively set for individuals by the circumstances also forms their aesthetic orientations. Due to the exchange-value character of their objective intentions, they are led to egocentric calculation, deceptive representation, and accumulating appropriation.⁶²

For Kühne, communism is not simply a status or a defined end goal, but rather a dynamic movement. In its initial stage, elements of both bourgeois and communist society are present in socialism, leading to a continuous struggle for dominance within it. Therefore, the communist revolution is not a one-time event, but an ongoing task. This is why the spatial aspect of socialization and cultural education is given great significance for the sustainability of the socialist revolution. The design concept of functionalism seeks to extend the time available and enhance the creative ability of social actors. The pursuit of constant progress and visionary developments led Kühne to oppose the existing state of socialism where communism was at risk of losing its dominance: in the limitations of its material-technical foundation, in the struggling development of communist production relations, and in the lack of advancement in communist social relations. This compelled Kühne to engage in repeated polemics against perspectives he saw as representing a regressive movement, hindering forward-looking progress, whether consciously or unconsciously expressed.

In the collective work *Aesthetics Today* from 1979, the research collective from the Department of Aesthetics and Art Sciences at Humboldt University referred predominantly in positive terms to Kühne's functionalism and his aesthetics oriented toward industrial development. Programmatically, they state: "Our conceptual concern aims at the underpinning of what is sometimes called 'functional aesthetics,' i.e., it must be based on the concrete historical function of people's aesthetic relations in the real process of history and in everyday life—this applies equally to the arts—and not on any philosophical and art-theoretical specifications and criteria, usually formed on the basis of other intellectual modes of appropriation."⁶³ In Kühne's opinion, however, this was not realized. Rather,

62 Lothar Kühne, "Denkübungen zu Marx: Gestaltungen des Reichtums," *Sinn und Form*, no. 3 (1985): 637.

63 Erwin Pracht et al., *Ästhetik heute* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1978), 7.

the conception of *Aesthetics Today* gave the “appearance of suspending the bias of aesthetics in the art horizon,” for it was “an artistic and inherently logical restoration of the same by a detour.”⁶⁴ Contrary to all proclamations, architecture was nonetheless included as one element of the ensemble arts. According to the authors of *Aesthetics Today*, the aesthetic holds intrinsic value and is formed through the fundamental contradiction between use value and form value. Aesthetics is an “actively evaluating, directly (indirectly) constitutively sensual relationship of individuals to objects and events, to themselves and each other, relatively free from the dominance of immediate, instrumental use.”⁶⁵ For Kühne, the practical life process of people is thus excluded from the context of aesthetic relationships. He comments mockingly:

Bread is thus no longer aesthetically valuable for the hungry person who chews it, dissolves it in saliva, tastes it, and feels it slide down to the stomach when swallowed, but only for the mere visual perception of the sated or the supersaturated. But since for the sense of the supersaturated, not the simple bread, but only the confectionary work of art cake is aesthetically valuable, the authors of *Aesthetics Today* have not neglected to concretize their concept of the aesthetic object not only in terms of perception but also in terms of gestalt theory so that human foodstuffs such as bread do not intervene in the object world of the aesthetic.⁶⁶

Kühne believes that the question of whether everyday things have aesthetic value is deeply connected to politics. If the institutionalized concept of aesthetics aims to train cultural workers to raise the level of aesthetic consciousness, then a theory that only gives superficial attention to everyday aesthetics cannot achieve its true potential for liberation. This perpetuates the issue that Hirdina sought to overcome with his conference concept. Everyday items such as industrial products, people’s homes, and workplaces are not typically viewed from an aesthetic perspective, and educational institutions, which should be promoting higher aesthetic standards, tend to approach these objects and associated problems in a conventional, bourgeois manner. Aesthetic value tends to be attributed only to objects considered works of art or in the process of becoming art.

64 Lothar Kühne, “Kritische Revue: Anmerkungen in drei Abschnitten zu *Ästhetik heute*,” in Kühne, *Haus und Landschaft*, 149.

65 Pracht et al., *Ästhetik heute*, 232.

66 Kühne, “Kritische Revue,” 150.

The provisional end of the functionalism program

During the 1980s, Kühne's impact on the aesthetics discourse decreased for several reasons. Firstly, his illness and disability prevented him from participating in academic discussions and working as a university lecturer. Secondly, the GDR faced growing economic challenges from the mid-1970s onward due to the oil price shock: rising raw material costs clashed with slower increases in sales prices for goods; industrial production and agriculture both slowed down due to overuse and monoculture issues; the country accumulated significant debt with the capitalist West; and cooperation with the USSR declined. Overall, these difficulties resulted in a lack of investment in modernization, including infrastructure and the environment.⁶⁷ As for housing construction, this meant that necessary policy measures, such as adjusting rents and addressing the issues of under-occupancy and the neglect of city centers in comparison to the housing developments on the outskirts, were not adequately addressed during Honecker's leadership.⁶⁸

The concept of "functional aesthetics" lost momentum due to objective conditions, and suffered a setback when Kühne committed suicide in 1985. Despite this, the discourse continued. In 1988, for instance, Heinz Hirdina published his dissertation B titled *Funktionalismus als Gestaltungsprinzip. Texte zur Designgeschichte* (Functionalism as a design principle: Texts on the history of design), while Olaf Weber submitted his dissertation B entitled "Die Funktion der Form in der Architektur. Zu Grundfragen und aktuellen Problem der Gestaltung" ("The function of form in architecture: On fundamental questions and current problems of design"). In his ninth chapter, Weber argues in favor of understanding functionalism as a "guideline" or methodology for socialist design. However, the ideal of a different, classless social formation conveyed by functionalism as a program lost its appeal to designers, architects, and politicians. Finally, support for socialism among end users also declined.

Kühne's concept is unique because he always linked the design options of objects and spaces to their social foundation. His goal was not to confine functionalism to its historical origins or to transform it into a specific style. Instead, he saw functionalism as a framework that offers an aesthetic outlook, one which can demonstrate an emancipated society and serve as a way to accomplish it: "People can only form a free attitude towards their objects," he writes programmatically, "through free association. This

67 Jörg Roesler, *Die Geschichte der DDR* (Köln: PapyRossa Verlag, 2021), 77ff.

68 Tesch, *Wohnungsbau*, 61ff.

requires a struggle that must be waged not essentially for the new object, but for the new society.”⁶⁹

After the fall of socialism, the discussions about the programmatic significance of functionalism gradually disappeared. In 1983, Schnaيدt pointed out that functionalism was no longer a topic of debate in Western European capitalist societies due to the privatization of large parts of social housing in the 1980s and the rise of postmodernism. However, he also cautioned that functionalism would always have a presence in factories and on building sites.⁷⁰ The fundamental issue it raised about consciously shaping one’s own objective living spaces is still relevant.⁷¹ It is still relevant today because the issue of housing is still a social issue in the twenty-first century in Europe. Broad sections of the population across the continent lack access to affordable housing, from Madrid to Oslo to Sofia. This problem also raises the question: How do we live? Programmatic functionalism had its strongest roots in the design of housing and continues to do so.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the project “Philosophy in Late Socialist Europe: Theoretical Practices in the Face of Polycrisis” funded by European Union—NextgenerationEU and Romanian Government, under National Recovery and Resilience Plan for Romania, contract no. 760044//23.05.2023, cod PNRR-C9-I8-CF104/15.11.2022, through the Romanian Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within Component 9, Investment I8.

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⁶⁹ Kühne, *Gegenstand und Raum*, 265.

⁷⁰ See Claude Schnaيدt, “Die Hemmnisse des Funktionalismus,” *form+zweck*, no. 2 (1983): 48.

⁷¹ See Heinz Hirdina, “Funktionalismus,” in *Wörterbuch für ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, eds. Martin Fontius et al. (Weimar/Berlin: Metzler Verlag, 2001), 607.

12. Humanism vs. Scientism? An Ilyenkovian Critique of Capital's Dualities and Dichotomies

Siyaves Azeri

Abstract: This chapter offers a Marxist critique of the dichotomy between humanism and scientism by engaging with Evald Ilyenkov's activity-based materialism. It argues that the apparent opposition between reason and emotion, science and morality, or subject and object reflects the antagonistic logic of capitalist social relations. The text critiques dualisms endemic to capitalist thought and challenges Kantian and positivist assumptions about reason's limits. Drawing on Marx and Ilyenkov, it proposes that thought and reality are unified through human activity, which is historically and socially constituted. The chapter further critiques the idealist fetishization of science, including the myth of the thinking machine, calling for a dialectical materialist rethinking of knowledge, ethics, and the human subject as part of a communist humanist project.

Keywords: dialectical materialism; Evald Ilyenkov; critique of scientism; capitalist social relations; Marxist philosophy of science; philosophy of mind

Introduction: The contradictory essence of capitalism

That we live in an age of the total crisis of capitalism is almost part of common knowledge; though being in part a commonsensical formulation itself, it can be misleading, as it may imply that the crisis is a matter of, say, "mismanagement" of resources, lack of a "proper" techno-scientific approach to nature and to the process of production, the absence of a "moral"

or “ethical” view of the world, or a malfunction due to the manipulations of “bad” (which is usually identified with “financial”) capital, which, in the final analysis is extrinsic to the capital-relation and thus can be handled mechanically and fixed. Yet, at a closer look, it becomes obvious that every aspect and facet of capitalist society—from the social relations of production among human individuals to the sciences, philosophies, ethics and moralities—are riddled with crisis, which implies that crisis is an essential aspect of capitalism; not only is capitalism *in* crisis, but more importantly, capitalism, as the total manifestation of the capital-relation, is *the* crisis. Capitalism persists not despite but through and *as* crises because in its essence, it is contradictory and constitutes an antagonistic totality.

The antagonistic essence of the capital-relation is manifest in the age-old dualities and dichotomies, albeit in their contemporary-capitalist forms, such as the mind–body, subject–object, emotion–reason, morality–rationality, and nature–culture, all of which are different forms of appearance of the presumably antagonistic relation between thought/thinking and being/reality, and which have uncritically been appropriated from common sense by different philosophical schools from empiricism to various breeds of idealism. What is specifically capitalistic in its approach to these dichotomies is not the mere admission of the contradictory positioning of their opposing poles but of the form of their conceptualization, which aims at eradicating the contradictions, usually through favoring the domination of one pole over another. A holistic understanding of capitalism and its crises, which is essential to the practical criticism of capitalist society, necessitates an analysis of these aspects with the aim of deciphering the mediations through which the capital-relation is actualized since a critique of this relation necessarily coincides with a critique of its forms of actualization. This latter is a unique aspect of Marxian materialism that considers praxis (human activity) as the fundamental category in explaining social reality and the process of knowledge-production and knowledge-acquisition with reference to that realm. Accordingly, there is no human activity in general; activity is actualized within specific socio-historical forms meaning that modes of activity (as much as knowledge-production, as a specific sphere of the metabolic relation between humans and nature) are historically emergent. Hence, a critique of the human–nature relation, of modes of relating to and knowing nature cannot be realized in isolation from the socio-historical mode of production.

Following Ilyenkov, I argue that these two positions are two sides of the same coin of the capitalist relations of production meaning that as real as the dichotomy between the poles is, it is also a pseudo-dichotomy—a

non-existent existent reminiscent of “sensible supra-sensible” existence of the value-form.¹ The experience of such dichotomies in real life is in no way illusory just as much as the determination of the relationships between individuals by commodities and the social relations between the latter is not. Rather, it signifies the irrationality not only of the moral-sentimental element, but also of the reason that is apparently opposed to sentimentality; it signifies the irrational rationality of the actual when looked at from the yet-to-be-actualized. As the actual present, and contradictory as it may seem, both parties are “rational,” but their inevitable demise and self-negation point to their irrationality and the necessity of their replacement with a new, humane actuality—communism.

Conceptualizing contradiction

The tendency to eradicate contradiction is a function of the way contradiction is conceived. The mainstream understanding of contradiction considers the opposing poles as exclusive binaries; in a sense, this exclusive relation between the opposing poles is conceived as an enmity, where one pole aims at to annihilate the other. This view of contradictions is best manifested in the way the relation between the human being and nature is traditionally conceived: under capitalism, nature is fundamentally considered to be a mere source of raw material at the service of the production of commodities and value; it is a resource that should be exploited to the point of exhaustion. Furthermore, even for a dialectician like Hegel, nature is also conceptualized as the ultimate source of fear, as the enemy, the alien, “the Idea that presents itself in the form of *otherness*,” the idea in its “negative form,”² the realm of unfreedom, of mere contingency and necessity that should be controlled, manipulated, and tamed. Unless the fetishistic mode of conceptualizing the human–nature relation, which is the necessary consequence of capitalist social relations of production, is done away with—in other words, unless the human–nature relation is conceived as human-to-human relation mediated by “nature”—any attempt at reforming or “humanizing” our relation to nature will be incomplete, irrelevant, and ultimately temporary fix. Inhumane social relations are the main obstacle on the path to humanizing nature and naturalizing humans.

1 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1992), 164.

2 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1817). Online at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/encindex.htm> § 192.

The subject in relation to the object of action/thinking who conceives of contradiction commonsensically, reacts to it hysterically; they experience a total collapse of thinking in the face of a contradiction—a personal crisis. On the side of the object, the subject conceives of the contradiction in terms of crisis but only negatively—as an anomaly or a state of emergency—and never as the opportunity to conceptualize crisis as a process that encourages and enhances creativity and the imagining of a different and better future. In other words, contradiction is not understood as the necessary form of coexistence of the contradictory poles. For instance, it is through the contradictory unity of the poles “human being” and “nature” that the human is humanized as much as naturalized, and vice-versa—nature becomes not only more itself but also more humanized. Nature is not an alien entity, a source of fear, or mere resource, but is the necessary condition of humanization, as it is the condition, the material, and the very tool of human activity (labor)—let alone the fact that humans belong to nature (of which there is more below).

Any act of thinking, in its essence, is contradictory, as thinking, first and foremost, is the negation of the given, while simultaneously it is an act of delimiting that is intrinsically an act of transcending the limit. Thus, any phenomenon in the universe, to the extent that it is an object of thought, can be expressed in two apparently mutually exclusive ways, where each theory violates neither the laws of logic nor the empirically provided data. Genuine thinking conceives of the apparent contradictions as the constituents of reality as well as the constituents of “thought-terms.” It suffices to recall Hegel’s treatment of “quality,” “quantity,” and “measure” as the three grades of being, which are exclusive even as they form a unity. While quality is what makes a thing what it is in its being, quantity identifies it as a specific being. The specificity of being requires quantification through measure; with the latter, we arrive at the idea of qualitative quantity, which directs the mind to the essence of being.³ Therefore, the “thinkable world”—the world as we know and think—is always “dialectical,” bifurcated in itself, and logically contradictory. From the non-dialectical perspective, the one and only way to eradicate the antinomies intrinsic to thinking is by excluding half of the categories from the toolbox of reason. However, it is not clear why one set should be excluded and not the other. Metaphysics, largely, has hitherto done this: for instance, it excludes “chance” or “accident” as necessary events whose causes remain unknown, thus declaring the former category subjective

³ Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, § 84.

and illusory and the latter objective and real; the same goes with quality and quantity.⁴

Kant, as Ilyenkov notes, is aware of the “arbitrariness” of the choice to privilege a set of categories over another. Yet, he naturalizes this randomness by conceptualizing antinomies as intrinsic and essential to Reason—Reason, in its essence, is defected and limited. The only way out of such a dead end, accordingly, “is the recognition of the eternal antinomies of ‘reason.’ Antinomy—logical inconsistency—is the essence of punishment for ‘reason’ for attempting to exceed its legitimate boundaries, for attempting to carry out an ‘absolutely complete synthesis’ of all concepts, that is, to make a judgment about what a thing is in itself, and not just ‘in every possible experience.’”⁵

The exploitative, exclusive relation between human beings and nature can be traced in a distorted form in Kant’s notion of the “thing-in-itself,” which is unknowable in principle. So conceived, nature in its essence sets the limit on thinking and, as such, contradicts rationality: where there is nature, there is no thinking, because nature is conceived of as the negation of thought. The essence transcends the scope of human thought and nature appears as the source of “hysteria,” since the juxtaposition of the human and nature amounts to a lack of freedom, which follows from the alleged absence of rationality and thinking in (relation to) nature—the other substance. The acquisition of freedom, thus, is bound to lead to the annihilation of nature as the source that yields anomalies of reason because Kant conceives of genuine thinking in terms of non-contradiction and complete coherence, which he himself admits to being an unachievable goal. In examining the world, as one of the unconditioned objects in Kant’s system, reason faces antinomies. Antinomies arise not from the essence of the object but are attached to the appearance (phenomena) and belong to reason; they follow from the state that two opposite propositions can be stated for each object. As Hegel notes,

According to Kant, however, thought has a natural tendency to issue in contradictions or antinomies, whenever it seeks to apprehend the infinite ... [However, Kant] never got beyond the negative result that the thing-in-itself is unknowable and never penetrated to the discovery of what the antinomies really and positively mean. That true and positive

⁴ Evald Ilyenkov, *Об идолах и идеалах* [Of Idols and Ideals] (1968), <http://caute.ru/ilyenkov/texts/iddl/index.html>, 94.

⁵ Ilyenkov, *Об идолах и идеалах*, 95.

meaning of the antinomies is this: that every actual thing involves a coexistence of opposed elements. Consequently to know, or, in other words, to comprehend an object is equivalent to being conscious of it as a concrete unity of opposed determinations.⁶

Reason vs. emotion

In his 1971 article “Humanism and Science” Evald Ilyenkov addresses a central problem that lies at the core of modern thought: the reason–emotion dichotomy that manifests itself in the form of the opposition between the mind and the “heart” or between humanism and science. This conflict is not a result of the caprices of dualist philosophers or the dogmas of their philosophies. Rather, “it is a stuff of reality, the centre of our lives and thoughts.”⁷ This conflict has severe consequences, particularly when, in the face of a dramatic event, the dicta of reason and emotions openly contradict each other. The question is whether we can come up with a universal schema for making decisions when confronted with such situations. Which of the principles should be considered foundational in making up our minds: the voice of conscience or the imperative of reason? Furthermore, which conditions are responsible for the emergence of such contradictory situations?

The traditional responses to this dichotomy imply that there is no choice other than to take one of these positions: the seemingly nobler moral pole or the cold, calculative rational side, i.e., the “noble” sentimentalism of Don Quixote vs. the coldblooded instrumental reason of Rudolf Höss—humanism vs. scientism. As Ilyenkov notes, both these positions “lead to defeat, to demise and to self-negation,” meaning that rather than being dichotomous, the two positions are complementary in the effect of forming a unity. Both positions are the expressions of the inhumane conditions humans are subject to.

The conflict between science and morality is itself a partial form of the appearance of capitalist social division of labor that culminates in the division between manual and intellectual labor.⁸ The outcome of this separation,

6 Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, § 48.

7 Evald Ilyenkov, “Humanism and Science,” (1971), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/articles/humanism-science.htm>.

8 “Division of labor only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labor appears. (The first form of ideologists, priests, is concurrent.) From this moment onwards consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it really represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness

insofar as the relation between science and morality is concerned, is a science devoid of all human sentiments, science as a utilitarian endeavor subsumed under instrumental reason that functions as a natural force of capital, and an “abstract humanism,” which noble as it may be, is “powerless before the ‘force of circumstances’ and condemned to the fate of a lamb before the slaughter.”⁹ Both these poles are catastrophic to human civilization as they share the common denominator of the exclusivity of reason and emotions; both parties uncritically endorse a historically specific situation as natural, ontological, and thus permanent, and in doing so, both parties leave the real historical ground—the capitalist mode of production—that yields this divide intact. One camp, scientism, intentionally or unintentionally, ends in supporting capitalism unconditionally, deifying science and the so-called scientific rationality (which cannot be other than the reason of capital), and forms the caste of priests of this new spirit, while the other camp, abstract, therefore romantic humanism, ends in “criticizing” capital from within capital by deifying “reason” as the cause of the catastrophe through identifying an historical form of reason with “reason-in-general.” One camp mistakes the historical scientific reason, which is the product of a specific mode of human activity, with Reason as the spirit that runs the machine, while the other camp attacks the machine to fight the ghost hidden underneath.

Rationalizing emotions and sentimentalizing reason

From the non-Marxian, uncritical point of view, the remedy is just an arm’s length away. It would be sufficient to inject a dose of science and knowledge,

is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of ‘pure’ theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc.” See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, in *Marx Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 5, 19–452 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 44–45. Although at this particular passage Marx and Engels have an eye on the “division of labor in general,” soon after they emphasize that the division of labor arrives at its heights with the development of capitalist social formation, with which the universal, “world-historical” class of propertyless mass also emerge: “this development of productive forces (which at the same time implies the actual empirical existence of men in their *world-historical*, instead of local, being) is an absolutely necessary practical premise, because without it privation, *want* is merely made general, and with *want* the struggle for necessities would begin again, and all the old filthy business would necessarily be restored; and furthermore, because only with this universal development of productive forces is a *universal* intercourse between men established, which on the one side produces in all nations simultaneously the phenomenon of the ‘propertyless’ mass (universal competition), making each nation dependent on the revolutions of the others, and finally puts *world-historical*, empirically universal individuals in place of local ones.” Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 49 (emphases in original).

9 Ilyenkov, “Humanism and Science.”

a bit of scientific “literacy,” to the supposedly moral layperson who is good by “nature” or, vice versa, provide a code of values as some moral regulator to the highly scientific-minded expert and everything will be in order and no catastrophe will occur anymore. Is such a “solution” viable? Is this proposal more than a fix or an adhesive band applied to an amputated limb?

Kant’s proposal, Ilyenkov argues, is the height of the latter position (which, in the final analysis, dialectically yields the former). For Kant, pure reason and practical reason function as two fundamental, independent powers. Pure reason is bound to the description, albeit partial, of the *is* without having a say on the *ought*—it cannot judge whether something is good or bad with regard to the well-being of the human species. Practical reason is a moral regulator, a power checking on pure reason, dictating the moral imperatives that cannot be scientifically proven or rejected (a position that eventually would be endorsed by logical positivism and post-positivism, with the former bashing it as metaphysical nonsense and the latter approving it conditionally as lying beyond the boundaries of scientific thought). At its basis, the categorical imperative is determined by faith. Pure scientific reason is neither good nor bad and thus it can serve both good and evil. Thus, it should be restricted by the moral imperatives of the practical reason. Pure reason, necessarily, arrives at antinomies that are irresolvable by appealing to the resources of pure intellect because, as mentioned above, pure reason considers nature (material stuff of the world) as the object of knowledge, which necessarily falls outside of the scope of its grasp and appears as its negating limit; in such cases of under-determination, the choice between the alternatives provided by pure reason should be left to the practical reason as the external arbiter.

Kant’s conceptualization of the inevitability of the antinomies of reason, a formulation that belongs to the realm of epistemology, is reminiscent of the Hobbesian theory of the “war of all against all,” which presumably concerns the realm of politics. Both of these situations are allegedly the consequence of reason being in the state of nature: “In the ‘state of nature,’ understanding (mind) imagines that it is capable, relying on ‘experience’ limited by the conditions of time and place, to develop concepts and theories that have an unconditionally universal character.”¹⁰ In contrast, “critical reason” will be aware of its legitimate sphere of application and of its limits; it will never intend to transgress into the transcendental by aiming for a “complete synthesis”; it will admit that with respect to the “thing-in-itself,” logically and empirically, two equally correct theories (conceptualization)

¹⁰ Ilyenkov, *Об идолах и идеалах*, 96.

are possible, and thus it should refrain from attempting to erase one in favor of the other.

Theoretical opponents, instead of waging constant war against each other, should establish among themselves something like peaceful coexistence, mutually recognizing each other's rights to relative truth, to "partial synthesis." They must finally understand that in relation to the "thing-in-itself" they are equally wrong, that the "thing-in-itself" will eternally remain unknown—an "X"—yielding immediately opposite interpretations. However, being equally wrong about "things in themselves," they are equally right in another respect, in the sense that "reason as a whole" (Reason) has within itself opposite interests that are equivalent and equally legitimate.¹¹

What we have before us, consequently, is the bifurcation of reason into two separate spheres: the one that seeks identities versus the one that seeks differences. A consistent synthesis of these two aspects is impossible since identity and difference (non-identity) are, formally-logically understood, mutually exclusive. The situation is similar to a state of fragile peace achieved not through deciding the "right" (by reason) but by the force of a one-sided judgment. Kant states,

The method by which states prosecute their rights can never be by process of law—as it is where there is an external tribunal—but only by war. Through this means, however, and its favorable issue, victory, the question of right is never decided. A treaty of peace makes, it may be, an end to the war of the moment, but not to the conditions of war which at any time may afford a new pretext for opening hostilities; and this we cannot exactly condemn as unjust, because under these conditions everyone is his own judge.¹²

Still, Kant would continue, reason condemns war as immoral, posing the duty of constituting the state of peace immediately through a *foedus pacificum* that would put an end to war forever.¹³ That the imperative for perpetual peace follows not from reason but from "pragmatic" incentives is clear in itself. Hence follows the untrustworthiness of science in resolving the most

¹¹ Ilyenkov, *Об идолах и идеалах*, 96–97.

¹² Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay*, trans. M. C. Smith (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1903), 133.

¹³ Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 134.

important issues humanity faces, which, in its turn, means the inevitability of appealing to faith (morality) when encountering such situations. It is only on the basis of faith, that belongs to the realm of “practical reason,” that a “consistent” understanding of human being and the human world is possible. Thus, the bifurcation/opposition of faith and reason, of morality and science, suggests that allegedly both are needed if “eternal peace”—both in science and in life—is to be favored: pure reason should be subordinated to practical reason; we, out of pragmatic concerns, should *accept* the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and free will.

Satisfactory and genuine as it may seem, Kant’s position is open to counterargument. A contrary formulation to that of Kant is also conceivable: after all, why should rational, scientific reason be subordinate to practical reason whose source of imperatives are unknown and not the other way around? One may further argue that this second proposal is more viable owing to the presumed identity between pure and practical reasons—the latter becomes a derivative of the former—basing moral imperatives on “human nature.” Despite its appearance as superior to Kant’s ethics, this position is nothing other than its mirror-image. This “latter would be a wonderful solution, but only under the condition that the notion (science) was an absolute one in terms of infallibility, meaning, free of error. To put it briefly, the scientific notion would have to possess all those qualities of divine perfection ascribed to it by Plato and Hegel respectively.”¹⁴ In other words, pure reason should be a deity, possessing all attributes of God—idealism in its crudest mode.

This position amounts to a subordination of the human being to its own products; science, after all, is a human-made tool with the purpose of serving the well-being and happiness of humankind. However, in this picture human being is considered an appendage to the science-machine, a mere executor of its commands. This could be tolerable if scientific reason were as “pure” as Kant and his successors of different breeds claim it to be, but what if it is not the case? And it is much more likely that it is not as pure, since reason is always human reason—and not that of an abstract, “human-in-general,” but of concrete, socially and historically determinate persons. With the deification of science—and of morality as its mirror-image—we are once again in “the misty realm of religion [...] [where] the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race.”¹⁵ The subordination of the human species to science and/or morality as oppressive

¹⁴ Ilyenkov, “Humanism and Science.”

¹⁵ Marx, *Capital*, 165.

forces capable even of the extermination of the human kind and the whole life on the planet “testifies above all to the inhuman, anti-humanist nature of that *system of relations between people* which so perverts the relations between science, morality, and the human being.”¹⁶

Humans are distinguished from non-human animals to the extent that they act in accordance with “the general interest of the species.” In the animal kingdom, the “interest of the species” is an accidental by-product dictated by necessity. The human being, on the other hand, is a “species being.” The specifically human consciousness thus emerges once the individual conceives of oneself as a Human, as the representation or the manifestation of the species, which means the coincidence of the development of each individual with that of the species. Kant’s moral philosophy is an attempt to conceptualize the conditions of the actualization of the ideal of the social individual, although, owing to historical circumstances, it adopts a religious, evangelical tone and is depoliticized. This latter feature is also responsible for the conservative reformism that is proposed by Kant when it comes to the realization of the ideals of the French Revolution (particularly in his “Perpetual Peace”) recommending “critical” dialogue with the aim of “enlightening” and convincing the sovereign to accept those ideals.

In contradistinction to Kant, Hegel realized that action is required for the realization of such an ideal, that is, we cannot and should not wait until the last pope and prince accept the ideal and act according to moral imperatives. In fact, human history has shown that circumstances are not much in favor of the Ideal, as much as they are in favor of the “actual,” meaning that the situation renders Kant’s ethics into another celestial, otherworldly doctrine similar to that of the church. Such a tendency is already visible in Kant’s and Fichte’s portrayal of the “transcendental subject” as the “better self” that is present in every human individual from birth, even though only as a weak flame. The transcendental subject is “*the same self*,” only multiplied, repeated without any changes, like countless identical prints made from the same reference image. Each individual copy may be a little brighter or darker, a little clearer or a little more blurry than the other, but it is still the same shot, only multiplied [...] [The transcendental self exists/resides/is manifest] in his copies imprinted ‘inside’ every living person, in his ‘soul.’”¹⁷ In Kant’s view, the ideal is this image of the “better self” reconstructed in subjective imagination; accordingly, the differences between individuals are caused by deviations from and distortions of this ideal image.

¹⁶ Ilyenkov, “Humanism and Science” (emphasis in original).

¹⁷ Ilyenkov, *Об идолах и идеалах*, 77.

Although conceived in this way, as something devoid of objectivity, the ideals in Kant's portrayal are far from being mere chimeras of the fantasy. As such, they provide the measure, the concept of what is "perfect," but only subjectively and imaginatively, liberating the acting agent from the chains of external conditions, and of time and space. Yet, such an "emancipatory effect" comes at the price of indifference towards empirical reality, including the external sphere as well as the internal—the sphere of the empirical I—that, in its turn, renders the ideal unactualizable. In its unrealizability, the Kantian ideal recapitulates religious idolatry.¹⁸

The fetish of the thinking machine

The aforementioned idealist formulation of the science fetish as the new deity, which replaces Hegel's God-Logos, is reflected in the perverse image of the "thinking machine," whose intellectual capabilities are expected to exceed those of human beings. The inherent idealism that haunts the proponents of the so-called Artificial Intelligence and the Thinking Machine discloses their simplistic mode of conceptualization of thinking/thought as an algorithmic procedure of compiling information. This conceptualization is rooted in the idea that it is the brain, and not the human person using the brain, that thinks. But what is a human person?

The human being is a social species. Even if the artificial brain-machine is provided with super-sensitive receptors and organs of activity similar to those of human beings, one cannot speak of a thinking machine in the specific sense of thinking as a human activity. This latter point is related to how one conceives of human individuals. In the formulation above, a human being is considered an abstract, trans-historical entity independent of social relations among people. However, the human personality is not a biologically inherited entity, and neither is their capacity for thinking—the "biological" might be a necessary but is definitely not a sufficient cause for the emergence of specifically human thinking. Human thinking, like all other human activities, is socially "inherited;" it is bound to the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation and is a response to socially created forms, needs, and goals—human civilization.¹⁹ It is by acquiring the "ideal" norms of human culture through learning to act and to work

¹⁸ Ilyenkov, *Об идолах и идеалах*, 80.

¹⁹ Anatoly Arseniev and Evald Ilyenkov and Vasily Davydov, "Машина и человек, кибернетика и философия: Ленинская теория отражения и современная наука" [Machine and Man,

with the artefacts that populate the social universe that one turns into a human person capable of thinking, speaking, and acting humanly, that is, one becomes a free agent of their acts. As Ilyenkov notes elsewhere, a person is free to the extent that they act and live in accordance with their goal, the ideal. Freedom means acting according to the ideal despite the forces of external circumstances, including one's own "selfish" needs dictated by "nature."²⁰

Personhood, thus conceived, is social through and through. Hence, the thinking ability is not determined by the individual features and morphological characteristics of a single individual as much as it is determined by the complex system of organization of people—social relations among people. "Thinking" is the active function of *this* system. [It is] derived from its structure, from its 'morphology,' from its organization, from its needs and possibilities. The thinking individual himself is only an organ of this system.²¹ Thus, the emergence of an artificial mind that is truly intelligent requires not only building a machine after the image of an individual person, but, more importantly, creating the whole social setting that includes both all the "pluses" and all the "minuses" (all the pros and cons) of human civilization, let alone the necessity of developing the "organs" facilitating participation in the spiritual life of a society, from sexual love and evoking mutual emotions in another to willing and imagining.

The techno-scientific obsession with the thinking machine that will be smarter than human beings reveals important tacit assumptions of the proponents of such an idea regarding the nature of thinking activity, the relation between reason and emotions (which was addressed above), the concepts of personality and individuality, and the relation between human beings and machines. As Arseniev, Ilyenkov and Davydov note, "the question of the relationship between human and machine is primarily a *social* question"²² that cannot be answered in "purely scientific" terms, even if the human person is considered to be a machine, as it is done from a techno-scientific (cybernetic) point of view. Treating this relation in mere techno-scientific terms can suggest only a temporary fix, leaving the core of the problem intact. The human-machine relation is, in its actuality, the human-to-human relationship mediated by the machine. The answer

Cybernetics and Philosophy: Lenin's Theory of Knowledge and Modern Science] (1966), <http://caute.ru/ilyenkov/texts/machomo.html>.

²⁰ Ilyenkov, *Об идолах и идеалах*, 71.

²¹ Arseniev and Ilyenkov and Davydov, "Машина и человек."

²² Arseniev, Ilyenkov, Davydov, "Машина и человек."

to this last question betrays the apologetic attitude toward the existing capitalist social relations, where technology and machinery do not function as instruments at the service of the well-being of the human species, but as ends in themselves, of which the individual person is an appendage and raw material—machines are revolutionary means of extraction of surplus-value. This is a much more inhumane picture when compared to Hegel's proposed relation between the *Geist* and human individual. As Ilyenkov notes, "with Hegel, God-Logos specifically granted men the right to act as instruments of self-cognition and self-awareness, 'objectification' and 'de-objectification' [...] Man as a thinking being is the God of this world."²³ In the techno-scientific imagery, however, the human is deprived of all agency and is turned into an automaton.

Idealism, materialism, and the reality of thought

The alleged dichotomy between humanism and science (pure reason and practical reason, intellect and emotion) is an inevitable consequence of the capitalist relations of production that subordinate all human activity to the universal goal of the valorization of capital by every means. The proclaimed neutrality and indifference of science (and scientists) in relation to political, social, and moral issues, which are considered as extrinsic to the scientific endeavor, is another form of expression of an instrumentalization of reason and a utilitarian approach to the human species. In this picture, humans are not considered as ends, but as mere means. Among the products of this approach are the physicist who considers the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima "a perfect experiment in physics" and Rudolf Höss, who conceptualizes devising means of genocide against the Jewish population as a mere technical problem.²⁴ The indifferent stance that facilitates such monstrosities is based on the presupposition of the discreteness of realms of thought and action, which itself is rooted in the assumption of the non-identity of thought and reality. Contradictory as it may seem, the supposed non-identity of thought and being is itself a showcase of the identity of a specific form of thought and being (of thinking and action). In fact, thinking independent of action, or thought independent of reality, is a contradiction in terms, as thinking not only is always thinking of an object, but also is a mode of

²³ Ilyenkov, "Humanism and Science."

²⁴ For a biographical-literary account of Rudolf Höss's part in the genocide, see Robert Merle, *La mort est mon métier* (Paris: Folio, 1976).

activity of the thinking body, with the latter being understood as a social relation. The claim concerning the non-identity of thought and reality and the indifference of objective thought toward social and ethical issues is the expression of a particular politico-philosophical stance that naturalizes and thus legitimizes the existing inhumane social relations. Hence follows the importance of clarifying the meaning of the identity of thought and reality from the “activity-materialist” stance.²⁵

Following Feuerbach, Ilyenkov proposes that the very form of stating the question as one concerning the relation between thought and being is fallacious, as it presupposes thinking/thought not as a human activity and its peculiar consequence, not as the thinking activity of the thinking body, but as something independent from such activity, external to it—not as an “ideal,” but as a substance—that further also includes “being in general.” Despite all its shortcomings, Feuerbach’s formulation of the question transcends idealist formulations—that of Hegel’s included. Being is not something general that is entailed by thought in general; it is the reality before us, “given” to the “senses,” which includes stones, mountains, stars, and automobiles just as much as thought itself, as the product of the thinking body.

Feuerbach shows that ... [it] is impossible to ask how “thought in general” is related to “being in general,” for this presupposes already that thought is regarded in a form alienated from man as something independent and externally opposed to being. But after all, being, understood not in the Hegelian way, that is, not as an abstract-logical category, not as being in thought, but as the real, sensuous—“object filled” [*predmetnyi*] world of nature and man, already includes thought. *Not only stones, trees, and stars but also man’s thinking body belong to being. Thus, to conceive being as something devoid of thought means to conceive it incorrectly, to exclude from being, at the very outset, man with his capacity to think.* This means to deprive being from one of its most important predicates, to think of it in an imperfect manner.²⁶

²⁵ “Activity materialism,” in contrast to substance materialisms of different breed that differentiate themselves from idealism by emphasizing the primacy of matter over mind/idea, is a materialism that has praxis as a philosophical category as its fundamental principle. For a related discussion see Siyaves Azeri, “Engels’ Dialectics of—Human Activity in—Nature,” *Marxism & Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2022): 69–97. Quotation from 84–89. Also see Nikolaos Folinis, “Production Beyond Instrumentality: Marx’s *Capital* and Ilyenkov’s Methodological Explanation,” *Marxism & Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2023): 137–55. Quotation from 139.

²⁶ Evald Ilyenkov, “The Question of the Identity of thought and Being in Pre-Marxist Philosophy,” *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 36, no. 1 (1997): 5–33. Quotation from 17, emphases added.

Hence follows the task of materialist dialectical thinking: to show why idealism arises and why it is so prevalent. What is the source of the idealist illusion that thought and matter are two disparate substances that are in need of reconciliation? One general reason for such misunderstanding is that the brain, like any other human organ, is an instrument of activity. Thus, it cannot have itself as its object of activity (unless certain conditions are met). Indeed, human beings are capable of acting on brains, say, when a surgery is needed, or in the study of the physiology of the human body and nervous system. This is similar to identifying any other organ of activity, say, a human hand or arm, as the object to work on, say, in case a surgical intervention is required following an accident or the like. The crux of the matter is that such abstraction is possible only once the human body, including the human brain, is conceived of as a social body—any organ of human activity is capable of becoming an object of the activity of that organ only within a social organization. The reflexive activity of human organs is necessarily a social activity. “A person perceives/cognizes immeasurably more, [in comparison to, say, a dog], in the world around him, because his gaze is controlled not by the organic needs of his body, but by the needs of the development of social and human culture that he has internalized.”²⁷ This aspect is also related to the idea concerning the difference between the working of the human mind and that of AI. The “wealth” of human cognition is not based on the immense quantity of data/input; in fact, human cognition, virtually speaking, is “independent” from data thanks to the social structure of the human mind and cognition—its ideality. The source of the “creativity” of the human mind is the social and activity-bound make-up of the human mind. The illusion that thought is a substance other than thinking, that is actualized with the use of the brain, is similar to considering seeing/sight as a substance despite the eye; that the eye cannot (and better that it cannot) see itself is the necessary condition for the formation of sight, but it does not make the latter independent of the former. The same goes for the relation between thinking/thought and the brain.

Thought/thinking is an activity in the world; concepts and images are located where the real things are, meaning that the world of thinking and that of doing are one and the same, as thinking is always thinking of a thing or thinking about a thing, just as working is working something or on something. Thus, there is no need for a divine mediation, for a spirit bridging the two: the bridge is the very acting agent, the human being as the

²⁷ Ilyenkov, *Об идолах и идеалах*, 216.

subject of the work and thinking. Hence, Ilyenkov writes, “the determinations of the world in thought (logical determinations) are directly and immediately determinations of the contemplated world.”²⁸ With the same token, the person that partakes in scientific activity and participates in the production of scientific knowledge, is the same person that behaves and acts in accordance with certain moral codes—these are one and the same person and not two different individuals. Their intellectual activity, as well as their moral attitude and conduct, are determined by the ideal rules and regulations that determine the form and mode of activity in each sphere, with both being rooted in and determined by the historically specific mode of social activity. It thus follows that the unity of their logical determinations, with logic being understood as “the abstract-universal forms of real content of thought,” and the determinations of the sensuous world, signify the unity of cognition and ethics as two aspects of logic, “not as a set of rules for expressing thought in speech, but as the science of the laws of development of real thought.”²⁹

Both Hegelian idealism and Feuerbachian materialism amount to political conservatism in the face of the existing socio-political state of affairs. Hegelian idealism, despite its apparent active aspect, is positivistic, passive, and apologetic, as it binds itself with “the empirically obvious state of affairs in the real world,”³⁰ meaning that it treats them as naturally given. Although Hegel’s system treats philosophy as the science of the laws of thinking, with thought understood as including all phenomena of social reality, the very fact that he considers each stage of the movement of thought as definitions of the absolute, as is the case, for instance, in his *Shorter Logic*, renders the whole apparent development of thinking ineffective in the face of reality. For instance, Hegel states, “Being itself and the special sub-categories of it which follow, as well as those of logic in general, may be looked upon as definitions of the Absolute, or metaphysical definitions of God [...]. Each of the three spheres of the logical idea proves to be a systematic whole of thought-terms, and a phase of the Absolute”³¹ with the three spheres signifying Being, Essence, and the Idea, as treated in the *Encyclopedia*. Hence, his formulation that the “rational is actual, and the actual is rational,”³² despite its revolutionary essence, may also amount to the sanctification

²⁸ Ilyenkov, “Identity of Thought and Being,” 20.

²⁹ Ilyenkov, “Identity of Thought and Being,” 20.

³⁰ Ilyenkov, “Identity of Thought and Being,” 17.

³¹ Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, § 85.

³² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. S. W. Dyde (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001), 18.

of actuality.³³ Similarly, crude materialism, Feuerbach's included, due to its contemplative standpoint, falls back into the point of naturalizing the existing order, and conceives of reality as fragmentary, as an objectivity constituted of individual, discrete parts and entities, and not as relations and processes. Furthermore, such materialism necessarily ignores the social determinations of "sensuous" activity and cognition. Thus, its account of activity is abstractly individual; accordingly, sensuous activity is a natural processing of neutral data (sense perception, atomic data, and so on and so forth) and thus carries no specific socio-historical significance.

One specificity of Marxian materialism, in contrast to crude materialism and idealism, is its emphasis on activity as the axis of unity of thinking and being (the immediate unity of the thinking body and being happens not in contemplation, as, say, Feuerbach suggests, but in activity, in praxis). Due to the sociality of human activity, when considered individualistically, the products of social labor, as non-individual entities, appear as mere objects of the senses as, say, is the case with planets or asteroids afar. Thus, Feuerbach commits the same fallacy as idealists: the latter, ignoring the social origins of the "ideal," are misled by the latter's independence from individual persons and consider them as entities in and by themselves; the former, for the same reason, attributes such independence to the objects of the senses. The latter fetishizes thought, the former fetishizes things. As Ilyenkov states, "Feuerbach abstracts from the real complexities of the social relations between theory and practice, from the division of labor, which alienates thought (in the form of science) from the majority of individuals and transforms it into a force independent of them and existing outside them."³⁴

The standpoint of a science that is blind to its own historicity—that is, to its own being a product of social human activity—simultaneously recapitulates crude materialism and idealism: science, in a general, trans-historical sense, is thought alienated from individuals, appearing as a force independent of them; this is a consequence of the social division of labor. Under capitalism, the alienated thought acquires a semblance of total independence, just as Feuerbach's alleged nature is "independent" from human beings and their activity, or as thought is supposedly independent from the social body in the form of Spirit or the Idea for Hegel or Plato. However, due to its "ideality," thought has an effect on human activity and determines its mode, even their individual conduct; it is similar to the

33 Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* in *Marx Engels Collected Works* (MECW), Vol. 26, 353–98 (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 359.

34 Ilyenkov, "Identity of Thought and Being," 23.

workers becoming subject to the laws of their own working as if these laws were independent forces functioning behind their back.

The same goes for moral laws and imperatives: these are imperatives drawn from action/activity, as in fact admitted by Kant himself.³⁵ However, at one level, they are considered being the immediate contrary of the pure reason (the recapitulation of the binary opposition between theory and practice, or between mind and body), which, at another level, can only be related to pure reason externally and mechanically—as is the case with the subordination of pure reason to practical reason in the face of the antinomies of reason or in cases of under-determination. What should be stressed is the assumption that morality lies outside the boundaries of pure reason and is not something that is essentially related to it: Kant ignores that both the so-called pure reason and practical reason are manifestations of one and the same essence: the historically specific form of human activity. Thus, he ignores the fact that the moral imperative is the corollary of, and the mirror-image of, the immoral and the unethical.³⁶ This is a position that would be reproduced by positivism and quasi-positivism, which declare the realm of the moral as the sphere of metaphysics and treat it as independent from the realm of reason (regardless of whether they consider it as meaningless or meaningful).

Crude materialism, by ignoring activity and the consequent historicity of social nature, arrives at physicalism and physical reductionism. As stated above, a further step in this direction is positivism. Both crude materialism and positivism, thus, arrive at a cul-de-sac because they are looking for the material conditions of thought and contemplation in the wrong place, that is, in the brain or in the skull, whereas those conditions lie elsewhere—outside of the individual, in the world.³⁷

When looked at from a medical-scientific point of view, thought or thinking *is* cerebral activity, but philosophically this is far from resolving

³⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Kant clearly states in several places that the categorical imperative is related to action; for instance, he writes: “The categorical imperative would be that which represented an action as objectively necessary of itself, without reference to another end” (*Groundwork*, 25). Furthermore, the famous first imperative, which is also the only categorical imperative according to Kant, reads, “*act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law*” (*Groundwork*, 31, emphasis in original).

³⁶ For a detailed discussion on the necessary unethicity of morality in Kant see Siyaves Azeri, “The ‘Kingdom of Ends’ and the State of Unfreedom: On the Impossibility of the Metaphysics of Morals,” in *Les catégories abstraites et la référence*, eds. George Kleiber et. al. (Reims: Éditions et presses universitaires de Reims, 2018), 501–16.

³⁷ Ilyenkov, “Identity of Thought and Being,” 24.

the question of the identity of thought and matter. A philosophical stance that does not transcend the boundaries of the physiological account of the identity of thought and matter is not (intelligent) materialism anymore, as it ignores the social universe as the condition for the emergence of thinking. As stated above, the agent of thought is the human person and not the "I," neither the Reason, nor the brain.

Furthermore, it is not even the person *himself/herself* that thinks individually, but only the social individual: "Taken out of the surrounding world and placed in the vacuum of abstraction a man is just as incapable of thinking as a brain excised from the human body and placed in a solution of formalin."³⁸ Obviously, it is the human being in unity with nature that is the agent of thought; s/he thinks with the aid of her brain. However, the unity with nature is mediated by the unity with society; it is only the human person in unity with social collectivity that produces the material and spiritual life that is capable of thinking. There can be no thinking outside the nexus of social relations.

Activity materialism

From the perspective of activity materialism, contemplation does not mean an immediate contact between the thinking person and nature; rather, thinking about nature is possible only through the mediation of praxis, labor, and production. It is here that the true unity between the thinking subject and the material object is attained. Through production (labor), where the term is understood in its broadest sense, the object of nature is transformed into an object of contemplation.³⁹ This means that there can be no knowledge prior to changing the object, that is, no knowledge without concretizing the object of knowledge as a historically determinate object. Hence follows the dual sense of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: since there is no knowledge without changing the object, without concretizing it—that is, without identifying its determinations—those views that insist on a contemplative stance are "ideological" as they ignore the historical determinations of the act of knowing and of knowledge-production and thus end up naturalizing and ontologizing it. Therefore, they arrive at conservatism and fetishize knowledge—in the contemporary capitalist world, they fetishize and deify science. Furthermore, once the historicity

³⁸ Ilyenkov, "Identity of Thought and Being," 25.

³⁹ Ilyenkov, "Identity of Thought and Being," 26.

of knowledge-production is admitted, one is provided with the conditions necessary for asking: why does knowing happen in this particular way? In other words, this acknowledgment opens up the possibility of analyzing the “how” of the knowledge-production process and its historically determinate form; such an analysis yields revolutionary praxis, as it opens up the path for a critical engagement with the existing mode of production (of knowledge). Marx and Engels express this succinctly when stating that “Even the objects of the simplest ‘sensuous certainty’ are only given to [the subject of knowledge] through social development, industry, and commercial intercourse.”⁴⁰

Materialistically conceived, the unity of thought and reality signifies the permanent transformation of reality into thought and of thought into reality through the mediation of human activity. In the face of reality as the condition, material, and means of activity, humans constitute representations or concepts that are the form of human activity objectivized, or the form of the object of activity subjectivized, which signifies the process of transformation of reality into thought. In response to the emergence of this new form of objectivity and subjectivity (that are construed through the mediation of social activity), new forms of activity are conceived of, which, logically speaking, signify the stage of transformation of thought into reality (noting that these two movements are inseparable and can be isolated only in the abstract). It is only in practice that the essence reveals itself, because it is only in practice that the changes imposed on the thing-in-itself can be revealed; only if one knows what the object *is* and *how* it is what it is, can one determine what it *has been*—it is “the human anatomy that contains a key to the anatomy of the ape.”⁴¹

By way of conclusion

Given the identity of thought and reality, of thinking and activity, we can conclude that the presumed dichotomy between mind and heart, reason and emotions, (scientific) intellect and morality is an illusion, as these allegedly discrete elements are merely forms of appearance of the historically specific activity of the human being as a psycho-physical unity. This pseudo-dichotomy is the expression of the subordination of the human

⁴⁰ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 39.

⁴¹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. M. Nicolaus (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 105.

species to the products of its own activity, in this case, the subordination of the species to science and morality, which originally were devised as means serving the well-being and happiness of the human species. Neither Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nor Hitler's gas chambers, nor the continuous nuclear threat are accidental by-products of science, just as cyclic financial and "overproduction" crises are not accidental features of capitalism. The Holocaust and nuclear extermination are not products of "sick" minds or morally degenerated scientists—the introduction of moral scales that would enlighten such "base" minds to the effect of preventing the reoccurrence of such atrocities might appear as a remedy only to naïve humanists. Immoral science and ignorant morality are the two sides of the same coin issued by the capitalist relations of production; they are necessary forms of realization of intellectual activity and moral conduct subsumed under capital. Proposals for "fixing" these "defects"—such as those by Hegel or the positivists, which idealistically construe the identity of thought and being, or like that of Kant, who treats this divide as real and the gap as unbridgeable—are non-solutions. The former amounts to a theory of sanctification of the existing state of affairs via the deification of the intellect/mind, while the latter amounts to an ethical theory of ineffective moral imperatives, which, despite the author's good intentions, guarantee the reoccurrence of evil. "The ambulance of theory arrives on the scene much too late" because theory ignores the source and essence of the catastrophe. The practical critique of the capitalist relations of production is the necessary condition for the constitution of an authentic humane science and a truly humanist morality and ethics as the two forms of expression of the consciousness of historical humanity and its world. Such critique is the core of the communist program as authentic humanism: "Man, the living human being, not money, nor machines, nor products or any form of 'wealth,' is the highest value and the 'creator-subject' of all 'alienated' forms."⁴²

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the project "Philosophy in Late Socialist Europe: Theoretical Practices in the Face of Polycrisis" funded by European Union—Nextgeneration EU and Romanian Government, under National Recovery and Resilience Plan for Romania, contract no. [760044//23.05.2023, cod PNRR-C9-I8-CF104/15.11.2022], through the Romanian Ministry of

⁴² Ilyenkov, "Humanism and Science."

Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within Component 9, Investment 18. Ministerul Cercetării și Inovării [PNRR-C9-I8-CF104/15.11.2022].

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