GREGOR MODER

Alienation in Yugoslavia: The *Praxis* Journal and the Problem of Anti-Humanism

Bled, Socialist Republic of Slovenia, Yugoslavia, November 1960. It is a lovely day, and it seems that the Party bureaucrats will be able to enjoy the sunny view of the mighty Alps surrounding the charming little church on a tiny island in the middle of a beautiful mountain lake while eating the famous cream cake and reflecting on the wonderful simplicity of dialectical materialism – or diamat, as they like to call it. This scientific paradigm was able to explain the dialectical totality of the world by comprehending the sun, the mountains, the lake, the reflection of the mountains in the lake, the cream cake, all social processes, both historical and contemporary, and even individual ideas in the minds of party bureaucrats as parts of an infinitely complex but scientifically totalizable system of dialectical relations.

But that day did not go according to plan. The fifth congress of the Yugoslav Association of Philosophers and Sociologists, held in Bled, was devoted to the "theory of reflection" as announced by Lenin in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and elaborated in detail by the Bulgarian materialist Todor Pavlov. The central thesis of this theory was that human consciousness is only a subjective reflection of objective reality. Despite the venerable roots of this materialist theory, a group of philosophers from Zagreb, led by Milan Kangrga and Predrag Vranicki, convincingly demonstrated

in their interventions at the symposium that the theory of reflection was not only naive but, much worse, deeply un-Marxist. The unexpected turn of events at the 1960 symposium in Bled had a lasting impact on the development of social philosophy in Yugoslavia: its traces could be felt from then on in its fundamental discussions, in the structure of international networks, and in the social and political spheres.

In the Department of Philosophy at the University of Zagreb, a decision was soon made to establish a new philosophical journal called *Praxis* and to organize what became an important international forum, modestly named the Korčula Summer School. For the Praxis group, the most decisive concept was that of alienation, as developed by Marx in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* and as established in the philosophy of the Frankfurt School. Marx's early manuscripts were first published in 1932 and were a significant novelty in the context of Marxism as a scientific study of economic relations, as they were marked by the spirit of Feuerbach and, generally speaking, a humanist view of the world. The concept of alienation, and especially alienation in socialist Yugoslavia, was a key concept for the Praxis group, perhaps even the only concept that gave this heterogeneous constellation of philosophers a common basis. While Marx used the concept of alienation primarily to describe the alienation of man from nature and from his own essence in the capitalist economic system and, in somewhat unclear terms, positively defined the project of socialism as a project of dis-alienation, for the Praxis group, this concept was important precisely because they could also use it to criticize the existing Yugoslav socialism.

Gajo Petrović, one of the founders of the *Praxis* journal, defined the group's programmatic orientation in the editorial of the first issue of the journal as follows: "The development of an authentic, humanist socialism is not possible without the renewal and development of Marx's philosophical thought."[1] The text titled "Why Praxis?" defines the purpose of founding the new journal quite candidly and determines its central themes and vantage points. By defining "an authentic, humanist socialism" as the

1 Gajo Petrović, "Čemu Praxis?", 3.

desired outcome, Petrović clearly took the position that existing Yugoslav socialism was neither authentic nor humanist. Secondly, by opting for Marx's philosophy rather than Marx's science and emphasizing the importance of renewing and further developing that philosophy, he quite openly set out a program according to which it is necessary to nurture and develop *philosophical thought* if we ever want to establish a political regime of authentic socialism. This intellectual orientation was a clear departure from Soviet scientific Marxism, from Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, and from the notorious "theory of reflection," which was the basis of the official doctrine of the Soviet-style dialectical materialism. A few lines below, Petrović wrote:

> The contemporary world is still a world of economic exploitation, national inequalities, political unfreedom, spiritual emptiness, a world of misery, hunger, hatred, war, and fear. Old anxieties have been joined by new ones: atomic destruction is not just a possible future; it is already actualized today as a necessity and as a concern that poisons our lives every day. Man's ever-increasing success in creating means to "subjugate" nature is successfully turning him into an auxiliary instrument of his own instruments. And the pressure of mass impersonality and scientific methods of "processing" the masses are increasingly impeding the development of the free human personality.[2]

The terms used and the topics chosen are very revealing. These lines, written in the mid-1960s, may seem unusually contemporary, except that the anxieties of that time, including nuclear war, have been joined by new ones. The idea that we humans have successfully become "instruments of our own instruments," that we have been enslaved by the very processes with which we have come to dominate nature, is a very felicitous phrase and certainly sounds true. The gadgets and robots for everyday use that modern technology has provided us with were perhaps created with the intention of helping us in our work and our daily activities, and they are

2 Petrović, "Čemu Praxis?", 3.

supposed to save us a great deal of time and energy. However, they have also proven to be an enormous waste of time and resources, both mental and physical, considering that we have to constantly ensure that they are working properly, that they are updated, that their batteries are sufficiently charged, not to mention the fact that the apps available to us for social interaction (and especially for *asocial* interaction) consume most of our free time. The smartphone has become not an instrument that helps us navigate the world, but the structure of our world itself, so that in reality, it is we humans who must constantly adapt and keep ourselves up to date in this rapidly changing technological world. Hegel's dialectic of master and slave has found its latest confirmation in the functioning of modern devices.

In Petrović's text, we also find a binary opposition between what he called "free human personality" on the one hand and "mass impersonality" on the other. For Petrović, the free personality was an immediate and obvious goal of Praxis philosophy. It was probably the personalist thought of Zagorka Golubović, one of the key Belgrade members of the group, that can be considered as the most profound attempt to justify this position at the intersection of philosophy, sociology, and anthropology. In her memoirs, she defined it as follows: "One could say that the essential assumption of personalist theories is that the development of free personalities is a *conditio sine qua non* of social and cultural progress without imposed authorities and restrictions … or that no 'higher goal' can nullify fundamental human rights."[3] She added that personalism does not mean liberalism alone, since "the autonomy of society and personal autonomy are mutually dependent."[4] Gajo Petrović arrived at a very similar conclusion when he rejected the idea that individuals must submit to class, since "*there is no revolutionary class struggle without free personalities* capable of raising themselves above the factual level of their class and of realizing their revolutionary, universally human potentialities." In this respect, he even regarded true socialism as a "cult of personality," while understand-

3 Zagorka Golubović, *Moji horizonti: mislim, delam, postojim*, 165.

4 Golubović, *Moji horizonti*, 167.

ing the practices of glorification of leaders and great political figures as a "cult of impersonality."[5] The Praxis group thus placed central importance on the concept of creative personality in the development of socialism, and their criticism of Yugoslav self-management in this regard was meant to be taken quite seriously.

Petrović most often used the term impersonality to refer to Stalinism, which was the central and most popular target of the Praxis group. Criticism of Soviet Marxism was also the most obvious point of agreement between the group and the official positions of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Ever since the split with the Soviet Union in 1948, criticism of Stalin and the Soviet economic system was widely understood as the only correct patriotic position in Yugoslavia. In the above passage, it is therefore particularly telling that the obstacle to "authentic socialism" is defined in relation to the scientific method; even though this undoubtedly also involves a broader criticism of the Enlightenment project, as was characteristic of the Frankfurt School, the key question for Marxism was whether it (i.e., Marxism itself) should be understood as a philosophy or as a science. At the same time, we should add something that may not be entirely obvious from the above quotation, namely that the Praxis group was also critical of the specific Yugoslav political and economic system, the system of self-management. Zagorka Golubović pointed out that the official party criticism of Stalinism remained external, superficial, as the party never really used it to criticize "Stalinism within its own ranks" and to criticize its own practices – which, as she insisted, became the fundamental task of the Praxis group.[6] The group chose as its motto the idea of "ruthless criticism of all that exists," which clearly included the existing reality in Yugoslavia – and the party structures were well aware of this.[7]

Let us return once more to Petrović's editorial. His criticism of human subordination to technology is not only a criticism of Stalinist bureaucracy but can also be seen as a broader criticism of technological modernity

5 Gajo Petrović, *Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, 131.

6 Nebojša Popov, ed., *Sloboda i nasilje*, 37.

7 This is a formulation from Marx's letter to Arnold Ruge from September 1843, MEW, Vol. 1, 344.

and the specific influence of probably the most important thinker of authenticity in the twentieth century, namely Martin Heidegger. The use of terms such as "instrument" and "anxiety" seems strategic. In the article that Petrović contributed to the first issue of the *Praxis* journal, in addition to the editorial, the connection between Heidegger's thought and Marxist humanism is made quite explicit. Moreover, in the conclusion of the article, Petrović even directly linked the Praxis group's position with Heidegger's intervention in Marx. He writes:

> Is not praxis that most authentic "mode" of Being that reveals the true meaning of Being, and therefore is not a special mode but the developed essence of Being? Is not praxis the starting point that makes it possible for us to see both the essence of the nonauthentic "lower" forms of Being and the meaning of Being "in general"?[8]

Heidegger's concept of authenticity, or more precisely, *Eigentlichkeit*, of being one's own, is in fact quite complex. Praxis philosophers in general employed the term authenticity to refer to the field of existentialist philosophy and, ultimately, to the field of humanism. According to this widespread interpretation, people must reject the everyday life of habits to which they have become accustomed in modernity and return to the "forgotten" question of their own being in order to come into their own, or "be who they are." Only in such a return to themselves can their existence be authentic. From the perspective of Heidegger's teaching, the problem with such an interpretation, and especially the problem of linking the concept of authenticity with actual social practice, is that it assumes that authentic human practice is even possible.[9] In this regard, it is very telling that in the German translation of his text, Petrović did not use Heidegger's

8 Petrović, *Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, 189.

9 Even though Heidegger's *Being and Time*, where the concept of authenticity is one of the central categories, shares the historical moment with the rise of Nazism, it is by no means an exercise in Nazi metaphysics. For the purposes of this article, I can only note that *Being and Time* is an attempt to pose the right question, while Nazism was first and foremost an outburst of (wrong) answers.

term *Eigentlichkeit*, but replaced it with the term *Authentizität*.[10] Perhaps he found the French interpretation of this concept better than the original; or perhaps he was well aware that the translation had significantly shifted the problem that Heidegger had assigned to the concept. In any case, not only Gajo Petrović, but the Praxis group as a whole believed that Marx's concept of alienated labor, as found in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, could be adequately addressed with the proposal of authentic, creative human practice. Moreover, they believed that this could be achieved with the help of Heidegger's philosophy.

In fact, we can find some support for the connection between Heidegger's philosophy and humanistic Marxism in Heidegger himself, since in his famous letter "On Humanism" he spoke in surprisingly complimentary terms about Marx's concept of alienation; moreover, he explicitly related his concept of fundamental human homelessness to Hegel's and Marx's concept of alienation and pointed to the historicity of being itself. Heidegger wrote:

> Homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world. Hence it is necessary to think that destiny in terms of the history of being. What Marx recognized in an essential and significant sense, though derived from Hegel, as the estrangement of the human being has its roots in the homelessness of modern human beings. This homelessness is specifically evoked from the destiny of being in the form of metaphysics, and through metaphysics is simultaneously entrenched and covered up as such. Because Marx by experiencing estrangement attains an essential dimension of history, the Marxist view of history is superior to that of other historical accounts. But since neither Husserl nor – so far as I have seen till now – Sartre recognizes the essential importance of the historical in being, neither phenomenology nor existentialism enters that dimension within which a productive dialogue with Marxism first becomes possible.[11]

10 Gajo Petrović, "Praxis und Sein," 40.

11 Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 258–59.

While phenomenology and existentialism are incapable of productive dialogue with Marxism because they have not grasped the historicity of being itself, Heidegger naturally reserved the right not only to participate in such a dialogue, but also to win, or rather to prevail (to borrow his term *überwinden*). For him, homelessness was by no means simply something that humanity could eliminate. Instead, homelessness was a defining characteristic of human existence as ek-sistence, throughout the long historical arc of the modern age, because in this historical horizon, being itself revealed itself as something withdrawn from man, forgotten, abandoned, and thus, in a sense, self-alienated. In other words, no matter how hard we may try to eliminate homelessness through political and social measures, we will not even begin to address the problem of the alienation of being itself, and human essence will still remain something elusive. The "overcoming of homelessness" from being itself, as Heidegger formulated the challenge,[12] can therefore never take the form that can be imagined within the framework of humanism, and thus also not in the form of the Praxis movement's authentic humanist socialism. But no matter how strongly and openly Heidegger criticized humanism, his humanist followers never took him seriously enough in this regard; the Praxis philosophers were no exception.

It is important to note that Gajo Petrović was well aware that Heidegger's philosophy could only be of limited significance for the development of Marxist thought.[13] He believed that *Being and Time* undoubtedly speaks of alienation when it refers to everyday existence as inauthentic (*uneigentlich*), but he wrote: "For Heidegger, then, man's alienation is not a historical stage, which in the course of further development can be overcome. Man as man is necessarily alienated; besides his authentic existence, he also leads a nonauthentic one, and it is illusory to expect that he will live

12 Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 258.

13 And as pointed out by Dean Komel, it is also highly questionable whether it is justified at all, given Heidegger's explicitly negative stance toward communism, to assume that the definition of alienation expressed in the above passage can in fact serve as a meaningful basis for a productive dialogue between Marxism and Heidegger's phenomenology. See Dean Komel, "The Influence of Heidegger's Thought on the Development of Philosophy in Ex-Yugoslav Countries," 648.

in the future only authentically. At least on a social plane, this problem cannot be solved."[14] In other words, what distinguishes Marx from Heidegger is precisely the idea that a dis-alienated society is possible in practice.

In addition, Petrović was critical of those Marxists who believed that humans originally lived in an unalienated society and that alienation could therefore be understood as a kind of historical fall from grace. In this regard, he took a critical look at Engels' classic work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, and in particular at the description of the Iroquois society of the Onöndowa'ga (Seneca) tribe in North America. Engels describes it, following the work of American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan, as wonderful in its "childlike simplicity," as "communistic," as a society where "all are equal and free – the women included," where life in accordance with ancient customs and traditions requires neither police nor courts; and he understands its decline as "a degradation, a fall from the simple moral greatness of the old gentile society."[15]

Even more important is Petrović's critique of Henri Lefebvre, a frequent guest at the Korčula Summer School, contributor to the journal *Praxis*, and one of the intellectual sources of the student movement in France in May 1968. In his work *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre, among other things, addressed the question of the origins of civilization through a reflection on old countryside celebrations, which in some places have survived "to this day." It is very interesting that, on the one hand, Lefebvre supported this reflection with "some fairly precise documents," while, on the other, he explicitly understood it as an exercise in imaginative representation, calling on us to "conjure up this country life" in our minds.[16] Although celebrations, as he acknowledged, are on the one hand contrary to everyday life, on the other hand they only intensify it – and in this sense they can reveal something universally true about humanity. Lefebvre's imaginative portrayal of rural celebrations is one of unity not only with the forces of nature, but also with oneself; in this image, human being "was basic and elementary, but at least he lived without being

14 Petrović, *Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, 86.

15 Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State*.

16 Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 201.

fundamentally 'repressed.'"[17] Petrović did not delve deeper into either Engels' or Lefebvre's theory, which is a pity, as both discussed the issue of sexuality and gender as part of their understanding of so-called primitive life. This exposes a blind spot of the Praxis group in general: it seems that their question of universal human essence did not encompass the issues of sexuality and gender difference. Instead, undoubtedly in the context of Heidegger's critique of humanism, Petrović dismissed Engels' and Lefebvre's ideas about the origins of humanity as "enthusiastic" and added that, in his opinion, Marx was more of a critic than a proponent of the thesis of the original non-alienation of man.[18]

The rejection of naive enthusiasm for primitive society is linked to another pitfall that Gajo Petrović avoided in his reflection on the problem of alienation – he avoided placing this issue in an eschatological, redemptive framework. It was Karl Löwith, responding to the publication of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, who pointed out that the philosophy of history in Hegel and Marx followed the well-known formula according to which "philosophy of history is, however, entirely dependent on theology of history, in particular on the theological concept of history as a history of fulfilment and salvation."[19] As for Hegel, the connection to the Christian metaphysical tradition is made quite explicit, since he described the philosophy of history as a kind of theodicy.[20] With regard to Marx, Löwith wrote that at the center of his theology of salvation is the wage laborer:

> Being completely alienated from himself …, the wage laborer – this impersonal producer of commodities who is himself but a commodity for sale on the world market – is the only revolutionary force which can redeem society at large. The proletarian embodies modern economy as human fate in such

17 Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 207.

18 Petrović, *Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, 86.

19 Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 1.

20 See G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 41: "From this point of view, our investigation can be seen as a theodicy, a justification of the ways of God."

> a way that his particular interest cannot but coincide with the common interest over against the private interest of private property or capital. Only in this universal and eschatological perspective could and did Marx assert that the proletariat is "the heart" of future history, while Marx's philosophy is its "brain."[21]

In Löwith's presentation of the Marxist concept of alienation and the historical task that awaits the wage laborer as the embodiment of human destiny we can recognize a similarity to Heidegger's existential-historical approach to the problem; and Löwith did indeed count Heidegger among eschatological thinkers.[22]

However, we cannot accuse Gajo Petrović of having such high expectations of the proletariat and Marxism; after all, he lived in socialist Yugoslavia, and his understanding of alienation was much more down-to-earth. He wrote: "Marx himself thought that man had always been self-alienated, but that he need not always remain so. Like Engels, he thought that man could and ought to come into his own."[23] In his commentary of alienation, Petrović preferred to rely on Erich Fromm, another regular guest at the Korčula Summer School and a friend of the Praxis group: "In this sense, Marx in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* speaks about communism as a society that means 'the *positive* supersession of all alienation and the return of man from religion, the family, the state, etc. to his *human*, that is, *social* existence.'"[24] For Petrović, alienation was not an inevitable element of the human condition, but neither was dis-alienation a fantastical or theological return of humanity to the promised land or to a

21 Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 38.

22 Although Löwith only discussed Heidegger in a few footnotes in *Meaning in History*, it is clear that he understood the concepts of future and resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*), which are essential to the work *Being and Time*, as existentialist, but fundamentally eschatological concepts. See Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 252–53, n. 21; 255, n. 1.

23 Petrović, *Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, 87.

24 Petrović, *Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, 87. The quote from Fromm refers to Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, 104. For Fromm, the abolition of private property is essential for overcoming alienation.

lost paradise. Precisely in this respect, in that he understood a dis-alienated society only as something *possible* in the future, and not as a historical necessity or theological destiny, Petrović freed Marx (and Marxism) from eschatological frameworks and, more importantly, more or less directly acknowledged the central role of historical contingency in Marx's philosophy of history. In this, his task, perhaps surprisingly, coincided with the endeavors of a completely different kind of Marxist philosopher, the anti-humanist Louis Althusser.

Praxis and Edvard Kardelj

The Yugoslav authorities took the issues and efforts of the Praxis group very seriously. Branislav Jakovljević, author of *Alienation Effects: Performance and Self-Management in Yugoslavia, 1945–91*, believes that the success of the Praxis group, including the international reputation and recognition they achieved with the Korčula Summer School and the journal *Praxis*, and especially with their criticism of the bureaucratized system of self-management, which was not only agreed with by intellectuals but also resonated with the general population, contributed to the widespread student protests in Belgrade in June 1968. According to Jakovljević, the theory of alienation as discussed by the Praxis group played the role of a kind of mediator or even served as a theoretical basis of the political discussion between the many spontaneous social movements on the one hand and the state authorities on the other. Jakovljević writes:

> Part of the reason Marcuse and other reformist Marxists kept coming to Korčula was that in Yugoslavia their ideas were not confined to street protests, but had at least some chance of filtering up to the highest levels of institutional politics. The theory of alienation was one avenue of this traffic between critical theory and state politics.[25]

25 Branislav Jakovljević, *Alienation Effects: Performance and Self-Management in Yugoslavia, 1945–91*, 120.

Yugoslavia was extremely interesting to Marxist theorists because it offered – albeit to a limited extent – an experimental terrain for their ideas. Although the party leadership tolerated and even supported the Praxis group to a certain extent, the differences in their views on development and the concept of self-management were ultimately insurmountable. In the mid-1970s, the journal *Praxis* and the Korčula Summer School lost government funding; in 1974, the Zagreb members of the group were threatened with a ban on university work if they did not cease the activities of Praxis, while attempts had been made to remove the Belgrade members from the university ever since the student demonstrations of June 1968, which was ultimately achieved when the decision was escalated to the General Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Serbia in 1975. The *Praxis* journal had 11 volumes in total, from the first issue in September and October 1964 to the last, joint issues 3-5 between May and October 1974. The Korčula Summer School as an international forum was first held in 1963 (in Dubrovnik) and last in 1974, with the most notable edition taking place in August 1968, during the global student protests, under the title "Marx and the Revolution."[26]

Edvard Kardelj, the leading intellectual force behind the idea of workers' self-management as a specifically Yugoslav economic model, dealt in considerable detail with the criticism of the Praxis group in his influential and often reprinted work *Smeri razvoja* (*Courses of Development of the Political System of Socialist Self-Management*). He labeled the Praxis group as extreme, ultra-leftist intellectuals and, somewhat paradoxically, accused them of anarchism on the one hand and Stalinist tendencies on the other. In a characteristic passage of the work, Kardelj does not explicitly name the Praxis group, but refers to the slogan of the "ruthless critique of all that exists" and explicitly links it to mass protests: "According to the views of a good part of the ultra-leftists – including the majority of our own – the workers' movement presents completely bureaucratized institutions which are merely a replica of the bureaucratized bourgeois

26 See Nebojša Popov, *Contra fatum*; Dobrilo Aranitović, *Bibliografija časopisa* Praxis; Petar Milat, "Praxis i Korčulanska ljetna škola. Tragovi jednog desetljeća," in: *Praxis. Društvena kritika i socijalistički humanizam*.

society and state. … The main and only form [for ultra-leftists] is direct action by the working class: wildcat strikes, factory occupations, street demonstrations, actions outside workers' institutions. This is, as the ultra-left emphasizes, a radical alternative to the institutionalized workers' movement, social democracy, and bureaucratized communist parties. In fact, it is a kind of modern aspect of anarchism."[27] And yet it is clear, as Gal Kirn, among others, has pointed out, that Kardelj took the humanist critique of the Praxis group seriously enough to ultimately incorporate it, at least in part, into his own concept of self-management.[28] Elements of such an absorption of humanism can be found in one of the most famous formulations of (Yugoslav) self-management by the late Kardelj:

> Happiness cannot be given to a man by the state, by the system, or by a political party. Only the man himself can create his own happiness. But not alone as an individual, only in equal relationships with other people. In these relationships, he must self-govern and freely control his individual and general social relationships and – in appropriate democratic organizational forms – also the state, the system, and the political party as instruments of his own self-management. The vanguard forces of socialism and socialist society can therefore have only one goal – to create, depending on the possibilities of a given historical moment, conditions in which people will be as free as possible in their personal expression and creativity, so that they can – on the basis of social ownership of the means of production – work and create freely for their own happiness. This is self-management.[29]

There is undoubtedly at least a grain of truth in Kardelj's thought, which draws on the Marxist tradition and at the same time flirts with Thomas Jefferson's idea of the pursuit of happiness. A political system, whatever it

27 Edvard Kardelj, *Smeri razvoja političnega sistema socialističnega samupravljanja*, 66.

28 Commenting on the fact that Kardelj placed man's pursuit of happiness at the center of his concept of self-management, Kirn writes: "It is impossible not to recognise the ironic 'return of the repressed' man from the Praxis philosophy in Kardelj's humanism, at a time when the political horizon began openly adopting the Euro-communist tendency." Gal Kirn, *Partisan Ruptures*.

29 Kardelj, *Smeri razvoja*, 9–10.

may be, is not possible without an extensive institutional and bureaucratic apparatus, neither of which can directly guarantee happiness, but can only hope to create the conditions for it. However, the positively defined goals of such measures – freedom to work, creating one's own happiness, freedom of personal expression – were precisely the characteristic emphases of the Praxis philosophy. Although Kardelj harshly rejected Praxis as a political force, he adopted their positive goals as his own.

A particularly bold example of such appropriation was the speech Kardelj gave in November 1975 at the opening of the Political School of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in Kumrovec in the Socialist Republic of Croatia. On the one hand, his address to future teachers of Marxism for everyday use is conceptually rather uninteresting and dull (with a few exceptions), but on the other hand it offers a remarkable insight into the pure expression of the direct relationship between the university as a system of knowledge and political power, so that in the history of political-philosophical speeches, it can perhaps even be compared to Heidegger's infamous *Rektoratsrede* in May 1933 when the Nazis took over the university in general (and specifically in Freiburg). In Yugoslavia in 1975, when the forced silence of the Praxis philosophers resonated strongly among university and school staff, and when the official authorities finally achieved the exclusion of the "ultra-leftist" professors in Belgrade, Edvard Kardelj, the chief ideologue of the Yugoslav doctrine of self-management and Tito's potential successor, placed the concept of practice (as the title already suggests)[30] at the center of his address to students of Marxism at the opening of the political school. Moreover, he articulated even radical criticism – criticism of all that exists – as the proper activity of the party: "As the working class, as a league of communists, and as a socialist society, we must be critical of ourselves and our practices. And we must be radically critical."[31] There is no doubt that Kardelj saw the Praxis group

30 See Edvard Kardelj, "Revolucionarna praksa in marksistično izobraževanje" [Revolutionary Practice and Marxist Education].

31 Kardelj, "Revolucionarna praksa," 78. Kardelj immediately added, however, that the criticism by the League of Communists of Yugoslavia was "productive," while the criticism by the unnamed Praxis thinkers was "destructive."

and its concepts as an important ideological opponent, and perhaps even the most immediate reason for the establishment of the Political School.

I mention all these details only to emphasize that the long-term influence of the humanist philosophy of the Praxis group in the context of the political and ideological history of Yugoslavia should not be underestimated. The central importance of the creative human personality in the political system became, through their intervention – and through the gradual appropriation by the official authorities – a prevailing, widely held opinion, even a political imperative, and certainly something that began to circulate as a self-evident truth, as a formula that was always at hand and could spontaneously appear on anyone's lips. When, in this ideological context, a new group of philosophers and sociologists emerged in Ljubljana in the late 1970s and especially in the 1980s, quickly establishing itself as the next most propulsive theoretical direction in Yugoslavia, the question of alienation had already exhausted its critical potential, and ideology became one of the central themes of social and political analysis.

The Role of Louis Althusser

Legend has it that shortly after the first issue was published in October 1964, authors from all around the world began submitting unsolicited contributions to the attention of the editors of the *Praxis* journal. Word of the promising new Marxist journal spread quickly. Among others, it was Louis Althusser who sent his text for publication as early as 1965. The editors carefully reviewed his text – and categorically rejected it. If we are to believe the charismatic Milan Kangrga, one of the founders of Praxis, the rejected article was soon published in the French communist magazine *La pensée*, bringing the author great fame and recognition in the West at the time.[32] Kangrga never mentioned the title of the rejected article, but it may have been the text "Marxism and Humanism," which was published in 1965 in Althusser's book *For Marx* by Maspero, a book that indeed launched

32 Milan Kangrga, *Šverceri vlastitog života*, 19; Popov, *Sloboda i nasilje*, 29.

the author into orbit. This assumption is supported primarily by the content of the text in question, its direct critique of humanistic Marxism, and its reference to the epistemological significance of Marx's intervention in political and social theory.[33] In addition, Althusser dealt in that text with the question of why the Soviet Union, as a state based on political Marxism, needed humanism and the question of human essence at a certain point in time – we can certainly assume that he wanted to hear the views of Marxists from Yugoslavia on these considerations. In his text on Marxism and humanism, Althusser rejected the entire humanist problem in Marx, from the concept of alienation onwards, as not without practical usefulness, but scientifically (or theoretically) irrelevant. Hence his conclusion:

> Strictly in respect to theory, therefore, one can and must speak openly of *Marx's theoretical anti-humanism*, and see in this *theoretical anti-humanism* the absolute (negative) precondition of the (positive) knowledge of the human world itself, and of its practical transformation. It is impossible to *know* anything about men except on the absolute precondition that the philosophical (theoretical) myth of man is reduced to ashes. So any thought that appeals to Marx for any kind of restoration of a theoretical anthropology or humanism is no more than ashes, *theoretically*.[34]

All this must have stuck in the throats of the Praxis group; and indeed, they rejected Althusser's theory in general, not just that specific contribution. Althusser's epistemological question, grounded in Bachelard's

---

33 This is suggested by Borislav Mikulić in his book on anti-humanism and in a recent interview. See Borislav Mikulić, *Čovjek, ali najbolji*, 20, and Filip Balunović and Ivica Mladenović, "O jugoslovenskoj praksis filozofiji. Razgovor s Borislavom Mikulićem," 209. This assumption is not without problems of its own, because the text of "Marxism and Humanism" was not originally published in *La pensée* in 1965, as Kangrga has often stated from memory, but in the June 1964 issue of *Cahiers de l'ISEA*, which means before the first issue of the journal *Praxis* was published. Of course, it is possible that Althusser sent the article to the editors of *Praxis* for republication, hoping to reach new readers, while Kangrga recounted the event anecdotally.

34 Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, 229–30.

theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis, was vehemently reduced to and completely misunderstood as an attempt to return to Stalinist forms of dialectical materialism as a variation of scientific reductionism. Althusser's epistemological and political Spinozism, according to which Marx's scientific definition of capitalism cannot, in itself, eliminate the ideologies that sustain capitalism, was understood as a direct opposition to their efforts at dis-alienation.

In his commentary of Althusser's *For Marx*, even Gajo Petrović, who was a rather precise and by no means naive reader, reduced Althusser's understanding of the relationship between the young and mature Marx to Stalinist Marxism, or to a kind of concession that Stalinism was able to make to the works of the young Marx, to a "liberalization" or "reasonable" correction of an overly simplistic Stalinist scheme.[35] It is particularly interesting that Petrović correctly understood the influence of Bachelard's epistemology in Althusser's definition of the break or cut in Marx's scientific work – but its influence, as well as the broader influence of linguistics and psychoanalysis on Althusser's philosophical thought, was, in Petrović's assessment, entirely subordinate to the question of the systematic suppression of the young Marx's works, which were (ostensibly) considered dangerous under Stalinism. He wrote the following about Althusser's division of Marx's works into several categories – early works, works of the break, transitional works, and mature works: "The main goal was arbitrary interpretation, as evidenced by the main concepts of Althusser's book [*For Marx*], which conclude with the radical Stalinist thesis that Marx was not a humanist, but a representative of 'theoretical anti-humanism.'"[36] This reveals the core of the problem for Petrović and the Praxis group in general: the question of anti-humanism. The necessity of a humanistic and anthropological standpoint was completely self-evident to them.

A similar discussion took place in the Slovenian journal *Anthropos* in 1970 and 1971. In response to Boris Majer's critical depiction of structuralism, Marko Kerševan wanted to "draw attention to some misunderstandings

35 Gajo Petrović, "Razvoj i bit Marxove misli," 349.

36 Petrović, "Razvoj i bit Marxove misli," 350.

of Althusser's formulation of problems."[37] In two issues of *Anthropos*, Majer critically reviewed the works of Foucault, Lacan, and especially Althusser, and in doing so – in keeping with the name of the journal – firmly defended the notion of man as a historical subject and as that which Marxism is ultimately all about. And even though Majer dealt with structuralism in much greater detail than the Praxis group (after all, he published a work devoted to *Strukturalizem* in 1971), his concluding thought can nevertheless be read, at least in part, as principled support for the position defended by Petrović in the editorial of the first issue of the journal *Praxis*. In the conclusion to his assessment of structuralism, Majer wrote: "The most disturbing and worrying thing is that man no longer conceives of himself as the creator of history, as a historical subject, but increasingly as an appendage of impersonal technological structures that completely define him, act in his place, and thus exclude him as a historical subject from history. In other words, this means recognizing the existing world as the only possible human world, accepting the domination of the reified world over man as an eternal and unchangeable fact."[38] The key term here is "impersonal technological structures" – whatever Majer had in mind with this, it is clear that, in his view, the problem with structuralism was precisely that it did not understand man as a historical subject and as an active being, at least not in the sense of a person, but as an "appendage." In this, I believe, we can easily recognize a similarity with Petrović's critique of the technological world and the subjugation of humans to their own instruments (see above), as well as the central importance of human personality in the later stage of Yugoslav socialism, where the ideas of "all-round development" and the "humanization of socialist relations" were enshrined in the constitution of 1974.

In his brief response to Majer, Kerševan defended Althusser and above all attempted to clearly articulate what neither the Praxis philosophers nor Majer were able to see due to their spontaneous, knee-jerk assertion of the centrality of human being. First, Kerševan pointed out that Althusser did

37 Marko Kerševan, "Althusser in marksistična teorija v družbenih vedah," 142.

38 Boris Majer, "Človek, struktura, zgodovina (nadaljevanje)," 110.

not reject the concept of the autonomous human subject because he believed that man was a non-historical being or that man as an individual was less important than ideas (or structures), but because Althusser considered the assumption of human autonomy as scientifically irrelevant. Kerševan writes: "Whether their actions become historical actions is not decided by [people themselves], their will, their intentions; this character is 'imparted' to their actions, or not, by the 'structures' in which they are involved; these structures determine the place their actions occupy."[39] In Kerševan's account, theoretical anti-humanism simply means that there is no reason to concern oneself with individual will or intentions when discussing historical causality. Kerševan's understanding of anti-humanism is thus compatible with Hegel's philosophy of history and must be read, as I suggest, in connection with Marx's famous formulation from the beginning of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please in circumstances they choose for themselves; rather they make it in present circumstances, given and inherited."[40] I believe that Kerševan thus translated the question of structure into the well-known question of specific historical circumstances, without which it is impossible to conceive of action. Secondly, Kerševan emphasized that, from Althusser's point of view, the very concept of man is not only too general and too abstract, but above all unscientific. Althusser considered Marx to be an ahumanist or anti-humanist in exactly the same sense that modern science is methodically atheistic. And although Kerševan (along with Althusser) acknowledged that revolutionary humanism can also inspire revolution and has mobilizing power, the problem of humanism is that "it cannot provide an adequate analysis of social relations—only science can do that."[41]

Kerševan's response to Majer is entirely appropriate, and I believe that his explanation of Althusser's concept of structure as specific historical circumstances without which human activity cannot be properly under-

39 Kerševan, "Althusser in marksistična teorija v družbenih vedah," 143.

40 Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in: *Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire. (Post)modern Interpretations*, 19.

41 Kerševan, "Althusser in marksistična teorija v družbenih vedah," 148.

stood as historical is even original and productive. Althusser's epistemological Marxism can indeed be criticized, as Mladen Dolar put it in relation to the concept of ideological interpellation, on account that "it can explain its proper success, but not how and why it does not work," i.e., on account that it can explain the successful functioning of ideology, but cannot explain its transformation.[42] But while Dolar defended Lacan's concept of the subject as precisely that which interpellation cannot quite grasp in an "autonomous" subjectivity (i.e., performing ideologically desirable actions without the need for external coercion), Kerševan's solution to the problem of human subjectivity can be understood as implicit support for the Hegelian understanding of historical action. In any case, the controversy between Kerševan and Majer clearly shows how the new generation of theorists in Ljubljana abandoned the inherited alternative, according to which one can only oppose Stalinism and diamat by adopting a humanistic, anthropological Marxism or by affirming the concept of the autonomous human subjectivity.

Althusser's intervention in Marxism in the 1960s and 1970s was extremely productive and even explosive for Yugoslav social philosophy. With the thesis of an epistemological break, in the course of which Marx had to abandon humanistic, anthropological ideology and establish the scientific foundations of his new theory, Althusser touched on a sensitive area in which the philosophers of the Praxis group had only recently managed to carve out a space for thought that was independent of the official party and critical of its policies. Althusser's rejection of the theoretical significance of human creativity and free personality as nothing but ideology was completely contrary to their efforts. However, at the end of the 1970s, and especially in the 1980s, the talk of the central importance of the individual and the free expression of his personality in the system of self-management became part of everyday language at all levels of social and political administration. At best, the system could create conditions in which people could pursue their own happiness and creative expression. Even primary school teachers began to emphasize that students were

42 Mladen Dolar, "Beyond Interpellation," 78.

not learning because their teachers told them to, but for their own benefit; the reality of this humane approach was, of course, that the students were still learning because their teachers told them to, but now they also had to want to do so themselves. For a group of new critical thinkers based in Ljubljana, Althusser's outright rejection of such forms of "free subjection" was undoubtedly a refreshing move, certainly a step in the right direction. An even more important, decisive reason why Slavoj Žižek, Rastko Močnik, Zoja Skušek, and, on the other hand, Eva Bahovec, Zdenko Kodelja, and others accepted Althusser as their essential interlocutor was his explicit linking of Marxist themes to psychoanalysis, especially under Lacan's influence.[43] But this would already take us beyond the scope of this article.

The contribution is a result of the research work conducted within the research program "Philosophical Investigations" (P6-0252) and within the research project "The History and Legacy of Yugoslav Social Philosophy (1960–1990)" (J6-4624), both financed by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency.

43 As an example, the philosophy of education emerged as one of the central topics, among other things, because it was directly linked to Althusser and his thesis about school as the central ideological apparatus of the modern state. See in particular the thematic issue of the journal *Problemi* 23, 4 (1985) titled "A Well-Rounded Personality?", in which this supposedly central concept of socialist education was subjected to massive criticism.

Bibliography

Althusser, Louis. "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État. (Notes pour une recherche)." *La pensée* 151 (1970): 3–38.

———. *For Marx*. Trans. Ben Brewster. London: Verso, 2005.

Aranitović, Dobrilo. *Bibliografija časopisa* Praxis. Belgrade: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2017.

Balunović, Filip and Ivica Mladenović. "O jugoslovenskoj praksis filozofiji. Razgovor s Borislavom Mikulićem." *Kritika: časopis za filozofiju i teoriju društva* 1 (2023): 199–222.

Dolar, Mladen. "Beyond Interpellation." *Qui Parle* 6, 2 (1993): 75–95.

Engels, Friedrich. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. London: Penguin, 2010. Ebook.

Fromm, Erich. *Marx's Concept of Man. With a translation from Marx's* Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts. London: Continuum, 2004.

Golubović, Zagorka. *Moji horizonti: mislim, delam, postojim*. Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2012.

Heidegger, Martin. *Pathmarks*. Trans. William McNeil et al. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*. Trans. H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Jakovljević, Branislav. *Alienation Effects. Performance and Self-Management in Yugoslavia, 1945–1991*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016.

Kardelj, Edvard. *Smeri razvoja političnega sistema socialističnega samoupravljanja*. Ljubljana: Komunist, 1977.

———. "Revolucionarna praksa in marksistično izobraževanje." *Anthropos* 11, 1-2 (1979): 68–81.

Kerševan, Marko. "Althusser in marksistična teorija v družbenih vedah." *Anthropos* 3, 1-2 (1971): 141–51.

Kirn, Gal. *Partisan Ruptures. Self-Management, Market Reform and the Spectre of Socialist Yugoslavia*. Trans. Borut Praper and Gal Kirn. London: Pluto Press, 2019. Ebook.

Komel, Dean. "The Influence of Heidegger's Thought on the Development of Philosophy in Ex-Yugoslav Countries." *Human Studies* 44 (2018): 643–60.

Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*. Trans. John Moore. London: Verso, 1991.

Lenin, Vladimir Iljič. *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism. Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy*. Trans. Abraham Fineberg. In: *Collected Works*. Vol. 14. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972.

Löwith, Karl. *Meaning in History. The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957.

Majer, Boris. "Človek – struktura – zgodovina. Skorajšnji konec človeka." *Anthropos* 2, 1 (1970): 9–21.

———. "Človek, struktura, zgodovina (nadaljevanje)." *Anthropos* 2, 3-4 (1970): 99–110.

Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Trans. Martin Milligan. Mineola: Dover, 2007. Ebook.

———. "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte." Trans. Terell Carver. In: *Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire. (Post)modern Interpretations*. Eds. Mark Cowling and James Martin. London: Pluto Press, 2002.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *Werke*, Vol. 1. Berlin: Dietz, 1981.

Mikulić, Borislav. *Čovjek, ali najbolji. Tri studije o antihumanizmu i jedan postskriptum*. Zagreb: FF press, 2021.

Milat, Petar (concept). "Praxis i Korčulanska ljetna škola. Tragovi jednog desetljeća (1963.–1974.)." In: *Praxis. Društvena kritika i socijalistički humanizam*, 391–411. Eds. Dragomir Olujić Oluja and Krunoslav Stojaković. Belgrade: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2012.

Petrović, Gajo. "Čemu Praxis?" *Praxis* 1, 1 (1964): 3–6.

———. "Praxis und Sein," *Praxis* 1, 1 (international edition, 1965): 26–40.

———. *Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century. A Yugoslav Philosopher Considers Karl Marx's Writings*. New York: Anchor, 1967.

———. "Razvoj i bit Marxove misli," *Praxis* 4 (1968): 343–59.

Popov, Nebojša. *Contra fatum: slučaj grupe profesora Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu: (1968–1988)*. Belgrade: Scientia Yugoslavica-Asocijacija naučnih unija Jugoslavije, 1988.

Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Sloboda i nasilje. Razgovor o časopisu* Praxis *i Korčulanskoj letnjoj školi*. Belgrade: Res publica, 2003.