"DISSATISFIED BREADWINNERS" IN SEARCH OF THE HUMAN BEING

How Gender Inequality Was Seen – and Not Seen – in Czechoslovak Marxist Humanism*

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Abstract

In East-Central Europe, Marxist humanism embodied one of the most promising theoretical developments of the 1960s. While respecting the unquestionable value of this intellectual current, this article highlights the contradiction between the emancipatory proclamations of humanist intellectuals and their reluctance to recognize certain prevalent forms of oppression. After comparing the humanist approach toward gender-structured themes in the former Czechoslovakia with the contrasting techno-optimist approach, the latter

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group is shown to have been more sensitive toward women's issues. The article concludes that there was an intrinsic problem in Marxist humanist theory that contributed to this historical shortcoming in its emancipatory efforts.
Keywords
Marxist humanism, gender, emancipation, Czechoslovakia

The intellectual world that was formed in the years after Stalin's death was characterized by a relative proliferation of opinions on what the social order ought to look like and which foundations it should be based upon. Despite the fact that during the period termed post-Stalinism inspirations of a non-Marxist provenience (existentialism, positivism, cybernetics, etc.) entered the playing field, the overwhelming majority of party intellectuals of both genders continued to rely upon Marxism as the fundamental and superior basis of thought. At the same time, in the course of abandoning orthodox Marxist traditions certain innovations came about: there were reinterpretations of basic Marxist concepts, diverse analyses of dialectics as a fundamental principle in human history, and reevaluations of classical Marxist texts. It is possible to classify the post-Stalinist diversification within Marxist theory as a certain type of "internal plurality," when individual intellectual currents often took up positions that were competing or mutually antithetical even while they were sharing a common Marxist foundation.[1]

The Czechoslovak context offers a suitable case through which it is possible to illustrate this internal plurality within post-Stalinism. Starting at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s, we can track at least two significant currents within the party intelligentsia from which arose a minimum of two important intellectual movements standing in opposition to the original Stalinist productivism, which was primarily founded upon massive industrial production. On one side was Marxist humanism, and on the other was techno-optimism. While the former was shaped around questions of human individuals and their full self-realization in a "truly" democratic socialist society, the second focused on science and technology as the powers that determine the forces of production for the development of socialism (from which was derived the period concept of a scientific and technological revolution). The latter was also

[1] On the circumscription of post-Stalinism as a unique intellectual field, see Jan Mervart and Jiří Růžička, *"Rehabilitovat Marxe!" Československá stranická inteligence a myšlení poststalinské modernity* ["Rehabilitate Marx!" The Czechoslovak party intelligentsia and the thinking of post-Stalinist modernity] (Prague: Nakladatelství lidové noviny, 2020), p. 9–42. The following text to a significant extent comes from the subchapters of the last chapter of this publication. I owe a debt of gratitude to my colleagues Joseph Grim Feinberg, Ľubica Kobová, Jan Matonoha, Dana Musilová, Marianna Placáková, and Jiří Růžička, and to anonymous reviewers as well. Their contribution to the development of this argumentation has been indispensable; however, responsibility for the analysis submitted belongs entirely to the author.

associated with an interest in effective planning, expert analysis, and the integration of qualified productive forces into socialist management.

Whereas at a general level, Marxist humanism was at one point subjected to condemnation from the pen of Louis Althusser, in the Czechoslovak case it is certainly true that a comparison of both trends reflects unfavorably upon techno-optimism, which is considered undemocratic and manipulative. By contrast, Marxist humanism is seen as an emancipatory project that attempts to establish socialist democracy and abolish all forms of manipulation of human beings by other human beings.[2] Without wanting to contradict these evaluations and thus create an opposite duality,[3] or incline towards the Althusserian view, in the following analysis I intend to demonstrate the limits of Marxist humanism, instantiated in its approach to the problem of gender. To whatever extent it could seem that the main factor in this was probably the personal gender blindness of individual humanist authors, I want to draw attention to the internal limitations of Marxist humanism, which did not allow the multi-layered forms of existing oppression to be visible. I conjecture that it is precisely thanks to internal indispositions of the theory itself that the incidental delineation of masculinity and femininity in period texts appeared in such surprisingly prejudicial forms. At the same time, the contradiction with the emancipatory appeal of Marxist humanism is more than evident in these examples. The primary motivation for writing this text is to show the contrast between the calls for emancipation and the neglect of more hidden forms of oppression that emerges in the course of a more thorough examination of the analyzed materials, and its form is thus rather essayistic. At the same time, it is necessary to mention that this is still only a preliminary probe into the issue, and it is primarily based on research about the Czechoslovak case. So, although I am availing myself of, for example, findings by Una Blagojević relating to the Yugoslav group Praxis, this text cannot answer the question of whether the traits it sketches out are characteristic

[2] For a general overview of Marxist humanism, see James H. Satterwhite, *Varieties of Marxist Humanism: Philosophical Revision in Postwar Eastern Europe* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992). For a comparison of humanism with techno-optimism in their diverse variations, see Johann P. Arnason, "Perspectives and Problems of Critical Marxism in Eastern Europe (Part Two)," *Thesis Eleven* 3 (1982), nos. 5–6, pp. 216–217; Erazim Kohák, "Filosofický smysl Československého jara 1968," manuscript 1981 (National Archives in Prague, collection Zdeněk Mlynář, box 24); Karel Kovanda, *Zápas o podnikové rady pracujících 1968–1969* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2014); Ivan Landa, "Technology and Politics: A Philosophical Lesson from the Prague Spring 1968," in Jana Ndiaye Beránková, Michael Hauser, and Nick Nesbitt (eds.), *Revolutions for the Future. May '68 and Prague Spring* (Lyon: Suture Press, 2020), pp. 216–256.

[3] In the above-mentioned monograph, Jiří Růžička and I attempt to go beyond interpretations founded upon either a humanistic or techno-optimistic approach, and instead seek common motifs that delineate post-Stalinism as its own unique intellectual formation within the framework of period Marxism. Besides these two trends, we also analyze the work of Josef Cibulka and Václav Černík, whom we categorize as dialectical determinists.

for the entire socialist bloc or are rather determined by specific aspects of the Czech cultural and intellectual tradition. The author wants to open up this subject, and not at all "exhaust" it with the synthesis herein submitted, and he is aware of the reality that he is also raising more questions in this way than he is answering.

Another of the motivations for writing this text was the fact that Czechoslovak post-Stalinism distinguished itself with a rich thematization of gender questions. In publications from this period, especially in the pages of the cultural and political weekly *Literární noviny*, which was popular at that time, the (male and female) authors addressed such topics as the shortage of apartments and the role of women in the household and in parenting.[4] The historian Květa Jechová opens up a debate titled "The Controversy over Woman of Our Era," which played out on the pages of the magazine *Vlasta* during 1967 and 1968.[5] And the film scholar Petra Hanáková speaks about movies by Věra Chytilová in which the director had collaborated with the artist Ester Krumbachová (*Sedmikrásky* [*Daisies*], 1966; *Ovoce stromů rajských jíme* [*Fruit of Paradise*], 1969), as well as about Krumbachová's own film (*Vražda ing. Čerta* [*Killing the Devil*], 1970) as "gender-critical" cinematography, which is possible to read as "feminist testimony."[6] The art historian Marianna Placáková understands the works of female artists (such as Naděžda Plíšková, Eva Švankmajerová, Běla Kolářová, Zorka Ságlová, and Soňa Švecová) working from the 1960s to the 1980s as "critical expressions of female voices."[7] Meanwhile, Libora Oates-Indruchová justifiably draws attention to the way that the unfulfilled promise of gender emancipation under Stalinism is precisely what gave rise to the post-Stalinist articulation of gender subjects,[8] and Hana Havelková, on the basis of the State Population Commission (*Státní populační komise*), demonstrates that the empirically and essentially technocratically attuned community of experts was only standing in for the absence of a truly emancipatory women's movement in the post-Stalinist period.[9] The questions of

[4] See, for example, Helena Klímová, *Nechte maličkých přijíti aneb civilizace versus děti?* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1966).

[5] Květa Jechová, "Cesta k emancipaci. Postavení ženy v české společnosti 20. století. Pokus o vymezení problému," in Oldřich Tůma and Tomáš Vilímek (eds.), *Pět studií k dějinám české společnosti po roce 1945* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2008), pp. 113–116.

[6] Petra Hanáková, "The Feminist Style in Czechoslovak Cinema: The Feminine Imprint in the Films of Věra Chytilová and Ester Krumbachová," in Hana Havelková and Libora Oates-Indruchová (eds.), *The Politics of Gender Culture under State Socialism: An Expropriated Voice* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 211–233.

[7] Marianna Placáková, "Československá zkušenost jako východisko. Feministické umění v období státního socialismu," *Sešit pro umění, teorii a příbuzné zóny* 13 (2019), no. 27, pp. 26–63, here 33.

[8] Libora Oates-Indruchová, "Unraveling a Tradition, or Spinning a Myth? Gender Critique in Czech Society and Culture," *Slavic Review* 75 (2016), no. 4, pp. 919–943, here 922–928. I owe thanks to Marianna Placáková for drawing my attention to this study.

[9] Hana Havelková, "(De)centralizovaná genderová politika: Role Státní populační komise," in Hana Havelková and Libora Oates Indruchová (eds.), *Vyvlastněný hlas. Proměny genderové kul-*

to what extent and in what manner the techno-optimists perceived gender when they were focusing on the project of a scientific and technological revolution, and of how it was perceived by the Marxist humanists, thus offer themselves up for our contemplation.

If we compare the presence of gender-structured subjects in the texts of the techno-optimists with the Marxist humanists, the result is that the first group has dealt with such matters to a significantly greater extent than the second. This is not only because the members of this group worked in disciplines close to sociology and to period expert discourses,[10] but it also seems that the internal disposition of their thinking about the future of socialism launched attempts at solving gendered problems of space. Although in most cases the techno-optimists were dealing with questions of science and automation, whenever there arose a need to analyze, for instance, leisure time, they did not use a broadly-depicted human individual in their models but women and men separately, and the monumental disproportion between women's and men's work in the household was also acknowledged.[11]

The research efforts by Ota Klein, the secretary of Radovan Richta's interdisciplinary team that gave rise to the famous book *Civilization at the Crossroads*, represented a fairly singular approach.[12] Klein's own study of the crisis of emotionality was published

tury české společnosti 1948–1989, pp. 125–168. We should also mention the research by Kateřina Lišková relating to sexuality in expert and public discussions. See: Kateřina Lišková, *Sexual Liberation, Socialist style: Communist Czechoslovakia and the Science of Desire, 1945–1989* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 137–146 (the chapter "Orgasm: Between Biological and Social Causation in the 1960s"). On the history of the women's movement, see Denisa Nečasová, *Buduj vlast – posílíš mír! Ženské hnutí v českých zemích 1945–1955* (Brno: Matice moravská, 2011).

[10] Period sociological research took questions about gender and women's position into account. The results of the research on Czech and Czechoslovak society conducted by Pavel Machonin's international team are certainly worth revisiting with a more thorough analysis (Pavel Machonin et al., *Československá společnost* (Bratislava: Epocha, 1969). Also see Libuše Háková, "Ženy v sociální struktuře naší společnosti," in Pavel Machonin (ed.), *Sociální struktura socialistické společnosti* (Prague: Svoboda, 1967), pp. 547–565.

[11] See, for example, Radoslav Selucký, *Člověk a jeho volný čas. Pokus o ekonomickou formulaci problému* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1966), p. 86. Blanka Filipcová was one of the leading researchers in the sociology of leisure time. See Blanka Filipcová, *Člověk, práce, volný čas* (Prague: Svoboda, 1966). On the debates over the disproportionate representation of housework done by women and men, see Martin Franc and Jiří Knapík, "Volný čas 1957–1967: dobové diskuse a vymezení," *Dějiny – teorie – kritika* 9 (2012), no. 1, pp. 33–68, here 56–60.

[12] Radovan Richta et al, *Civilizace na rozcestí. Společenské a lidské souvislosti vědeckotechnické revoluce* (Prague: Svoboda, 1969), first edition 1966; English version Radovan Richta, *Civilization at the Crossroads: Social and Human Implications of the Scientific and Technological Revolution* (Prague: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1969). On this subject, also see the work of Vítězslav Sommer, such as Vítězslav Sommer, "Scientists of the World, Unite! Radovan Richta's Theory of Scientific and Technological Revolution," in Elena Aronova and Simone Turchetti (eds.), *Science Studies during the Cold War and Beyond. Paradigms Defected* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 177–204.

posthumously at the beginning of 1969.[13] Against the background of the relationship of mother and child as the fundamental determining factors for human emotionality, the author attempts to sketch out some points of departure that would correspond to a civilization undergoing rapid changes. He forthrightly labeled "women's emancipation by itself" as one of the reasons to tackle such issues, and stated that the "handicap of the wife-mother in demanding professions [...] is utterly obvious."[14] Klein's text was published with the fundamental assumption that if it is the case that human emotionality is subject to historical development, which he proved through the analysis of transitions from traditional to capitalist societies, it is necessary to also consider its changes within the framework of a scientific and technological revolution. It is precisely in such a context that a future regulation of emotionality, which aims at a kind of rationalization that corresponds to changes in the "structures of the reality of the holistic human society" – and thus to a change in the relationship of mothers or other caregivers with children – could take place.

However, despite the motivation that he attributes in the introduction to his work, the techno-optimist endeavor to optimize social relationships and commitments shines right through Klein's text. In the transformation of the relationship between mother and child, he was clearly not interested in women's emancipation but rather in freeing up social capacity for the development of the intellectually demanding transition to a scientific and technological society. In simpler terms, women were to be freed from their traditional roles as mothers so they could take part in the social and civilizational transformation. It is apparent from Klein's text that his techno-optimist visions relied upon women no less than upon men for this undertaking, and that the discrepancies in the social roles of the period were reflected here. Similarly, the sociologist Dragoslav Slejška spoke of the complicated conditions women experienced when they were the directors of companies because, besides managing their own work and their housework, they no longer wanted to be burdened with the extra mental strain and the systematic self-education required of administrative functionaries. Just like Klein, Slejška called for overcoming these barriers and, after the increase in their representation in such positions in the future, counted on women's "participation working in management."[15]

[13] Ota Klein, "Ke krizi emocionality," in Ota Klein, *Životní styl a moderní civilizace*, ed. Irena Dubská and Radovan Richta (Prague: Symposium, 1969), pp. 61–94. According to a commentary by Jan Šindelář, who prepared the study for publication, this was a fragment from more extensive manuscript materials in the author's estate. The text was also published under the title of "Krize emocionality," *Sociologický časopis* 5 (1969), no. 2, pp. 129–149.

[14] Klein, "Ke krizi," p. 62. One year later, *Sociologický časopis* published a study by Libuše Háková that clearly represents one of the most fully developed reflections of the period on the role of women in socialist and, by extension, developed industrial societies. In that text, Háková drew directly upon Klein's work in her openness toward questions related to future development. See Libuše Háková, "Úvaha a podněty k chápání společenských funkcí ženy," *Sociologický časopis* 6 (1970), no. 5, pp. 436–448. I owe thanks to Denise Nečasová for the reference to this text.

By contrast, the occasional ruminations by Marxist humanists who foregrounded the project of what was called the "total development of man" had an entirely different nature. For consideration of the mutual interlinkage of humanity and gender, the late remark by Predgar Vranický (1976) is very striking. As Una Blagojević presents it, this representative of the philosophical school centered around the magazine *Praxis* said in a lecture titled "Marxism and the Social Position of Women" that Marxism did not divide mankind into two parts, but was always concerned with the human individual as a "social and historical being" and with "emancipation of the working class and liberating mankind, always meant in the sense of holistic freedom."[16] In the subtext of Vranický's dictums is a very palpable, generally-shared humanistic assumption about a universally-defined humanity. I assume that it is precisely the abstraction of this definition of mankind among humanists that laid the foundation for the Marxist humanists being unable to see and to name certain forms of ethnic (especially in the case of ethnic minorities) or gender oppression.[17] Nikolay Karkov and Zhivka Valiavicharska, on the basis of examples from Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, draw attention to the fact that this universalism opened space for the future ethnonationalism among some representatives of humanism.[18]

Joseph G. Feinberg justifiably argues that Marxist humanists always explain humanity as arising from itself; human beings are defined on the basis of their own humanity.[19] This circumstance, in my view, ultimately leads to the unconscious implication of a model of the human being based on its own image. The case is also similar to defining the fully developed and well-rounded human being, whose totality is conceived of universally, but which is always circumscribed negatively, like the inverse image of the "fragmentary" man of the modern era and never as a positively circumscribed project. This human universality in the conceptions of Czechoslovak humanists then more or

[15] Dragoslav Slejška, "Problémy aktivity žen při účasti na řízení v průmyslovém závodě," *Sociologický časopis* 1 (1965), no. 5, pp. 509–523. Hana Havelková appreciates not only the interest in the vertical segregation of women, including psychological causes, but also the fairly unusual approach founded in focus groups in Slejška's research. See Havelková, "(De)centralizovaná," p. 160.

[16] Cited by Una Blagojević, "Praxis and Women Intellectuals," see in this issue of *Contradictions*, pp. 47–69.

[17] Civilizational, ethnic, and class-oriented forms of dominance in connection with positions taken by the party intelligentsia or by Marxist humanists are addressed in certain passages in the chapter titled "Beyond post-Stalinism" of the aforementioned book (Mervart and Růžička, "Rehabilitovat Marxe!" pp. 182–220).

[18] Nikolay Karkov, "Decolonizing Praxis in Eastern Europe: Toward a South-to-South Dialogue," *Comparative & continental philosophy* 7 (2015), no. 2, pp. 180–200; Zhivka Valiavicharska, "Marxist Humanism and the Rise of Ethnonationalism in Post-Stalinist Bulgaria," conference presentation at ASEEES, Washington DC 2016.

[19] Joseph Grim Feinberg, "And the 'Thing Itself' Is Man: Radical Democracy and the Roots of Humanity," in Joseph Grim Feinberg, Ivan Landa, and Jan Mervart (eds.), *Karel Kosík and Dialectics of the Concrete* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

less culminated in an image of the human individual that essentially copied the social position, gender and ethnic identity, and Eurocentric orientation of the given authors. Their image of the human being thus corresponds to the context of how the male members of the state-socialist middle class perceive the world. Thanks to continuities with the presocialist period, the socialist middle class remained firmly rooted in bourgeois culture; however, their defining trait was not their economic background and material assets, but rather their possession of a significant amount of symbolic capital. In connection with the ethnic position of the writer, this implicitly meant their position as a Czech or Slovak and self-identification with European culture – and thus with the West. As Jaroslav Střítecký, who was one of the participants in a debate that took place between Milan Kundera and Václav Havel on the significance of the year 1968 in Czechoslovakia, would add, it was essentially about middle-aged, middle-class Czech men and dissatisfied breadwinners.[20] It is precisely these types who gave shape to normative conceptions about how the well-rounded, well-developed man ought to look, and if someone from a different generational, social, or gender identity (and it was these three distinctions that Střítecký was primarily concerned with), or from a non-European-oriented perspective, did not match well, they were automatically marginalized in the discourse about the image of man. Additionally, the reality that universal humanity at that time corresponded to a purely masculine image is unwittingly revealed by the humanist philosopher Ivan Sviták. In one of the entries in his intellectual diary from the years 1959–1961, under the heading of "Man" (*Člověk*), he speaks about mistaken escapes from the "emptiness of being" through the "seemly woman," a "fast vehicle," and a "flock of young ladies."[21]

The occasional appearance of gender categories in period humanist texts certainly give form to this kind of image. So in the beginning of the 1960s, although Karel Kosík wrote in the entry about Božena Němcová that she was not only a great Czech writer

[20] Jaroslav Střítecký, "Úděl proměny a tvář sebeklamu," *Host do domu* 15 (1969), no. 5, p. 19. The social origin of the party intelligentsia was noticed by Michael Voříšek on the basis of John Connelly's work *Captive University: The Sovietization of East Germany, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945–1956* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), see *The Reform Generation: 1960s Czechoslovak Sociology from a Comparative Perspective* (Prague: Kalich, 2012), pp. 289–290. The overwhelming majority of party intellectuals came from the middle class, and despite the political changes, their moral and aesthetic values retained a significant degree of continuity. Vítězslav Gardavský, Ivan Sviták, Karel Kosík, A. J. Liehm, Radovan Richta, Milan Kundera, Josef Zumr, and others were usually from families of officials, teachers, lawyers, etc., and all of them had started their educations at academic high schools (*gymnázium*) before 1945. It is also no coincidence that this milieu fostered the culture of intellectual salons, such as the Prague salon of Klement Lukeš, the lecturer of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (Komunistická strana Československa, KSČ).

[21] Ivan Sviták, "Člověk," in Sviták, *Nevědecká antropologie. Dialectica modo bohemico demonstrata. I* (Chico: self-published, 1984), p. 61. These are entries that were written during his engagement with the OV KSČ (District Committee of the KSČ) in Kyjov, where the author was sent as part of a campaign against so-called "revisionism."

but also "the first modern and emancipated woman,"[22] he did not further expand upon the category of "emancipated woman" here or in any other texts. When at the end of the same decade he began drafting his essay about Karel Havlíček Borovsky's democratism, he analyzed the author's terms "masculinity" and "femininity" [*mužskost* and *ženskost*] in it. We certainly cannot anachronistically reproach Kosík for not applying the tools of gender-critical analysis that are available today to the political thinking of the 19th century – though the unproblematic acceptance and use of both of these categories is somewhat startling. At the same time, his conception of the essential nature of "masculinity" and "femininity" is quite different from the post-Stalinist exaltation of femininity promoted by, for example, Irena Dubská and Helena Klímová as an argument against Stalinist universalism.[23] To wit, Kosík is claiming that it is actually thanks to the strict division of both categories that is it not possible for "monsters which have already inundated the twentieth century – a feminine and weak man, and a masculine woman deprived of grace," to appear in Havlíček's world.[24] If Kosík is giving a nod to masculinity as the "correct measure" of man based on Havlíček, and if he defines democracy as the "unity of manliness and humor," femininity in his view appears only as one side of the above-mentioned "monster" of the 20th century, or as "grace."[25]

However, this was not only the result of an abstractly-drawn humanity: unconscious reproduction of prejudices against women was not only manifested in unreflected borrowing of the essential categories of masculinity and femininity. They were also evident in, for example, period magazine interviews with female intellectuals,[26] and this could shade into ventilating the open and patronizing arrogance of his own (not only) gender prerogatives. When a Czech translation of Simone de Beauvoir's work

[22] Karel Kosík, "Božena Němcová 4. 2. 1820 – 21. 1. 1862," *Kulturně politický kalendář 1962,* Prague and Bratislava 1961, p. 46.

[23] On the Stalinist image of women, see Denisa Nečasová, *Nový socialistický člověk: Československo 1948–1956* (Brno: Host, 2018), pp. 125–168; on the essential understanding of femininity in post-Stalinist texts by Irena Dubská and Helena Klímová, see Marianna Placáková, "Člověk, nebo sexus? Diskuze k českému vydání knihy Simone de Beauvoir *Druhé pohlaví*," *Filosofický časopis* 68 (2020), no. 6, pp. 865–886 (also look here for more details on Helena Klímová's professional life). See Placáková's introduction to the debate in this issue of *Contradictions*, pp. 156–168.

[24] Karel Kosík, "Havlíček's Principles of Democracy," in Kosík, *The Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Observations from the 1968 Era*, ed. J. H. Satterwhite (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), pp. 199–202. The quoted text has been newly translated here by Melinda Reidinger.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 199.

[26] Dana Musilová mentions that A. J. Liehm paid more attention in his interview with Simone de Beauvoir to the author's literary activities. She claims that "male and female readers" of the interview printed in *Kultúrný život* "did not get a chance to find out something about her philosophical opinions, never mind about essays on the relationships between men and women." Musilová finds out that in Bratislava male editors treated Beauvoir entirely as Sartre's partner. See Dana Musilová, *Na okraj jedné návštěvy. Simone de Beauvoir v Československu* (Ústí nad Orlicí: Oftis, 2007), pp. 22–25, here 24.

The Second Sex was published in 1966, a tumultuous discussion broke out on the pages of *Literární noviny* in which Ivan Sviták, Jan Patočka, Irena Dubská, and Helena Klímová became involved. Its contents were reconstructed by Dana Musilová, and then again more recently by Kristýna Miholová and Marianna Placáková. The latter also analyzed readers' letters responding to the debate.[27]

Sviták, in accordance with period Marxist critiques of existentialism,[28] draws lines in the sand against excessive subjectification of human individuality and against its separation from social and economic relations. Of course, he combined this stance, which is legitimate within Marxism, with feelings of a priori intellectual superiority. Instead of engaging in polemics, he heaps a pile of invective upon the author of *The Second Sex* with the goal of diminishing her philosophical credibility and making Beauvoir's argument look as flimsy as possible. Accusations of her being uninformed as a scholar and of being overly ideological and speculative are among the more substantiated "arguments" presented, and his texts distinguished themselves with an uncommonly belligerent tone. For example, he claims that Beauvoir is showing off the "plush salon in her head" instead of thoughts, and that she understands Hegel in the same naïve manner that she might serve "female immanence" to "a woman preparing a steak," and that the most that emerges from the author's work is that "she knows how to count to two," and so on.[29] He finally crowns his patronizing remarks towards the author, as well as the issue itself, with the concluding statement that, in his opinion, philosophers and poets are "perceptive of the essence of life [...]. Without symbolism or transcendence they understand precious femininity, from which Ms. Beauvoir and Ms. Dubská have, for a change, unshackled us, even though we are having a beautiful spring."[30] Here, Sviták seems to imply that beautiful weather leaves little room for any other feminine quality than beauty.

[27] *Ibid*.; Kristýna Miholová, "Krátké nadechnutí: Otevírání genderových témat v českém tisku šedesátých let," Master's thesis, Faculty of Humanities, Charles University (FHS UK) 2010 (advised by Hana Havelková), 152 pages (see, especially pp. 51–79); Placáková, "Člověk, nebo sexus?" Dagmar Pichová comments on the dubiousness of the Czech translation of *The Second Sex*, edited by Jan Patočka, and she additionally claims that thanks to the abridgement, it "entirely loses the dramaturgy and structure of the original work." Dagmar Pichová, "Simone de Beauvoir: 'Druhé pohlaví' – a kletba překladu," *Filosofický časopis* 67 (2019), no. 2, pp. 241–250, here 242. Pichová concurrently makes the claim that the terminology was rendered significantly better in this Czech translation (clearly due to Patočka's attention to it) than in Parshley's English translation.

[28] Mervart and Růžička, "Rehabilitovat Marxe!" pp. 100–103.

[29] Ivan Sviták, "Člověk nebo sexus?" *Literární noviny* 16 (1967), no. 9, pp. 1 and 6, here 1. See the English translation of Sviták's text in this issue. Along with *The Second Sex*, in this text Sviták addresses Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (New York 1963). Sviták's second text with the same title was published later (*Literární noviny* 16, 1967, no. 18, p. 7) as a reply to the reactions by Jan Patočka and Irena Dubská. For more, see Placáková, "Člověk, nebo sexus?" and Placáková's introduction to the debate in this issue.

[30] Sviták, "Člověk nebo sexus?" p. 7.

Furthermore, Sviták's method of fighting against a female perspective is inconsistent in a particular way. Like most of the other post-Stalinist intellectuals, he hardly notices any social, racial, or gender contingency in his texts, but of course he accuses Beauvoir of reproducing the prejudices of her social class.[31] While in other essays he speaks of the power of poetry or of love, which is the only thing capable of overcoming the limitations of the scientific perspective ("cool objectivity"),[32] here he is suddenly helping himself out with period expert discourse ("Anthropological research has proven that for a child's first three years, childrearing is an irreplaceable human value") and he speaks about the dubiousness of infant nurseries for childrearing. Whereas in his texts relating to culture he calls for absolute autonomy of art, artists, and of man (as such) who must be independent of political and economic frameworks, now he labels the woman question as mainly an economic problem, and as the "development of economic-social structures."[33] The economic stance was certainly not far removed from the Beauvoir's ken: she did not avoid the problem, and as she succinctly expressed in a period interview,[34] she considered the elimination of economic inequality as the fundamental precondition of female emancipation; but, naturally, Sviták did not take account of her perspectives. For him Beauvoir was not a counterpart worthy of engaging in discussion with.

[31] Marianna Placáková reads Sviták in a more sympathetic light, as an expression of Marxist criticism. She also draws attention to the context that should not be denied a hearing here: "The criticism of Beauvoir as 'white, bourgeois feminism' that Sviták has raised in the Czech debate primarily appears in the West only in the 1970s along with criticism of the 1960s. The symbol of that period's emancipation, Betty Friedan, who was responsible for founding the National Organization for Women in 1966, began to be criticized for holding white, middle-class, and sexually heteronormative opinions. [...] At the same time, the controversy between bourgeois and socialist feminism has accompanied the women's movement and discussion of the 'woman question' in society goes back to its beginning in the nineteenth century." Placáková, "Člověk, nebo sexus?" p. 877, ftn. 61.

[32] See Ivan Sviták, "Prolegomena to Love," in Sviták, *The Windmills of Humanity: On Culture and Surrealism in the Manipulated World*, trans. and ed. Joseph Grim Feinberg (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2014), pp. 80–89 (especially p. 85) and "Surrealist Image of Humankind," *ibid*., pp. 111–117. Originally published in *Host do domu* 13 (1966), no. 8, pp. 22–30 and in *Filosofický časopis* 16 (1968), no. 3, pp. 400–407.

[33] Sviták, "Člověk nebo sexus?" p. 6. On period expert discourses, see the basic publication by Josef Langmeier and Zdeněk Matějček, *Psychická deprivace v dětství* (Prague: SZdN, 1963). This was also made into the subject of films. See Kurt Goldberger, *Děti bez lásky*, Czechoslovakia 1963, 37 minutes. From the secondary literature, look primarily at Alena Heitlinger, *Women and State Socialism: Sex Inequality in the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979); Alena Wagnerová, *Žena za socialismu. Československo 1945–1974 vývoje před rokem 1989 a po něm* (Prague: Sociologické nakladatelství, 2017); Hana Hašková, Steven Saxonberg, and Jiří Mudrák, *Péče o nejmenší. Boření mýtů* (Prague: Sociologické nakladatelství, 2012). I owe thanks to Ľubica Kobová for drawing my attention to these references.

[34] Antonín J. Liehm, *Rozhovor* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1966), p. 77, cited by Musilová, "*Na okraj*," p. 45.

Sviták refused to consider motherhood as a problem; he argued that this subject was inflated every year in speeches on the occasion of International Women's Day, though he did not hesitate to propose original instructions that were in concordance with the abstract humanism of his time: "The solution to the female question shall arrive only with a structural transformation of the human species, on which contemporary history is working with hectic intensity in order [...] to create such a scenario of modern humanity as would be commensurate to the reality in which people are capable of flying to the cosmos and mastering nature outside of themselves."[35]

At the same time, it is quite interesting that female intellectuals who were active in the post-Stalinist period in expert or cultural-political debates did not always view themselves through a gendered lens. In her analysis of the previously-mentioned discussion in *Literární noviny*, Marianna Placáková illustrates the dual nature of the perception of gender inequality. The first overlaps with the post-Stalinist feeling of the superiority of Czechoslovak socialism, which in many regards was not afflicted with the gender inequality described in the Western world (Dubská, Klímová). In this context, the author demonstrates that letters from the male and female readers of *Literární noviny*, for the same reason, were often staking out positions on Sviták's side of "Marxist criticism."[36] The second feature would require a lengthier analysis, but nevertheless it illustrates that even though Dubská and Klímová criticized Sviták, at the same time they together established a scholarly sociological and psychological discourse about human beings that reacted to the shortcomings of one-size-fits-all solutions offered by Stalinism and official post-Stalinist experts alike.[37] As research by other female scholars has indicated, the emancipatory dimension of expert discourses was minimally controversial and the 1960s are in this regard often considered to be the beginning of a conservative turn.[38] Incidentally, though for different reasons, Ota Klein took a similar view on period expert discourse that advocated a larger role for mothers in childrearing. He considered it to be a conservative-romantic escape from the necessary social changes of the given migration of a large part of the population into skilled work. In this regard, Klein, like the other techno-optimists was relying on the scientific and technological revolution,

[35] Sviták, "Člověk nebo sexus?" p. 6.

[36] Placáková, "Člověk, nebo sexus?"

[37] *Ibid*., Hana Havelková draws our attention to the necessity of perceiving their "return to biologism" counterposed against "the social construction of gender" as "part of the resistance to an official approach," which, according to the author, was represented by, for example, the State Population Commission. Havelková, "(De)centralizovaná," p. 158.

[38] See, for example, Barbara Havelková, "The Three Stages of Gender in Law," in Havelková and Oates-Indruchová, *The Politics of Gender*, pp. 31–56; Havelková, "Genderová rovnost v období socialismu," in Michal Bobek, Pavel Molek, and Vojtěch Šimíček (eds.), *Komunistické právo v Československu. Kapitoly z dějin bezpráví* (Brno: Mezinárodní politologický ústav, 2009), pp. 179–207.

which changes the method of manufacturing and liberates human beings (as we have seen, men as well as women) from their dependence on immediate production.[39]

In her study, Petra Hanáková presents us with the symptomatic testimony given by the filmmaker and director Ester Krumbachová. To the question of what is specific about the female perspective, the leading female artist of the Czech new wave at the end of her answer unwittingly identifies with perspectives from Marxist humanism that consist of understanding intellectual activity as a fundamental expression of human praxis: "Not only thinking inspires respect, whether it's from a woman or a man; true, real thinking, which is not fashioned into pre-made forms. But it goes, it pushes itself wherever it can."[40] We can also see a similar example in the activities of the female philosophers at the journal *Praxis*, which Una Blagojević's findings tell us reported on works by Lucien Goldmann and Herbert Marcuse, although, with the exception of the previously-discussed work of Simone de Beauvoir, they did not deal with feminist topics and literature, and their studies appeared in the journal only sporadically.[41] Interventions such as those by Irena Dubská and Helena Klímová were fairly rare among members of the Czechoslovak post-Stalinist party intelligentsia, but they can be read

[39] Klein, "Ke krizi," pp. 86–87.

[40] Cited by Hanáková, "The feminist style," p. 213. Translated by Melinda Reidinger from the Czech version of the article: Hanáková, "Feministický styl v československé kinematografii: Ženský rukopis filmů Věry Chytilové a Ester Krumbachové," in: Havelková and Oates-Indruchová (eds.), *Vyvlastněný hlas. Proměny genderové kultury české společnosti 1948–1989* (Prague: Slon, 2015), p. 431.

[41] Blagojević, "Praxis and Women Intellectuals." Besides reviews and reports, the author mainly mentions translation activities that the women collaborating with *Praxis* took part in. The distribution of the authors' genres clearly displays a strong relationship to the roles women take within philosophy itself. If we also take a superficial look at Czechoslovak periodicals through this lens (*Filosofický časopis*, *Otázky marxistickej filozofie*, *Filozofia*) we will see that women (Irena Dubská, Evelína Bodnárová, Vlasta Černíková) are usually authors of the same genres as those discussed by Una Blagojević. They also occasionally contribute to discussions, but their author profiles in the columns for such studies is naturally not comparable with those of men. One of the few Czech female professors of philosophy was Jiřina Popelová Otáhalová, whose interests included the history of philosophy, ethics, and the study of Jan Amos Comenius. Her role and intergenerational connections certainly represent one of the challenges for further research. For an overview of this subject, see Jan Zouhar, "Tři setkání s Jiřinou Popelovou," *Studia philosophica* 65 (2018), nos. 1–2, pp. 29–35. By contrast, it seems that the situation elsewhere in the central European region was different. One of the intellectual symbols of the Budapest school was embodied in a woman, Ágnes Heller. Even though men dominated Polish philosophy, women there played an essential role. Monika Woźniak alerted me to the Marxist philosopher Helena Eilstein, "who published original texts in the most important philosophical journals, held quite important positions, and was an active participant in academic life" (cited from an email of July 29, 2020). For non-Marxist traditions, see Elżbieta Pakszys, "Women's Contributions to the Achievements of the Lvov–Warsaw School: A Survey," in: Katarzyna Kijania-Placek and Jan Woleński (eds.), *The Lvov-Warsaw School and Contemporary Philosophy* (Springer-Science+Business Media, B.V.: Dodrecht, 1998), pp. 55–71.

as contributions to a Marxist debate over gender questions.[42] At the same time, the attempts at integrating authentic Marxism with feminism represented in the Yugoslav case of Blaženka Despot were even rarer within state socialism.[43]

Searching for and analyzing period gender motifs and the manners of their conceptualization exceeds the intentions of this text, so let us therefore arc back to the post-Stalinist protagonists. It would be utterly impossible to overestimate the significance of the above-mentioned debate over *The Second Sex*, both on account of its uniqueness as well as the eccentric character of Ivan Sviták, but at the same time I do not suppose it would be possible to label the author's sorties as coincidental or arising purely out of his individual personality traits because they were neither isolated nor unique. In his analysis of period literature, Jan Matonoha has demonstrated to what extent women are conceived of as objects by authors such as Josef Škvorecký, Ludvík Vaculík, Arnošt Lustig, and Milan Kundera; as beings that lack their own voices and are incapable of independent actions (Kundera).[44]

Until the end of his life, Sviták considered women to be essentially beings that are incapable of rational analysis or even of transcending themselves through creative work: "Man aspires for women only in passing, on the path to his calling. Women are not his program; his work lies in actualizing something outside of himself. It is precisely this disregard that women love: the more he is fundamentally a stranger, the more he attracts them."[45] A man is the mediator of works and of humanist categories for the female

[42] The relationship between gender and Marxism is underscored by the concluding passage of Irena Dubská's book *Objevování Ameriky* [Discovering America], in which the author speaks of the negative aspect of the "mediated moment" entering into personal relations. Mediating interventions from outside can lead to "an absolute validation or absolute submission to the personality of the other," which is a more primitive form of human relationship, especially in contrast with critical and egalitarian relationships between two individualities. The paradox consists in the spontaneity of the "validation" or "submission," which lends it an illusory (phenomenal) convincingness and "fullness" that, in the author's view, is also true for historical changes in the relationships between men and women. See Irena Dubská, *Objevování Ameriky. Příspěvek k otázkám "moderního člověka"* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1964), pp. 167–168.

[43] See Blaženka Despot, "Women and Self-Management," *Socialist Thought and Practice: A Yugoslav Monthly* (March 1981), pp. 34–38. See the revised text introduced by Zsófia Loránd in this issue of *Contradictions*, pp. 141–151. For more on this subject, see Zsófia Loránd, *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 42–83. Here the author also analyzes Despot's monograph on the subject: Blaženka Despot, *Žensko pitanje i socijalističko samoupravljanje* [The woman question and socialist self-management] (Zagreb: Cekade, 1987).

[44] Jan Matonoha, "Dispositives of Silence. Gender, Feminism and Czech Literature between 1948 and 1989," in Havelková and Oates Indruchová (eds.), *The Politics of Gender*, pp. 162–187. On the inaccurate images of femininity and of women in 1960s films, see Petra Hanáková, "Od zednice Mařky k černobílé Sylvě: obrazy žen v české vizuální kultuře a východoevropský vizuální paradox," in Petra Hanáková et al., *Volání rodu* (Prague: Akropolis, 2013), pp. 126–141 (I owe thanks to Marianna Placáková for drawing my attention to this text).

[45] Ivan Sviták, "Paradoxy lásky. Instruktáž stárnoucímu muži," in Vasil Katyn [Ivan Sviták], *Ne-*

world: a woman according to him meets with the value of freedom through love, when "a real man has infected her forever."[46] In an essay about the new wave, Ivan Sviták compares Věra Chytilová's *Daisies* with Jiří Menzel's *Closely Watched Trains* (both films were released in Czechoslovakia in 1966). However positively he evaluates the originality and contribution of both works, he reproaches the first with too much subjectivity and an escape into the ego, and says it is characterized by "esoteric symbolism" and its "universe is entirely subsumed within the author"; Menzel, by contrast, "acts" and "changes his surroundings," and his film is simply "full of interest about objectivity, he portrays the hero on the most civil background, he alternates humor with lyricism and loving and smiling humanism [...]."[47] Thus a woman, when she gets around to creating something, focuses on her private life, encloses the cosmos into herself, while a man with his openness to the world and his activity fulfills a humanist calling.

In spite of the professed humanism of Sviták and other authors, it is precisely humanism and the abstract (non)delimitation of the human individual that I consider to be a rich source for civilizational, ethnic, and finally also gender dominance. In other words, humanists in the post-Stalinist era quite often inadvertently transformed into their opposite, and what was supposed to have been emancipatory and progressive became – at the very least – problematic and traditionalist.[48] In contrast to Libora Oates-Indruchová, I do not suppose that the main enemy of the development of critical thinking on gender was the political normalization that took place in Czechoslovakia after 1968.[49] Rather, in this regard it was the post-Stalinist party intelligentsia's own internal (in)disposition, which was presented especially in Marxist humanism.

vědecká antropologie. Dialectica modo bohemico demonstrata. II (Chico, self-published, n.d.), p. 94.

[46] Ivan Sviták, *Devět životů. Konkrétní dialektika* (Prague: Sakko, 1992), p. 231.

[47] Ivan Sviták, "Hrdinové odcizení," in Stanislav Ulver, *Film a doba. Antologie textů z let 1962–1970* (Prague: Sdružení přátel odborného filmového tisku, n.d.), pp. 81–82, here 82. Originally published in *Film a doba* 13 (1967), no. 2, pp. 60–67.

[48] A traditionalism in the understanding of culture (at the very least, in the distinctions made between what is and is not culture) is evident in Sviták's skepticism towards the radical refusal of existing forms of culture by the underground. Along with the conservative Catholic exile Rio Preisner, he took a stance against the "degeneracy" and "barbarism" of the underground novel *...a bude hůř* [It's gonna get worse] by Jan Pelc (Ivan Sviták, "Šmejd z andrgraundu," in Ivan Jirous, *Magorův zápisník*, ed. Michael Špirit [Prague: Torst, 1997], pp. 644–651; originally published in exile in *Právo lidu*, 1985, no. 4, p. 5). Michaela Kašičková is right when she claims that at the same time Sviták was not only arguing against Pelc's text, but he was also squaring off with the values and aesthetics of Czech underground culture as such. See Michaela Kašičková, "Přijetí románu Jana Pelce ... a bude hůř v proměnách politického režimu," Bachelor's thesis (advised by Michael Špirit), FF UK 2013, pp. 24–25.

[49] Libora Oates-Indruchová, "Unraveling a Tradition, or Spinning a Myth?" p. 941.