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EDITORIAL

A year has passed since the first volume of *Contradictions* went to press. While that issue appeared on the centenary of the February and October revolutions in Russia, this year sees still other relevant anniversaries: The centenary of the end of the First World War is also the centenary of the post-war settlement, and Poland, the Czech Republic, and (with somewhat greater ambivalence) Slovakia therefore celebrate 100 years of statehood this year, inviting at least some reflection on how different these states were, geographically, ethnically, and in political outlook from their current forms (the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as *separate* states, celebrate a more modest 25 years of independence, a fact generally received with more enthusiasm among Slovak political elites than their Czech counterparts). Perhaps more significantly, this year also sees the 50th anniversary of 1968 – a vital year in the self-image of dissidents of all stripes. While such occasions will be dominated by establishment mythmaking, they also offer opportunities for critical reappraisal of our contemporary societies and the forces that shaped them.

The importance of such reappraisal has only grown in the year since our last publication. Various developments have made the region once again an object of concern for Western observers. Elections in the Czech Republic have seen the continued rise of anti-political billionaire Andrej Babiš alongside new parties of the far right, as well as the re-election of President Milos Zeman in a campaign dominated by hostility to immigration. In Slovakia, protests have led to the resignation of Prime Minister Robert Fico, long a dominant figure in Slovak politics. Political space appears to be opening for the rise of new political forces, but it remains an open question whether those who step into the void will be preferable to the old guard. The most recent independence day celebrations in Poland saw some of the largest far-right demonstrations in recent European history, while the Law and Justice government has sought to criminalize attempts to discuss Polish complicity in the holocaust. A renewed Cold War-style paranoia has sought to blame Russia for political convulsions from Trump to Brexit, and the leader of the British Labour Party has been accused of being a Czechoslovak spy by a media that could not quite remember whether the latter country still existed!

The last of these is all too typical of this coverage, which may have raised interest in the region and its politics but has done little to raise the intellectual level of its discussion. Two sets of ideas dominate this discussion: The first invokes the language of "populism," a concept with an important history and lineage, but which is too frequently used as a catch-all that obscures the specific ideological and social bases of diverse

phenomena. Too often, this discourse betrays a disdain for "the people" and a longing for the opportunity to simply dissolve it and elect another. The second dominant set of ideas involves the essentializing of East and West, in which analysis is abandoned for geopolitics and any independent politics is displaced to a battle between Russophilia and Russophobia. At worst, these two sets of ideas merge in a patronizing vision of an unreconstructed Eastern-facing populace reasserting itself against a Western-facing elite. Because neither the East nor the West as it actually exists can save us from our current predicament, it is hard to see where this leads but to despair.

It is thus clearer than ever that an adequate critique of our so-called post-communist present must better understand what created this present, and *Contradictions*, we hope, has begun carving out a space where this can happen. We aim to examine the self-understanding of the movements and forces that produced these societies: the ideals and ideologies of post-communist liberal-conservatism; of dissent; of official and unofficial communism; of the socialist movement that gave birth to official Communist movements and parties but also to their most powerful critics – in other words, of the multiple processes that gave birth to a situation, before 1989–1991, in which the idea of communism would be associated with regimes that suppressed radical socialist thought and engagement, and to a situation after 1989–1991, in which the very possibility of moving nearer to any sort of communism at all would be declared definitively foreclosed.

When we say, therefore, that we live in an age of post-communism, this does not mean that communism once really existed as an established social system and then ceased to exist. The reality to which "post-communism" refers is a reality in which communism was once imaginable and then, for most people, ceased to be imaginable. The terms "communism" and "post-communism" are relevant to us today not because they accurately characterize two successive configurations of society, but because they draw attention to shifting configurations of the desirable and shifting conceptions of the political horizon. The idea of communism has been mobilized as a claim by Communist parties, and the illegitimacy or impossibility of communism has been mobilized as a counter-claim by the parties that subsequently occupied the Communists' erstwhile seats of power. The problem of post-communism is a problem of untangling claims about social reality from imaginings of possibilities for social change.

Post-communism is, in this sense, a "condition." It conditions what we are able to imagine and what will be heard when we speak. It conditions our political horizon, making alternatives to the present invisible and closing off spaces of potential emancipation. It conditions our experience of the past and future, associating radical reimaginings of the future with an already-rejected past. And it conditions the critique of the present, demanding that the critique of post-communism come to terms with communism, or at least with what post-communism calls "communism" – the history of "Communist" parties and movements, the ideas they advocated, and the societies they led.

The critique of post-communism calls for a critical look at the pre-post-communist past. It calls for us to look back from the post-communist moment to the history of

all that post-communism positions itself against. Looking at the social systems that legitimated themselves with the ideal of communism, we can ask how those systems functioned, how they emerged and (mostly) "ended," how they were criticized, and how the legacy of opposition to "actually existing socialism" can inform the contemporary critique of post-communism, as well as the critique of potential alternatives to post-communism. As we look back on the circuitous and often tragic historical developments that led to "communism" and its "end," we can also look back on the ideas and aspirations that accompanied this history. Rather than delegitimizing these ideas and aspirations *a priori*, we can look at them in their complexity, asking how some ideas took hold but were transformed, how other ideas may have contained from the start the seeds of their own eventual negation, while other ideas were marginalized and never had the chance to be realized.

Our intent is therefore to offer a space for the promiscuous critique of socialist, Communist (that is, Communist Party-affiliated), and "post-communist" thought and practice. "Promiscuous" because the critique comes from close analysis and often from direct experience of the objects of criticism, even while it attempts to transcend those objects' limitations, enabling us to move beyond the multiple "ends of history" that have come and gone, the multiple moments when the political horizon has been declared closed and finite only to be opened up again. And in addition to being promiscuous, the critique that appears in our pages is also, directly or indirectly, *partisan*: it takes part in the processes it observes, looking not only at domination but also at moments of rupture and liberation. Our authors examine the contradictory potential contained in such ideas as subjectivity and ideology, self-management and nationalization, anti-statism and the welfare state, alternative culture and the dissident ghetto, universal human fulfillment and historically-situated transformation.

Why have we done this by publishing yet another journal? First, because a journal is committed to keeping up with its times, continually renewing its critical attitude with the goal of always being adequate to its present. But while news is fast, theory is slow, and publishing annually allows our authors to take the time to observe developments, reflect, analyze, and finally react. But second, our journal has something specific to say. Ours may not be the first international journal to make it a priority to develop the tradition of critical social thought by engaging with the history of Central and Eastern European socialism, Communist Party rule, and post-communism, but other journals that once filled this role have by now gone in other directions. The old project has remained unfinished.

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In keeping with this commitment, this volume continues our authors' engagement with the condition of post-communism and the intellectual currents that helped create it. The question is approached most directly in Neda Genova's review of Boris Buden's *Zone des Übergangs. Vom Ende des Postkomunismus* (The zone of transition: On the end of

post-communism), a book which has still not found its way to English-language readers, though it offers one of the few sustained theoretical attempts to critically understand the phenomenon of post-communism. Peter Steiner, meanwhile, offers a critical look at the post-communist rhetorical engagement of one of the region's most prominent former dissidents, Václav Havel.

In the Czech/Slovak-language section, Matěj Metelec discusses the significance of the historic dissident movement for the contemporary left, as well as the limitations of both; and Lukáš Makovický examines the work of former dissident G. M. Tamás, who has become a trenchant critic of contemporary society and a once-again-dissident voice in increasingly authoritarian Hungary. The English-language section, meanwhile, approaches dissident thought with three texts on the work of phenomenologist Jan Patočka: two reviews, one by Sergio Mas Díaz and the other by Michaela Belejkaničová, of recent interpretations of Patočka's political relevance, and an article by Alex Forbes on the meaning of "Europe" in Patočka's thought, against the backdrop of Theo Angelopoulos's film *Ulysses' Gaze*.

Coming from a very different critical tradition, Alain Badiou discusses, in an interview with Jana Beránková, the relationship between his original philosophy and the emancipatory meaning of communism, in light (among other things) of the attempts made around the world in 1968 to wrest communism from the grasp of established Communist Party elites. Dirk Dalberg reviews a recent collection of essays in English translation by the Marxist-humanist philosopher Ivan Sviták, who became one of the Czechoslovak government's fiercest critics before being forced into exile after the defeat of the so-called Prague Spring of 1968. We also publish here the first English translation of an essay by Sviták's contemporary, the philosopher, aesthetic theorist, and intellectual historian Robert Kalivoda, and we print a revised translation (as well as the unpublished original) of a literary-theoretical essay by the surrealist intellectual, and collaborator of both Sviták and Kalivoda, Vratislav Effenberger, whose thought is introduced in an accompanying study by Šimon Svěrák. And Miroslav Tížik reviews (in Slovak) a recent volume on yet another aspect of the reform process in Communist-led society, a project of dialog between reform-oriented Marxists and socially progressive Christians in 1960s Czechoslovakia.

Katarzyna Bielinska-Kowalewska, meanwhile, looks at another attempt to reform a society established in the Soviet mold: in a review of Vladimir Unkovski-Korica's study of Tito's Yugoslavia, she considers the country's tradition of "self-managing socialism" and defends Unkovski-Korica's interpretation of the system as, in fact, a form of "state capitalism." In the Czech/Slovak section, Petr Kužel further explores the meaning of state capitalism in a new entry in *Contradictions'* ongoing "conceptual dictionary." And Martin Nový looks at the interconnection between the state and the liberal capitalism of Western Europe in a Czech-language review of Werner Bonefeld's book *The Strong State and the Free Economy*.

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A series of other texts looks farther into the past, exploring the longer intellectual history of East-Central Europe. In the English section of *Contradictions*, Dan Swain examines the thought of Soviet legal theorist Yegeny Pashukanis as a critical counterpoint to recent left-Rawlsian theories of justice. Two reviews, by Nick Evans and by Vikash Singh and Sangeeta Parashar, discuss the legacy of heterodox economic theorist Karl Polanyi, with attention to his early Hungarian-language writings in comparison with his better-known later writings. In the Czech/Slovak section, Ivana Komanická also looks at the intellectual world of the left-wing Hungarian-speaking intelligentsia after World War I, with a look at the socialist avant-garde and the movement for proletarian culture in Košice (today in Slovakia, then a part of the short-lived Slovak Soviet Republic, affiliated with the Hungarian Soviet Republic, before being incorporated into Czechoslovakia).

The work of Pashukanis and Polanyi raises important questions regarding the interconnection of economic structure, social institutions, and cultural forms. Such questions are explored further by Nicole Pepperell in her critical look at György Lukács's understanding of commodity fetishism, which appears in his work, she notes, as a "false veil of objectivity" that must be pulled back to reveal the true social relations beneath. Pepperell instead proposes a return to Marx's notion of the fetishized commodity as a *real* form of social interdependence. Étienne Balibar looks at the related problem of ideology in its relation to political institutions in an interview with Petr Kužel (here in Czech translation), in which he discusses the thought of Louis Althusser. Herbert Marcuse explores the relationship between capitalism and the aesthetic dimension of human experience in the first Czech translation of chapter 9 of his *Eros and Civilization*. And Nick Nesbitt, also in Czech translation, explores the specific problem of "internal difference" in the musical philosophies of Theodor Adorno and Gilles Deleuze.

Other texts branch out in a number of theoretical directions. In the English section, Norbert Trenkle considers the rise of what he calls "fictitious capital," which, he argues, is increasingly replacing the direct exploitation of labor. In the Czech/Slovak section, Petr Kužel reviews Juraj Halas's book on Marx's contribution to the methodology of the critical social sciences, and Erik Leško reviews a recent book on global inequality by Ondřej Horký-Hlucháň and Tomáš Profant, et al. Vít Bartoš, meanwhile, turns to the natural sciences, arguing, against one tradition of humanist Marxism, in favor of a more sympathetic look at Engels's notion of the dialectics of nature. We also offer a Czech translation of a review essay by Joseph Grim Feinberg that appeared in English in *Contradictions* 2017, on the notions of hegemony and multitude as they appear in the book *Radical Democracy and Collective Movements Today*.

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Critical and emancipatory theory are inherently optimistic in at least one sense: they see society as always incomplete, full of contradiction and, therefore, full of potential that is never quite exhausted. Critique, as a process that never ends, is a game that is never definitively lost. The same is not true, unfortunately, of the individual human life, and

we conclude *Contradictions* 2018 with memorials to two important thinkers who passed away since our last volume was released. The first is Italian philosopher and intellectual historian Domenico Losurdo, who, among his many accomplishments, made seminal contributions to the critique of liberalism and the notion of totalitarianism, and to our understanding of the Hegelian contribution to emancipatory theory. The second is Moishe Postone, who not only influenced us with his groundbreaking reinterpretations of Marxism and the original thought of Karl Marx, but who was also, as a member of our international editorial board, an important collaborator of *Contradictions*. Their battles against death could not, in the end, be won, but their work – which has now left their hands and entered the shared process of social critique – has plenty of life still in it.

STUDIES

JUSTICE AS FETISH

Marx, Pashukanis, and the Form of Justice

Dan Swain

This article considers the relevance of the ideas of Soviet jurist Evgeny Pashukanis for debates about the relationship between Marxism and justice. In particular, it employs these ideas as a criticism of those who seek to supplement Marx's critique of capitalism with liberal theories of justice, paradigmatically those of John Rawls. Pashukanis's analysis of the legal form as a kind of fetish, arising on the basis of capitalist relations of production, opens up the possibility of a similar criticism of theories of justice. This involves more than just the familiar critique that such theories are ideological; Pashukanis suggests an approach that recognises the practical effectiveness of theories of justice while also recognising their limits from the perspective of radical critique. This new approach allows for a better understanding of how theories of justice might form part of radical theory and practice today.
Keywords: Marx, Pashukanis, Rawls, theories of justice, Soviet jurisprudence, ethics, commodity fetishism

Introduction

In 1847 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels won positions and achieved influence with a small propaganda group known as the League of the Just. One of their first acts was to change this name to the Communist League, with the reasoning that "we are not distinguished by wanting justice in general – anyone can claim that for himself – but

by our attack on the existing social order and on private property."[1] Almost 30 years later, Marx expresses similar ideas in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, re-asserting his suspicions of justice and those who claim to act in its name. Yet Marx fought for a better world, and inspired generations after him to do the same, and many have done it precisely in the idioms of social justice – condemning the existing state of affairs as unjust, and insisting on the possibility of an alternative. This has given rise to a complex, and often fraught, debate about the role of ideas of justice within Marxism.

This article presents the case for a particular understanding of notions of justice from a Marxist perspective. In part, this is intended as a critique of those who suggest a dialogue or fusion between a Marxist analysis of capitalism as an economic form and liberal theories of justice, paradigmatically those developed by John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* and *Justice as Fairness*.[2] These thinkers, for good reason, see it as being an urgent task to complement Marx's insights into capitalism as a system of economic domination and exploitation with the principles of justice that would govern a just alternative. Without ideas of justice, it is argued, any attack on the existing social order rings hollow – leaving only an economic analysis, without normative force. Even more importantly, it is argued that in failing to articulate principles by which capitalism could be condemned as unjust, Marx also failed to articulate what would make communism *just*, and thus left his alternative horribly unspecified. If that was ever justified, the argument goes, after the events of the 20th century it cannot be any longer.

As an alternative to these positions, I offer an argument rooted in the work of the Soviet legal theorist Evgeny Pashukanis, who developed a critique of the legal form. In a sense, this can be seen as re-asserting some of Marx's own arguments, but I argue Pashukanis's approach grants a richer perspective from which to consider both the theoretical and practical value of the language of justice. Understanding the form of justice as analogous to the legal form helps recognise both its significance and its limits. While this may not necessitate an abandonment of the language of justice tout court, it does require a recognition of its roots in commodity producing society and a deep awareness of its limits.

The Marx and Justice Debate

The debate about Marx's attitude to justice is longstanding and wide-ranging, with clearly defined views on all sides.[3] Although often conflated with it,[4] this is a subset of a broader debate about Marx and morality, sparked by Marx's famous hostility towards

[1] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Circular of First Congress to Members, June 9, 1847," in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 6 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976), p. 589.

[2] Two recent examples of such thinkers are Alex Callinicos, *Resources of Critique* (London: Polity, 2006); and Jeffrey Reiman, *As Free and as Just as Possible: The Theory of Marxian Liberalism* (London: Wily Blackwell, 2012).

[3] The two canonical texts on either side are probably Allen W. Wood, "The Marxian Critique

the language of ethics and morality in favour of systemic or "scientific" criticisms. While there are various reasons for this reluctance to employ the language of ethics, on the question of justice and rights Marx is quite specific. He sees such questions as tied closely to the economic structure of society, asserting famously that "right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby."[5] The core of this view is summarised in the following passage from *Capital Vol. III*:

> The justice of transactions between agents of production consists in the fact that these transactions arise from the relations of production as their natural consequence. The legal forms in which these economic transactions appear as voluntary actions of the participants, as the expressions of their common will and as contracts that can be enforced on the parties concerned by the power of the state are mere forms that cannot themselves determine this content. They simply express it. The content is just so long as it corresponds to the mode of production and is adequate to it, it is unjust as soon as it contradicts it.[6]

Thus, according to Marx, "slavery, on the basis of the capitalist mode of production, is unjust; so is cheating on the quality of commodities," but capitalism itself is not. The point here seems to be that while certain kinds of activities that happen to take place within capitalism can be denounced as unjust because they violate its norms, capitalist production relations themselves are immune to such criticism.

This rejection of justice-based criticisms of capitalism can be construed in a stronger and a weaker sense. In the weaker sense, it says that *capitalist* standards of justice are inadequate to criticising capitalism, that from the point of view of capitalist relations of production it makes no sense to denounce capitalism. This leaves open the possibility that from the point of view of an alternative (not yet existing) economic system capitalism can be considered as unjust, just as slavery is unjust from the point of view of capitalism. On this reading, however, Marx does not really give us any reason to not criticise capitalism as unjust, so long as we are clear by which standards and from which standpoint we are

of Justice," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1 (1972), no. 3, pp. 244–282; and Norman Geras, "The Controversy About Marx and Justice," *New Left Review* I, no. 150 (1985), pp. 47–85.

[4] Kai Nielsen, for example, suggests that anyone who condemns capitalism as exploitative or unequal "must agree [...] that capitalism is indeed, in the plain untechnical sense of the term, an unjust social system." Kai Nielsen, *Marxism and the Moral Point of View* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), p. 170. I am doubtful that there is any "plain, untechnical" sense of justice, but in any case this misses the distinctive form of the theories under discussion here.

[5] Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," in *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, Vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), pp. 13–30 (online at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Critque_of_the_Gotha_Programme.pdf [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

[6] Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3 (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 460.

criticising, namely that of an envisaged higher form of social organisation.[7] Note here that this seems to rule out a strategy of "immanent critique," according to which capitalism can be criticised for failing to live up to *its own* standards of justice. Such forms of argument are often seen as part of a Marxist or critical theory tradition, and there are certainly some reasons to think Marx thought in this way about certain aspects of capitalism – that it, for example, created needs in the working class that it was structurally unable to fulfil. However, when it comes to the language of *justice* specifically he seems to reject such a strategy, holding not just that such ideas are produced by capitalism, but that they can do nothing but uncritically reflect it. Defending this, however, requires demonstrating not just that they are produced by capitalism, but that they are formally constrained in certain ways that make them ill-suited to criticise it.

Thus, a stronger sense pursues the notion of form and content alluded to in the quotation above, suggesting that the problem is not merely specific standards of justice, but the form of justice itself. Communism will not merely just have different standards of justice, but it will be *beyond* justice. This position, however, is often seen as depending on one or another utopian commitment, either sufficient abundance to overcome the "conditions of justice" or a radical transformation of individuals that overcomes competing individual interests. For many, these commitments are unrealistic or unpalatable (a point I will return to below).

This leads to two broad interpretive positions: The first accepts Marx's claims that capitalism is, in fact, perfectly just, and thus looks to develop other idioms and concepts with which to criticise capitalism (and perhaps to articulate alternatives).[8] The second, which became dominant in Analytical Marxism and by extension much of Anglo-American political theory, follows G. A. Cohen's famous suggestion that, "while Marx believed that capitalism was unjust, and that communism was just, he did not always realize that he had those beliefs."[9] This naturally leads to the conclusion that any rejection of the language of justice rests on a misunderstanding, and thus that there should be no barrier to developing a Marxist or Marxian account of justice in order to criticise capitalist society.

With this task in mind, it made sense to turn from an intellectual tradition that had expended little energy discussing the precise configuration of a just society to one that

[7] This, however, raises the question of how we know what such higher standards are prior to living in such a society. It might be argued that since we cannot yet know the standards of a higher (communist) justice, we cannot use them to criticise capitalism. I think this position has merit both as an interpretation of Marx and in its own right, but it is not directly relevant to my purpose and I will not defend it here.

[8] See, e.g., Allen W. Wood, *Karl Marx* (London: Routledge, 2004).

[9] G. A. Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom and Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

had done little else. Rawls's theory, first published in 1971, provides the framework for a vast and interminable debate about the precise principles that would govern a just society. While many disagree with both his specific principles and the methodology by which they are derived, his work provides the touchstone and form for a great deal of this discussion. In particular, Rawls can be seen as the initiator of a broad paradigm in which discussions of justice took a specific and narrow form. Speaking of a broad paradigm in this sense inevitably invites objections and risks failing to do justice to the various specificities and debates within it. Indeed, while Rawls can be seen as its initiator, many such theories have moved some distance from his original intent. Some of these differences matter, and will be addressed further below, but there remain some importantly shared features that make it possible to talk of a shared structure or form. In particular, such theories are distributive – representing subjects as recipients of their fair share of social goods (whether broadly or narrowly defined)[10] – and tend to rely on a more or less ideal conception of a just alternative which is used to both guide political action and to assess existing societies. [11]

It is a feature of many such theories that, were they fully realised in contemporary society, they would result in something very different from what we have today. Nonetheless, this article will argue that these formal features remain, as Marx put it, constrained by the narrow horizon of the bourgeois right. In order to do that, I will turn to the ideas of Pashukanis, who attempted to develop and understand those limits through an analysis and critique of the legal form.

The Form of Justice

Evgeny Pashukanis was a Bolshevik activist and legal theorist in the early days of the Soviet Union.[12] In 1924 he published his *General Theory of Law and Marxism*, which formed the basis of an ambitious attempt to develop a general theory of law, against what he took to be various one-sided accounts both in and outside of the Soviet Union. Initially playing a significant role in the new Soviet state, he rose to the position of Vice-President of the Communist Academy and compiled the *Encyclopedia of State and Law* alongside long-time collaborator Pyotr Stuchka. However, he gradually found

[10] Norman Geras, for example, suggests extending it to "cover the generality of social advantages, especially the relative availability of free time, time, that is, for autonomous individual development." Geras, "The Controversy About Marx," p. 74.

[11] For various positions on the relationship, see Laura Valentini, "On the Apparent Paradox of Ideal Theory," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 17 (2009), no. 3, pp. 332–355; Zofia Stemplowska, "What's Ideal About Ideal Theory," *Social Theory and Practice* 34 (2008), no. 3, pp. 319–340; A. John Simmons, "Ideal and Non-Ideal Theory," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 38 (2010), no. 1, pp. 5–36.

[12] See Michael Head, "The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Jurist: Evgeny Pashukanis and Stalinism," *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 17 (2004), no. 2, pp. 269–294.

himself on the wrong side of the Stalinist orthodoxy, eventually being executed as a Trotskyite saboteur in 1937. The specific reasons for his decline and demise are not entirely irrelevant to this discussion, and I will return to them later.

In the General Theory, Pashukanis's intention was to do for the law what Marx had done for economics.[13] In particular, his intention was to "to analyse the fundamental definitions of the legal form in the same way that political economy analyses the basic, most general definitions of the commodity-form or the value form."[14] Just as the commodity was the cell-form of capitalist society, according to Pashukanis, the legal subject was the cell-form of law in general. Indeed, he went deeper than this. At the heart of his theory is the idea that "*the logic of the commodity is the logic of the legal form*."[15]

For him, law as such arises on the basis of the isolation and opposition of interests in society. If there were no such conflicts, there would merely be technical regulation, not legal regulation. He gives the example of a doctor, for whom there exists a set of rules and regulations of treatment which should be applied and respected. These regulations, however, are not legal, and the lawyer has no place in them. "His role begins at the point where we are forced to leave this realm of unity of purpose and to take up another standpoint, that of mutually opposed separate subjects." From this point onwards, the doctor and patient appear as subjects with rights and duties, and the question is no longer a practical technical question of what works in treatment, but a formal, legal question of permissibility. This subject, possessing rights and enabled to make claims on the basis of these rights, is the basic form of law itself. Moreover, in a society whose organising principle is commodity exchange – that is, where all commodities are produced for exchange and human beings are recognised primarily as bearers of commodities – this form becomes fundamental:

> The subject as representative and addressee of every possible claim, the succession of subjects linked together by claims on each other, is the fundamental legal fabric

[13] I do not intend to defend Pashukanis' analysis of law here, merely to elaborate it in order to draw out its relevance for theories of justice. For a thorough defence see China Miéville, *Between Equal Rights: A Marxist Theory of International Law* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), Chapters 3 and 4. It is worth noting that Miéville cautions against identifying law with justice, both in Pashukanis' work and in general. However, this is partly because he has in mind a broader sense of justice than those at stake in this discussion, and is concerned with showing that Pashukanis's anticipated withering away of law does not therefore entail a rejection of the norms of justice. However, given the content of the chapter on law and morality, which I discuss later, such a clear demarcation of Pashukanis's themes seems to me untenable. Even if this were not the case, the structural similarities between the heavily juridical notion of the subject at stake in such theories and the subject in Pashukanis's work are too strong to ignore.

[14] Evgeny B. Pashukanis, *Law and Marxism: A General Theory* (London: Pluto, 1983), pp. 49–50.

[15] Miéville, *Between Equal Rights*, p. 78.

> which corresponds to the economic fabric, that is, to the production relations of a society based on division of labour and exchange.[16]

Thus, capitalism instantiates the fullest realisation of the legal form, generalising and completing it.[17]

In arguing this, Pashukanis draws clear connections with Marx's account of commodity fetishism. According to Marx, in a society where productive activity is governed by commodity exchange, the commodities themselves come to take on a particular significance, a life of their own. Production is organised not according to a particular plan or set of purposes, but on the basis of values determined by exchange on the market. Decisions about what, when, and how to produce become dictated purely by the value of commodities themselves. A concept of value arises as an attempt to equalise diverse human products and activities, to make possible exchange according to equivalent standards. This in turn gives rise to a concept of value as located in the commodities themselves. As I. I. Rubin puts it, "the fact that production relations are not established only *for* things, but *through* things [is] what gives production relations among people a 'materialised,' 'reified' form, and gives birth to commodity fetishism, the confusion between the material-technical and the social-economic aspect of the production process."[18] Instead of appearing as co-operative individuals, we appear as individual possessors of commodities, and it appears to be the commodities themselves that motivate and animate the activity. And, in a sense, they do – these ideas are a reflection of the way the economy itself is organised.

However, while a real reflection of the exchange process, this commodity fetishism also serves to conceal the true nature of production relations. By making the economy appear as a collection of interacting things rather than human relationships, it masks the character of these relationships. Thus fetishism arises from the nature of commodity production and exchange, and simultaneously conceals the true nature of that production. Crucially, fetishism itself takes on a sort of objective reality. It is not mere illusion. Marx corrects the Italian economist Galiani by pointing out that when he said "'value is a relation between persons' he ought to have added: a relation concealed beneath a material shell."[19]

Since fetishism takes on this objective reality, it cannot be dispelled merely through *demonstrating* the social nature of value. Marx insists that the theoretical analysis of

[16] Pashukanis, *Law and Marxism*, p. 99.

[17] Pashukanis presents his theory as partly a historical one, but Miéville is right to suggest that it should first and foremost be understood as "a dialectical-logical theory of the legal form, and [that] any implications for a historical narrative or theory are inchoate." Miéville, *Between Equal Rights*, p. 97.

[18] Isaak I. Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1973), p. 29.

[19] Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 167.

value "marks an epoch in the history of mankind's development, but by no means banishes the semblance of objectivity possessed by the social characteristics of labour."[20] It follows from this that ideas ought to be examined in their connection to material life and never assumed to have objectivity independent of it. But it also follows that such ideas will persist until there is a change in the material conditions of human life.

Pashukanis believes that the legal form can be seen as arising on substantially the same basis and possessing the same basic structure and function. Just as society organised on the basis of commodity exchange requires a standard of value by which diverse human beings, their activities, and their products can be compared and measured, it also requires a concept that relates human beings, as willing agents, to those products and to each other. For Pashukanis, this concept is the legal subject, which arises co-extensively with the concept of value:

> Just as in the commodity, the multiplicity of use-values natural to a product appears simply as the shell of value, and the concrete types of human labour are dissolved into abstract human labour as the creator of value, so also the concrete multiplicity of the relations between man and objects manifests itself as the abstract will of the owner. All concrete peculiarities which distinguish one representative of the *genus homo sapiens* from one another dissolve in the abstraction of man in general, man as legal subject.[21]

Thus, for Pashukanis, commodity production results in the highest development of the legal form as such – the completely abstract legal subject who "acquires the significance of a mathematical point, a centre in which a certain number of rights is concentrated." The formal equality of these "distinct and different individuals is in exact homology with the equalisation of qualitatively different commodities in commodity exchange, through the medium of abstract labour (the stuff of value)."[22]

Chris Arthur summarises this argument as follows:

> While things rule people through the 'fetishism of commodities,' a person is juridically dominant over things because, as an owner, he is posited as an abstract impersonal subject of rights in things. Social life in the present epoch has two distinctive and complementary features: on the one hand human relationships are mediated by the cash nexus in all its forms, prices, profits, credit-worthiness and so on, in short all those relationships where people are related in terms of

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] Pashukanis, *Law and Marxism*, p. 113.

[22] Miéville, *Between Equal Rights*, p. 88.

> things; on the other hand we have relationships where a person is defined only in contrast to a thing – that is to say as a subject freely disposing of what is his. The social bond appears simultaneously in two incoherent forms: as the abstract equivalence of commodity values, and as a person's capacity to be the abstract subject of rights.[23]

This structure also, according to Pashukanis, necessitates the growth of an external, third party authority to mediate between individual legal subjects, namely a state:

> Effective power takes on a marked juridical, public character, as soon as relations arise in addition to and independently of it, in connection with the act of exchange, that is to say, private relations par excellence. By appearing as a guarantor, authority becomes social and public, an authority representing the impersonal interest of the system.[24]

Commodity producing society requires people represented as autonomous wills, capable of freely disposing of what they produce and own. Therefore, "coercion as the imperative addressed by one person to another, and backed up by force, contradicts the fundamental precondition for dealings between the owners of commodities." This is because within the act of exchange itself coercion can only appear as the act of one or other parties to the exchange, and thus "subjection to one person, as a concrete individual, implies subjection to an arbitrary force."

> That is also why coercion cannot appear here in undisguised form as a simple act of expediency. It has to appear rather as coercion emanating from an abstract collective person, exercised not in the interest of the individual from whom it emanates… but in the interest of all parties to legal transactions.[25]

Thus while accepting that a state of some kind is a crucial part of the legal form, Pashukanis rejects the idea that the state itself gives rise to law. Rather, the state issues from the development of the legal form.

In the most challenging, and least complete, chapter of the *General Theory*, Pashukanis attempts to extend this analysis to a criticism of morality in general. Here he extends the notion of abstractly identical bearers of rights before the law to the idea of equal moral worth more generally: "Man as a moral subject, that is as a personality of equal worth, is indeed no more than a necessary condition for exchange according to the

[23] Chris J. Arthur, "Editor's Introduction," in Pashukanis, *Law and Marxism*, pp. 9–32, here 14.
[24] Pashukanis, *Law and Marxism*, p. 137.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 150.

law of value."[26] This "moral personality" is, alongside the egoistic subject and the legal subject, one of the "three most important character masks assumed by people in commodity-producing society."[27] Corresponding to this conception of moral personality is a conception of moral law which both stands above individuals in order to regulate them and "penetrate the soul of every commodity owner." This Pashukanis locates in Kant, suggesting that "the Kantian ethic typifies commodity-producing society, yet at the same time it is the purest and most consummate form of ethic there is."[28] Yet the fact that Kant's theory is the most consummate form only shows the deficiencies of the form itself, since Kant's various antinomies presuppose, rather than resolve, isolation and social tension. Rather, just as the commodity form possesses a twin in the legal form, it also correlates with a particular ethical or moral form, and "the abolition of moral fetishes can only be accomplished in practice simultaneously with the abolition of commodity fetishism and legal fetishism."[29]

Illusion Beneath a Material Shell

Pashukanis's analysis of law develops Marx's idea that notions of "right" are bound up with specific forms of the organisation of economic life. He offers an account of how the legal subject and the form that builds around it can be seen as resting on a specific economic form of life. This is thus an argument about ideology in a classical sense: an analysis of a form of thought that emerges from and is intimately linked to a particular social practice, serving to systematically reinforce it and mask the real relations of domination that operate within it. Pashukanis only explicitly mentions justice in passing, in order to endorse Marx's criticism of Proudhon,[30] but his belief that there can be moral fetishes alongside legal fetishes opens up the possibility of applying his ideas to a broader moral theory. In particular, the ideas associated with theories of justice seem particularly apt to be analysed in this way. Just as Pashukanis identifies strong structural similarities between the legal form and the commodity form, it is possible to do something similar with the form taken by theories of justice. Such an analysis is by its nature speculative and operates at a high level of generality, made even more challenging by the familiar challenges of saying anything very general and critical about Rawls's intricate and complex theoretical architecture.[31] Nonetheless, I will try

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 151.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

[30] "Basically, the concept of justice does not contain anything substantively new, apart from the concept of equal worth of all men which we have already analysed. Consequently it is ludicrous to see some autonomous and absolute criterion in the idea of justice." *Ibid.*, p. 161.

[31] Lorna Finlayson, *The Political is Political: Conformity and the Illusion of Dissent in Contemporary Political Philosophy* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), Chapter 2.

in this section to motivate the claim that ideas of justice are tightly bound up with the commodity form and to consider some of its consequences.

Rawls assumes a model of society as being made of up of necessary social cooperation between people within a society that they can only enter by birth and leave by death, yet in which people have diverse and different goals and conceptions of the good life.[32] Thus, people are in a sense thrown together and forced to agree on basic rules of social cooperation, and society therefore appears as a tissue of connected individuals, each pursuing their own individual goals (based on their own individual conception of the good life). While these subjects are real people, with specific powers, capacities, desires, and social locations, it is possible to represent them *abstractly*. Indeed, this is part of the function of Rawls's famous "veil of ignorance," which invites us to consciously set aside our particular characteristics in order to determine fair rules of social cooperation.[33] Although Rawls is clear that the veil of ignorance must operate alongside our considered intuitions about justice in a reflective equilibrium, not as a substitute for them, he also insists that this plays an important role in determining their fairness overall. His theory is thus a form of social contract (again, something he is explicit about), through which rules of social cooperation are *agreed* by rational agents operating within society.[34] These rules specify a set of rights, claims, and entitlements that regulate relationships between subjects and specify their share of particular social advantages and goods.

Here we already see the outlines of certain shared features with the legal form emerging. First, the subjects appearing as abstract bearers of claims, similar to Pashukanis's identification of the legal subject as a fixed, mathematical point, on which rights are overlain. Moreover, social cooperation is represented as arising on the basis of different and incommensurable goals, which must thus be mediated between by political institutions. Rawls insists that his theory is *political*, designed to apply only to what he calls the "basic structure" of society and not to operate in every specific interaction between subjects. There is an expectation that if the various institutional features are already designed in a way that instantiates justice then individual agents need not *themselves* consider the justice of their interaction.

Alongside the notion of subjects as bearers of rights and claims is a particular approach to the various goods over which they exercise these claims. Rawls calls these primary goods, including material wealth but also a wide variety of human powers, capacities, and relational features. These amount to "what free and equal persons (as defined by the political conception) need as citizens," and include basic rights and

[32] John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 39–40.

[33] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: Revised Second Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 15–9; Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 80–96.

[34] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 10–11; Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 16–17.

liberties, freedom of movement, and the "social bases of self-respect."[35] The principles of justice agreed to in the social contract "assess the basic structure according to how it regulates citizens' share of primary goods, these shares being specified in terms of an appropriate index."[36] These principles of justice first guarantee an equal set of basic liberties and fair opportunity, and then that any inequalities in other goods that do exist are arranged to the benefit of the worst off (the so-called difference principle). Primary goods, while diverse and social, have an objective character – their value does not depend on any specific goal, but are seen as necessary for all (or at least all rational) plans of life. Indeed, it is precisely this objective character that allows them to be measured in such a way that establishes who counts as "worst off" and the extent to which inequalities generate some benefit for them.

Moreover, Rawls's theory involves a distinctive approach to subjects' "natural" assets or endowments. Rawls assumes that there will be to a certain extent an uneven distribution of such natural abilities, and that some of these will be the result of greater opportunity to develop these abilities through education and so forth. The difference principle, however, involves treating the distribution of such endowments as "a common asset."[37] Rawls insists that this should not be confused with treating the endowments *themselves* as a common asset (this is because his principle of basic liberty protects the integrity of the person as owner of their assets). Rather, the fact that some people have greater natural endowments should be approached in a way that encourages people to develop those endowments for the good of the worst off in society (including by giving them a greater share of goods to help them do so). This leads to probably the most substantive disagreement between Rawls and other theorists of justice (so called luck egalitarians), who suggest that those with lesser opportunities due to natural endowments should be directly compensated rather than those with greater being rewarded.

This approach to diverse human goods can be seen to map on to Arthur's schema presented above: an abstract subject with no particular distinguishing features, which stands over a bundle of properties to which it relates to mainly as possessor. Indeed, within the subject-object schema, the more the subject is reduced to a narrow abstract point, the more its particular features and specificities appear on the object side of the schema. This seems to be a feature of Rawls's account of primary goods – people appear as the possessors of a share of primary goods, which are both recognised as complexly social, the result of social cooperation, but also as potentially individually allocated and possessed. There is thus a movement here between representing human capacities as part of a social stock while also insisting they can be individually appropriated by subjects. This movement can be seen as reflecting the reality that under capitalism social

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 58–59.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 75–76; Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 88–89.

activity can and does appear as individually owned, as a commodity, while simultaneously having an irreducibly social aspect. This, in turn, evokes the logic of commodity fetishism: First, people's social activity appears as something objectively measurable, to be parcelled up, distributed, and possessed by individual subjects. Second, that the relationships between people are represented and judged as quantitative relationships between things. As Iris Young puts it: "individuals are externally related to the goods they possess, and their only relation to one another that matters from the point of view of the paradigm is a comparison of the amount of goods they possess."[38]

This way of representing human goods involves various potential ideological distortions, many of which should be familiar. Firstly, it seems to represent the relationship between subjects and their personal endowment as one primarily of possession, suggesting a model of self-ownership which is both contestable and historically intimately linked to notions of property of other people's bodies.[39] Second, it risks representing inherently social goods and capacities as individually possessable and quantifiable in a way that ignores their social and relational character. In particular, it risks drawing attention away from the specific social relations that help produce and sustain these goods. This calls to mind Marx's insistence in *Capital* that we descend from the sphere of freely contracting individuals, where "either in accordance with the pre-established harmony of things, or under the auspices of an omniscient providence, they all work together for their mutual advantage" to specific relations of exploitation and domination in the workplace.[40]

The criticism that Rawls's ideas reflect the presuppositions of capitalist society are not new ones. Young charges that such theories "help forestall criticism of relations of power and culture in welfare capitalist society… reinforce domination and oppression, and block the political imagination from envisioning more emancipatory institutions and practices."[41] Alasdair MacIntyre suggests that "Rawls equates the human self with the liberal self in a way which is atypical of the liberal tradition only in its clarity of conception and statement,"[42] while G.A. Cohen suggests that in Rawls "the politics of liberal (in the American sense) democracy and social (in the European sense) democracy rises to consciousness of itself."[43] Indeed, Rawls does not really deny this. He is quite explicit that he sees his principles as arising based on reasoned reflection on the considered

[38] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 18.

[39] See Anne Phillips, *Our Bodies, Whose Property?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[40] Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 280.

[41] Young, *Justice*, p. 75.

[42] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1988), p. 337.

[43] G. A. Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 11.

intuitions of those living within modern democratic states, not that they should be seen as universal principles applied to any and all societies. Thus, there is a sense in which the ideology criticism is uncontroversial: The principles of justice are what emerge from considered reflection on a liberal constitutional order, dominated by notions of subject, property, and right. They are precisely the abstracted and idealised form of existing property relations, and we should thus be unsurprised they are ill-suited to criticising them.

Nonetheless, Rawls does suggest that his principles are compatible with both a property-owning democracy and a planned socialist economy, insisting that they merely offer a "conception of justice in the light of which, given the particular circumstances of a country, those questions can be reasonably decided." It is possible to question how deep this commitment is and, as Lorna Finlayson does, to highlight the potentially ideological role of this attempt to efface potentially deep ideological differences.[44] Moreover, it also pays to examine precisely what Rawls means by "socialism" in this context, since Rawls is also quite clear that his approach is incompatible with Marx's communism.[45] In *Theory of Justice*, socialism is distinguished by the scope and size of the "public sector" as it is "measured by the fraction of total output produced by state-owned firms and managed either by state officials or by workers' councils."[46] Moreover, while Rawls sees the importance of certain public goods that cannot be privately possessed, he also sees their very existence as depending on the existence and authority of state coercion, something which is "a normal condition of human life in this case."[47] This mirrors the pattern that Pashukanis identifies, which invokes the state as a third element that both arbitrates between competing claims and possesses claims of its own. This focus on state ownership, however, can be seen as having two ideological effects: First, a focus on ownership alone appears subject to a classically Marxist critique about drawing our eyes away from specific relations of domination within the workplace and industry; the apparent neutrality between management by state officials and workers' councils seems instructive here. Second, it rules out entirely the idea that certain goods might be subject to other potential models of use and ownership – appearing perhaps as collective or common property – without the regulation of a coercive agency.

In this context, it is worth noting that Cohen's own approach to questions of justice is presented precisely in terms of a Marxist challenge to Rawls on the question of the state.[48] Cohen wants to take seriously the idea that the state might wither away and that there might be no special separation between state and society; as a result, he calls for

[44] Finlayson, *The Political is Political*, Chapter 2.

[45] Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 176–178.

[46] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 235.

[47] *Ibid*., p. 237.

[48] Cohen, *Rescuing Justice*, pp. 1–2.

deeper egalitarian principles. In particular, he rejects the idea that justice itself should be sensitive to particular facts about current society: "the principles at the summit of our convictions are grounded in no facts whatsoever."[49] While Rawls believes justice should be sensitive to the constraints of what is possible, Cohen sees what is just and what is possible as two distinct questions. The task is thus to elaborate what is just, independent of what appears possible in the here and now. However, while Cohen intends this to be liberating and to enable deeper criticism, his conception of justice still rests on distributive principles (albeit more deeply egalitarian ones) that see people as bearers of claims over goods. Moreover, as Elizabeth Anderson has argued (in defending Rawls), Cohen's approach tends to present justice as a particular kind of end state pattern to be aimed at rather than as something that exists between individuals, and thus to invoke a third person standard for justification.[50] To this extent, it seems even less sensitive to concrete social relationships between people and even more dependent on a regulating agency that aims at achieving this end state.

Pashukanis's work pushes us in the opposite direction to Cohen. He suggests identifying the problem not with the particular content of the principles, but with their form. If this is the case, however, then simply developing more idealised, less "fact sensitive" principles is unlikely to provide an adequate alternative. However, Pashukanis also suggests another important point. If such ideas are represented as *fetishes*, then they cannot merely be abandoned or wished away. Rather, they are "concretely effective principles" that are capable of motivating and regulating social action.[51] If law were merely ideas generated by the powerful to justify the existing state of things, it would be impossible to explain either why it takes the particular form it does (that is, as law, rather than some other bundle of concepts and practices), and why it is *effective* at managing social relations. Thus while law is ideology, it is not *mere* ideology, and understanding this is crucial in understanding how to approach it.

Grasping Fetishes by the Root

In the quotation from *Capital Vol. 3* that I referred to above, Marx stresses that the form of justice renders us unable in some crucial ways to criticise the actual content of capitalism. If the Pashukanis inspired argument I have developed here is correct, then he is right, but this remains only half the story. For it is also the case that the form is not something we can simply abandon or see through. It is a fetish that has to be both grasped and uprooted. It is useful here to return to the context in which Pashukanis was writing. The main target of his argument is those who sought to paint bourgeois

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 229.

[50] Elizabeth Anderson, "The Fundamental Disagreement between Luck Egalitarians and Relational Egalitarians," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Supplementary Volume 36 (2010), pp. 1–23.

[51] Pashukanis, *Law and Marxism*, p. 40.

law as "purely" ideological, as a set of ideas whose role was to legitimise capitalist production relations but which reflected nothing in reality. This was part of a polemic with those who believed that, after the revolution, it was possible and necessary to replace bourgeois law with a higher, proletarian law. For Pashukanis, while such a demand appeared to be "revolutionary par excellence," it in fact "proclaims the immortality of the legal form, in that it strives to wrench this form from the particular historical conditions which had helped bring it to full fruition, and to present it as capable of permanent renewal."[52] Rather, just as under communism the form of value, and the state, will wither away, so will the legal form. It follows, then, that to the extent that law persists, it is bourgeois law, not proletarian law.

It is important to be clear about what this argument is saying. While it *is* saying that the legal form will wither away, it is *not* saying that it ought to, or even could, be abandoned instantly. Indeed, what Pashukanis is calling for is recognition and acknowledgement that these forms are historically specific. They will persist so long as the conditions that give rise to them persist, and under these conditions "the proletariat may well have to utilise these forms, but that in no way implies that they could be developed further, or permeated by a socialist content." However, in order to do this,

> the proletariat must above all have an absolutely clear idea – freed of all ideological haziness – of the historical origin of these forms. The proletariat must take a soberly critical attitude, not only towards the bourgeois state and bourgeois morality, but also towards their own state and their own morality. Phrased differently, they must be aware that both the existence and the disappearance of these forms are historically necessary.[53]

It is positions such as this one that put him on a collision course with Stalinism.

We are, of course, a long way from where Pashukanis was when he wrote these words. We exist not in a society consciously attempting to transcend capitalism and replace it with an alternative, but in societies dominated by stuttering, but still rampant, forms of capitalism. The idea of either the value form or the legal form withering away seems remote. Nonetheless, Pashukanis's approach might inform radical movements today. In particular, we might approach ideas of justice the way that Pashukanis approached law – to use them where appropriate but also to grasp their historically specific character and to confront them with a "soberly critical attitude." Recognising their fetish character does not involve dismissing them all together, but it does mean seeing them in their specific context as reflecting and potentially reinforcing elements of existing society. One important way to do this is to present proposals that adopt the language and form

[52] *Ibid.*

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 160.

of justice not as part of generalised theories of justice, but as specific proposals and demands. These might play the role that Marx suggests for the various proposals offered in *The Communist Manifesto* for progressive taxation, free education, nationalisation, etc. These clearly fall short of the kinds of principles that would actually be necessary to regulate a communist (or even socialist) society, but they nonetheless "in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the old social order, and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionising the mode of production."[54] These proposals have, as it were, a foot in both camps: they adopt and accept to a certain extent the form and logic of contemporary property relations, while at the same time pointing beyond them, creating the conditions for a broader transformation.

Two examples might help flesh this out. First, in the face of precarious employment and growing inequality, there have been growing demands for a minimum basic income, guaranteed by the state. This demand appears clearly rooted in the terms and language of distributive justice, based on alleviating inequality and securing conditions for the worst off. Moreover, it might be criticised as depending upon and empowering a state – and indeed, many of the concrete proposals for such incomes also include mechanisms of control and discipline for its recipients. Yet this demand is also clearly capable of inspiring many. A more critical approach might be capable of supporting such demands, but also recognising their limited character: What agency will actually enforce this income? How will the amount be determined? Under what controls of democratic accountability can it be placed? In this way both its radical potential and its limits might be better unmasked. A second example might be the recent revival of ideas of "the right to the city." Such a demand might appear as a narrow, individualistic right, exercised by individual subjects, and if it were merely this, it would be of limited value. However, in posing fundamental questions of power, democracy, and people's relationship to their built environment, it also can appear as something more expansive which, in turn, presents a deeper challenge to existing structures of ownership and governance, forming, as David Harvey puts it, "a way station" on the road to something else.[55]

Once concern might be that such proposals, if presented as merely provisional or artificial, might be weakly motivating. If people are encouraged to see principles of justice as temporary, why would they campaign for them? Far from being "concretely effective" such principles will fail to inspire support. There are two responses to this. Firstly, if the analysis offered here is correct, then this is the *only* appropriate attitude to take – anything else is to reinforce illusions in a way that is at best dishonest and at worst counterproductive. Secondly, however, it is far from clear that partial and temporary proposals or demands cannot motivate, given the right circumstances. In-

[54] Marx, The Communist Manifesto (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 104.

[55] David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012), p. xviii.

deed, in responding to specific grievances and ills, such proposals are often capable of mobilising broader bases of support than abstract claims of justice. History contains plenty of examples of movements where people were capable of mobilising behind a specific proposal or reform while simultaneously recognising it as a mere step in a broader project of emancipation.

What broader emancipation? Here it is important to stress a difference between Pashukanis's treatment of the legal form and his treatment of the moral form. While Pashukanis is clear that his critique of the legal form is a critique of law as such that will later be replaced by something analogous to technical regulation in the context of shared social goals, he is more guarded when it comes to ethics. In a footnote, he says:

> Does this mean, then, that "there will be no morality in the society of the future"? Not at all, if one understands morality in the wider sense as the development of higher forms of humanity, as the transformation of man into a species-being (to use Marx's expression). In the given case, however, we are talking about something different, about specific forms of moral consciousness and conduct which, once they have played out their historical role, will have to make way for different forms of the relationship between the individual and the collective.[56]

In talking in such vague terms about a changing relationship between the individual and the collective, Pashukanis leaves himself open to the charge that he depends on a utopian ideal of a fully social individual whose interests never conflict with either other members of society or society itself.[57] Indeed, his contemporary Karl Korsch suggests that he would be more consistent suggesting the disappearance of ethics entirely.[58] Given Pashukanis's (over)enthusiasm for planning and technical regulation, it is possible that this is what he thought. However, these remarks leave open another strategy, namely an attempt to develop morality in a different form, perhaps presupposing social co-operation rather than social division. These forms will only become meaningful when they reflect real alternative forms of life that emerge within and beyond the existing system.

This can thus be seen as operating a kind of two-track strategy. As well as adopting demands and proposals that take the form of justice, it is necessary to develop and show awareness of alternative approaches to morality that might emerge that are not constrained by this form. Pashukanis's criticism of Kant and gestures towards an alternative are strikingly similar to those offered by MacIntyre in his early attempts at a Marxist treatment of morality, which have more recently been developed by Paul

[56] Pashukanis, *Law and Marxism*, p. 161.

[57] See in particular Cohen, *Self-Ownership*, for criticisms of this type.

[58] Karl Korsch, "Appendix: An Assessment," in Pashukanis, *Law and Marxism*, pp. 189–195, here 190–191.

Blackledge.[59] In these works, MacIntyre suggests that the experience of "human equality and unity" that develops through working class solidarity and struggle makes it possible to "acquire a new moral standpoint." This is a standpoint from which people come to recognise the ways in which individual and collective desires coincide, in which people "discover above all that what they want most is what they want in common with others."[60] For MacIntyre, as it seems to be for Pashukanis, this is not a perspective beyond morality but a new form of morality. Whether or not the norms that arise from this are ultimately labelled "justice," they are likely to have very different formal features from the theories discussed above where justice appeared as a form inseparable from juridical norms. Moreover, this is not a perspective that can be adopted through introspection – it is one which emerges with a given form of life. It follows, therefore, that it is easier to say what it is not than what it is, to outline its form negatively rather than specify its content.

Is this aspiration utopian? Returning to Rawls, we can consider this question in light of his notion of the circumstances of justice, which have an objective and subjective form. The objective circumstances concern the fact of "moderate scarcity and the necessity of social cooperation for us all to have a decent standard of life."[61] While it likely depends on a high level of social development and a broad availability of material resources (such as actually exists in the modern world), it is not so clear that it requires an absolute overcoming of scarcity. Even limited goods might still be held and used according to social relationships other than individual appropriation. However, this does involve transcending what Rawls calls the "subjective circumstances" of justice, that "citizens affirm different, and indeed incommensurable and irreconcilable… comprehensive doctrines in the light of which they understand their conception of the good."[62] If the analysis presented here is correct, this is not a natural constraint but a specific product of a society based on commodity production and exchange. What Pashukanis points to is the historical specificity of certain key forms of thought, and the possibility that they might be displaced by (and only by) the developments of alternative forms of social cooperation. Moreover, as MacIntyre and Blackledge both argue in different ways, historical examples exist of people who have, through shared experiences of struggle and solidarity, come to shared, or at least reconcilable, conceptions of the good. That such experiences are not fleeting or utopian but rather might form the basis of an alternative form of life seems in my opinion to be a vital part of the Marxist wager on the future.

[59] See Paul Blackledge, *Marxism and Ethics: Freedom, Desire, and Revolution* (New York: SUNY, 2012); and Alasdair MacIntyre, "Notes from the Moral Wilderness," in Paul Blackledge and Neil Davidson (eds.), *Alasdair MacIntyre's Engagement with Marxism* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009), pp. 45–68.

[60] *Ibid*., p. 65.

[61] Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p. 84.

[62] *Ibid*.

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BEYOND REIFICATION

Reclaiming Marx's Concept of the Fetish Character of the Commodity

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Abstract: György Lukács's influential interpretation of commodity fetishism as "reification" shapes many contemporary critiques of the apparently objective and impersonal form taken by capitalist social relations. Such critiques seek to debunk the false veil of objectivity that results from fetishism, revealing the real character of the social relations underneath. This line of criticism, however, often attributes totalising power to capitalism, which undermines its own critical standpoint. I argue that the solution to this dilemma lies in understanding the fetish not as an ideological veil that needs to be debunked, but instead as a novel form of social interdependence that is genuinely – not illusorily – impersonal. This impersonal form is generated by a diverse array of disparate social practices whose interaction yields this unanticipated and unintended result. Within this framework, the diversity of the underlying social practices offers a practical potential basis for constituting new forms of social interdependence that lack not only the semblance, but also the reality of capitalism's oppressive objectivity.

Keywords: Marx, Lukács, Hegel, Capital*, commodity fetishism, critical social theory, reification*

Introducing the concept of the fetish character of the commodity, Marx describes the phenomenon as one in which "the definite social relation between men themselves [...] assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things."[1] The meaning of this passage is murky.[2] The language – in which social relations are described as assuming a "fantastic form" – is often interpreted as though Marx understands the fetish character as some sort of "ideology" in the sense of a distorted perception or false belief that causes what is "really" a social relation between people to appear as something that this relation is *not:* namely, a "relation between things." In this interpretation, the "relation between things" would operate as a sort of veil covering over what is *really* the fundamental reality, which is a personal relation. On this understanding, critique would consist in stripping back the veil to uncover the real relation underneath.

In the text surrounding this quotation, however, Marx makes clear that he does *not* understand the fetish character of the commodity as a veil that *covers over* a real relation. Instead, he understands this character as expressive of a very unusual kind of social relation – one specific to capitalist societies – which has the peculiar attribute that it can be taken not to be social at all. He does this, first, by suggesting that the fetish character of the commodity is not, strictly speaking, a subjective belief or an intersubjective phenomenon. This point becomes clear when Marx sets up, but ultimately rejects, an analogy between commodity fetishism and religion.[3] Marx argues:

> In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities *with the products of men's hands*.[4]

[1] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth, England and Ringwood, Australia: Penguin Books, 1976).

[2] In Knafo's words: "The passage on fetishism in Marx's Capital is one of the most debated amongst Marxists and their critics." Samuel Knafo, "The Fetishizing Subject in Marx's Capital," *Capital and Class* 26 (2002), no. 1, pp. 145–175, here 147. Dimoulis and Milios, by contrast, suggest that: "The concept of commodity fetishism is not hard to understand and there are no serious disagreements between Marxists as to its content." Dimitri Dimoulis and John Milios, "Commodity fetishism vs. capital fetishism: Marxist interpretations vis-a-vis Marx's analyses in *Capital*," *Historical Materialism* 12 (2004), no. 3, pp. 3–42, here 5. This may overstate the interpretive consensus, but Dimoulis and Milios provide a nice breakdown of major views of the passage's implications, which I will not replicate here. See also Christopher Arthur, "The Practical Truth of Abstract Labour," in Riccardo Bellofiore, Guido Starosta, and Peter D. Thomas (eds.), *In Marx's Laboratory: Critical Interpretations of the Grundrisse* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 101–120.

[3] For a recent reading of the fetishism passage that emphasises the connection to religion, see Roland Boer, "Kapitalfetisch: 'The religion of everyday life,'" *International Critical Thought* 1 (2011), no. 4, pp. 416–426.

[4] Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 165, italics mine.

The analogy Marx wants to make is that both fetishism and religion posit the existence of intangible entities – entities that Marx regards as the products of human practice, but which the social actors in question treat as "autonomous figures." Marx quickly qualifies, however, that the *way* that social actors posit intangible entities is not the same in these two cases. Marx suggests that religion involves social actors sharing a common, intersubjectively-meaningful, *belief* in the existence of intangible beings. Shared beliefs – products of the human brain – generate collective practices that, by inducing social actors to behave as though certain intangible entities exist, constitute these entities as a practical, social reality with which social actors must contend in the course of their everyday practice.

To generate the fetish character of the commodity, by contrast, Marx argues that this sort of belief is not required. Instead, social actors somehow *make* the intangible entities Marx describes in terms of commodity fetishism – and they do this "with the products of their hands." What this distinction could mean is somewhat unclear at this point in the text. As the argument develops, however, it becomes clearer that Marx intends to draw a distinction between social phenomena that could either be understood purely in cultural terms or solely in terms of intersubjectively-meaningful social phenomena, and a different kind of social phenomenon, one that Marx suggests social actors can create unintentionally, prior to integrating it into meaningful intersubjective belief systems. This distinction becomes important to Marx's claim that political economy only *retroactively discovers* certain social patterns that Marx regards as intrinsic to capitalist production, and is important to understanding why Marx's concept of the fetish is distinct from many attempts to thematize *ideology*, which often understand ideology in terms of *false* consciousness or incorrect belief. For Marx, the fetish character of capitalist relations is not a veil of illusion to be penetrated but an important qualitative characteristic of a special kind of social phenomenon that helps to distinguish specifically capitalist relations from the kinds of social relations characteristic of other forms of social life. I return to this point further below, but first I want to focus on the passages in which Marx introduces this distinction.

Having suggested that the fetish character of the commodity should not be understood as a *belief*, Marx goes on to suggest that this character is also not *false*. He argues:

> the labour of the private individual manifests itself as an element of the total labour of society only through the relations which the act of exchange establishes directly between the products, and, through their mediation, between the producers. To the producers, therefore, the social relations between their private labours appear as *what they are*, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material [*dinglich*] relations between persons and social relations between things.[5]

[5] *Ibid.,* p. 165–166, italics mine.

Here the "fantastic form of a relation between things" *is* the "definite social relation between men": there is no illusion to be stripped away, no veil to pierce. Yet, if producers see their social relations "as what they are," why is this passage framed so critically? Why call this a "fetish" character? How does Marx understand the standpoint from which he offers his criticism of how things "really are"?

In this paper, I want to explore a possible answer to these questions, one informed by a close reading of the textual strategy of the first volume of *Capital* that, in particular, draws attention to significant parallels between Marx's work and Hegel's.[6] I frame this reading in contrast to Lukács's classic analysis of reification by comparing the two authors' very different understandings of the standpoint and target of critique.[7] Through a close reading of key passages from Marx's text, I draw attention to aspects of Marx's argument that are often overlooked in discussions of the fetish character of the commodity – in particular, to the way in which Marx's discussion *juxtaposes*, rather than *contrasts*, the categories of use-value and value when introducing the concept of the fetish character of the commodity.

I argue that, in contrast to Lukács, Marx does not understand the fetish character of the commodity solely in terms of the universalisation of a social relation constituted primarily or exclusively by practices of exchange. Instead, Marx points to a much more complex, overarching, genuinely impersonal social relation, built out of component social practices that – considered by themselves or as they could be situated within different sorts of relations – would not generate this fetish character. This approach makes it possible for Marx to treat the fetish character of the commodity as a (socially, practically) *real* – rather than imaginary or solely ideological – phenomenon, one that reflects the aggregate effects or emergent properties that arise when particular component social practices come to be suspended in a particular kind of overarching social relation.

In this way, Marx can hold out the possibility for an immanent critique of social relations that exhibit this fetish character; not, however, by declaring the fetish character to be ideological but by contrasting the negative consequences of such relations with alternative possibilities for collective life that are anchored in the *potentially disaggregable parts* out of which that overarching relation is built. In this way, Marx can offer the possibility for the practical abolition of the socially real – but transient and transformable – phenomenon of a social relation that, so long as it continues to be reproduced, will generate fetish properties.

I begin below with a brief reflection on key dimensions of Lukács's analysis of reification. I argue that Lukács positions critique as a process of stripping away illusions in order to unveil an *underlying* set of social relations that have *falsely* taken on an ap-

[6] For convenience of expression, since this paper focuses on the first volume of *Capital*, I will hereafter just refer to "*Capital*" when I mean volume 1.

[7] György Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968), pp. 83–222.

pearance of rationality and objectivity. This form of critique is consonant with political strategies that would aim to replace this false rationality and objectivity with something more truly objective and rational – an approach that can provide inadequate critical purchase on technocratic capitalist forms.

I argue that Marx's approach, by contrast, seeks to understand how a *genuinely* impersonal form of social relation comes to be generated unintentionally in collective practice. By analysing the genesis of this social phenomenon, Marx does *not* seek to unveil it as an illusion. Instead, Marx seeks to reveal the social practices through which this phenomenon has *become real* and to understand how it continues to be *reproduced* as a "fantastic form" of social reality. I argue that Marx attempts to grasp the phenomenon he calls the fetish character of the commodity as an unintended *emergent property* of the collective performance of a broad range of social practices that are directly oriented to other ends. This social relation, according to Marx, is not intersubjectively meaningful and therefore does not rely on social actors' shared belief in, or understanding of, the relation. Instead, it is an *impersonal* – but still social – relation, which has been built out of component social institutions and forms of social interaction that, looked at individually, do not *intrinsically* possess the properties that these components help to generate when they are suspended together within this specific relation. This approach enables Marx to open up the possibility for a critique of the overarching relation from the standpoint provided by that relation's own potentially disaggregable parts – parts that can now be treated as immanently-available materials for constructing alternative forms of collective life – as moments of overarching social conditions we have not chosen, but out of which we nevertheless can build a very different sort of collective history.

I have suggested that a close reading of the passages where Marx introduces the fetish character of the commodity suggests that Marx does not view the fetish character as a veil. In his influential interpretation of reification,[8] Lukács cites some of these same passages, yet he reads them through the lens of other elements of Marx's work – in particular, in light of passages from much later in *Capital* that thematise the development of machinery and large-scale production and that analyse structural tendencies toward bureaucratic management. This more eclectic approach to Marx's text enables Lukács to uncover what Lukács presents as "Weberian" elements in *Capital* – but in a way that obscures Marx's own analysis of such dimensions of capitalist production. This eclecticism allows Lukács to import into Marx his own argument that capitalism is characterised by parallel trends toward the expansion of formalistic, mathematical systems through philosophy, government, economics, and culture. Lukács understands these trends as expressions of a socially-general privileging of forms of thought that

[8] Lukács's influence is often tacit and indirect – as Grondin argues: "if Lukács does not seem to be at the center of philosophical debates today, it is because his presence is basically beneath the surface […] it works especially throughout critical theory." Jean Grondin, "Reification from Lukács to Habermas," in Tom Rockmore (ed.), *Lukács Today* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1988), pp. 86–107, here 87.

abstract from qualitative specificity, in the same way that Lukács takes market exchange to abstract from the qualitative specificity of the use-values of goods.

Lukács's approach enables a creative interpretation of *Capital* oriented to the distinctive circumstances of the transition away from liberal capitalism. It also, however, leads Lukács to overlook some of the implications of the passages to which I have drawn attention above. As a consequence, Lukács starts from the position that the concept of the fetish character of the commodity is intended to pick out an *illusion,* which Lukács describes as:

> a relation between people [that] takes on the *character of a thing* and thus acquires a "phantom objectivity," an autonomy that *seems* so strictly rational and all-embracing as to *conceal* every trace of its *fundamental nature*: the relation between people.[9]

In Lukács's version of the argument, then, there is a hierarchy of levels of social reality that includes a "fundamental nature" – a "relation between people" – that is more *foundational* than other dimensions of social experience, and which is also *hidden*.[10] Lukács suggests that the fetish character of the commodity describes a social relation that "takes on the character of a thing" – a relation that *appears* objective because it "seems so strictly rational and all-embracing." Already with this formulation, Lukács is setting up for an argument that capitalism only *appears* rational and all-encompassing. In *reality*, however, the argument implies that the system is *ir*rational and *insufficiently* encompassing. Lukács is reaching for a standpoint of critique that is more fully rational and more genuinely comprehensive, and from which he can convict capitalism for its irrational and partial character. Lukács's critique aligns well, therefore, with a critique of liberal capitalism and of the irrationality of the market from the standpoint of the greater rationality and transparency that will purportedly be provided by centralised planning.[11]

[9] Lukács, "Reification," p. 83, italics mine.

[10] Other criticisms of this aspect of Lukács's work can be found in Andrew Arato and Paul Breines, *The Young Lukács and the Origins of Western Marxism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979); as well as Moishe Postone, "Lukács and the Dialectical Critique of Capitalism," in Robert Albritton and John Simoulidis (eds.), *New Dialectics and Political Economy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 78–100, here 92–94.

[11] A more complete analysis would address the "elective affinity" between Lukács's critique and the structural transformation associated with the transition to more organised forms of capitalism. I am conscious that, without such an analysis, the present critique can itself appear "idealist," as though the issue is a conceptual error or a mistake in reading Marx, rather than expressive of a specific configuration of social relations. The present piece, however, does not allow space to consider this question adequately, and so I focus on highlighting the different implications of Lukács's and Marx's analyses.

How would this approach differ from the reading of Marx I am proposing? If Marx does *not* see the fetish character of the commodity as an illusion, and critique does *not* take the form of penetrating this illusion to capture the reality underneath, what is the standpoint and the target of the critique? My suggestion is that Marx wants to describe the *form* of a historically distinctive social relation – a relation that, in his account, does not simply "appear" objective, but rather is genuinely mediated through social actors' interactions with *objects*. A social relation, then, that *implicates*, as one of its moments, a particular relation of social actors *to things* – and that arises, moreover, as an unintended aggregate result of a diverse range of social practices oriented to various immediate social and material goals. As a consequence, the complex, aggregate social relation that confers the fetish character onto commodities (including proletarian workers, who are treated as commodities in human form) has a *socially impersonal* character that escapes the boundaries of the intersubjective frameworks through which social actors mediate other sorts of social interactions. The critical edge of Marx's analysis does not derive, therefore, from any sort of declaration that this impersonal social relation does not exist, or is not "truly" impersonal. Instead, it derives from the demonstration of how such a peculiar and counter-intuitive sort of social relation – one that possesses qualitative characteristics more normally associated with our interactions with non-social reality – comes to be unintentionally generated in collective practice.

Within this framework, critique does not take the form of debunking its object. Instead, critique entails the demonstration of how its object is produced – the demonstration of what sorts of social conditions or practices its object presupposes. It is in this spirit that Marx acknowledges the (bounded, socially situated) validity of political economy, saying:

> The categories of bourgeois economy [...] are forms of thought which are socially valid, and therefore objective, for the relations of production belonging to this historically determined mode of social production [...].[12]

This acknowledgement, however, entrains a critique. Marx intends to convict political economy of not grasping the conditions or presuppositions of its own categories – of not grasping the limits of its own analysis. As *Capital* unfolds, Marx will systematically explore those limits in order to demonstrate the ways in which the reproduction of capital – the practical process that renders the categories of bourgeois economy "socially valid" – generates possibilities to overturn this transient social validity by effecting determinate practical transformations.

Marx's approach, I suggest, points toward an analysis that will accept the (contingent, social) *reality* of the properties of the social relation it sets out to criticise, rather than treating the properties of this relation as illusions that need to be reduced back to

[12] Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 169.

something more "real." Having started from the reality of this relation, however, Marx will then investigate the conflictual multiplicity of the constitutive moments that make up the relation – the diversity of social practices that are required to produce it. The result is an analysis of a heterogeneous assemblage of diverse parts that possess particular qualitative attributes as they exist *now*, as elements situated within a particular overarching social relation – but that can also be examined for the qualitative attributes these parts could *potentially* possess, if reassembled into different sorts of wholes. By carefully and systematically exploring the divergent implications of various moments of the reproduction of capital, and speculatively teasing apart how those moments exist within this process from how they might exist outside it, Marx can thus investigate diverse immanent potentials to develop the conflictual possibilities for novel forms of practice that are currently being incubated within the reproduction of capital.[13] Where Lukács's work points toward a more rational, transparent, and comprehensive realisation of the potentials generated by capitalism, Marx's work points toward the creative multiplication of diverse potentials that can be realised only by bursting through the constraints imposed by the reproduction of capital.

Returning to Lukács: I have suggested above that Lukács conceptualises the fetish character of the commodity differently from Marx – that Lukács takes the argument about the fetish to be a claim that critique must strip away an illusion to reveal an underlying reality, rather than a claim that critique must grasp how a distinctive relation comes to be produced in a *specific* form. At the same time, Lukács also operates with a different notion of the *commodity* than the one Marx puts into play.[14] On the one hand, consonant with my interpretation of Marx's text, Lukács senses that the category of the commodity is intended to pick out more than just an object or a thing and that Marx's analysis of the commodity is intended to cast light on more than just the "economic" dimensions of capitalist society. On the other hand, Lukács understands this category in a particularly univocal, one dimensional manner, arguing:

> at this stage in the history of mankind there is no problem that does not ultimately lead back to that question and there is no solution that could not be found in the solution to the riddle of commodity-structure [...] [T]he problem of commodities

[13] Dimoulis and Melios draw attention to this speculative dimension of Marx's approach when they discuss what they call Marx's "comparative method" – a method that effects comparisons between capitalism and "other communities, real and imaginary." Dimitri Dimoulis and John Milios, "Commodity Fetishism vs. Capital Fetishism: Marxist Interpretations vis-à-vis Marx's Analyses in *Capital*," *Historical Materialism* 12 (2004), no. 3, pp. 3–42, here 5.

[14] Postone, in "Lukács and the Dialectical Critique," also argues that Lukács's understanding of the commodity differs from Marx's, but focuses on a different distinction than the one I draw here, drawing attention to the tacitly transhistorical conception of labour that underlies Lukács's notion of the use value dimension of the commodity.

> must not be considered in isolation or even regarded as the central problem in economics, but as the central, structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects. Only in this case can the structure of commodity-relations be made to yield a model of all the objective forms of bourgeois society together with all the subjective forms corresponding to them.[15]

Yet Lukács conceptualises the commodity-relation as being effected through the social practices of market exchange, which Lukács understands in terms of the exchange of goods on the market. This understanding of the commodity-relation presents a dilemma, which to his credit Lukács explicitly recognises: market exchange long predates the phenomena Lukács wants to pick out with the term "commodity fetishism," and so Lukács must account for how a very old social practice should suddenly come to generate qualitatively different effects in recent history which the social practice did not generate in the past.[16] To get around this dilemma, Lukács hits on the solution that the fetish character of the commodity arises only when the commodity relation – the exchange relation – has become *totalised*.[17] He argues:

[15] Lukács, "Reification," p. 83. Note that, while I do not endorse the sweeping and tacitly reductive way in which Lukács attempts to treat the commodity form as an all-purpose concept for interpreting forms of subjectivity and objectivity in capitalism, I do agree with the basic impulse that Marx does intend to analyse both subjective and objective dimensions of the reproduction of capital with reference to a theory of practice. In this sense, my work aligns with an otherwise diverse collection of recent interpretations of Marx that have attempted to recover the argument Marx is making about the practical constitution of forms of subjectivity, as well as "objective" trends, that are reproduced along with the reproduction of capital. For other works that draw out different implications of Marx's analysis of forms of subjectivity, with complex overlaps and divergences from my own, see for example Robert Albritton, *Dialectics and Deconstruction in Political Economy* (London: Macmillan, 1999); Robert Albritton, "Superseding Lukács: A Contribution to the Theory of Subjectivity," in Robert Albritton and John Simoulidis (eds.), *New Dialectics and Political Economy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 60–77; Christopher Arthur, "Hegel's *Logic* and Marx's *Capital*," in Fred Moseley (ed.), *Marx's Method in* Capital (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1993); Patrick Murray, *Marx's Theory of Scientific Knowledge* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1988); Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Bertell Ollman, *Dialectical Investigations* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

[16] Lukács, "Reification," p. 84.

[17] Albritton suggests that Lukács has fallen into "an absolutely fundamental theoretical trap" by confusing the *theoretical* extrapolation that needs to be made in order to conceptualise reification as a *concept* with a *real phenomenon*: in reality, Albritton argues, the theoretical category of reification would never be realised in such a pure fashion, and so the task of critique and real social mobilisation is easier than Lukács's theory suggests because capitalism never

> What is at issue *here,* however, is the question: how far is commodity exchange together with its structural consequences able to influence the *total* outer and inner life of society?[18]

Lukács suggests that the quantitative expansion of social practices that effect exchange relations, to the point where such relations become totalising, effects a *qualitative* shift that generates the historically specific phenomena associated with the fetish character of the commodity. Prior to this totalisation, according to Lukács, it was still possible to see through the veil and to recognise the personal character of the commodity-relation. As Lukács frames it:

> the *personal nature* of economic relations was still *understood clearly* on occasion at the start of capitalist development, but [...] as the process advanced and forms became more complex and less direct, it became increasingly difficult and rare to find anyone *penetrating the veil* of reification.[19]

Lukács therefore interprets the commodity relation as a *personal* relation, deriving from the practice of market exchange, which begins to generate novel consequences as this relation expands beyond the boundaries it occupied in earlier forms of social life. Among these novel consequences is what Lukács calls *reification* – in which the personal character of the social relation comes to be *veiled* and social actors assume a contemplative stance toward a relation that has come to *appear* objective, impersonal, and beyond their control.

Once Lukács has posed the problem in this way, he sets critique the task of piercing the veil to reveal the personal character of the underlying relation. Since the personal relation is understood to relate to market exchange, critique and political contestation are here pointed to the overthrow of the market and the institutionalisation of state

lives up completely to its "ideal" and therefore always remains only *partially* reified. Albritton, "Superseding Lukács," p. 62. Albritton is of course empirically correct, but I suspect there is an even more fundamental issue. The question isn't just whether Lukács mistakes his "ideal type" theoretical categories for practical reality, but also whether those theoretical categories could ever provide a basis for grasping ways in which capitalism *immanently* generates possibilities for its own transformation. No doubt there are many possibilities for the critique of capitalism that lie in the gap between capitalism's tendencies (which are theorisable) and elements of social experience that fall outside of what can be grasped theoretically. Marx claims, though, to be able to say something *even on a theoretical level* about capitalism as a system that somehow generates possibilities for its own transformation. Lukács's categories provide no indication of how such an immanent critique could ever be constructed because he fundamentally relies on a critical standpoint that is expressly defined as lying outside the processes he theorises.

[18] Lukács, "Reification," p. 84.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 86, italics mine.

planning, within which the rationality and objectivity that were only illusory under capitalism could finally achieve social reality.

So how does this differ from what I am suggesting is Marx's own argument? I have already suggested above that Marx does not view the fetish character of the commodity as an illusion to be pierced, but rather as a phenomenon with practical "social validity" within a complex, aggregate social relation. The core theoretical problem for Marx is therefore not how to pierce an illusion, but how to understand the *practical generation* of a peculiar and oppressive social relation so that it becomes clearer what sorts of political actions would be required to dismantle it. I have further suggested that there is some sense in which Marx maintains that this complex relation, although social in the sense of originating in human practice, is somehow not intersubjectively meaningful at the point that it is constituted in social practice – that the appearance that capitalist society is characterised by "material relations between persons and social relations between things" is not an illusion to be penetrated but somehow expresses an important, historically-specific, insight into how things "really are" – and therefore casts an important light on a qualitatively distinctive feature of capitalist societies.

Does this mean that Marx understands the fetish character of the commodity as the result of social practices oriented primarily to market exchange, but sees the market as somehow more impersonal than Lukács does? Or is something *beyond* market exchange intended when Marx uses the category of the commodity to pick out a form of social relation? To address these questions, I need first to take a closer look at the opening paragraphs of the discussion of the fetish character of the commodity, situating these paragraphs in relation to the dramatic structure of the chapter as a whole. This discussion provides the foundation for understanding how Marx understands the "peculiar social character" of commodity-producing labour.

When Marx opens his discussion of the fetish character of the commodity, the first point he makes is that use value cannot account for this phenomenon. He argues:

> A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis shows that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it [...] But as soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it changes into a thing that transcends sensuousness.[20]

Lukács joins many other interpreters in concluding that Marx's point here is to distinguish use-value from exchange-value – and to argue that fetishism arises from the practice of tossing use-values into the cauldron of the market. A close look at the text, however, suggests that Marx is trying to argue something else entirely.

[20] Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 163.

The opening sentences of the fetish character section, I suggest, should be read as a quick summation of the first three sections of the opening chapter of *Capital*.[21] To review these sections quickly: *Capital* opens by telling us how the wealth of capitalist societies "appears" – which initially is in the form of an "immense collection of commodities." These commodities are immediately sensuous, directly perceptible "external objects" – things that are the objects of human contemplation. These sensuous objects are then described as possessing a dual nature, combining use-value, presented in this opening section as a transhistorical substance of wealth anchored in the objective material properties of things, and exchange-value, presented in this opening section as a contingent and an arbitrary and transient social form of wealth connected only contingently to the material substance of use-value.[22]

On a first reading, this opening discussion can seem to be merely definitional – a setting out of the terms and ground rules that will continue to inform the subsequent discussion. A couple of pages in, however, the text introduces a strange dramatic twist: a second voice intrudes, openly contradicting the claims of the first, "empiricist" voice. This second voice insists that the wealth of capitalist society in fact cannot be adequately understood with reference to the commodity's directly perceptible, sensuous properties. Behind the sensible phenomena of use-value and exchange-value lies another, *supersensible* realm – the realm of the categories of value and "human labour in the abstract." These supersensible categories cannot be directly perceived, but their existence can nevertheless be intuited by *reason* – a process the second, "transcendental" voice now proceeds to demonstrate through a series of deductions reminiscent of Descartes's critique of sense perception[23] and which purport to derive the categories of value and abstract labour as something like transcendental conditions of possibility

[21] I am summarising very briefly here an analysis I have developed elsewhere in much greater detail. For the more fully developed version of this argument see Nicole Pepperell, *Disassembling Capital.* PhD Thesis (Melbourne: RMIT University, 2010) (online at http://rtheory.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/disassembling-capital-n-pepperell.pdf [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]); Nicole Pepperell, "Capitalism: Some Disassembly Required," in Benjamin Noys (ed.), *Communization and Its Discontents: Contestation, Critique and Contemporary Struggles* (London: Autonomedia/Minor Compositions, 2011), pp. 105–130; and Nicole Pepperell, "When Is It Safe to Go on Reading *Capital*?," in Tom Bunyard (ed.), *The Devil's Party: Marx, Theory and Philosophy* (London: Centre for Cultural Studies and Goldsmiths, 2009), pp. 11–21. Note that the reading I am offering here goes some way to explaining the strategic intention of sections of the first chapter that often seem confusing and mutually contradictory even to commentators who have very sophisticated interpretations of *Capital* and are very well aware of Marx's complex relationship with Hegel. I suggest there is a level of humour and metacommentary in play in the structure and organisation of the first chapter of *Capital* that, perhaps because it seems out of place in such a work, tends to go overlooked.

[22] Marx, *Capital,* Vol. 1, p. 125–126.

[23] Murray points to the way in which Marx is spoofing Descartes in this passage. Patrick Murray, "Enlightenment roots of Habermas' critique of Marx," *The Modern Schoolman* 57 (1979), no. 1, pp. 1–24.

for commodity exchange.[24] This "transcendental" voice then gives way, in its turn, to a "dialectical" voice, which presents a derivation of the money form in order to argue that the wealth of capitalist society cannot be adequately grasped in terms of *either* immediately sensible categories like use-value and exchange-value *or* supersensible essences like value and abstract labour, but rather must be grasped in terms of a *dynamic relation* that, through a series of dialectical "inversions,"[25] connects together antinomic moments into a contradictory whole.[26]

The order and content of this movement – from sense-perception, via a transcendental analysis of a supersensible world, through a confrontation with an inverted world, opening out on the "reflexive" analysis presented in the section on the fetish character of the commodity – is not unique to the opening chapter of *Capital*. This structure mirrors the dramatic movement of the early chapters of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind,* where Hegel follows consciousness in its quest to achieve certainty over its object.[27] In these

[24] Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 126–137.

[25] Marx's adaptation of Hegel's concept of an "inverted world" is central to Marx's standpoint of critique in ways I cannot explore adequately in this context. Mike Wayne provides a nice analysis of how the concept of inversion is central to the discussion of commodity fetishism and to Marx's conception of the historical specificity of capitalism, although Wayne focuses on exchange as the fetishistic act and emphasises the functionality of this practical abstraction for class domination – a move that may not fully credit Marx's claim that social relations really are as they appear to be. Mike Wayne, "Fetishism and Ideology: A Reply to Dimoulis and Milios," *Historical Materialism* 13 (2005), no. 3, pp. 193–218. See also the discussion of Marx's inversion of Hegel in Djordje Popović, "Materialist Regressions and a Return to Idealism," *Contradictions* 1 (2017), no. 2, pp. 63–91, which highlights – as I develop below – the ways in which Marx is attempting a demystification of Hegel along lines similar to Hegel's own demystification of Kant and Fichte: by demonstrating how Hegel's work presents a glorified transfiguration of social relations that actually exist. For demystification as an ongoing touchstone throughout Marx's work, see Nicole Pepperell, "Impure Inheritances: Spectral Materiality in Derrida and Marx," in Anna Glazova and Paul North (eds.), *Messianic Thought Outside Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), pp. 43–72.

[26] Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, pp. 138–163. The third section of Capital is often understood as using Hegelian language, with commentators varying over whether the section draws from the *Logic*, or the *Phenomenology*; for a recent survey on connections between *Capital* and the *Logic*, see Fred Moseley and Tony Smith, *Marx's Capital and Hegel's Logic: A Reexamination* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); for another take on the importance of the *Phenomenology* to the issues discussed in this paper, see Eric-John Russell, "Living Distinctions over Atrophied Distinctions: Hegel as Critic of Reification," *Contradictions* 1 (2017), no. 2, pp. 93–115. For present purposes, it does not matter whether Marx has Hegel's *Phenomenology* or *Logic* more directly in mind when writing these sections of Capital – for a more thorough discussion of the textual issues, see Pepperell, *Disassembling Capital*, and Nicole Pepperell, "The Bond of Fragmentation: On Marx, Hegel and the social determination of the material world," *Borderlands* 10 (2011), no. 1 (online at http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol10no1_2011/pepperell_bond.htm [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

[27] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. James Black Baillie (New York: Courier Dover Publications, 2003).

chapters, consciousness assumes a number of different shapes in successive, unstable attempts to achieve certainty of an object posited as existing outside consciousness. Consciousness first assumes a shape Hegel calls Perception, in which it positions its object as an external thing that can be grasped through sense-perception.[28] This shape proves unstable, propelling consciousness into a new shape Hegel names Understanding, in which consciousness attempts to achieve certainty by taking its object to be a world of supersensible universals that subside behind the flux of sensible phenomena.[29] This new shape in turn comes to be undermined through the confrontation with something Hegel calls the "inverted world," which finally drives consciousness to realise, self-reflexively, that its object does not reside outside itself – that consciousness has been its own object all along.

The narrative structure of the opening chapter of *Capital* re-enacts this Hegelian drama – translating Hegel's high drama into a burlesque parody that recounts, not consciousness' quest for certainty of its object, but a debauched quest to grasp the wealth of capitalist society.[30] This parodic rendition of Hegel's story line foreshadows the analytical trajectory Marx will follow over the next several chapters: that the wealth of capitalist society cannot be adequately grasped so long as we try to grasp this wealth as an object outside us – whether this object is understood in terms of a sensible property, supersensible entity, or dialectical relation. Instead, we must achieve the insight that *we* are the wealth we are attempting to grasp – that, in spite of appearances, the wealth of capitalist society is a subjective entity – living, fluid, human labour. Marx's reflexive analysis will unfold this conclusion – not, however, in order to unveil the secret, intrinsic social centrality of human labour to the production of material wealth, but in order to criticise a runaway form of production that continues compulsively to reproduce an immaterial, *social* requirement for the expenditure of human labour-power, no matter how high the growth of productivity or material wealth. In the opening chapter of *Capital* this conclusion is hinted, but not yet rendered explicit, through the subtle textual parallel with Hegel's work.

This parody of Hegel's narrative provides the narrative frame that leads up to Marx's discussion of the fetish character of the commodity. In the opening of the discussion of the fetish, Marx briefly recapitulates the main lines of the opening narrative of the chapter. Thus, when Marx states that "a commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing," he refers to the position articulated by the "empiricist" voice

[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 62–73.

[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 74–96.

[30] For more on the substantive role of parody within Marx's work, see Pepperell, "Capitalism: Some Disassembly Required"; Pepperell, *Disassembling Capital*; and Nicole Pepperell, "Debasing the Superstructure," in Brad West (ed.), *Proceedings of the Australian Sociological Association 2014 Conference* (Adelaide: University of Adelaide: TASA, 2014) (online at http://staging.tasa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Pepperell_P2.pdf [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

that opens the chapter and that attempts to grasp wealth in terms of properties directly evident to sense-perception. Marx flags that the "transcendental" and "dialectical" voices have contested this empiricist perception by arguing that the chapter has shown that the commodity "is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties."[31]

If readers had missed the strategic intention of the text when working through these earlier sections, Marx is telling them explicitly in his opening sentence here that he does not endorse the *form* in which these earlier arguments were presented: there is some sense in which the perspectives articulated in the earlier sections of the chapter express, and yet are not fully adequate to, the phenomenon they are seeking to grasp. Marx intends the reader to be "in on the joke" implicit in the order and structure of the opening sections. Believing his readers have been following this rather subtle bit of textual play, Marx now thinks he has adequately set up the puzzle whose solution is the concept of the fetish character of the commodity: the puzzle of why what Marx takes to be the self-evidently "deranged" categories outlined in the first three sections of this chapter should, in spite of their bizarreness, possess a social validity under capitalism – the puzzle of how these apparently mystical forms of thinking express something that is (socially, practically) real.

Readers know at this point in the text, if they did not know before, that the strategic intention of the earlier sections of this chapter is to illustrate *historically distinctive* forms of thought – forms of thought that express different aspects of the peculiar properties generated by a social relation that possesses a fetish character. In the section on the fetish character of the commodity, Marx then finally begins to discuss the sort of analysis that needs to be undertaken in order to account for *how* these forms of thought come to be socially valid. Marx begins by outlining what does *not* account for the fetish. This is the context in which Marx comments on use-value in the quotation above: use-value, he argues, if you could abstract it from the commodity relation, contains nothing that would generate the sorts of seemingly metaphysical properties Marx believes he has illustrated earlier in the chapter. The analysis of use-value, abstracted from the commodity-relation, therefore cannot explain why the empiricist, transcendental, and dialectical voices are socially valid.

Many commentators – including Lukács – assume that, by talking about use-value here, Marx is aiming to set up a contrast with exchange-value. It is therefore common to overlook the specific move that Marx makes next in the text. Immediately after arguing that the component elements of use-value do not account for the fetish character of the commodity, Marx insists – in an exact parallel to the preceding argument about use-value – that the component parts of *value* also do not account for the fetish character of the commodity-form. Marx writes:

[31] Marx, *Capital,* Vol. 1, p. 163.

> The mystical character of the commodity does not therefore arise from its use-value. *Just as little does it proceed from the nature of the determinants of value*.[32]

So neither the determinants of use-value (abstracted from the commodity-relation) nor the determinants of value (abstracted from the commodity-relation) explain the fetish. What *does* explain the fetish then, for Marx? The answer is that the commodity-relation *itself* explains the fetish – the fetish arises, not from any of the component *parts* of the commodity-relation, but rather from the aggregate relation into which these component parts have come to be suspended. Marx expresses this point in the following way:

> Whence, then, arises the enigmatic character of the product of labour, so soon as it assumes the form of a commodity? Clearly, it arises from this form itself.[33]

In other words, Marx is trying to make an argument here, not about the contrast between use-value and exchange-value, but rather about the way in which a relation can be comprised of many parts and yet have distinctive qualitative characteristics that cannot be found in any of those parts when the parts are analysed independently of that relation.[34] In more contemporary terms, Marx is making an argument here about *emergence* – about the possibility for properties to arise within some overarching assemblage, without those properties reflecting the attributes that any of the component parts of that assemblage might manifest if these parts were examined in isolation or as they might exist if situated within some other sort of relation.

Within this context, the sorts of perspectives outlined in the opening sections of *Capital* simultaneously express aspects of the real properties of a social relation but also overlook the distinctive contribution that the relation makes to the qualitative characteristics expressed by its own moments. Marx opens up here the possibility for an immanent critique of forms of thought that confuse the attributes that parts possess *within* a particular relation for attributes that are *essential* or *intrinsic* to those parts – thereby naturalising the overarching relationship and missing opportunities to examine what alternative properties those parts might acquire if they could be reassembled into

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 164, italics mine.

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] My focus on the *relational* and *mutually-implicating* character of Marx's categories is consonant with much of the work undertaken by Ollman, whose work also highlights the way in which Marx breaks moments of the reproduction of capital down and examines them from multiple perspectives. Ollman, however, tends to conceptualise this relationality in terms of immanent relations, an approach that leads the analysis of relations in a slightly different direction to the one I suggest here. Ollman, *Alienation*; Ollman, *Dialectical Investigations*.

different social configurations.[35] The critical strategy of *Capital* involves breaking down the overarching process of the reproduction of capital into its constitutive moments and then exploring the characteristics those moments possess within the process of the reproduction of capital, precisely in order then to distinguish these characteristics from what might become possible if those moments could be extracted from this process. This approach allows Marx to offer a critique of the whole from the standpoint of the potentially disaggregable parts – a very different concept of the standpoint and the target of critique than that offered by Lukács.

Among many other implications, this approach provides Marx with a much more supple means of explaining the historical specificity of the fetish character of the commodity than Lukács has at his disposal. When Lukács equates the commodity relation with market exchange, and then notes that market exchange is historically quite old, he finds himself forced into the position that the quantitative expansion of market relations at some point leads to a qualitative shift – a move that then leaves him confronted with a totalising social relation whose power and pervasiveness make critique difficult to conceptualise.[36] Lukács's ultimately mystical evocation of the proletariat as the subject-object of history can be understood, in part, as a response necessitated by the power and coherence he has already ceded to capitalism by conceptualising it in such a totalising fashion.[37]

Marx has another option. He argues that many of the component moments that participate in the commodity-relation – markets, money, division of labour, and other factors – are certainly conditions or integral elements of the reproduction of capital. Many of these same moments, however, have also existed in other forms of social life without their existence generating the same fetish character. What has changed to generate the distinctive properties Marx associates with the fetish is the recent *recombination* of these

[35] Sayer makes a very similar point, arguing that fetishism involves a confusion whereby: "Properties which things acquire entirely as a consequence of their standing in a specific set of social relations are mistakenly seen as inhering in, and explained by, the material qualities of the objects themselves." Derek Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction* (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 40.

[36] Arato and Breines formulate this dilemma succinctly: "Given the fact that Lukács was presenting himself a problem that was impossible to solve, it is not surprising that his solution ends in mythology." Arato and Breines, *The Young Lukács*, p. 157. Russell's "Living Distinctions" provides a useful discussion of how Hegel's *Phenomenology* provides important theoretical resources for overcoming the impasses created by this dimension of Lukács's approach: in a certain respect, this paper can be regarded as an exploration of how Marx is already putting those Hegelian resources into play, in ways Lukács and his successors have been unable to recognise.

[37] Lukács's concept of the proletariat as the subject-object of history comes under frequent fire. For a sample of criticisms made of this concept, see Albritton, "Superseding Lukács," pp. 72–75; Arato and Breines, *The Young Lukács*, pp. 139–141; Lee Congdon, *The Young Lukács* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), pp. 185–186; Postone, "Lukács," pp. 87–89.

older moments into a new configuration that constitutes a historically unique form of social relation. In chapter six, where Marx analyses the market for labour-power, he finally makes explicit what he regards this "something new" to be,[38] arguing:

> The historical conditions of [capital's] existence are by no means given with the mere circulation of money and commodities. It arises only when the owner of the means of production and subsistence finds the free worker available, on the market, as the seller of his own labour-power. And this one historical pre-condition comprises a world's history.[39]

This new factor combines with inherited elements into a novel relation, with unprecedented historical consequences. Interestingly, Lukács actually *reverses* Marx's argument in his own discussion of free labour, arguing:

> Only when the whole life of society is thus fragmented into the isolated acts of commodity exchange can the "free" worker come into being; at the same time, his fate becomes the typical fate of the whole society.[40]

For Lukács, therefore, the totalisation of the market eventually engulfs even labour itself; for Marx, by contrast, the generalization of a market in labour-power is one among several institutional innovations that operate together to transform markets into such a dynamic force. From Marx's point of view, Lukács could be said to *naturalise* the dynamism of the market, treating the qualitative characteristics the market possesses only *within* a particular social configuration, as an *intrinsic* characteristic, at least once a certain quantitative threshold has been crossed. In this account, the distinctive qualitative social transformations that historically coincide with the emergence of capitalist production are not the result of a qualitatively novel form of social relation, but are instead understood in terms of the quantitative expansion of institutions posited to possess immanent characteristics that were somehow held in check in previ-

[38] Marx's full argument is a bit more complicated than the slice of the argument I am presenting above. He focuses on free labour as the condition that "comprises a world's history" due to the analytical centrality of free labour, not simply or mainly as cause, but also as *product*, of capitalist production. The historical circumstances that bring capitalism into being are more complex than the addition of any one new factor: Marx's discussion of primitive accumulation provides a better sense of how he understands the contingent and messy historical process that resulted in the new configuration he has been analysing in the text. Just as he could not introduce the category of free labour in his opening discussion of the commodity, he is not yet ready to introduce the discussion of primitive accumulation here. My intention above is to clarify the *sort* of argument Marx is making rather than to recount the argument in full.

[39] Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 274.

[40] Lukács, "Reification," p. 91.

ous historical periods but become manifest once those institutions become totalising. Unlike Lukács, Marx does not need to claim that market relations become totalised and all-encompassing, nor does he need to reduce all forms of social objectivity and subjectivity back to any single factor. This is because Marx is talking about the emergence of a social relation that is both genuinely new and yet also exhibits distinctive properties that arise as aggregate effects from complex interactions among a number of different component parts. Marx's stance points toward a form of theory that grasps capitalism as an assemblage whose various component parts and subrelations might potentially point in multiple, divergent directions.

How does Marx make clear that he intends to analyse an assemblage of this sort rather than simply identifying a specific, single relation – the exchange of labour for a wage, perhaps – as the central, structuring institution that confers a distinctive social character on labour in capitalist societies? To answer this question, it is important to distinguish what Marx regards as an essential *condition* or *presupposition* of capitalism from the *commodity-relation* implicated in the argument about the fetish character of the commodity. In Marx's argument, the emergence of a labour market figures as a condition for capitalism, and capitalism figures as a condition for generalised commodity production – and therefore for the social validity of the categories expressed in the opening chapter. In spite of this, the impersonal social relation being discussed in the section on the fetish character of the commodity cannot be reduced to the wage relation or to the existence of a labour market. This point becomes clear in Marx's own discussion of the fetish character when he claims to have *already shown* the distinctive social nature of labour under capitalism in the first chapter. Marx writes:

> As the foregoing analysis *has already demonstrated*, this fetishism of the world of commodities arises from the peculiar social character of the labour that produces them.[41]

How do we know that the "peculiar social character of the labour" Marx refers to here is *not* the wage relation Marx discusses in chapter six? We know this because Marx says as much *in* chapter six, when he argues that the analysis of wage labour "would have been foreign to the analysis of commodities" – in other words, Marx's argument about the fetish character of the commodity does not depend on his later analysis of wage labour to establish what is peculiar about the social character of the labour that produces commodities.[42] Something *else* must be going on in the first chapter for Marx to claim that the "foregoing analysis has already demonstrated" this peculiar character. So what does Marx believe he has shown?

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 165.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 273.

I cannot develop this argument in full in the space available here, but I can at least gesture to the *type* of argument Marx believes he has made. My suggestion is that the "peculiar social character" of commodity-producing labour, as Marx describes it in the opening chapter of *Capital*, consists precisely in the fact that, in capitalism, social actors unintentionally generate a real abstraction – "social labour" – that is distinguished in practice from the aggregate of the empirical labouring activities in which those actors independently engage.[43] Social actors do not set out to generate such an entity, yet they generate it nevertheless – bringing it into existence unintentionally, in Marx's terms, through the mediation of the products of their hands.

What Marx is doing here is casting an anthropologist's gaze on an implicit logic of social practice that we indigenous inhabitants of capitalist society take so much for granted that it is difficult for us to appreciate the extent to which this logic pervades our habits of embodiment and perception, practice and thought. In a very preliminary way in the opening chapter, Marx has begun to suggest that there are strange consequences to the actions we undertake in order to survive in a society in which empirical labouring activities are undertaken *speculatively* – without certain knowledge of whether those activities will ultimately be *allowed* to count as part of *social labour*. Marx is arguing that the practice of producing commodities for market exchange in a capitalist context introduces a disjuncture between empirical efforts expended in production and the degree to which those efforts will be rewarded once the products of labour are exchanged on the market.

Marx is suggesting that capitalist production involves the collective enactment of a nonconscious, collective social judgement that determines which empirical activities get to "count" as part of "social labour." This practical distinction between empirical labours actually undertaken and labours whose products "succeed" in market exchange enlists social actors – wittingly or no – in behaving as though there exists an intangible

[43] One implication of my argument is that at least certain categories of Marx's work should *not* be conceptualised as idealisations, ideal types, conceptual abstractions, or other forms of theoretical or mental abstraction from an inevitably more complex and messy social reality (as, for example, suggested by Thomas T. Sekine, *An Outline of the Dialectic of Capital*, 2 vols. [London: Macmillan, 1997]) but rather as *real abstractions* (cf. Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual*, although I understand the sorts of real abstractions, and their practical enactment, in a different way to Sohn-Rethel) or as "ideals" in the sense analysed by Ilyenkov; he usefully thematises the possibility for a form of abstraction that does not relate to the "sameness" that diverse entities share in common, but rather to the products of "diverse collisions of differently orientated 'individual wills'" – see Evald Ilyenkov, *The Concept of the Ideal* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977). Overlooking this element in Marx's argument loses the distinctive "supersensible sensible" character of some of the *socially enacted realities* whose practical constitution Marx is specifically trying to theorise. Concepts like "abstract labour" are not intended, in Marx's work, as convenient theoretical concepts that simplify a much more diverse social reality: there is a sense in which such abstractions "really do" exist – because social actors *behave as though they do* and thereby *enact them* as socially-existent entities.

entity, "social labour," that exists both within, and yet distinct from, the aggregate of labouring activities that social actors undertake. This collective behaviour constitutes "social labour" as a practical reality that unintentionally *bestows* a special social status on an elect of privileged labouring activities – but only after the fact, once production is long complete. There is no way for social actors to deduce *in advance*, through a synchronic empirical examination of the sensuous properties of the labour-process or the goods produced, which sorts of activities will succeed in gaining social recognition when cast into market exchange.[44] "Social labour" is therefore, in Marx's vocabulary, a "supersensible sensible" entity – an abstract, intangible subset of the universe of empirically labouring activities actually undertaken whose composition remains inscrutable at any given moment in time because the category is fundamentally *retroactive*. "Social labour" is a category that *will have been* – a category perpetually out of synch with any given moment in time – something that social actors unintentionally constitute by acting in ways that reduce and distil the labouring activities they have empirically undertaken, down to a smaller subset of labouring activities that are encouraged to reproduce themselves over time because their products have been socially validated through market exchange. The result of this unintentional, collective reduction of empirical labouring activities to those that get to "count" as "social labour" is what Marx has earlier attempted to pick out through the "supersensible sensible" categories of abstract labour and value.

This process – by which empirical labouring activities are culled down to those activities that get to "count" as part of "social labour" – is impersonal and objective in a number of different senses. Marx describes the process as happening "behind the backs" of the social actors whose practices generate it – as unintentional and therefore apparently objective. The process is moreover mediated via the exchange of objects and is thus genuinely carried out via the constitution of "social relations between things." Also, although this point is only hinted at in the opening chapter, the process involves a strange form of mutual compulsion in which social actors place pressure on one another to conform to average conditions of production, thus resulting in a form of collective "systemic" coercion that is separable from any personal social relations that social actors

[44] Sekine makes a similar point in his analysis of the category of value, arguing: "It can only be found *ex post facto* in the market, not by the sale of this single jacket, but by the repetitive purchase of the same jacket in many samples which establishes its normal price. Value is not an empirically observable quantity [...] Being imperceptible to the senses, value appears to be mysterious substance, and it constitutes the true source of the fetishism of commodities." Sekine, *Outline*, p. 141. Sekine would not, however, endorse the conclusions I draw above about the way in which this process, for Marx, constitutes a "real abstraction" in which an *intangible entity* acquires a (social) reality because social actors behave as though it exists. Sekine prefers instead to see Marx's argument in terms of a "capital eye view" of the production process – and, indeed, does not thematise the category of "abstract labour" when discussing the strange counter-empirical character of the category of value.

may also constitute.[45] In each of these respects, Marx argues, the commodity relation is *genuinely* objective and impersonal – there is no illusion of objectivity to be pierced, only an impersonal form of social relation to be grasped and, if possible, overcome.

From this standpoint, it becomes possible to see the forms of thought expressed in the opening sections of the first chapter of *Capital* as socially valid – *even though these forms of thought contradict one another*. The opening "empiricist" voice that perceives use-value and exchange-value, but overlooks the intangible entities of abstract labour and value, is a plausible, but *partial*, perspective that picks up on a particular dimension of the commodity-relation. That is, the dimension that manifests itself in empirical goods and money. The "transcendental" voice picks up on the existence of certain "real abstractions" – certain intangible entities that cannot be directly perceived by the senses but whose existence can be inferred. The "dialectical" voice picks up on the relational and dynamic character of both the sensible and supersensible dimensions of the commodity-relation and analyses the way in which these antinomic phenomena mutually implicate one another and are reproduced together over time. All of these perspectives are reasonable approximations of a *dimension* of social experience under capitalism – and yet they point to theoretical analysis in different directions and suggest very different possibilities for practice. Marx's own method – which he will develop in much greater detail as *Capital* unfolds – consists in tracing out a wide array of dimensions of social experience and tying these dimensions back to types of formal

[45] The impersonal structural character of this form of domination is developed particularly well in both Sekine's analysis in *An Outline of the Dialectic of Capital* of the impersonal character of market-mediated compulsion, and Postone's analysis in *Time, Labor and Social Domination* of the structuration of time in capitalist society which emphasises how innovations in productivity become coercive on other producers, generating a "treadmill effect" in which technical progress fails to reduce the necessity for human labour. Both authors, however, arrive at this conclusion while maintaining a different understanding than the one I am suggesting of "abstract labour." Sekine posits "abstract labour" as a sort of "capital eye view" of the labour process – a view from which labouring activities are important only as a means to generate value. While I agree that elements of Marx's analysis do adopt a "capital eye view," I don't believe that "abstract labour" is this sort of category; I see the category, instead, as a "real abstraction." A number of elements of Sekine's understanding of the commodity, use-value, and other categories differ from the understanding that underlies the reading above, particularly, from the standpoint of the reading I am proposing, by taking certain stances that Marx articulates – especially in the opening definition of use-value – as being absolute definitional claims rather than, as I take them to be, preliminary determinations that must be understood as partial and incomplete. Postone's work also involves a different interpretation of "abstract labour" as a "function" that labour performs uniquely under capitalism. Postone has in mind Marx's argument on the importance of free labour for the development of capitalism, to which I refer above. As I explain in the main text, I think it is necessary to distinguish Marx's argument about the importance of the labour market from the phenomena that Marx is trying to pick out via concepts like "abstract labour" which, in my account, are not references to a special "function" that labour performs but rather attempts to describe an unintentional side effect of aggregate social practice. In Marx's terms, abstract labour is an "intangible entity" that we make "with the products of our hands."

theory or popular ideals that express their potentials. With each step, Marx traces the validity, and the limits, of the dimensions of social experience that he analyses, working to differentiate the qualitative characteristics that derive from the overarching process of the reproduction of capital from the potentials that could be released if this overarching process were overcome.

Lukács criticises capitalism for terraforming social existence by covering over the qualitative diversity of sensuous experience with an abstract, formalistic monoculture. His univocal vision of capitalism drives his critique in the direction of a counter-totality even more comprehensive and rational than what he opposes. Marx, by contrast, understands critique as a sort of autopsy performed on a monstrous, Frankensteinian creation. This autopsy enables Marx to demonstrate the stitches that hold the great beast together, to trace the active and sometimes precarious efforts that are continuously required to animate the creature, and to draw attention to the ways in which the history and present potentials of the transplanted parts suggest promising opportunities for future dismemberment and decomposition. These two approaches suggest radically different concepts of the standpoint and target of critique – with Marx's approach, I suggest, offering far greater possibilities, methodologically and substantively, for reconceptualising capitalism, and its critique, in the contemporary era.

THE EUROPEAN CAVE

Jan Patočka and Cinema in Theo Angelopoulos's Film *Ulysses' Gaze*

Alex Forbes

Abstract: The image of a dismantled statue of Lenin from Ukraine being transported up the Danube in Theo Angelopoulos's 1995 film Ulysses' Gaze *is the starting point for a discussion of the film's urgent resonance with the questioning of "Europe" in the present day. This image foreshadows the destruction of Lenin statues in Ukraine during the ongoing civil war and is more than a fortuitous indicator of the historical context of the present Ukrainian crisis in the aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. Exploring the territory of seven post-Cold War Eastern European states and ending amid the rubble and destruction of the besieged city of Sarajevo,* Ulysses' Gaze *offers a panoramic, yet highly subjective, depiction of a Europe undergoing a painful and as-yet-undecided transition. This article will show the strong connections between the understanding of Europe that emerges from the film and that elucidated in the work of the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka. Both the film and Patočka's thought seek the European on a utopian level that transcends particular temporal and territorial borders, recalls Classical polity and philosophy, and consists primarily in introspective thinking. The recurrence, in today's Europe, of questions from the immediate post-Cold War era indicates that the work of definition undertaken after 1989 is not yet completed and suggests that films from that period may contain images that have the capacity to guide the process of understanding Europe in the present day.*
Keywords: Patočka, Angelopoulos, Plato, Žižek, Iordanova, Ulysses' Gaze, *Balkans, European, Cinema, Lenin, Ukraine, post-Cold War*

This article explores the highly subjective presentation of twentieth-century Balkan history in Theodoros Angelopoulos's *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995). In doing so, it calls upon the work of Jan Patočka and demonstrates the potential contribution of the Czech philosopher's interlinked thought on the subjects of "technical civilisation" and, especially, "Europe" to Anglophone film studies. Associating a post-1989 film with a philosopher who worked under, and frequently in conflict with, a Soviet-type socialist regime foregrounds the significant recollection that so-called "dissidence" in the Soviet sphere of influence was not restricted to resistance against "real existing" socialism but had the capacity to articulate a positive project for social reform whose universal aspirations underlie what, in the present, the critic Boris Groys terms "postdissident art." Groys sees in such work the legacy of "the independent, unofficial art of late socialism"[1] after the end of the socialist regimes themselves.

Dissident art, produced and distributed in conditions of the struggle not only for artistic but for actual survival, is seen as the initiator of the postdissident form which, rather than direct confrontation with existing regimes of sense and of political control, instead extraordinarily "clings to peaceful universalism as an idyllic utopia beyond any struggle."[2] Groys's examples include the Slovenian art group IRWIN, whose actions include the ongoing issuing of false "passports" for a non-existent state.[3] Such an action accords with Groys's interpretation of an art form dedicated "to expand the utopia of the peaceful coexistence of all nations, cultures, and ideologies both to the capitalist West and the pre-Communist history of the past."[4] The statement describes equally well the temporal and geographical scope of *Ulysses' Gaze*. Further, the same claim holds for Patočka's view of Europe, articulated in "dissidence" in private seminars and destined only for illicit transcription and publication, and for Angelopolous's film, which ends by representing the desperate struggle for survival of the besieged city of Sarajevo.

This article, furthermore, takes the opportunity to link Cold War-era Czech philosophy with a film by a Greek filmmaker featuring American and Romanian leading actors and dealing with the aftermath of superpower conflict. Linking these works on conceptual ground is a means of showing that appreciation of the "postcommunist condition" or of "postcommunist film"[5] must encapsulate an appreciation of the transnational post-

[1] Boris Groys, "Privatizations, or Artificial Paradises of Post-Communism," in Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2013), pp. 165–173, here 170.

[2] *Ibid*., p. 173.

[3] See IRWIN, *State in Time?: Minor Compositions* (online at www.minorcompositions.info [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

[4] Groys, "Privatizations," p. 170.

[5] See, for instance, Aleksandra Galasinska and Dariusz Galansinski (eds.), *The Post-Communist Condition: Public and Private Discourses of Transformation* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2010) and Lars Kristensen (ed.), *Postcommunist Film: Russia, Eastern Europe and World Culture* (London: Routledge, 2012).

1989 world that bridges the former East and West. Such an appreciation understands that on both sides of the division, the longstanding traces of forty-five years of nuclear standoff remain present. This thought underlies, for instance, the stated intentions of the research project "Former West," which ran from 2008-16. In a text published to accompany a conference at the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* in Berlin and titled "Dissident Knowledges," the curator Maria Hlavajova begins by insisting on a return to the past in order to understand the present, insisting upon a connection between the present time and the pre-1989 East-West division:

> The contemporary moment [...] unmasks modernity's misunderstandings about the place of the so-called West in the post-1989 world. [...] One among the places we could consider as a starting point [...] may be located within the way of the world since 1989 as we tend to understand it. In its creases and folds [...] we can seek the knowledges, thoughts, and interpretations that have been arrested by the political, social, and aesthetic prejudice of the prevailing consensus. We may recover documents – not yet known, or known and misunderstood – that lay bare the faultlines of 'formerness' and carry seeds of reorientation for our understanding of the prospects ahead.[6]

Ulysses' Gaze observes the "prevailing consensus" as it was installing itself around its production and the very environment on which it turns its camera. Its "political, social, and aesthetic" position, in what follows, will be associated with the category of "dissidence" and the possibility that the utopia it sought has survived after 1989, albeit in another sphere of intellectual activity. The "dissident" movements that were the precursors of the 1989 revolutions, Charta 77, Neues Forum, Solidarność, and so on, could not sustain the more utopian part of their aspirations in the context of economic "transition" and the necessity of political compromise, but that does not mean that such aspirations were universally forgotten.

Ulysses' Gaze will be approached as a "document" of the type Hlavajova proposes, carrying "seeds of reorientation" towards thinking about what happened to the utopian in Europe after 1989 as well as "knowledges, thoughts, and interpretations" of the state of such aspirations in that time and in the present day. There are positive reasons for associating the medium of film with these categories and possibilities, including its privileged relationship to modernity and historicity, which I will have cause to discuss in terms of Patočka's writing.

[6] Maria Hlavajova, "Dissident Knowledges," Mar. 18, 2013 (online at http://www.formerwest.org/DocumentsConstellationsProspects/Texts/DissidentKnowledges [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

Ulysses' Gaze through the Balkans to Europe

There are three reasons for introducing the Czech philosopher's elaboration on the notion of Europe in order to interpret *Ulysses' Gaze* specifically, and these reasons suggest the potential utility of Patočka's thinking to studies of European Cinema. First, Patočka's definition relates only indirectly to the idea that Europe would be the boundary of a particular territory. Instead, it situates the European within individuals themselves. This is helpful because in *Ulysses' Gaze* the protagonist's search leads, through a transnational space, to the inside of his own personality and the recognition that the object of his Balkan-wide search is to be found there.

Secondly, that realisation takes place in the besieged Sarajevo of the winter of 1994, which functions as a spatiotemporal pivot point. The relationship between geopolitical realities and proclaimed European ideals and values having to do with universal human rights was tested, strained, and broken in the atrocious inhumanity of the Yugoslavian War. The non-existence of a coherent European intervention to prevent those atrocities was an integral part of this inhumanity. In that context, it becomes helpful to refer to Patočka's understanding of Europe as a means of cleaving to universal values in the face of desperate present circumstances.

Thirdly, Patočka describes a transcendental version of the European drawing on classical Greek philosophy, a conscious reference point for *Ulysses' Gaze* through a Platonic epigraph and through a moment in which nostalgia for the classical past is expressed. Within the classical framework, the characteristic upon which Patočka focuses most closely is the idea that human life is given underlying purpose by what is known as "care of the soul": "*The soul* forms the *centre of philosophy. Philosophy is the care of the soul* in its own essence and in its own element."[7]

Sense can be made of the link between *Ulysses' Gaze* and abstract conceptual investigation of the European through its epigraph, taken from Plato's *Alcibiades*: "if the soul is to know itself, it must look into the soul." The evocation of Plato, and of the soul, is powerfully significant in a film which extrapolates a universal and abstract conclusion from its peripatetic movement, one couched in the specific terms of a utopian, transnational Europe. The platonic gaze into the soul, however, is only part of the definition of the film's title. The title simultaneously refers to the gaze of the eponymous modern-day Ulysses, played by Harvey Keitel. The gaze, therefore, is also that of the film camera lens, and the history of the capture of the moving image becomes imbricated with the metaphysical vision of the philosopher.[8] This is because the film raises the same terms

[7] Jan Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, trans. Petr Lom (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), emphasis original.

[8] It is also the gaze of one who has witnessed tragedy. Angelopolous's contribution to the 1995 anthology film *Lumière & co.*, shot with an original cinematograph, depicts Ulysses crawling from the sea and staring, fixedly, into the far distance. This is supposedly the fragment of film that Keitel's character has been searching for, the "first gaze."

which are pre-eminent in the work of a philosopher for whom the Platonic soul and its introspective cultivation, together with a transcendental interpretation of the cultural heritage which passes under the name of "Europe," were of pivotal importance.

Travelling through a considerable area of European territory, *Ulysses' Gaze* explores and presents real physical spaces only as a means of evoking the layers of imaginary, utopian space which saturate the experience of travel. The selection of places, far from arbitrary, groups together Balkan nation-states and autonomous Republics which, during the inception and production of *Ulysses' Gaze*, were experiencing the aftermath of Cold War political upheaval (Greece), Soviet-type "real existing" socialist dictatorship (Albania, Bulgaria, Romania), and the collapse of an independent socialist federal state, (Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia), all simultaneous with the uncertain coalescence of a new Europe. The stakes of being classified "within" or "outside" this emergent political entity were in common measure with the level of uncertainty as to where the taxonomical, geographical, and economic boundaries would eventually be placed. The film ends in the besieged city of Sarajevo, where the deleterious consequences of being overlooked by the newly-formed European Union were made starkly apparent.

The film's pretext for the journey, however, invokes the spectral presence of an entirely unofficial transnational space that drew within itself, during the twentieth century, the Balkans together with Western Europe. The protagonist of *Ulysses' Gaze*, an expatriate Greek-American filmmaker named "A" by the closing credits, is supposedly looking for the first reels of film ever shot in the Balkans. The reels would have been shot by the pioneering Balkan filmmakers, the Manakia brothers, and the film explores the territory in which they lived and worked, superimposing its map onto that of the collapsed socialist republics and creating a territory which is explored temporally as well as spatially. In the course of his journey, A relives two past incidents as if they were his own present experience. One is Iannakis Manakia's arrest and last-minute pardon from a firing squad at the Macedonian-Bulgarian border, the other is the deportation of A's family as part of the forced repatriation of the Greek community in Constanța, Romania.

Between Florina and Sarajevo, the film generates its own representation of Balkan space and of twentieth-century Balkan history, carried forward through the exploration of the territory in which the pioneering filmmakers, Iannakis and Miltos Manakia, lived and worked. These photographers introduced the film camera to the Balkans. They were made official photographers to the Romanian, Turkish, and Bulgarian Royal courts, but lived for a long period in Bitola in the present-day Republic of Macedonia; thus, according to Marian Țuțui, "the attempt to establish their affiliation to one or another national cinema is foredoomed to failure."[9]

[9] Marian Tutui, "Manakia Brothers, pioneers of Balkan Cinema, claimed by six nations," in *Orient Express: Balkan Cinema versus Cinema of the Balkan Nations* ([no location indicated] NOI Press; Albanian National Film Archive, 2011) (online at http://aqshf.gov.al/uploads/2.___Manakia_Bros_Pioneers_of_Balkan_Cinema_Claimed_by_Six_Nations.pdf [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

On a train from Macedonia to Romania, two characters share a speech which evokes the brothers' activity and the possibility it is made to stand for. In their films, "for over sixty years they recorded faces, events, in the turmoil of the Balkans. They weren't concerned with politics, racial questions, friends or enemies. They were concerned with people. They were always on the move, [...] recording everything: landscapes, weddings, local customs, political changes, village fairs, revolutions, battles, official celebrations, sultans, kings, prime ministers, bishops, rebels." Moreover, the concept of nationality itself is of limited usefulness when discussing the Manakia brothers. As well as being born in territory disputed between Greece and Macedonia, they were of Aromanian ethnicity, a group having its own language and living in parts of Albania, Macedonia, and Bulgaria. Using the brothers to evoke the transnational, multi-ethnic, Balkan culture of the pre-second World War era, the film proceeds to represent its dismemberment in the wake of that conflict, and the creation of what the historian Tony Judt called "a Europe of nation-states more ethnically homogeneous than ever before."[10] In the midst of the turmoil of Southeastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Manakia brothers carved out for themselves a cosmopolitan space, however precarious its existence and however dangerous it was to inhabit. The preservation of its record is, nonetheless, the peg on which *Ulysses' Gaze* hangs its plot, and a quest capable of making its central character (and the director of its fictional representation) undertake a long, difficult, and eventually dangerous journey ending in the heart of a war zone.

The world in which the Manakia brothers lived and worked, however, is hardly seen as the subject for wistful nostalgia, as the film is equally invested in showing how that world was destroyed in the wake of the Second World War by deportations and the closing of borders. It is the vanished socialist utopia, furthermore, that gives the film one of its most startling images, a sequence of film which is both a timely representation of the dismantlement of eastern European socialism and an untimely indication of the continuing influence of that historical era on present-day events. A significant and widely-reported aspect of the beginnings, in 2013-14, of the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, was the destruction of statues of Lenin.[11] Sergey Loznitza's documentary *Maidan* (2014) records the speeches made in the square of that name in Kiev, and the copious reference to "Europe" made in those speeches. The desire expressed by these Ukrainian citizens to be a part of "Europe" has meaning beyond the argument over closer diplomatic ties to the European Union that resulted in the secession of a part of Ukraine to the Russian Federation after its military occupation. The appearance, in a film from almost twenty years earlier, of a dismantled statue of Lenin from Ukraine being transported up the River Danube is more than an indicator of the historical context of the present Ukrain-

[10] Tony Judt, *Postwar* (London: Vintage, 2010), p. 27.

[11] Channel 4 News, 2013; BBC News, 2014.

ian crisis in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The camera of *Ulysses' Gaze* circles the toppled icon being transported from the former Soviet Union, through the former Yugoslavia, and on to a destination in the former West Germany. The questions asked of Europe after the series of revolutionary changes to which this sequence alludes, regarding its future form and its utopian possibility, have yet to find definitive answers; a re-investigation of films from that time can therefore illuminate the ongoing interrogation of the sense and direction of Europe in the present day.

In this regard, the ending of *Ulysses' Gaze* in a conflict zone whose significance for Europe was – I will have cause to show – seen as definitive by contemporary observers takes on an extensive signifying potential. Dina Iordanova has examined the bitterness of these closing sequences, in which A finds the developed reels of films he has been searching for only after witnessing a massacre in which children and women, including his recently-discovered lover, are murdered and the corpses thrown into the river. Coming at the end of a journey of regional discovery that is also one of self-discovery, these sequences force the realisation that "the return to one's roots can take place, but it makes no sense: by the time one arrives, everything that mattered in the past is over, and things will never be the same again. The nostalgia is meaningless, and all that remains is the longing for something that is impossible to attain."[12] In this context, she argues, "Balkan troubles are seen as problems of the world", and Angelopolous "is the only [filmmaker] daring enough to suggest that problems of universal identity lurk within the peculiar Balkan universe."[13] Such an interaction of particular and universal, of investigation into the self combined with the investigation of the condition of Europe, in a film which investigates the specific circumstances of post-communism is the point at which we are brought into contact with the Patočkian linking between "Europe" and "care for the soul."

Patočka among Versions of the European

Rodolphe Gasché identifies that, in Patočka's *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* and *Plato and Europe*, "a truly new, and original, conception of what is European emerges."[14] Gasché's "study of a philosophical concept" accords Patočka's work great significance in taking forward the notion of the European in terms of its place in interpreting "the present situation of Europe, and the world" and of the "urgent practical necessity"[15] that drives this interpretation. Despite its recognised importance within Gasché's field of enquiry, scholars have yet to make the attempt to encapsulate Patoč-

[12] Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* (London: BFI Publishing, 2001), p. 106.

[13] *Ibid*., p. 107.

[14] Rodolphe Gasché, *Europe, or The Infinite Task: A Study of a Philosophical Concept* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 213.

[15] *Ibid*., p. 211.

ka's thinking for the purpose of making sense of the conceptual understanding of the European that emerges from films which make that understanding their subject matter. I will have cause to refer to responses to Patočka's philosophy from Anglophone scholars, and from philosophers in France, where his work has been available in translation since the early 1980s. These scholars provide important syntheses and interpretations of the political and historical context for Patočka's thought, but here too the relationship between Patočka, the visual, and especially the cinematic, has been under-emphasised. The connection will be made through the significant difference Patočka identifies between the technologically-structured world of the present day and the Classical world in which myth determined perception, not the other way around. This point is central in Patočka's own interpretation of the role of art within his philosophical framework, as described in the essay *L'Art et le Temps*, which has not appeared in English translation but was originally a public lecture delivered in French.[16]

Patočka's thought is the basis for a strongly positive, but conceptual, understanding of the European that has found at best a peripheral role in the numerous, varied, and lucid scholarly approaches to the question of "European cinema." Work in this field has attempted to encapsulate the scale and diversity of film production in Europe, including its popular cinema and the attempt of its industries to rival that of Hollywood.[17] Other scholars have traced the genealogy of a strand of "European art cinema" that, existing in parallel with popular filmmaking but rarely crossing over with its infrastructure or audience, develops its own set of aesthetic and political preoccupations.[18] More recently, Marc Betz has pointed out that international co-production within that "art cinema" has always had the capacity to extract such films from closed national categories and therefore evokes the possibility for such films to encounter and to disturb the definition of the "European."[19]

Numerous scholars have commented that, in the wake of the Cold War, the institutions of the European Union have invested in film production programmes reflecting an official version of the idea of a European cultural heritage.[20] The language of the

[16] See Erika Abrams's notes to her edited volume *L'Art et le Temps* (Paris: P.O.L, 1990), pp. 369–370 .

[17] See Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005).

[18] See David Bordwell, "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice," *Film Criticism* 4, 1979, no. 1, pp. 56–64.

[19] See Mark Betz, "The Name above the (Sub)Title: Internationalism, Coproduction, and Polyglot European Art Cinema," *Camera Obscura* 16 (2001), no. 1 (46), pp. 1–45.

[20] See, for instance, Philip Schlesinger, "From cultural defence to political culture: Media, politics and collective identity in the European Union," *Media, Culture, Society* 19 (1997), no. 3, pp. 369–391; Luisa Rivi, *European Cinema after 1989: Cultural Identity and Transnational Production* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997); Mike Wayne, *The Politics of Contemporary European Cinema: Histories, Borders, Diasporas* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2002); and Randall Halle, *The Europeanization of Cinema* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

founding documents of those programmes echoes that of European Union documents and treaties more generally. The 1992 "European Convention on Cinematic Co-Production," for instance, states that "the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve a greater unity between its members in order, in particular, to safeguard and promote the ideals and principles which form that common heritage."[21]

It is significant that the Convention does not name those values, a tacit acknowledgement that their very definition and current status were a matter of intellectual controversy. Not the least significant reason for this was the developing conflict in the former Yugoslavia, and, in representing this combat zone, *Ulysses' Gaze* can clearly be distanced from an official rhetoric of European "values." Although "unified" with a particular conception of the European relating to a cultural heritage shared across national borders, the film challenges the capacity of institutions to uphold the form of universality that it seeks and therefore takes a strong critical position, in spite of its having benefited materially from the existence of those institutions for its production.

Following Patočka, this article is focused on the European as a prefix that, in a select, self-reflexive narrative film, evokes a paradoxical intersection of the material-historical and the utopian-transcendental, the formless particular, and the hopeful universal. In the Patočkian conception of Europe, it is precisely by giving central, definitive status to that which appears as abject that a hopeful, utopian possibility for Europe can be articulated. This kind of Europe is a conceptual one whose definition can never be applied to a fixed territory in which nation-states do not form units that can be included and excluded but which, and this is most notable in its Patočkian version, resides in risk, contingency, adversity, and moral courage.

Where A's journey concludes with a painful acknowledgement that his search for self-knowledge leads inwards, apparently towards a Platonic "gaze into the soul," his end point is where Patočka's definition of Europe begins. "[…] *only in Europe*," he asserts, "or better said, in what was the embryo of Europe, Greece," did philosophy initiate "an inheritance of thinking about the state where philosophers might live, about a state of justice founded not on mere tradition, but rather on *looking-in*."[22] Such a form of introspection is clarified with reference to two closely-related principles: the care of the soul and the upholding of universal values. *Ulysses' Gaze* displays interest in both principles, and, as for the spatiotemporal origin Patočka applies to them, classical Greece is held up less as the source of present-day civilisation and more as the avatar of its decay.

In the Albanian mountains, A and his driver are stopped by heavy snow. While they wait, the taxi driver laments, "Greece is dying. We're dying as a people. We've come full circle. I don't know how many thousands of years among broken stones and statues, and

[21] Council of Europe, "European Convention on Cinematographic Co-Production," Strasbourg 1992.

[22] Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, p. 88.

we're dying. But if Greece is going to die, then she'd better do it quickly, because the agony lasts too long and makes too much noise." What is particularly agonising about this death, the speech implies, is the tantalising possibility inherent in the "broken stones and statues," the utopian and anachronistic longing for the classical *polis*. Within Patočka's thought, too, the classical *polis* is a touchstone of reflection. It is situated, within the broader framework of a historical movement, as the point of transition from mythological to a more analytically truthful understanding of human being as such. As a consequence, Patočka claims that "the Greek *polis*, *epos*, tragedy, and philosophy are different aspects of the same thrust which represents a rising above decadence."[23]

Such "decadence" and its resistance are an integral part of the conception of the European that Patočka himself calls "heretical," while it is in the "positive" opposition to contemporary decadence that his thinking takes its utopian form. The opposition, however, is the first in a cascading sequence laid out, for example, in the essay "Is Technological Civilisation Decadent, and Why?" The oppositions run: decadent/positive, everyday/holiday-exceptional, profane/sacred.[24] I will show through the example of *Ulysses' Gaze* that cinema has a meaningful place to take in addressing each of these three oppositions and in expressing their conflict and resolution within the modern world.

The "decadence" in modern civilisation resides in life losing "its grasp on the innermost nerve of its functioning, when it is disrupted at its innermost core so that while thinking itself full it is actually draining and laming itself with every step and act."[25] For him, this is the underlying situation which manifests itself in the fact that

> European humanity and humanity as such simply are no longer capable of physically surviving but for the mode of production that rests increasingly on science and technology (and, of course, increasingly devastates the global planetary store of energy), so that rational domination, the cold 'truth' of the coldest of cold monsters, today wholly obscures to us its origin [...].[26]

Elsewhere, examining the "Wars of the Twentieth Century and the Twentieth Century as War," Patočka is even more explicit about the role of technology in "the transformation of the world into a laboratory for releasing reserves of energy accumulated over billions

[23] Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), p. 97.

[24] See *ibid.*, pp. 98–99. For a depackaging of these oppositions, and of Patočka's suggestion that they emerge with the passage from prehistorical to historical humanity, see Ivan Chvatík, "The Heretical Conception of the European in the Late Essays of Jan Patočka," Sept. 2003 (online at http://www.cts.cuni.cz/soubory/reporty/CTS-03-14.pdf [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

[25] Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, p. 97.

[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 111–112.

of years."[27] What role could film, as a manifestation of the science and technology that Patočka sees at the root of this transformation and the heart of contemporary decadence, play in raising consciousness of the possibility that the classical Greek civilisation represented towards a foundation of life on more authentic grounds? An indication comes at the end of Patočka's essay cited above, when he returns to the question "Is Technological Civilisation decadent, and why?" He concludes on an ambivalent note. First, he acknowledges that "the chief possibility, which emerges for the first time in history with our civilisation, is the *possibility* of a turn from accidental rule to the rule of those who understand what history is about."

This would indeed be a "heretical" statement in the context of its being written in a country governed by those who claimed that the basis of their authority was precisely that they knew exactly what history was about. Patočka's claim that their rule, and that of those on the Western side of the Iron Curtain, was "accidental," points to his commitment to the need for philosophy as a foundation of political systems. He accelerates to the conclusion that "there is no civilisation as such. The question is whether historical humans are still willing to embrace history."[28] Such an embrace, based on introspective enquiry into one's own past and that of the history of civilisation, is what *Ulysses' Gaze* appears to attempt.

A Journey through Post-Communist Europe

In some of its images, none more so than that of the dismantled Lenin statue, the film has the ability to represent multiple layers of temporal fact and, in doing so, to generate a subjective view of the historical process which engendered the events referred to and, reflexively, the film itself. The sequence begins in a hotel room in Constanța. From its window, A sees the statue on a ship in the port. Subsequently, he becomes a passenger on the barge transporting the dismantled statue up the Danube, the toppled figure lying on its back, its raised arm no longer outstretched as if towards a crowd of assembled masses but instead directed purposelessly skyward.

Following the barge on its journey, the film creates an image of the post-Communist era which stands apart. Tearing the statue from its expected context, the film seeks to surprise and astonish the viewer, an effect which could have only been rendered more acute at the time of the film's release when an era of entirely upright Lenins embodying the persistence of a political system and of an interpretation of the role and function of history was a very recent memory.

The barge passes a high-angled camera which follows it as it passes up the Danube, a contemplative shot which invites reflection on the historical circumstances. A relic of Eastern European Communism is being transported to the West where, apparently,

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 124.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 118.

such a memento is in demand. The statue, A is told, was carried from Kiev down the Dniepr and across the Black Sea. After transhipment to the barge, it is being taken to Germany, with the implication – though never the statement – that this is the delivery of a prearranged purchase. In the shot which shows A jumping aboard the barge, a ship is seen in the background flying the Russian (as opposed to Soviet) flag and called *Mir*, the Russian word that means both "world" and "peace." The juxtaposition is distinctly ironic for the beginning of a journey whose destination is a war zone.

The toppled and dismantled statue symbolises Communism's defeat, and the image of the revolutionary leader is indicative of the failure of the ideals his statue was intended to incarnate. To emphasise the point, in a travelling shot taken from the barge the film shows crowds of people on the banks of the river making the sign of the cross as the statue passes. The film brings together two phenomena of the post-socialist moment: the commodification of socialism's legacy and the resurgence of religious commitment. The sequence is accompanied by Eleni Karaindrou's orchestral theme, which the film reserves for moments of contextual illustration rather than narrative development. David Bordwell compares the sequence's aesthetics to "a weirdly sparse music video,"[29] a description which complements his classification of Angelopolous's style within the category of European art cinema he inaugurated as being of "severe, contemplative beauty."[30] The generation of such an image, however, is far more than an exercise in the technically proficient development of a particular aesthetic norm. This moment of the film exists apart, as a fragmentary moment which, in its abandonment of verisimilitude, nonetheless relates to contextual facts and situates them in a historical context, creating the opportunity for its fortuitous resonance with the no less extraordinary images generated by the real-life destruction of equivalent statues in recent years in Ukraine.

The use of dismantled statuary as an emblem for the end of the Communist era is not in itself unique: *Goldeneye* (Martin Campbell, 1995), the first James Bond film of the post-Cold War era, is an example of the commercial cinema's exploitation of the trope. Later, *Good Bye Lenin!* (Wolfgang Becker, 2003) features the dismantled top half of a statue of Lenin being carried around the former East Berlin suspended from a helicopter. This image itself recalls, perhaps intentionally, the closing sequence of Dušan Makavajev's *Gorilla Bathes at Noon* (1993), whose plot revolves, precisely, around the demolition of such a statue in that city.

There are, however, far more precise and deeper intertextual connections underpinning the Lenin barge sequence that elucidate its capacity for being emblematic of

[29] David Bordwell, "Angelopoulos, or Melancholy," in David Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 140–186, here 176.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 185.

the ambivalent beginning of a new era. To begin with, there is the connection between *Gorilla Bathes at Noon* and *Ulysses' Gaze*. Angelopolous disavowed the suggestion that he had taken inspiration from the Serbian director, claiming only to have found out about Makavajev's film when he met him in Belgrade during the filming of *Ulysses' Gaze*.[31] It may or may not be a case of "talented artists thinking alike,"[32] but a further connection with Makavajev's work exists – to *Sweet Movie* (1974). That film features a canal barge called "Survival," sailed by a woman called Anna Planeta through the canals of Amsterdam while blaring hippy folk-rock music. The barge's prow is formed by an enormous papier-maché head of Karl Marx, and, in an early scene of the film, Anna and a sailor from the battleship *Potemkin*, who only speaks French, stand proudly there and sing the Italian communist song "Bandiera Rossa." If the barge in Makavajev's film is farcical, an assemblage of symbols of communist propaganda and filmmaking, then it finds its melancholy counterpart in the dismantled Lenin of *Ulysses' Gaze*, appearing for the second time as tragedy. Inverting the Marxian formula on the repetition of historical events makes sense of the intertextual connection at work here and its critical position on ostensibly Marxist political regimes. The Lenin barge in *Ulysses' Gaze* appears elegiac because, situating itself in a lineage of European Marxist filmmaking, it clearly shows itself here as the end of that line, dismantling its remains and putting them, like the statue, to new purposes.

Horton points to the search, in *Ulysses' Gaze*, for "a relationship with the past of the Balkan cinematic community."[33] This community would link the various cities containing the archives, including the fictional one in Sarajevo, that A visits in search of the Manakia reels. It would also include those places whose history was recorded by the brothers, but furthermore extends through the twentieth century by means of intertextual references – especially those to the cinema of Makavajev.

In this film, which is described as a search for, and an exploration of, "problems of a universal nature" (as in Iordanova's interpretation, above), the question however does not stop at positing an integral Balkan community but extends outwards through "the question of the individual and the community" which is "at the centre of the ancient Greek experience" because "what the Greeks have given the world is, in large part, a concern for the *polis*, that is, the city-state, and an ongoing democratic dialogue on how that concern can best be expressed."[34]

[31] Andrew Horton (ed.), *The Last Modernist: The Films of Theo Angelopoulos* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1997), p. 104.

[32] *Ibid*., p. 191.

[33] *Ibid*., p. 16.

[34] *Ibid*., pp. 16–17.

The Twentieth Century and the Classical *Polis*

In spite of the reduction of the physical remains of the civilisation that engendered such dialogue to "broken stones and statues," and in resistance to the "decadent" technological domination of the twentieth century, Angelopolous's film here converges with Patočka's work, evoking simultaneously the classical Greek concern for building a well-organised public realm and the sheer destructive force of the twentieth century. However, in its self-reflexive exploration of the cinematic heritage of that century that extends from the early Manakia reels through to Makavajev's pan-European evocation of left-wing iconography and culminating in the emblematic image of the dismantled statue, *Ulysses' Gaze* seeks to rescue film, and the practice of film-making, from the generalised technological destruction of that century.

Patočka prefigures Hobsbawm in setting the inception of the twentieth century in 1914, stating that "the first world war is the decisive event in the history of the twentieth century. It determined its entire character."[35] *Ulysses' Gaze* refers to that conflict chiefly through a sequence in which A relives Iannakis Mankia's arrest and threatened execution by the Bulgarian authorities, an event from 1916. It places it within the narrative of the brothers' career, suggesting an alternative beginning to the twentieth century in 1905, and the possibility of the twentieth century as belonging not to war but to the film camera. In a gesture which recalls Walter Benjamin's assignation to cinema of the task "to establish equilibrium between human beings and the apparatus,"[36] *Ulysses' Gaze*, through the figure of the Manakia brothers, suggests that cinema represents a bridge between technology and a peaceful alternative, an opportunity to resist rather than perpetuate "decadence."

The film therefore ties together a search for a cinematic and for a philosophical heritage. Where the former draws the territories which the film visits into the "community" of European history, the latter is ascribed a universal dimension, a possibility for introspective thinking about polity. What is it about classical Greek civilisation that is so appealing and differentiates it so much from the present? According to Patočka, the answer lies in values inherent in that civilisation. In his description, the classical Greek city, as Plato relates it following the example of Socrates, was based on the principle that "all free noblemen upheld divinely sanctioned rules: not to harm others, not to interfere in their own private sphere, to leave them alone, not to enslave them, not to take, and not even to attempt to take what does not belong to one."[37] More than the basic

[35] Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, p. 124. See Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).

[36] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction [Second Version]," in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2002).

[37] Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, p. 83.

civility of these principles, the interest in such a formulation of the basic underlying form of classical Greek civilisation lies in its direct connection to introspective philosophical practice. The Socratic method would be aptly described as "what Plato says, following Socrates: the care of the soul."[38] The centre of this practice, Patočka insists, is "looking-in," and this consists precisely in Socrates's inciting people "to *think*, that they think like him, that they search, that everyone responsibly examine their every thought. That means that they should not accept mere opinion, as if it were insight, as if it were looking-in."[39]

The Platonic conceptual difference between "knowledge" and "opinion" is a significant one in terms of a connection between the classical philosopher's well-known cave analogy and cinema. Stephen Rainey discusses the apparent similarity between the discussion, in Book 7 of the *Republic*, of a cave wall illuminated by fire, onto which shadows are projected, and the modern film theatre. Rainey's conclusion is that, rather than imprisoned within the world of their perceptions like Plato's cave-dwellers, film spectators are endowed with an extrinsic point of view which is susceptible to the attainment of knowledge. "The Platonic cave of the movie theatre," he writes, "has its value precisely in its depiction of the shadowplay and the audience's self-consciously aware release when the house lights go up. It is the suspension of disbelief while in the cave of the movie theatre that gains cinematic knowledge, as opposed to the apprehension of the immutable and indubitable that for Plato is the mark of knowledge."[40] The possibility of attaining to "knowledge" in Platonic terms is a valuable one for the connection between Patočka's Platonic thinking of the European and *Ulysses' Gaze* since, for the Czech philosopher, knowledge and enquiry are conceptually intrinsic to the European. Furthermore, Rainey's view helps us to see cinema, which is so importantly redemptive in *Ulysses' Gaze*, as the bridge between Platonic "knowledge" and modern-day experience.

Thinking in this way opens the possibility of a reciprocal clarification of *Ulysses' Gaze* through Patočka's thought and, furthermore, of using an important strand in that body of work to think about the cinematic apparatus. To do so is to stretch the frame of reference of the philosopher's writings on art, but to sustain his conclusions on art's potential to further the purpose of philosophical enquiry. For all the importance that Patočka accords the historical epoch of the Classical Greek city-state, he acknowledges its incompatibility with our own era. "We do not [...] perceive in the same way as the ancient Greeks," he observes, because we inhabit a world that is not simply materially

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 85.

[40] Stephen Rainey, "Plato's Cave and the Big Screen," in Barbara Gabriella Renzi and Stephen Rainey (eds.), *From Plato's Cave to the Multiplex: Contemporary Philosophy and Film* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), pp. 103–104.

different, but, in its technological secularity, affects our own perception. We "see not only different things, but see them differently."[41]

The difference of our era in respect to preceding historical epochs is a crucial one for Patočka, especially when it comes to thinking about the historical aspect of art. He describes "classical Greek science which *saw* ideas," and "whose very concepts were forms and the demonstrations of the architectures."[42] By contrast, "art is no longer the air we breathe" in an era in which "the dominant spiritual character is the abstract intellectual knowledge which mathematical natural science, which has become one with technology, offers the most perfect model."[43] Patočka's concerns about this state of affairs have already been noted above. The attention paid to the "coldest of cold monsters" and its tendency to devour not only resources that sustain life but simultaneously the historical purpose of human life itself is iterated in his essay on *Art and Time*, in which the merger of techno-scientific knowledge with techno-industrial production is the "correlate" of a "reality" which "becomes the 'natural' environment of a humanity in continuous quest for the great reserves of energy needed to sustain production that can only continue on the condition of keeping up its growth."

Patočka ascribes to contemporary art no lesser function than resistance to the instrumentalisation of humanity, precisely within the context of a technologically-dominated contemporaneity. In this timeliness, art, "precisely because it does not stay in the margins of what is happening presently, because it is not an artificial paradise, it can express the intimate distress of our time better than any other means" including, notably, philosophy.[44] There is an emphasis on the visual in Patočka's emphatic affirmation of the possibilities for creativity that belies his overlooking of cinema, and indeed of photography, in his artistic references. Art nonetheless "expresses the creative force of humanity, that is to say, the human faculty to allow being to become visible."[45]

In *Ulysses' Gaze*, modern technology (cinematography) serves the purpose of rendering apparent the problematic of modern civilisation as Patočka sees it, namely the "decadent" separation of the material conditions of life from a real, introspective appreciation of the nature of being. The self-referential aspect of the film's exploration of twentieth-century history through the history of the film camera takes on an additional function in this interpretation: the film is engaged in trying to convert the simple looking at the screen within the "cave of the movie theatre" into an authentic "looking-in."

Suggested by the Platonic epigraph, the connection between A's journey in *Ulysses' Gaze* and the "looking-in" Patočka describes corresponds with Iordanova's interpretation

[41] Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, p. 11.

[42] Jan Patočka, "Art and Time," in Patočka, *L'Art et le Temps*, pp. 344–369, here 351.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 359.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 365–366, cf. 362.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 367.

of the film as making sense, through abstraction, of a convoluted individual identity. In doing so, it generates a situation – A's experience in Sarajevo – which displays strong Patočkian characteristics.

Sarajevo

The small, provincial city in which A arrives, the end of his journey, was at that time, and for the short period of the siege, occupying a uniquely central position on the imaginary European map. For instance, Slavoj Žižek in 1997 referred to "the recent pathetic statement of solidarity 'Sarajevo is the capital of Europe.'"[46] He observed that this idea (which he assumed was sufficiently widespread as not to need to cite a source) "was also an exemplary case of [...] a notion of exception as embodying universality: the way the enlightened liberal Europe related to Sarajevo bore witness to the way it related to itself, to its universal notion."[47] Placing Sarajevo in context by exploring the post-Cold War Balkans before visiting it, *Ulysses' Gaze* culminates by showing what Žižek classifies as the "abject," corresponding necessarily to "the only point of true universality, the point which belies the existing concrete universality."[48] By means of this gesture towards the universal, coupled with its investment in the understanding and interpretation of a shared European cinematic heritage, *Ulysses' Gaze* firmly counters another prevailing argument of the time, as summarised by Susan Sontag, herself present in Sarajevo at the time of the siege: "one of the main ways of understanding the war crimes committed in southeastern Europe in the 1990s was to say that the Balkans, after all, were never really part of Europe."[49]

In placing Sarajevo at the culmination of its protagonist's question, *Ulysses' Gaze* seeks to assert that city's paradoxical centrality to the questions being asked of Europe during the period of the early 1990s, and to show the seemingly hopeless situation there as one in which, in fact, the fundamental, "universal" characteristics associated with Europe were evoked with authentic force. In this final segment of the film, A appears for the first time as a naïve American in Europe, a tourist out of his element. Constant sniper fire can be heard, and the streets are deserted apart from white UN armoured cars and civilians on foot with water canisters, keeping low and moving quickly. They do not stop to answer A's repeated question, "is this Sarajevo?" In these shots, he briefly appears in the role of "naïve Western outsider," a common figure of 1990s films concerning the same war, whether ex-Yugoslav or foreign productions. Examples include the Anglophone correspondents living in the Holiday Inn in Michael Winterbottom's

[46] Slavoj Žižek, "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism," *New Left Review* I, no. 225 (1997), pp. 28–51, here 19.

[47] *Ibid.*

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[49] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 64.

Welcome to Sarajevo (1997) and Lisa Moncure's American aid worker trapped in a tunnel with a group of Bosnian Serb paramilitaries in Srđan Dragojevic's *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* (1996). What distinguishes *Ulysses' Gaze* from these filmic representations of the Yugoslav Wars is that it is not a film *about* those wars exclusively, and although the city is a point of narrative culmination the film as a whole makes no pretence of giving the viewer an insider's perspective on the events taking place there, the task of such films as *Shot Through the Heart* (David Attwood, 1998) and *Jours tranquilles à Sarajevo* (François Lunel, 2003).

Instead of focusing on the plight of the besieged, it has been noted above, *Ulysses' Gaze* is interested in the universal consequences raised by the state of siege and their resonance with a conceptual question which, I have identified, has to do with the definition of "Europe." In the context of intellectual outrage about the siege, which had been going on for two years and nine months by the time of the filming of *Ulysses' Gaze*,[50] desperation at the failure of European institutions and values took on a pre-eminent role. The Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo, visiting Sarajevo during the siege in the summer of 1993, observed that the city's inhabitants had drawn their own conclusions regarding the ideals of international institutions and their practicability. In an improvised cemetery where bodies from artillery and sniper attacks were buried, he observed:

> One should add to this compacted harvest of funeral crosses and stelas another more monumental memorial, with the dates of the 1948 UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights, the 1956 UN Agreement on Civil and Political Rights, the 1990 Charter of the Paris Conference on European Cooperation and Security, the Founding Charter of the United Nations, and the renowned Geneva Convention with the inscription "here lie the dignity of the European Community and the credibility of the United Nations Organisation, perished in Sarajevo."[51]

If the citizens of the besieged city resented what they perceived as their abandonment by the hypocritical leaders of what Goytisolo termed "a thick-skinned, stonily selfish Europe,"[52] then certain outside observers had already taken the step of dismissing the atrocity by diminishing the claim on universal rights whose very universality, the Sarajevans were right to observe, could no longer remain credible while the siege went on. *Ulysses' Gaze* shows itself in agreement with the line of thinking that ties the state of Sarajevo to the question of Europe and of its relationship to protecting a universal

[50] The siege began with attacks by the Yugoslav National Army and Serb paramilitaries on 5 April 1992. In the film, the date of A's arrival is given as 3rd December 1994.

[51] Juan Goytisolo, *Landscapes of War*, trans. Peter Bush (San Francisco: City Lights, 2000), p. 16.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

humanity, and it is in this regard that the film demands to be interpreted in light of the elements which connect it both to Patočka's thinking and to the "dissident" political position which that thinking lead him to adopt.

Europe and the Utopian

These begin with its place in the heart of European self-definition, as evidenced by the statements cited above from Goytisolo, Sontag, and Žižek. The latter in particular gestures towards Patočkian thinking in discussing the situation in Sarajevo in terms of different formulations of the universal. As has been seen, for Žižek the position of Sarajevo as the "abject" of universal values is the generator of its paradoxical centrality. Such a situation parallels Patočka's association of decline and decadence with the unique possibility of renewal; it is precisely in the position of abjection that the Czech philosopher identifies the emergence of resistance. Such a conception is in line with Patočka's own political activity of what was called "dissidence" in relation to the Soviet-type regime in Czechoslovakia. The connection has not escaped the attention, for instance, of Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, who in 1998 asked and answered the rhetorical question of dissidence: would it

> no longer have anything to say at a time when the soldiers of peace can be reduced to assisting ethnic "cleansing" in Rwanda or in Bosnia? The Czech philosopher would doubtless have seen here one of the greatest expressions of the process of European self-suppression whose traces he had already indicated in the 1950s.[53]

Indeed, Patočka's "dissident" writings point to the utopian hope for universal human rights officially enshrined in the various declarations and treaties whose mock tombs Goytisolo found in a Sarajevo cemetery. He saw in those values and their declaration the possibility to further the political project which emerged from his utopian interpretation of Europe. Writing in 1977, Patočka issued an essay in support of the recently-founded Charta 77 movement in Czechoslovakia.[54] In it, he reiterated the conceptual link between the foundation of society on principles of civility and the philosophical need for a coherent understanding of the nature of human existence:

> No society, no matter how well-equipped it may be technologically, can function without a moral foundation, without convictions that do not depend on convenience, circumstances, or expected advantage. Yet the point of morality is to assure

[53] Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, *Jan Patočka: L'ésprit de la dissidence* (Paris: Michalon, 1998), p. 68.

[54] The essay's description of the movement's basis and objectives was, according to Erazim Kohák, "privately circulated in typescript in Prague in 1977 and widely reprinted, in many variations of title and text, in the world press."

> not the functioning of society but the humanity of humans. Humans do not invent morality, arbitrarily, to suit their needs, wishes, inclinations, and aspirations. Quite the contrary, it is morality that defines what being human means.[55]

Where Charta 77 represented the *de facto* opposition to the single-party state, negative critique of the system might have been expected. Instead, Patočka offered a positive articulation of the kind of society the movement hoped for, based on its stated purpose of enforcing the application of the 1974 Helsinki agreement.[56] Heralding such agreements, he did not hesitate to associate them with utopian possibility:

> [...] we consider a time when it became possible to sign a Declaration of Human Rights a new historical epoch, the stage for an immense outreach, since it represents a reversal of human consciousness, of the attitude of humans to themselves and to their society. Not simply or primarily fear or profit, but respect for what is higher in humans, a sense of duty, or the common good, and of the need to accept even discomfort, misunderstanding, and a certain risk, should henceforth be our motives.[57]

Noting that risk is an integral part of the political project outlined here, its representation in *Ulysses' Gaze* is given additional significance. The film invokes the precarious creativity in adversity of the Manakia brothers, but over the course of A's journey it subjects him to the same risks: misidentification, superstition, censorship, accusations of espionage, and simply being an observer and bystander in the wrong place and at the wrong time. The film sets A's soul-seeking in an environment which constantly reminds the viewer of the political turmoil of its present and of its twentieth-century history. In the taxi driver's lament for the lingering death of classical Greece, the film makes reference to what Patočka calls the "embryo" of the decrepitude of the present. In the Lenin barge sequence, the film counterpoints the millennial "broken stones and statues" of the taxi driver's monologue with a highly contemporary image of a collapsed utopia. The superstition evinced by those on the banks of the Danube who cross themselves when the barge passes, the film suggests, is a last foreclosure on the ideals for which the statue once stood, before being reduced to the status of cargo.

Ulysses' Gaze itself, however, works to keep open the possibility, not for socialism as such, but moreover for the society existing in the welcoming of risk and in the up-

[55] Jan Patočka, "The Obligation to Resist Injustice," in Erazim Kohák, *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 340–343, here 341.

[56] See Edward F. Findlay, "Classical Ethics and Postmodern Critique: Political Philosophy in Václav Havel and Jan Patočka," *Review of Politics* 61 (1999), no. 3, pp. 403–426, here 405.

[57] Patočka, "Obligation to resist," pp. 342–343.

holding of universal values in the face of that risk, which Patočka incited and that the Manakia brothers seemingly embodied. At the end, immediately before the massacre sequence, the film includes a scene in which there are only two players and whose action relates most closely to A's memory. In the midst of circumstances that relate to a specific historical moment and a specific place, and their relation to a universal value set that belongs to no historical epoch, the film draws a concrete situation towards the universal.

A meets a woman (Maïa Morgenstern) who is simultaneously the daughter of the Sarajevo film archivist and the woman he left behind when he first left Florina. He finds her near a group of young people who have set up an outdoor disco, dancing to pop music on the snow-covered ground. After he enthuses that he "should have dreamed" of dancing in Sarajevo, a sudden change takes place in the scene. The camera's movement allows a change in the scene within the same shot.[58] In this case, a 180-degree pan to the right accompanied by a short forward track follows the characters as they move apart from the group of dancing youths. A change in the music indicates the alteration. As the piano begins to play a waltz, the drums, bass, and electric guitar of the disco music fall silent. The actor's body language changes rapidly. From dancing apart, they fall into a passionate embrace, holding each other closely as they follow the musical time. From brief sentences in broken English, she begins speaking Greek. It is the text of her speech which reveals what is happening to the viewer: she echoes almost word for word one of his speeches from the opening section of the film, complaining of the "rain and mud in winter – dust in summer" that characterised A's recollection of his time as a conscript stationed in Florina. A cuts her off to tell her that he can hear his train arriving, a sound inaudible to the viewer and therefore an indication that, decades later and hundreds of kilometres away, they are reprising a leave-taking and his promise to return and take her away, a promise that will remain unfulfilled for a second time as she is shortly to vanish into the fog and never return.

In juxtaposing and mixing a personal recollection with a politically-charged and emblematic location, *Ulysses' Gaze* implies the universal applicability of the state of siege: it could be happening to anyone, from anywhere, becoming intermingled with their own personal history and raising its uncanny recollection. More specifically, the film culminates here its point about the shared historical experience of the twentieth century in Europe. As I have argued, Sarajevo was seen, not least by its inhabitants, as a place where universal values were tested to destruction. Interpreting the way in which *Ulysses' Gaze* shows that city as a universal situation makes sense in light of the association made with the Patočkian understanding of the category of "Europe." In the midst of the turmoil of South-Eastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, the

[58] In a technique noted as typical of Angelopolous's filmmaking style: see, for instance, Bordwell, *Figures*, p. 148.

Manakia brothers carved out for themselves a cosmopolitan space that the film implies has now become a utopian possibility as remote as the classical civilisation lamented by a Greek taxi driver. Within the film's panoramic view, the aftermath of the collapse of Soviet-type socialist regimes is an outstanding feature. Deportees from Greece to Albania, trudging home through the mountains, and the victims of the Yugoslavian wars as much as the dismantled Lenin statue that gives the film its defining image are all seen as aspects of a transnational situation whose historical antecedents, as well as its present effects, are shown to the viewer.

Just as Patočka did not simply critique that system when it was in place, *Ulysses' Gaze* does not simply bury socialism but instead looks for the possibility for something other than violence and fear to be installed in its place. Amongst the apparent ruin of the universal values in which Patočka placed so much hope, *Ulysses' Gaze* retains a trace of the longing for a society that would uphold those values. I framed the presentation of the film with the philosopher's idea of "Europe" through Groys' category of the "post-dissident." Where Patočka's philosophical convictions placed him in direct involvement with "dissidence" in its pre-1989 form, *Ulysses' Gaze* regards the post-1989 moment in the light of equivalent values, which are the ones Groys names: transnationalism, peaceful coexistence, cultural understanding, ideological flexibility combined with universalist commitment. The film serves as a reminder of the desire to make Europe a space for those values, as well as the suggestion that those values inhere in the very definition of Europe itself.

ESSAYS

VÁCLAV HAVEL AND THE INVASION OF IRAQ

(with Constant Reference to the Soviet-led Occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968)

Peter Steiner

The fact that I'm not you doesn't free me – at least before my conscience – from the obligation to assume a position and inform you of it...
Havel's letter to Alexander Dubček of August 9, 1969[1]

Skimming over the front page of their favorite newspaper on Wednesday, August 21, 1968, and skipping the all too familiar masthead "Proletarians of all lands, unite!" the readers of Moscow's Pravda came across news that suddenly made the meaning of that slogan quite relevant: "TASS was authorized to announce," the official communiqué stated in typical Soviet newspeak, "that the representatives of the Party and the government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic addressed the Soviet Union and other allied governments with a request to provide their brothers the Czechoslovak people with urgent help, including military force."

[1] Václav Havel, „Dopis Alexandru Dubčekovi z 9. srpna 1969", in Václav Havel, *Do různých stran*. ed. Vilém Prečan (Prague: Lidové noviny, 1989), pp. 428–441, here 435. The abridged English translation of the letter does not contain this passage; see Václav Havel, "Letter to Alexander Dubček," trans. A. G. Brian, in Václav Havel, *Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965–1990*, ed. Paul Wilson (New York: Vintage, 1992), pp. 36–49.

This appeal was made because of the threat to the existing socialist order in Czechoslovakia and to established constitutional statehood by contra-revolutionary forces in collusion with external forces inimical to socialism. Invoking "the right of governments to individual and collective self-defense" and "the real interests of the [Warsaw Pact] countries in defending European peace against forces of militarism, aggression, and revanchism that more than once have plunged the European nations into war" (TASS), Comrade Brezhnev could not turn a deaf ear to the heartfelt plea by "the healthy kernel of the CCP," as the signatories of the letter subsequently became called, and he provided "brotherly assistance" in the form of a half million troops to overthrow the local government so that one more corresponding to the Soviet image could be put in its place.

Some thirty-five years later in yet another paper – with an ideological spin diametrically opposite that of good old Moscow *Pravda* – a letter similar in self-righteous tone and aggressive purport appeared on the editorial page of *The Wall Street Journal*. Entitled "United We Stand," it was signed by eight European statesmen and more or less regurgitated the United States' accusations against Iraq to which the UN Security Council had proved so egregiously unresponsive. In the name of values shared with the US, "democracy, individual freedom, human rules and the rule of laws," they demanded to "rid the world of the danger posed by Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction" which, combined with "terrorism, is a threat of incalculable consequence [...] Resolution 1441 is Saddam Hussein's last chance to disarm using peaceful means," the letter charged – or else.[2] Given the military muscle of the eight countries whose leaders issued the warning, such an ultimatum might have at first glance looked rather quixotic. But only if one disregards the implicit addressee of the letter – the man commanding enough power to make Hussein say uncle. If not for the sake of tried and true trans-Atlantic unity then at least to assuage the fears of his allies, George W. Bush had to act. On March 20, 2003, he launched a war against Iraq.

These two letters are an excellent example, I believe, of what linguists call the perlocutionary effect of language: the power of words to have consequences in the real world. A short missive scribbled by a small cabal of men can move military troops across continents, bring tanks into the middle of modern cities with all the consequences that tons of loose steal might have on human lives. But does the similarity between the two instances of a peculiar epistolary genre go beyond mere formal resemblance? Do these letters have more in common than meets the eye? Such a question might seem frivolous at first glance. Separated by decades and continents, if not by the enormous political change that the world has undergone during intervening decades, including the disappearance of the Soviet Union, the two texts seem utterly incomparable. But not according to Václav Havel! Reminiscing about the Soviet-led invasion of 1968 at

[2] Jose Maria Aznar, et al., "United We Stand," *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 30, 2003 (online at http://www.opinionjournal.com/extra/?id=110002994 [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

a meeting on the transformation of NATO, he observed: "This [...] experience makes me extremely cautious. It seems to me that whenever we wish to intervene against a particular state in the name of the defense of human life we must always and again – albeit if only for a moment and only in the depths of our souls – ask the question whether this is not, perchance, a version of 'brotherly assistance' [...] It is necessary, therefore, to weigh again and again on the finest scales whether we are truly helping people against a criminal regime and defending humankind against its weapons, or whether perchance this is not another – understandably more sophisticated than the Soviet one of 1968 – version of 'the brotherly assistance.'"[3] When some two months later Havel appealed to Bush to deal with the Iraq situation in a decisive manner he had to be, it seems, well aware of the profound ambiguity of his act. Let me pick up the gantlet thrown down in such a challenging manner and compare the incomparable.

The context of the 1968 invasion is well known. Alexander Dubček's attempts to liberalize the Communist regime in his homeland posed a tough problem for Kremlin suzerains. Since the country was nominally independent, there was the danger that the reformed leadership of the Communist Party might subordinate proletarian unity to national interests and slip out of the Russian bear's hug, with the rest of the socialist camp eventually following suit. Which would have finished the Soviet empire twenty years prematurely. Moscow sent Dubček plenty of signals about its unhappiness with his reforms, far too popular among the Czechoslovaks for Soviet taste, but, alas, these went mostly unheeded. So, as of March/April 1968 military intervention became a viable solution to the problem.

Missing at this point was political legitimization of such an action. We do not know exactly when the letter of invitation signed by five prominent Czechoslovak Communists was composed and how exactly it reached its destination. According to an apocryphal story, it was a member of a conspiratorial quintet, the Slovak party leader Vasil Biľak, who passed the missive onto the First Secretary of the Ukraine CP, Petro Shelest, in the men's room during last minute negotiations in Bratislava on August 3. Whether true or not, the epistle eventually reached its addressee, Leonid Brezhnev, who read it aloud at a meeting planning for intervention that took place in Moscow on August 10.[4] And it was put to good use in justifying the August 21 invasion.[5] But the arrival of Warsaw Pact troops did not achieve the desired effect, for the signatories of the letter failed to form a workers' and peasants' government. After initial hesitation, the Soviets succeeded

[3] Václav Havel, "The Transformation of NATO: Opening speech by Václav Havel, President of the Czech Republic at the conference organized by Host Committee and Aspen Institute of Berlin," Nov 20, 2002 (online at http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s021120c.htm [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

[4] For details about the letter and its text itself, see František Janáček, et al., "Příběh zvacího dopisu," *Soudobé dějiny* 1, 1993, no. 1, p. 87–95.

[5] See the *Pravda* communiqué: TASS, "Zaiavlenie TASS," *Pravda: Organ Tsentraľnogo Komiteta KPSS*, Aug 21, 1968, p. 1.

in bringing, voluntarily and otherwise, most of the old leadership to Moscow where all – with one notable exception to which I will return – ratified a protocol allowing the temporary stationing of the Red Army on Czechoslovak soil. "Temporary" in this context meant no less then twenty-three years.

The origins of *The Wall Street Journal* letter are not entirely clear either. Whose idea was it, how was it produced, to whom was it sent and why?[6] Its very title – a clear allusion to Lincoln's 1858 "House Divided" speech – betrays an American mytho-political imagination and suggests its non-European authorship or at least some trans-Atlantic input. What, however, has already been proven beyond any reasonable doubt is the fact that the two central points of the letter were patently false. Hussein could not have violated Security Council Resolution 1441, as the octet of concerned Europeans accused him, if only because he did not possess any weapons of mass destruction. And he could not have passed such bogus "weapons of mass destruction" (WMDs) onto anybody, not only because he did not possess them but also because his alleged links to Al Qaeda terrorists were yet another fabrication. That these charges were trumped up by Bush's administration to hoodwink the American public into endorsing a war of its choice was known long before negative findings concerning the WMDs charges were published by Charles Duelfer and absolution of Hussein of any complicity in the New York terrorist attack by the 9/11 Commission. The speech by Robert C. Byrd, Dean of the US Senate, on May 21, 2003, explains eloquently, with a bluntness indicating the level of the speaker's frustration, why this strategy worked on the western shore of the Atlantic:

> Regarding the situation in Iraq, it appears to this Senator that the American people may have been lured into accepting the unprovoked invasion of a sovereign nation, in violation of long-standing International law, under false premises. There is ample evidence that the horrific events of September 11 have been carefully manipulated to switch public focus from Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda who

[6] According to some commentators, the intended addressee of this letter was the Security Council of the United Nations. They most likely came to this conclusion because of the letter's last paragraph urging the Security Council to "maintain its credibility" and authorize an attack against the UN's member state before the Hans Blix Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission would publish its final report about the WMDs in Iraq. I find such an interpretation not convincing because it disregards the actual membership of the Security Council. The haughty phrases about "the real bond between the U. S. and Europe," with which the letter opens, completely disregard the African, Latin American, and Asian countries wielding three-fifths of the votes in the Security Council. And even if the French, German, and Russian representatives were suckered by the siren sweet song of European unity into voting for a new resolution allowing military intervention in Iraq, its passage would still require the minimum of two non-European votes. It is hard to believe that Aznar *et tutti quanti* would be foolish enough to think that by extolling "American bravery, generosity and farsightedness" thanks to which "Europe was set free from two forms of tyranny that devastated our continent in the 20th century: Nazism and communism," they could sway to their sides the representatives of China, Guinea, Pakistan, or Syria.

> masterminded the September 11th attacks, to Saddam Hussein who did not. The run up to our invasion of Iraq featured the President and members of his cabinet invoking every frightening image they could conjure, from mushroom clouds, to buried caches of germ warfare, to drones poised to deliver germ laden death in our major cities. We were treated to a heavy dose of overstatement concerning Saddam Hussein's direct threat to our freedoms. The tactic was guaranteed to provoke a sure reaction from a nation still suffering from a combination of post-traumatic stress and justifiable anger after the attacks of 9/11. It was the exploitation of fear. It was a placebo for the anger.[7]

If the letter to Brezhnev was used retroactively to legitimize a military *fait accompli*, the function of that implicitly addressed to Bush was proleptic. It was a calculated element in the overall psychological campaign to whip up a war hysteria that would make the world overlook how contrived and conjectural this *causa belli* was.[8] The Europeans (including the citizens of the countries whose representatives endorsed the letter) seemed genuinely annoyed by American neo-cons beating the drum of war with anything at hand; opposition to the invasion was gaining momentum on the continent. Moreover, at the time when the letter emerged a spark of hope that diplomacy might eventually work had been rekindled. On January 19 the UN Chief Inspector, Hans Blix, on a visit to Baghdad stated, "We do not think that war is inevitable. We think that the inspection process that we are conducting is the peaceful alternative"; and, the next day, "Iraq and the UN reached an agreement aimed at better cooperation on weapons" resulting in a new "10-point agreement."[9] Franco-German opposition to the UN Security Council resolution authorizing the war frustrated the Bush administration's efforts to obtain endorsement for its aggressive plan by the world's most authoritative body and an "independent" European initiative was necessary to dispel the lingering doubt that *this* swashbuckling Middle-Eastern policy did not command solid trans-Atlantic

[7] Robert C. Byrd, "The Truth Will Emerge," May 21, 2003, published in *The Nation*, May 22, 2003 (online at https://www.thenation.com/article/truth-will-emerge/ [accessed Oct. 30, 2018]).

[8] See, among other items, a compilation released by the White House on January 22 (The White House, "The Apparatus of Lies: Saddam's Disinformation and Propaganda 1990–2003," Jan. 22, 2003 [formerly posted online at www.whitehouse.gov/ogc/apparatus]), or the subsequent Vilnius letter of February 5 in which the ten Foreign Ministers from the Rumsfeldesque "New Europe" stated their full support for a military solution of the Iraq crisis. This action coincided with Colin Powells UN presentation of the evidence about Hussein's material breach of Resolution 1441 that the East Europeans found "compelling." Vilnius Group, "Statement of the Vilnius Group Countries," Feb. 5, 2003 (online at http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=19022 [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

[9] Quoted in Australian Broadcasting Corporation, "Iraq Chronicle: 2003" (formerly online at http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/s695368.htm; see also Richard Norton-Taylor and Helena Smith, "US Offers Immunity to Saddam," *The Guardian*, Jan. 20, 2003, online at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jan/20/iraq.richardnortontaylor [accessed Oct. 30, 2018).

support. "United We Stand," declared the eight "healthy kernels of Europe" partaking in this public spectacle.

"Truth," Havel observed about this topic of perennial interest to him, "lies not only in what is said, but also [in] who says it, and to whom, why, how and under what circumstances."[10] Who are these people, then, who were eager to sign so readily a letter whose contents were proven so false, and why? The hastily convened "union" seems such a motley crew that the individual motives of their desire to defend Western values are impossible to assay. The checkered past of several signatories should be noted, though. Say, for example, the accused money-launderer, briber, and perjurer, Silvio Berlusconi, whom a conservative British weekly *The Economist* labeled "an outrage against the Italian people and their judicial system, and [...] Europe's most extreme case of the abuse by a capitalist of the democracy within which he lives and operates."[11] Or the Soviet-era Hungarian counterintelligence agent, Péter Medgyessy, forced to resign as his country's Prime Minister in June 2003 when his sordid past was revealed by the press. And a Pole, Leszek Miller – a seasoned Communist apparatchik – who stepped down from his premiership in May 2004 after being implicated in the biggest ever Polish corporate scandal. These men, needless to say, had a keen need for the political clout that the White House could have bestowed upon them in exchange for their public support of the Iraq invasion. But by no stretch of imagination can they be considered guardians of "shared trans-Atlantic values." On the contrary, such values, if they ever existed, may thrive only if protected from them.

Politics, common wisdom has it, makes strange bedfellows. Yet, while willingly associating with such curious characters, Havel's position among the signatories was unique in one respect. All the others served at that very moment as their countries' respective Prime Ministers, he as President. In Europe, where the heads of states are mostly symbolic figures, this difference means a great deal. By endorsing the document in the company of seven Prime Ministers, Havel might have misled the readers of *The Wall Street Journal* into believing that he was presenting official Czech policy toward Iraq. Whether this was intentional or not, the opposite is true. Czech foreign policy falls fully within the purview of the executive branch of the government (headed by the Prime Minister) which, to the chagrin of the US, always insisted that any military action against Iraq must be authorized through a UN resolution. For this reason, both the country's Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister repeatedly stated in public that the letter to Bush was Mr. Havel's private initiative, not binding in any way for the Czech

[10] Václav Havel, *Letters to Olga: June 1979–September 1982*, trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1989), p. 347 (Letter from July 25, 1982).

[11] The Economist, "Dear Mr. Berlusconi...," *The Economist* Jul 31, 2003 (online at http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=1957150 [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

government.[12] Furthermore, on January 30, Havel was the lamest of all presidential ducks. His occupancy lease on Prague Castle was expiring in three days (his term ended as of February 2, 2003), the circumstance of which only further underscores the performative character of his action. So why did Havel sign the letter?

To answer this question, I will turn to Havel's own writings. In his oft quoted *The Power of the Powerless* of 1978, he analyzes a similarly ostentatious unity-request by a hypothetical Czech greengrocer who in his shop window displayed the thin-worn Communist slogan, "Proletarians of All Lands, Unite!" Asks Havel: "Why did he do it? What did he wish to convey to the world by it? […] Was he indeed personally so inflamed by the idea that he felt an insuppressible need to convey it to the public? Did he ever think just for a while how this unity is to be achieved and what would it mean?" Havel's reply to all the above is a resounding "no." "The greengrocer," he explains, "received this slogan from his company together with onions and carrots and he put it into the shop window simply because he has been doing it for years, because everybody does it, because it is done this way." For Havel, to make the story short, the greengrocer's acquiescence to the power of the post-totalitarian state is a prima facie example of an "inauthentic existence," of somebody who does not believe in what he does, yet does it anyway, of a "life within a lie."[13]

Applying, *mutatis mutandis*, the same criteria to Havel's signing of the letter suggests that his own behavior in this case was, lo and behold, not so different from the lamentable greengrocer's. With, perhaps, one slight difference. He – unlike the fictional vegetable vendor – did not receive "United We Stand" together with onions and carrots, but with theatre buffet edibles. Robin Shepherd of *The Times* explains: "It emerged […] that […] the first letter of support for the Anglo-American position had been anything but the result of considered deliberation. Then Czech President Václav Havel, for one, had not seen the letter before agreeing to sign it. He had been contacted by the Czech deputy foreign minister [Alexandr Vondra] during intermission at a […] performance at Bratislava's National Theatre who related the gist of the letter by the cell phone."[14] Did it occur to Havel, by some fluke, to question the veracity of the claims in the document he was asked to approve? Of course, but "only for a moment and only in the depth of his soul."

[12] David Král and Lukáš Pachta, "The Czech Republic and the Iraq Crisis: Shaping the Czech Stance," *Europeum*, Jan., 2005 (online at https://old.europeum.org/doc/publications/Irak_ENG.pdf, [accesssed Oct. 30, 2018]), pp. 1–45.

[13] Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless*, trans. Steven Lukes (New York: M. E. Sharpe Inc., 1985), pp. 27–29, 39.

[14] Robin Shepherd, "America's New Friends in the East: Does EU and NATO Expansion Promise to Re-energize the Transatlantic Alliance?," *EES News*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Jan.–Feb., 2004, pp. 3–4, 10–11, here 3–4; Michal Mocek, et al., "Spor o válku proti Iráku rozdělil Evropu," *Mladá fronta DNES*, Jan. 31, 2003, p. 14.

We might speculate about what made Havel behave in such an "inauthentic" manner. One reason can be that he had been informed of the irrevocable American decision to invade Iraq some six months before the fateful letter. This is, at least, what Jana Hybášková, the former Czech Ambassadress to Kuwait – a hawkish supporter of the American invasion who was eventually fired from her office for insubordination – tells us. In summer 2002 she visited (at the instigation of her husband, one of Havel's coterie) US Central Command headquarters in Tampa, Florida, and, apparently, dispatched back to Prague detailed plans for the Iraq operation that she had received from Lieutenant General Michael "Rifle" DeLong (whose name she misspells). "The Czech executive and Parliament's Foreign Committee," Hybášková insists, "had, as of end of July and beginning of August, all information available in 2002 that the war would happen and how it would happen. They knew."[15] Well aware, at the very moment of ratifying the letter, that the US would go ahead with the invasion of Iraq as planned, Havel – and his blasé attitude suggests as much – only pretended to act as somebody "personally so inflamed by" Hussein's latest non-compliance with Resolution 1441 "that he felt an insuperable need to convey it to the public." In reality he was just providing the Bush administration with what it asked him for at the moment: instant public endorsement of its premeditated military plans. Havel needed to verify the facts contained in the letter that he affirmed or to ponder its meaning as much as his greengrocer needed to read *The Communist Manifesto*. Or, put differently, the letter "United We Stand" appearing in *The Wall Street Journal* relates to the truth not unlike the sign, "Proletarians of all lands, unite!" amidst the heap of bulbous and tuberous vegetables.

The above parallel between Havel and the meek vegetable-monger has, I am ready to admit, one serious flaw. The said greengrocer was a simple, disaffected citizen of a post-totalitarian regime, powerless against its massive repressive apparatus. He bought his right to a peaceful existence by acting contrary to his own convictions, by saying what he was asked to say rather than what he really thought. Havel, on the other hand, was the head of a state endowed with many powers and free to act as he saw fit. In this respect, it might be more felicitous to compare his theatre buffet act to that of the five Communist leaders seeking comfort and help from their Soviet friends. In their psyches, the split between private and public stances seemed definitely less pronounced than among their unhappy subjects, those selling vegetables included. True, the restoration of socialism in the country that "brotherly assistance" was to bring about would be personally beneficial to them in every conceivable respect – prestige, perks, positions–and their cry for foreign military intervention to some degree self - serving. At the same time, however, their life-long identification with the Communist movement set them far apart from the hapless greengrocer from whom they extorted involuntary support

[15] Jana Hybášková, *Čekání na válku: Výpověď odvolané české velvyslankyně v Kuvajtu* (Prague: Rybka Publishers, 2004), p. 34.

of their regime. In contrast to him they shared a particular group psychology – a false consciousness some might say – which skewed their understanding of what was transpiring in the Czechoslovakia of 1968 in a very particular way. If we are to believe in the sincerity of Václav Havel's claims about Hussein's material breach of UN security resolution 1441, why not extend the same courtesy to the signatories of the Brezhnev letter, like Vasil Biľak, who as of late June 1968 became convinced that "the leadership of the CCP either cannot or does not have the power to prevent an encroaching catastrophe, an outbreak of civil war."[16] From this vantage point, then, his inviting the Soviet Army to deal with this particular security threat to his country seems as warranted as bidding its American counterpart to rid Iraq of WMDs.

Though quite unlike each other in many respects, what makes Biľak and his cohort similar to Havel is their explicitly internationalist and activist perspective on foreign affairs, the conviction that under certain circumstances the sovereignty of independent states ought to be disregarded. In the case of the Czechoslovak Communists, the claim derives from the Marxian privileging of class identity over any ethnic or national allegiance. Capitalism is a global system and its overthrow necessitates mutuality among proletarians across state boundaries as attested to by Marx's slogan that I have quoted several times.

The coveted proletarian reciprocity, however, eventually turned one-way. The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 made Moscow the Mecca of World Communism and unswerving loyalty to the Soviet Union the litmus test of being a true believer. After World War Two, during which the Red Army liberated most of Eastern Europe and directly or through local proxies managed to establish Communist regimes in the region, this intra-party agreement became the norm for the relationship between local governments and Moscow. "The Brezhnev doctrine" of limited national sovereignty advanced after the 1968 invasion that granted the Soviet Union the right to interfere in the affairs of another socialist country if it threatened the common interest of the entire Eastern block was merely an explicit formulation of knowledge common to everyone "since an iron curtain has descended, from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, across the Continent." And though to the great majority of Czechoslovak citizens the inviting of a foreign army in 1968 might have looked like high treason, it did not to the quintet of inviters, as long as the army was Soviet. In their hearts they knew that they were serving a higher cause and their conscience was untroubled. Toward the end of his informative memoirs, invoking the solemn promise that he gave his mother on her deathbed, Vasil Biľak says as much: "I think that I fulfilled the wish of my dying mother not to break the law. If, however, some of my deeds contradicted it, my good and just mother would agree to it without hesitation, for the law itself contradicted the people's interests, the interests of the workers." And, quoting in his defense the founding father

[16] Vasil Biľak, *Paměti Vasila Biľaka*, Vol. 2 (Prague: Agentura Cesty, 1991), p. 43.

of the CCP, Bohumír Šmeral, he concludes: "Nothing in the world is ever legal. All law is grounded in power. Thus, the will to fight for power on behalf of the working class must be our highest virtue."[17]

Havel, who found the chief value of Biľak's speeches in their "being funny,"[18] should not be expected to share the latter's view of legality. If "consciousness precedes being,"[19] as he declared during his speech to the joint session of the US Congress in 1990 (for which statement he received huzza from the members of both Houses), justice cannot be a function of economy, Havel's youthful infatuation with socialism notwithstanding.[20] Yet, neither can it be reduced, he stated unequivocally, to a set of cooperative rules for the orderly management of society. "It is not in rational calculation where the fountainhead of law and, whence, of jurisprudence lies," he told the Central European Judicial Forum, but "in an ethical order that has metaphysical moorings."[21] Without the "absolute horizon of being" (which Havel sometimes calls God) that transcends all individual beings, we would be unable to distinguish right from wrong, to resume responsibility for our own deeds vis-à-vis ourselves and others.[22] According to Havel, it is this ultimate moral horizon – the invisible soundboard against which all our deeds always resonate – whence spring the absolute, universal and indivisible values of "human rights, human liberties, and human dignity"[23] that allow for no exception,

[17] *Ibid*., p. 198.

[18] Václav Havel, "Farce, Reformability, and the Future of the World," in Václav Havel, *Open Letters: Selected Writtings 1965–1990*, trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), p. 357.

[19] Václav Havel, *The Art of the Impossible: Politics and Morality in Practice: Speeches and Writtings, 1990–1996*, trans. Paul Wilson (New York and Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), p. 18. The general kudos that the Hegelian dictum about the primacy of consciousness over being received from the US legislators who, as a rule, are not steeped in continental philosophy, puzzled *The Washington Post* and led it to ruminate about what these politicians actually heard in Havel's words. The *Post*'s editorial of February 23, 1990 ventured to suggest that it was either "Let's stick it to the Japanese," or "No one should get welfare who refuses to take an available job – and I mean *any* job." Its readers, though, respectfully disagreed and came up with their own imaginative "misprisions," like "Confucius precedes Beijing," purportedly indicating Havel's support for Bush's China policy or, because of the impending lunch break, "Nacho chips precede beans." Aviezer Tucker, *The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patočka to Havel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), pp. 181–183.

[20] Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations*, trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), p. 61.

[21] Václav Havel, *Spisy*, Vol. 7 (Prague: Torst, 1999), p. 119.

[22] This is a rather minimalist rendition of Havel's views on moral responsibility that he elaborated extensively in his *Letters to Olga*. The earliest attempt at a theistic grounding of morality I was able to find appears in the 1953 essay "Hamlet's Question" (vol. 3: 34).

[23] Václav Havel, "Address to the Senate and the House of Commons of the Parliament of Canada, Parliament Hill, Ottawa, 29 April 1999," see (online at http://www.vaclavhavel.cz/showtrans.php?cat=projevy&val=105_aj_projevy.html&typ=html [accessed Aug. 24, 2018]).

superseding all national boundaries, and obliging everybody to intercede on their behalf by any means available wherever they are violated.

The actual fulfillment of these lofty ethical aspirations is the matter of mundane political decision-making. Yet, for Havel, morality and politics are just two sides of the same coin: "[…] both morality and immorality have direct political consequences, just as political decisions have a direct bearing on morality. That is why I think that it is nonsense to separate politics from morality, or to say that the two are totally unrelated. To put such thoughts into practice, or even just to speak them, is – paradoxically – not only deeply immoral, but very wrong politically as well. […] politics that dissociates itself from morality is simply bad politics."[24] In calling the punitive bombing of Gaddafi's Libya ordered by President Reagan in 1986 "a conditioned reflex of a physiologically reacting primitive," he put his money where his mouth is. Havel – the dissident – was outraged by the flagrant discrepancy between the high-horse ethics espoused by Western democracies and their actual foreign policy. His argument is worthy of repeating because of its uncanny bearing on the Iraq invasion: "For years now, the entire Western has known that Khaddafi is a terrorist, and for years the West has bought oil from him and helped him extract it from the ground. So, in fact, the West has cultivated him and continues to support him. […] Westerners are risking their security and their basic moral principles for the sake of a few barrels of crude oil. Particular interests take precedence over general interests. Everyone hopes the bomb will not fall on him. And then, when the situation becomes untenable, the only thing anyone can think of doing is bombing Libya."[25]

But how different is this from what happened in Iraq? Just a few years before Khaddafi was bombed, we may recall, Saddam Hussein was suddenly recognized as an invaluable US ally by Reagan, who was eager to counter the spread of the Ayatollah Khomeini-inspired Islamic revolution that was so inimical to American interests. As such, Hussein was allowed to purchase fairly large amounts of the US armaments that he needed for the war he declared on Iran. After all, he had the oil to pay for it. This despite his abominable human rights record and the well-known fact that he used forbidden chemical weapons not only against his Iranian foes but also against domestic Kurdish rebels. It was none other than Donald Rumsfeld himself who, as Reagan's personal envoy to Hussein, was instrumental in forging these friendly US-Iraqi ties.[26] What happened to Havel's moral consciousness some seventeen years later when he saw this very man,

[24] Havel, *The Art of the Impossible*, pp. 213–214 (Catalonia International Prize, Barcelona, May 11, 1995).

[25] Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvížďala*, trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 168.

[26] See, e.g., Julian Borger, "Rumsfeld 'offered help to Saddam,'" *Guardian Unlimited* Dec. 31, 2002 (online at http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,866873,00.html [accessed Oct. 25,

now the US Defense Secretary, leading the charge against the very same Hussein "once the situation became unsustainable?" And why, instead of calling George W. Bush "a physiologically reacting primitive," did he endorse the invasion? Comparing the two existing super powers in 1985, Havel declared candidly: "As for myself – should anyone care to know – I have no great illusions about America, about the American establishment, and about American foreign policy."[27] How charmingly daring then, how miserably pathetic now!

The Khaddafi-Hussein parallel exemplifies how thorny the application of unworldly ethical categories to the messy reality of the quotidian is and even Havel himself has, on rare occasion, reluctantly admitted as much.[28] But when push comes to shove he was a moral absolutist of interventionist bent who in several of his speeches did not shy away from proposing specific conditions which would allow for preemptive strikes against states offending the code of behavior he upheld. "The Havel doctrine" of a limited sovereignty justifying a war of choice around the globe consisted, according to my count, of three articles of faith. Let me quote them briefly in the order that they appeared to see how they square with his case against Iraq (emphasis within quotes are mine). The first was formulated during his 1997 visit to Washington, D.C.: "As for security matters," Havel stated, "I believe that in *any cases that are beyond any doubt and with general support of freedom-loving people and peace-loving democratic states*, the USA must have the strength to intervene with force – that is by military means – against evident evil.[29] The second emerged in his address to the Canadian Senate and the House of Commons in 1999 apropos of the NATO campaign in the former Yugoslavia: "But no person of sound judgement can deny one thing [about the fight against Milošević]: This is probably the first war ever fought that is not being fought in the name of interests, but in the name of certain principles and values. If it is possible to say about a war *that it is ethical*, or *that it is fought for ethical reasons*, it is true of this war. Kosovo has no oil fields whose output might perhaps attract somebody's interest; no member country of the Alliance has any territorial claims there."[30] The last came in New York on September 19, 2002 when Havel, most likely, already knew of the impending Iraq intervention: "Evil must

2018]); and Jeremy Scahill, "The Saddam in Rumsfeld's Closet," Aug. 2, 2002 (formerly online at http://www.commondreams.org/views02/0802-01.htm; now available at http://dissidentvoice.org/Articles/Scahill_Iraq.htm [accessed Oct. 30, 2018]).

[27] Václav Havel, "Anatomy of a Reticence," trans. Erazim Kohák, in Havel, *Open Letters*, p. 319.

[28] David Remnick, "Exit Havel: The King Leaves the Castle," *The New Yorker* Feb. 17–24, 2003, pp. 90–101, here 101; Viliam Buchert, "Havel se vyhýbá domácí politice," *Mladá fronta DNES* Feb. 18, 2004, p. 2.

[29] Václav Havel, *NATO, Europe, and the security of democracy: Selected Speeches, Articles, and Interviews 1990–2002*, trans. Alexandra Brabcová, ed. Luboš Dobrovský (Pardubice: Theo, 2002), p. 80 (The Fulbright Prize Washington, 3. 10. 1997).

[30] Václav Havel, "Address to the Senate and the House of Commons of the Parliament of Canada."

be confronted in its womb and, if there is no other way to do it, then it has to be dealt with by the use of force. If immensely sophisticated and *expensive modern weaponry must be used*, let it be used *in a way that does not harm the civilian population*. If this is not possible, then the billions spent on those weapons will be wasted."[31]

The Iraqi invasion flies in the face of all three of these principles and made Havel's crying Wolfowitz a hypocrisy. Hussein's case was not extreme by any conceivable measure. He was no longer a credible threat to anybody, sandwiched between two no-fly zones patrolled by British and the US Air Forces which pummeled Iraqi military installations at will and on a regular basis. Thus the Kurds and Shiites living on these territories were safely out of Hussein's reach. Furthermore, his connections to terrorism – the peril which the letter of the eight flaunts – was a red herring and Havel, at least according to *The New York Times*, knew this.[32] Whether he discretely informed the White House that the alleged meeting in Prague between Mohammed Atta and an Iraqi diplomat could not be substantiated by any evidence, as reported by *The New York Times* and subsequently denied by Havel's spokesman, is ultimately irrelevant because as of mid-December 2001 the fact that such a rendezvous never took place was widely reported in Czech newspapers.[33] And, needless to say, the Iraq invasion did not enjoy "the general support of freedom loving people and of peace loving democratic nations" – the best proof of which is the very existence of the "United We Stand" letter that would be fully superfluous were not such a unity merely rhetoric.

I do not wish to comment on Havel's second principle, the chivalrous idea of a purely moral war: a quest for justice devoid of any crass, tangible payoff. It does not deserve serious discussion. We might have granted Havel, if it would have helped him to sleep better, that on the killing fields of Kosovo, for the first time in the "memory of being," GOOD at its most sublime revealed itself to the world because there was no oil there. But we would have had to remind him as well that there is a lot of "sweet crude" in Iraq, which information he himself could have secured with relative ease from both President Bush and the Vice President Cheney, whose deep involvement with this profitable commodity left many wondering as to their true economic disinterestedness in having the oil fields of Iraq under American control. But these two are honorable men and Havel, I am sure, ruled out any potential conflict of interest on their part while he was pondering – "albeit only for a moment" and, for understandable reasons, "only in the depth of his soul" – whether to sign the letter.

[31] Václav Havel, "A Farewell to Politics," trans. Paul Wilson, *The New York Review of Books* Oct. 24, 2002 (online at http://www.nybooks.com/articles/15750 [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]), pp. 1–4, here 3.

[32] James Risen, "Threats and Responses: The View from Prague; Prague Discounts an Iraqi Meeting," *The New York Times* Oct. 21, 2002, p. A1.

[33] Peter S. Green, "Threats and Responses: Havel Denies Telephoning U.S. on Iraq Meeting," *The New York Times* Oct. 23, 2002, p. A11; Sabina Slonková, "Jediný důkaz o spojení teroristů s Irákem padl," *Mladá fronta DNES* Dec. 14, 2002, p. 1.

But it was the last tenet of Havel's doctrine of a "war of choice" that I find most troubling, especially in light of what actually happened in Iraq. Did this self-avowed humanist really believe that "immensely sophisticated and expensive modern weaponry" would "be used [...] in a way that does not harm the civilian population," or was this opportunistic hedging against his future culpability for encouraging the deployment of such lethal weaponry in Iraq? To keep the record straight, it was a week before "United We Stand" appeared that the US media divulged the Pentagon's strategy for the war: so shocking and awesome that any other name but "Shock and Awe" would be utterly inadequate. According to the CBS News report from January 24, 2003, "one day in March the Air Force and Navy will launch between 300 and 400 cruise missiles at targets in Iraq [...] On the second day, the plan calls for launching another 300 to 400 cruise missiles. 'There will not be a safe place in Baghdad,' said one Pentagon official who has been briefed on the plan."[34] It is simply unimaginable that such a massive strike would not harm the civilian population even if aimed solely at what might be deemed legitimate military targets. Yet, Havel signed the letter.

However executed, military occupations inevitably result in civilian casualties, and Iraq confirms this rule in a particularly odious manner. The US armed forces, while meticulously recording their own dead, not only do not keep any data on the natives killed but, according to the ACLU, "the defence department has gone to unprecedented length to control and suppress information about the human cost of war."[35] Consequently, our entire knowledge about Iraqi civilian casualties is based solely on estimations of various kinds. Let me mention the two most authoritative sources on this grim matter. One independent public database known as Iraq Body County (IBC) "is derived from a comprehensive survey of online media reports and eyewitness accounts." According to this source, in the period from the invasion to April 2007, the number of civilian deaths directly attributable to the military invasion of Iraq lies somewhere between sixty-two and six-eight thousand (Iraq Body Count).[36] The other estimate is a cluster survey carried out across Iraq between May and July of 2007 by an international team of doctors led by Gilbert Burnham, with the results reported three months later in the venerable British medical journal *The Lancet*. "We estimate," the authors assert, "that, as a consequence of the coalition invasion of March 18, 2003, about 655 000 Iraqis have died above the number that would be expected in a non-conflict situation. [...] About

[34] CBS, "Iraq Faces Massive U.S. Missile Barrage," *CBS Evening News* Jan. 24, 2003 (online at http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/01/24/eveningnews/main537928.shtml [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

[35] Mark Tran, "US Compensation Payments to Iraqi Civilians Made Public," *Guardian Unlimited* Apr. 12, 2007 (online at http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,2055493,00.html [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

[36] According to the IBC's last available tally of March 13, 2017, there were 171,174–190,937 documented civilian deaths from violence. See http://www.iraqbodycount.net.

601 000 of these excess deaths were due to violent causes."[37] Rather than lamenting "the waste of the billions spent on those weapons," one should mourn the wasted Iraqi lives. "When is this dear lad going to comprehend," and I am hurling back at Havel his own rhetorical question from the essay "Politics and Consciousness," "that even the most promising project of 'general well-being' convicts itself of inhumanity the moment it demands a single involuntary death?"[38] Is it not time to start beating around the Bush and name W.'s accomplices in this crime? Havel is definitely one of them.

By their very nature military invasions tend to be a bloody business. Innocent bystanders get murdered whether the lethal force is unleashed to eliminate a perceived threat to the socialist order or to stop the proliferation of putative WMDs. Yet, whatever their ideological difference, such violent actions can be compared at least in one regard: the quantity of their respective victims. And from this vantage point the Soviet military occupation of Czechoslovakia fares incomparably better than its US analogue in Iraq. According to a source with impeccable anti-Commie credentials, the September 12, 1968 report by the Paris Bureau of the Assembly of Captive European Nations, in the aftermath of the Soviet-led incursion "186 Czechoslovak citizens had been killed, 362 seriously wounded and several hundred deported to unknown destinations during the first week of the occupation."[39] True, all signatories of letters that bid troops to enter a foreign territory by force end up with blood on their hands. But, in this respect, the despicable Communist functionary, high traitor, and quisling, Vasil Biľak, had considerably less soap to waste than the man who mentored Laura Bush as to what democracy is, "playwright, intellectual, freedom fighter, political prisoner," Václav Havel.[40]

Let me return now to Havel's aporia with which I began: how can one distinguish between a "brotherly assistance" and imperialist conquest? The issue seems a difficult one, indeed. If at the onset of my paper I did not see much similarity between the 1968 and the 2003 letters, by now I am having considerable difficulty in telling them apart. Are they the repetition of difference as sameness or of the same as different? And if I cannot resolve this paradox, how am I to emplot my paper, provide it with its narrative epiphany, a finalizing ending? Let me turn, once more, for help to Havel. Poking fun at

[37] Gilbert Burnham, et al., "Mortality after 2003 Invasion of Iraq: A Cross-Sectional Cluster Sample Survey," *The Lancet* Oct. 21, 2006, pp. 1421–1428, here 1426.

[38] Václav Havel, "Politics and Conscience," trans. Erazim Kohák and Roger Scruton, in Havel, *Open Letters*, p. 266.

[39] Quoted in Vojtěch Mastný (ed.), *Czechoslovakia: Crisis in World Communism* (New York: Facts on File, 1972), p. 79.

[40] Laura Bush, "First Lady Laura Bush's Remarks to the Republican National Convention with Introduction via Satellite by President George W. Bush," Aug. 31, 2004 (online at https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/08/text/20040831-15.html [accessed Oct. 30, 2018]).

Hegel (at a forum considering Karl Popper the acme of Western thought), he credited this "con man of philosophy" with a single truthful insight: "reality is ambiguous."[41] If he is right, and insomuch as his doubt about the world's seeming simplicity is sincere, any singular conclusion to my essay would be palpably inappropriate: a fallacious disambiguation of what seems unamenable to such a treatment. To remain what it is, it must forever remain undecidable. The dual ending of my story is a (de)ontic must.

Historical repetition? This phenomenon, Biľak and Havel again seem to concur, can beget a comical resolution. Marx is correct in "that it is often difficult to find a boundary between comedy and tragedy" asserts the former,[42] only to be seconded by the latter's affirmation of "Marx's well known dictum that events in history repeat themselves, first as a tragedy and then as a farce."[43] The comic emplotment renders Havel a parody of Biľak, a clumsy imitator of the genre – "the letter of invitation" – which in the Czech "memory of spirit" will forever be inscribed in that most ambiguous *anno mirabilis* and *horribilis* of 1968: the year of the highest national aspirations and of even deeper humiliations. This is not cruel mockery, I hasten to add. Comedy is a reconciliatory genre: where there is laughter there is a hope. "The only thing that I can, at this point, personally recommend" to Václav Havel is Václav Havel's own personal recommendation for coping with the shocking incongruities of the contemporary world, "a sense of humor; an ability to see the ridiculous and the absurd dimensions of things; an ability to laugh about others as well as about ourselves."[44] For "the man fully conscious of himself and of his situation, who is, therefore, fully authentic," the young Havel observed shrewdly in 1963, "say, a statesman with the sense of how comic his position is [...] is usually not an object of humor."[45]

At this point, however, I ought to self-critically concede that the comic emplotment of the Havel story is not entirely faultless. Its legitimacy is suspect because the meaning of the *Eighteenth Brumaire*'s first sentence is far from being as simple as Biľak and Havel purported. For if Marx truly believed that a historical reiteration entails a generic catachresis – tragedy turning into farce – why would he enframe this assertion as a double play of disclosure and concealment? He, on the one hand, explicitly disavowed his title to this idea, fingering Hegel as the citation's true author while, on the other hand, immediately discrediting this very source by substituting the indefinite

[41] Václav Havel, "Address in Acceptance of 'Open Society' Prize," Budapest, Jun. 24, 1999 (online at http://www.vaclavhavel.cz/showtrans.php?cat=projevy&val=102_aj_projevy.html&typ=HTML [accessed Aug. 24, 2018]).

[42] Biľak, *Paměti*, p. 123.

[43] Havel, "Farce, Reformability," p. 355.

[44] Havel, "Address in acceptance."

[45] Václav Havel, "Anatomie gagu," in Václav Havel, *Spisy*, Vol. 3 (Prague: Torst, 1999), p. 607.

pronoun "somewhere" for a proper bibliographical reference.[46] And not without a good reason, I should add. Until now, nobody has ever been able to locate this "quotation" in Hegel's oeuvre. Was not Marx, the master dialectician, intimating, through a sly game of seek and hide, that Napoléon-le-Pettit's metamorphoses from the first President of France to its last Emperor (in this order) was, despite all the attending farcicality, still a tragedy? Yes, maybe, perhaps. But rather than trying to figure out what this down-and-out partisan of being's primacy had in mind, let me try to obtain inspiration for a more apropos denouement of my story elsewhere – preferably in the land that blessed our planet with George Walker Bush.

How does F. Scott Fitzgerald's oft-quoted jocularity, "show me a hero and I'll write you a tragedy" apply to my hero?[47] A tragic plot requires the calamitous stumbling of a noble protagonist, caused by error, excessive pride, or wrongdoing. According to this script, the meritorious leader of the forces of the day overthrows the unworthy lord of the night to establish a rectified state ruled by "love and truth." Yet, then something goes awry and the celebrated hero is discredited – his mission marred by a moral lapse – Václav Havel resembling in the eyes of some… Vasil Biľak. It is a tearful story of one who wished to live eternally in the truth but, as if by sleight of a wicked hand, could no longer tell the truth from a lie.

Tragic narratives, however, are more than simple psychological machines that arouse pity for the sake of subsequent purging. They have their axiological aspect as well: the clash of equipotent values, each compelling, each with a logic of its own that, however, are mutually incompatible. A tragic hero who must choose between them but cannot is a victim of this paradox. Havel, I must observe, employed precisely such a script in portraying someone I have so far mentioned only obliquely, whose predicament he himself presented as the epitome of tragic perplexity. The individual under the scrutiny was František Kriegel, the lone figure among the Czechoslovak political representation who, during post-invasion "diplomatic" negotiations in Moscow in August 1968, categorically refused to sign the shameful protocol of surrender and subsequently became a prominent member of the Prague dissident underground, Havel's comrade-in-arms. A man of the staunchest moral principles and behavior, Havel assures us, generous and selfless to the limit. It was, no doubt, his keen sense of social justice that made Kriegel join the Communist party in 1931. The peripeteia without which there is no tragedy came in 1948 when he as the *Politruk* of the People's Militia–the iron fist of the Czechoslovak proletariat–played a decisive role in the Communist coup that established

[46] Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 11: Marx and Engels: 1851–53 (New York: International Publishers, 1979), pp. 99–197, here 103.

[47] Matthew J. Bruccoli (ed.). *The Notebooks of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p. 51.

in that country a regime patently inimical to everything he practiced in his life. But Kriegeľs biography, puzzling as it is, led Havel to raise some larger questions relevant for my paper: "Can people who are truly pure in heart, people of independent spirit determined to be guided by it alone, attain the summit of real power in a world of sectional interests, irrational passions, 'political realities,' power-seeking ideologies, and blind mutinies, in short, in the chaotic world of modern civilization? Can such people be successful in these spheres? Or have they no alternative but to get involved – either for reasons of realistic compromise or idealistic belief – in something else, something that the world finds more credible, something that may be in accord with their consciences in the immediate term but can turn against them at any time?"[48] Does Havel's own involvement with politics provide a convincing answer to this tragic dilemma? Did he manage to enter the proverbial "labyrinth of the world" without ever leaving "the paradise of the heart" – yes or no? But let me stop here lest tragedy is to turn into satire.

An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the conference "Poétique et politique dans l'œuvre de Václav Havel," organized by Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Civilisations Slaves, Université Michel de Montaigne – Bordeaux 3, on June 9, 2005. It was published in the conference proceedings as "Václav Havel et l'invasion de l'Irak (avec des references constantes à l'occupation par les Soviétiques de la Tchécoslovaquie en 1968)," trans. Carole Paris-Formanek, in Milan Burda (ed.), La politique et la poétique dans l'oeuvre de Václav Havel *(Toulouse: Slavica Occitania, 2007), pp. 149–176. For a Czech version in Milan Machovec's translation, see* Václav Havel a invaze do Iráku: Úvaha vedená se stálým zřetelem k sovětské okupaci Československa v roce 1968 *(Prague: Rubato, 2014).*

Abstract: Since the late 9th century the genre of "the letter of invitation" has enjoyed an uncanny status in Czech political discourse. Great Moravia's incorporation into Slavia orthodoxa *ensued from Prince Rastislav's request for Christian missionaries addressed to the Byzantine Emperor Michael III. Consonantly, the eastward political orientation of Czechoslovakia after WW2 was, in part, the result of František Palacký's refusal to accept the "Committee of Fifty's" invitation extended in its missive of April 6, 1848 (attributed by K. H. Borovský to Franz Schusselka) to represent his people at the German Parliament convening in Frankfurt.*

My paper juxtaposes the two most recent variations on the said epistolary genre: 1) the letter authored by Vasil Biľak together with four other top CPC functionaries in mid-1968 asking Leonid Brezhnev for "a brotherly assistance," that is, a military intervention

[48] Václav Havel, "Thinking about František K.," trans. A. G. Brain, in Havel, *Open Letters*, pp. 371–372, translation slightly revised.

*thwarting the imminent counterrevolution in their homeland; and 2) the letter "United We Stand" (*Wall Street Journal*,* Jan. 30, 2003*) co-signed by Václav Havel and an assorted septet of European prime ministers urging its implied addressee, George W. Bush, to dispatch the military that would "rid the world of the danger posed by Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction."*

The compelling need to compare these two texts was highlighted by Havel himself in his speech of November 20, 2002 insisting that "it is necessary [...] to weigh again and again on the finest scales whether we are truly helping people against a criminal regime and defending humankind against its weapons, or whether perchance this is not another–understandably more sophisticated than the Soviet one of 1968–version of 'the brotherly assistance.'" My analysis demonstrates that the latter is the case and that the US invasion of Iraq solicited by Havel's letter was as unjustified and unsophisticated as the earlier Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia that Biľak's epistle legitimized.
Keywords: Václav Havel, 2002 invasion of Iraq, rhetoric

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LABOUR IN THE ERA OF FICTITIOUS CAPITAL*

Norbert Trenkle

The production of value through the exploitation of labour has been replaced with the systematic anticipation of future value in the form of fictitious capital.

The Central Function of Labour in Capitalism

It is widely understood that social production in capitalist society takes the form of commodity production. That is why Marx quite rightly regarded the commodity as the "elementary form" of capitalist wealth and chose it as the analytical starting point for his critique of political economy.[1] Economic theory has no idea at all what to do with this theoretical approach. It treats the notion that people mediate their sociality through the production and exchange of commodities as an anthropological truism. It never regards

* Based on a paper given at the Never Work Conference in Cardiff on July 10, 2015. An earlier draft of the article was published online at http://www.krisis.org/2015/labour-in-the-era-of-fictitious-capital/. Translated by Joe Keady.

[1] Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1, Marx-Engels-Werke, Bd. 23 (Berlin: Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus, 1983), p. 49.

a human being as anything other than a potential private producer who manufactures things in order to exchange them with other private producers while always keeping his or her own particular interests in mind. The difference between wealth production in modern capitalist society and in traditional communities is therefore regarded as merely one of degree, with the caveat that the social division of labour is far more highly developed under modern capitalism due to technological advancements and the clever insight that people become more productive as they become more specialised.

This view is a simple projection that intrinsically legitimises capitalist relations as trans-historical. While commodities and money did exist in many pre-capitalist societies, their social significance was entirely different from that under capitalism. Interactions with commodities and money were always embedded in other forms of domination and social configurations that existed at the time (feudal dependency, traditional norms, patriarchal structures, religious belief systems, etc.), as Karl Polanyi (Polanyi 2001) has shown. By contrast, in capitalist society, commodities and money represent the universal form of wealth while simultaneously playing the role of social mediator. That is to say that individuals establish their relationships with one another and with the wealth they produce through commodities and money.[2]

But when things are produced as commodities, the corresponding productive activities take on a very specific form. They are performed in a sphere apart from the diverse other social activities, and they are subject to a specific instrumental logic, rationality, and time discipline. This common form has nothing to do with the particular content of the various activities. It can only be ascribed to the fact that they are performed for the purpose of commodity production. Based on this social structure, all these activities fall under a single rubric: labour.[3]

Like the commodity, labour has a dual character. It is divided into a concrete side, which produces use value, and an abstract side, which produces value. Concrete labour is of interest to the commodity producer strictly insofar as he or she can only sell the produced commodity if it is of some use to the buyer. For the producer, use value is only a means to an extrinsic end: the transformation of abstract labour, as embodied by the commodity, into money. This is because money is the *universal commodity* or, as Marx called it, the queen of commodities or the commodity to which all other commodities refer. Put another way, money represents the *abstract wealth* of capitalist society or its universally recognised wealth.[4]

[2] Norbert Trenkle, "Value and Crisis: Basic Questions," in Neil Larsen, Mathias Nilges, Josh Robinson, and Nicholas Brown (eds.), *Marxism and the Critique of Value* (Chicago and Alberta: MCM', 2014), pp. 1–15.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, Marx-Engels-Werke, Bd. 42 (Berlin: Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus, 1983), p. 156; Ernst Lohoff, *Kapitalakkumulation ohne Wertakkumulation. Der Fetischcharakter der Kapitalmarktwaren und sein Geheimnis*, published

In this respect, only the abstract side of labour is universally socially accepted because it alone enters into social circulation as value (represented by money) and remains as such.[5] The concrete side of work, by contrast, terminates with each sale because use value then disappears from social circulation: an object's utility becomes the buyer's private affair. The *material wealth* that takes the form of use value under the conditions of commodity production is therefore always particular.

We can not only say that labour is a form of activity in which capitalist wealth is produced in its specifically dual form, but that labour furthermore fulfils the core function of social mediation. Or, to put it more precisely, it is the abstract side of work that fulfils this function while the concrete side remains subordinate. This touches upon a fundamental contradiction in that everybody produces as a *private producer* according to his or her particular interests and is *socially* active in precisely that moment. The nature of this structure is such that this mediation cannot be conscious. Instead, it inevitably assumes a reified form of domination. As Marx wrote in his famous passage in the chapter on commodity fetishism:

> As a general rule, articles of utility become commodities, only because they are products of the labour of private individuals or groups of individuals who carry on their work independently of each other. The sum total of the labour of all these private individuals forms the aggregate labour of society. Since the producers do not come into social contact with each other until they exchange their products, the specific social character of each producer's labour does not show itself except in the act of exchange. In other words, the labour of the individual asserts itself as a part of the labour of society, only by means of the relations which the act of exchange establishes directly between the products, and indirectly, through them, between the producers. To the latter, therefore, the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear not as direct social relations between individuals at work but as what they really are: material relations between persons and social relations between things.[6]

Talk of private producers should not be understood as referring to small businesses and individual people who produce various products in order to then trade them for other products on the market. Most commodity producers under capitalism are of course companies that regard the valorisation of the capital they invest as the sole

as *krisis* Beitrag 1 (2014), pp. 24–29 (online at www.krisis.org/2014/kapitalakkumulation-ohne-wertakkumulation/ [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

[5] Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 148.

[6] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2011), pp. 83–84.

objective of production. The commodities they produce are merely a stepping-stone or a means to this end.

These companies are faced with the great mass of people who have only one commodity to sell: their labour power, which they have to sell on a permanent basis in order to survive. And as commodity owners, they are likewise socially engaged as private producers in the pursuit of their particular goals of selling their own labour power for the highest possible price and prevailing in competition with other labour power sellers. From the perspective of the labour power seller, however, mediation by labour does not look quite the same as it does from the perspective of the capitalist company. While selling one's own commodity is also merely the means to an external end for the labour power seller, that end does not consist in valorising a particular sum of money but in securing one's own subsistence.

Social mediation by labour therefore has a distinct appearance from each of these perspectives. While for capital it appears directly in the form of the self-referential motion of capital, which Marx summarised in the well known formula M–C–M', from the perspective of a labour power seller it appears as an exchange motion C–M–C.[7] The commodity of labour power is an object of exchange that he or she unloads on the market in order to obtain other commodities in return. In that process, money is only a means to this end, while in the former case (M-C-M') it was an end unto itself.[8] At first glance, this second motion corresponds to what Marx described as simple commodity exchange; there is, however, an important difference. Even if the individual labour power seller only uses his or her commodity for the purpose of exchanging it for consumable articles and even if no valorisation of the original value should occur, this act of exchange is nonetheless an integral component of the overall motion of capital valorisation that always begins and ends with value in its tangible form: money. Only while an endless loop of value continues to feed back on itself can there be demand for labour power, which is the only commodity that can create more value than it needs for its own (re)production.

The Changed Relationship between Labour and Capital in the Post-Fordist Era

Furthermore, this distinct position within the process of social mediation by labour constitutes the conflict of interest between capital and those who sell their labour power. This conflict is *not*, as traditional Marxism has always claimed, antagonistic in the sense

[7] Marx, *Capital*, p. 161–170. "Marx had characterized the circulation of commodities as Commodity-Money-Commodity, or C-M-C, as a qualitative transformation of one use value for another, but he presents the circuit of capital as Money-Commodity-Money or, more accurately, M-C-M', where the difference between M and M' is necessarily only quantitative. […] The formula M-C-M' does […] refer […] to a process whereby *value* is increased […] Value becomes capital according to Marx, as a result of the valorization of value, whereby its magnitude is increased." Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, pp. 267–268.

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 267–272.

of a fundamental incommensurability. Rather it is an immanent conflict between two standpoints both constituted by the process of social mediation by labour. Nonetheless, it has often been fiercely fought out because, ultimately, the very survival of the owners of labour power is dependent on the conditions *under which* and the price *for which* they can sell their commodity while, on the other hand, the less capital has to pay for the commodity of labour power the better it can achieve the end-in-itself of valorisation.

Until the 1970s, this conflict of interest (and therefore social mediation through labour) was characterised by an irresolvable mutual dependency: capital needed labour in order to be able to valorise itself and labour power sellers needed functioning capital valorisation in order to sell their commodity.

That relationship qualitatively changed with the end of the Fordist post-war boom and the start of the Third Industrial Revolution. Massive displacement of labour from the core industrial sectors in the course of sweeping automation and the accompanying transnational reorganisation of production processes and commodity flows fundamentally and irreversibly weakened labour power sellers' negotiating position.[9] In other words, with the implementation and universalization of new technologies based on microelectronics, the main productive force became the application of knowledge to production, giving capital a freer hand than ever before with respect to wage labour. But making large numbers of labour power sellers redundant also had consequences for capital. Given that capital valorisation is simply based on exploitation of labour power in commodity production on a massive scale, the start of the Third Industrial Revolution also marked the onset of a fundamental crisis.[10]

[9] Ernst Lohoff and Norbert Trenkle, *Die große Entwertung: Warum Spekulation und Staatsverschuldung nicht die Ursache der Krise sind* (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2012), pp. 75–104.

[10] The argument that the labour force has been made redundant on a great scale has often been put in question because, even if in Europe and the US a lot of industrial jobs have been replaced by new technologies, in many other countries industry still plays an important role in terms of employment. But this objection omits two central points. Firstly, the argument I'm putting forward is not simply a matter of quantity of jobs, but of the quantity of *value* produced by the labour force. And this quantity depends – among other factors – mainly on the level of productivity on which the labour force is employed. Because the value of a certain commodity does not depend on the time expended in the particular production process but on the labour time that is socially necessary for its production, on the "social labour hour" which changes continuously as productivity rises (Marx, *Das Kapital*, pp. 54–55; Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, pp. 186–192). Therefore, if for example *ten* workers in China produce the same quantity of a certain commodity as *one* worker does in a European factory, the value they produce is only that of *one* "social labour hour." The large expansion of the labour force in countries like China or India was based mainly on very low wages producing on a low level of productivity. Hence this strategy increases the number of jobs in those countries, but does not augment the quantity of value produced on world scale. See Lohoff and Trenkle, *Die große Entwertung*, p. 90–105; Norbert Trenkle, *Die Arbeit hängt am Tropf des fiktiven Kapitals*, published as *krisis* Beitrag 1 (2016), pp. 30–36.

Secondly, most of the jobs nowadays do not contribute to the valorization of value but inversely depend themselves on the ongoing accumulation of fictitious capital – one of the main arguments

This crisis is distinct from all previous large-scale capitalist crises in that it can no longer be overcome by accelerating the expansion of the industrial base. At the existing and continually increasing level of productivity, even developing new production sectors (flat-screen televisions or mobile phones, for example) does not create additional need for new labour power. At best it can slow the massive expulsion of living labour from production.

Yet to the extent that capitalist dynamics have been able to regain momentum, they have only done so by creating a new basis for capital accumulation. The production of value through the exploitation of labour has been replaced with the systematic anticipation of future value in the form of fictitious capital. Capital has undergone another enormous expansion on that basis – an expansion that is now increasingly reaching its limits and is above all linked with significant costs to society and to the sellers of labour power.

In order to understand this connection, we must first look more closely at the internal logic of fictitious capital.

Fictitious Capital Replaces Labour Exploitation

As previously stated, fictitious capital is anticipation of future value. But what exactly does that mean? And what are the consequences for the accumulation of capital? Let's begin with the first question.

In essence, fictitious capital arises whenever someone gives money to someone else in exchange for a title of ownership (a bond, share in a company, etc.) that represents a claim to that money and its augmentation (in the form of interest or dividends, for example). This process doubles the original sum: now it exists twice over and can be used by both parties. The recipient can use the money to buy things, make investments, or acquire financial assets and at the same time it has become monetary capital that yields a regular profit for the one who gave the money in the first place.[11]

of this text. The growing accumulation of fictitious capital is not the *cause* of the actual crisis-process, as is widely perceived in the public debate, but the *consequence* of a deep and fundamental crisis of valorization that started back in the 1970s. See Lohoff and Trenkle, *Die große Entwertung*, p. 52–74; Ernst Lohoff, *Kapitalakkumulation*; Norbert Trenkle, "Tremors on the Global Market: On the underlying causes of the current financial crisis," trans. Josh Robinson, *krisis* (online at www.krisis.org/2009/tremors-on-the-global-market/ [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]). The rapid progress in productivity has undermined the basis of valorization, which is the ever-growing employment of labour force in commodity production, and the accumulation of fictitious capital was the only way to postpone the crisis for some decades. The increase of the size of the labour force in the countries of the former Third World as well as in the services sectors in the capitalist centres is just a *secondary effect* of this accumulation of fictitious capital. Therefore, we talk of an inverse capitalism; see Lohoff and Trenkle, *Die große Entwertung*, p. 209–246; Trenkle, *Die Arbeit hängt am Tropf*, pp. 9–16.

[11] Lohoff, *Kapitalakkumulation*, pp. 35–39.

But this monetary capital consists of nothing more than a documented claim representing the anticipation of future value. Whether or not that anticipation is covered only becomes clear in retrospect. If the sum concerned is invested in a production facility and if that investment is successful, its value will endure in the form of functioning capital and grow through the use of labour power in the process of commodity production. But if the investment should fail or if the loaned money should be spent on private or state consumption, then the claim to the original value will remain (for instance in the form of a credit agreement or a bond) even though the value itself has dissipated. In that case, the fictitious capital is not covered and must be replaced by creating new claims to future value (by issuing new bonds, for example) so that the monetary claim can be redeemed.

Anticipation of future value in the form of fictitious capital is a standard feature of capitalism. But it took on a completely different meaning over the course of the crisis in the wake of the Third Industrial Revolution. If the creation of fictitious capital once served to flank and support the process of capital valorisation (for instance through pre-financing large investments), now those roles have reversed because the basis for that process has fallen away. Capital accumulation is no longer significantly based on the exploitation of labour in the production of commodities like cars, hamburgers, and smartphones but on the massive emission of property titles like shares, bonds, and financial derivatives that represent claims to future value. As a result, fictitious capital itself has become the engine of capital accumulation while the production of commodities has been reduced to a dependent variable.[12]

Of course, there is a critical distinction between this form of capital accumulation and the prior form of capitalist motion. Because it is based on the anticipation of value to be created in the future, it is a process of capital *accumulation* without capital *valorisation*. It is not based on the *present exploitation* of labour power in the process of producing value but on the *expectation* of future profits, which must ultimately be derived from additional exploitation of labour. But because this anticipation cannot be redeemed in light of the development of productive power, these claims must be renewed again and again and the anticipation of future value must be postponed further and further into the future. As a result, most financial property titles are subject to an exponential growth imperative. That is why the value of capital consisting of financial assets surpassed that of manufactured and traded commodities many times over long ago. These "runaway financial markets" are often criticised in public opinion as allegedly causing the crisis, but in fact, once the basis for valorisation was lost, this was the only way for capital accumulation to continue at all.

Nonetheless, the exponential-growth imperative marks a logical limit for the accumulation of fictitious capital: the economic activities that expectations of future

[12] Lohoff and Trenkle, *Die große Entwertung*, pp. 147–150.

profits refer to cannot be multiplied arbitrarily and one after another has proven to be a chimera (the new economy, the real estate boom, etc.). This limit can be deferred significantly, as a look back at the fictitious capital era of the past thirty-five years shows, however this postponement comes with constantly growing social costs that are increasingly unendurable. Earnings and wealth are concentrating in fewer and fewer hands, working and living conditions are increasingly precarious worldwide, and the remaining natural resources are being mercilessly squandered – just to keep capital accumulation in motion.[13]

Lost Bargaining Power of the Workers

At first glance, this would appear to be nothing new for capitalism. Indeed, a heedless attitude toward material living conditions and the physical world is an essential characteristic of a mode of production that is oriented to valorising value, which is to say increasing abstract wealth. But the transition to the era of fictitious capital is a qualitative leap (in the negative sense) in this respect as well.

For a better understanding of the reasons for this, we must first look at the consequences of displacing capital accumulation into the sphere of fictitious capital for the underlying form of social relations: mediation by labour. In connection with this, we have to ask how the relationship between the two sides of the capitalist form of wealth – abstract wealth and material wealth – have changed during that same process.

I have argued above that social mediation by labour was characterised by a mutual dependency of capital and labour until the 1970s. That is because capital, in its compulsion toward valorisation, was reliant on living labour while the owners of the commodity of labour power depended on successfully selling that very commodity for their survival. But that relationship has changed drastically in the era of fictitious capital. Not only has the Third Industrial Revolution made living labour redundant on a massive scale, but what is even more decisive is the fact that the emphasis of capital accumulation has shifted from the exploitation of labour in the process of producing commodities to the anticipation of future value. Consequently, capital's end-in-itself motion has become self-referential in a whole new way. Anticipation of future value that is capitalised and accumulated in the present remains immanent to the logic and the form of commodity production; it is achieved through the sale of a commodity, namely a title of property that certifies the claim to a specific sum of money and its augmentation. However, the sellers of these property titles are not workers selling the promise of rendered labour in ten or twenty years. It is instead the operatives of capital itself (primarily banks and other financial institutions) that sell one another these certified claims to future value

[13] Lohoff and Trenkle, *Die große Entwertung*, pp. 256–283; Ernst Lohoff, *Die letzten Tage des Weltkapitals. Kapitalakkumulation und Politik im Zeitalter des fiktiven Kapitals*, published as *krisis* Beitrag 5 (2016) (online at http://www.krisis.org/2016/die-letzten-tage-des-weltkapitals/ [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

and thereby generate and accumulate fictitious capital. In this respect, therefore, capital has become completely self-referential; the commodity that has the magic quality of augmenting capital comes about within the sphere of capital itself.[14]

Conversely, however, that means that the sellers of labour power are by and large losing their bargaining power. Faced with advances in productivity and globalisation, not only can they be replaced at any time by machines or cheaper competition anywhere in the world, but much more critically their commodity is *no longer the basic commodity* of capital accumulation. This leaves us with a structural imbalance. For the great majority of the world's population, social mediation by labour remains pivotal inasmuch as they must sell their labour power or the products of their labour as a commodity here and now in order to be able to participate in society's wealth – which is to say in order to buy the articles of consumption that they need. Capital also continues to be based on social mediation by labour because it has by no means abandoned the world of commodity production. However, to the extent that capital accumulates through anticipation of *future* value production (which is to say it uses the results of potential future work in advance), it frees itself from dependency on the exploitation of present-day labour and the sellers of labour power.

Of course, that does not mean that capital is no longer valorised in the process of producing commodities. Assuming as much would obviously be false in light of the enormous volume of commodities spilling out of supermarkets and department stores. Nonetheless, the relationship between the commodity production sector and the overall process of capital accumulation has changed. Where the production of material goods in the form of commodities was the decisive medium for augmenting capital in the past, it has now transformed into a dependent variable in the dynamics of fictitious capital. It is dependent because a self-sustaining dynamic of capital valorisation can no longer be boosted in the value-producing sectors through the ever-increasing displacement of labour. Instead, the production of commodities (in the sense of material goods for sale) can only continue if the equivalent value for the realisation of the value represented by these commodities is largely created elsewhere, that is, in the sphere of fictitious capital. This mechanism is the basis for the entire industrial boom in China and other "developing countries" as well as Germany's corresponding export business. We might therefore call it "induced value production." Indeed, this induced value production does fulfil an important systemic function. But that function does not consist of valorising capital but rather of providing the *imaginary* material that underpins financial markets' future expectations.[15] This is because even if the anticipation of future value is not dependent on the exploitation of labour in the present, it is nonetheless based on the constant generation of *expectations* of profitable material production at a later

[14] Lohoff, *Kapitalakkumulation*, pp. 39–44.

[15] Lohoff and Trenkle, *Die große Entwertung*, pp. 156, 235–246.

date. In order to support these expectations, activity in the present-day real economy is indispensable. If that should stop, promises of future profit become implausible and the sale of property titles grinds to a halt. We can see this quite clearly in the slumps that continually recur during periods of crisis, when states and their central banks have to step in to restore confidence in the future (at ever-higher cost).[16]

Incidentally, it makes no difference whether or not the induced activity in the real economy produces value in the narrow sense – which is to say, whether or not the application of labour power actually creates surplus value (as in industrial production, for example) or if the value that had already been produced is merely reallocated or recycled (as, in great part, the service sector). Because this distinction does not exist at all in the current, superficial perception of economic circulation, it is not a factor in the generation of expectations either. The sole deciding factor is the fact that the promise of subsequent profits needs to have some point of reference in the real economy. This explains how such a large service sector has been able to arise worldwide without generating any surplus value, rendering it completely unsuited to form a basis for capitalist valorisation. But for the production of "fantasies of markets," as stock exchange parlance candidly calls it, growing ad revenues for Google and Facebook are no better than the manufacture of electric cars or wind turbines. Capitalisation of land or of property rights to knowledge (in the form of patents and licensing arrangements) on a massive scale is only possible due to the continuous influx of fictitious capital and *simultaneously* represents a central reference point for the anticipation of perpetually effervescent profits.

In any case, the means of "making money" are irrelevant from the perspective of individual capitals. That is why there are always enough investors around who will direct their money toward the real economy, provided only that the returns add up. However, that proviso embodies the direct dependence on the dynamics of fictitious capital because an investment can only be profitable if it yields approximately as much in profit as a corresponding investment in the financial markets with their enormously high profitability targets. Investments in the real economy are therefore subject to the dominance of fictitious capital and, of course, the resulting pressure is massively relayed downward, meaning first and foremost onto those who sell their labour power and the many small independent contractors but also onto state actors that are competing for tax revenues or working to attract business.

We are now in a better position to understand why recklessness toward working and living conditions in the era of fictitious capital is taking on a new (negative) quality. While the production of material wealth up to the end of Fordism was merely an extrinsic means to augment abstract wealth, it at least implied a direct (if instrumental) relationship. Market commodities inevitably represented past abstract labour and

[16] Lohoff, "Die letzten Tage."

therefore value and surplus value. But when the systemic function of material wealth is reduced to providing imaginary material for the anticipation of future value, indifference toward the content, conditions, and consequences of that production intensifies to the extreme. The accumulation of abstract wealth is delinked from its material side to the greatest extent possible.

The continual destruction of both life's natural foundations and the social and cultural conditions of social coexistence is no longer merely a kind of collateral damage in capitalism's end-in-itself motion. Rather, it is becoming its essential content. In the most conspicuous embodiment of this dynamic, countries in crisis like Greece, Spain, and Portugal are being forced to shut down large segments of their social and health systems along with other public services in the name of the (notoriously illusory) expectation that the state will at some point be able to pay its debts. In these cases, the *outright destruction* of material wealth becomes the reference point for further accumulation of fictitious capital. Similarly, the present boom in raw materials is fundamentally based on anticipation of future scarcity. The attendant expectation of increasing prices permits massive amounts of fictitious capital to flow into that sector and occasionally even make very expensive (and extremely dangerous) technologies like fracking profitable in the short term.[17]

The distribution of earnings and wealth is increasingly polarised on a global scale for the same structural reasons. Because labour power has lost its core significance as the fundamental commodity in capital's end-in-itself motion, the conditions of its sale are increasingly deteriorating. Meanwhile, capital is in the comfortable position of being able to independently "produce" the commodity necessary for capital accumulation in the form of claims to future value. In the process, it can rely on the active support of governments and central banks.

Ways Forward for the Left in the Era of Fictitious Capital

These and other increasingly insupportable consequences of the dynamics of capitalist crisis have made criticising capitalism fashionable again. But much of that criticism inverts the problem, usually boiling down to insisting that money should "once again" serve people as a simple means of exchange rather than as an end in itself. From that perspective, capitalism's end-in-itself motion looks like a simple quirk of an autonomous, self-perpetuating world of financial markets that is outwardly taking over society and that should therefore be abolished or at least severely curtailed.

This "critique" is based on an inversion of the conception of the capitalist mode of production mentioned at the outset. It claims that, "by its nature," that mode of production is a highly differentiated way of producing goods for the benefit of humanity in which money is *really* no more than a tool to facilitate countless exchanges. This notion,

[17] Lohoff and Trenkle, *Die große Entwertung*, pp. 105–108.

which is part of the basic ideological hardware of the modern worldview, is not only presented in the opening chapters of economics textbooks, which always pretend that modern economics is no more than a globalised variant of an idyllic village community in which butchers, bakers, and tailors exchange their products with one another. It also takes a dangerous turn in the form of the anti-Semitic delusion of conniving, money-grubbing capital.[18] And it is the leitmotiv of a putative "critique of capitalism" that dreams of a return to an idealised, regulated post-war market economy that never existed in the first place. This deliberately overlooks the fact that such a regression is completely impossible because the structural foundations for capital valorisation no longer exist. That view also pretends that Fordist capitalism was not based on the principle of capital valorisation but was instead a state regulated, market-based arrangement designed to generally provide society with useful products.[19]

Another reason why this pseudo-critique has so much resonance today is that social mediation by labour has spread everywhere across the globe and, as has already been explained, from the perspective of the sellers of labour power, it looks like nothing more than an exchange relationship in which one commodity is given away in order to procure another. One way or another, the fact that this mode of existence presupposes capital's end-in-itself motion is always suppressed. Thus, the traditional Left has always preached the liberation *of* labour rather than liberation *from* labour. But since capital has essentially become more concerned with prospective future labour, which will never actually be expended and has largely been de-linked from the sellers of labour power and the material production of wealth, the utopia of a universal exchange economy or a regulated market economy without the burden of capital looks more like a model of social liberation than ever.

However, pursuit of that model means not only being taken in by an ideological chimera but also inevitably hitting a wall in terms of political practice. To merely deny dependence on capital's end-in-itself motion is to guarantee it that it will come surging back with the full force of its suppression.

So instead of regressively romanticising the existing social mediation, it should be categorically challenged. As long as humans relate to one another through commodities and abstract labour, they cannot freely master their social circumstances. On the contrary, they will be ruled by those circumstances in reified form. That has always meant violence, misery, and domination, but amid the crisis of fictitious capital it means that the world will become a desert in the foreseeable future.

[18] Moishe Postone, "Anti-semitism and National Socialism: Notes on the German Reaction to 'Holocaust,'" *New German Critique* 8 (1980), no. 19, Special Issue 1: Germans and Jews, pp. 97–115 (online at https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/philosophy/news/seminars/reading-groups/poetry-and-philosophy/postone_as__ns.pdf [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

[19] Norbert Trenkle, "Aus der Krise in die Regression. Zur Kritik der linken Nationalismus," in Merlin Wolf (ed.) *Irrewege der Kapitalismuskritik* (Aschaffenburg, Alibri 2017), pp. 51–70.

The only prospect for social emancipation is therefore the abolition of this form of mediation. The first steps toward that goal can and must be taken today. When confronting crisis management and capital's crazed rampage, social achievements must be preserved and, wherever possible, the production of material wealth must be freed from its dependence on capital accumulation. The goal must be to build a broad new sector of social self-organisation that draws on all available potential productive power (meaning technology) to establish decentralised, globally networked structures. But above all, new forms of social mediation must be developed in which freely associated individuals consciously determine their own affairs.

Abstract: This essay discusses the consequences of the changed relationship between capital and labour after the end of the Fordist post-war boom. As a result of these changes, capital accumulation is no longer predominantly based on the exploitation of labour in the production of commodities like cars, hamburgers, and smartphones but on the massive emission of property titles like shares, bonds, and financial derivatives that represent claims to future value. These changes irreversibly weakened labour power, giving capital a freer hand than ever before. But making large numbers of workers redundant also had consequences for capital. The Third Industrial Revolution thus marked the onset of a fundamental crisis. The production of value through the exploitation of labour has been replaced with the systematic anticipation of future value in the form of fictitious capital. However, this form of expansion is reaching its limits and is linked with significant costs to society. Albeit sobering and chilling, this analysis suggests removing the political response of the left from the retrospective romanticising of the Fordist era capitalism and pursue the abolition of labour as a form of social mediation. In other words: pursue liberation from *labour and from its dependence on capital accumulation rather than the liberation* of *labour.*
Keywords: Labor, fictitious capital, value theory

INTERVIEW

COMMUNISM IS A NEW IDEA

Interview with Alain Badiou, by Jana Beránková

I met with French philosopher Alain Badiou in Prague on April 13, 2018, on the occasion of the conference "Alain Badiou: Thinking the Infinite", which focused on the position of mathematics in Badiou's thought. The conference, organized by the Prague Axiomatic Circle, was held in the National Gallery in Prague on April 11th and 12th, 2018. We discussed the affirmative power of thought, communism, mathematics, and the forthcoming third volume of his magnum opus Being and Event, *entitled* The Immanence of Truths.

At the conference "Alain Badiou: Thinking the Infinite," you surprised us by criticising your own famous declaration "mathematics is ontology." What did you mean by this self-criticism?

That conference was distinguished by an array of criticisms of the statement "mathematics is ontology," and I therefore meditated upon what had been said and it seemed to me that many of these critical comments were justified, because the declaration "mathematics is ontology" is superficial. It's a simple, superficial sentence which everyone can understand. As a result, I wanted to reconstruct the sense of this statement. And I therefore merely said, and in this sense it was a case of self-criticism, that this declaration was something of an advertisement, because philosophers are always accused of being excessively complex and incomprehensible. The declaration "mathematics is ontology" is highly comprehensible, but the price of this comprehensibility is its unacceptable simplification. In Prague I wanted to remind those in attendance at the

conference that philosophy always has to be precise, and if philosophy abdicates this precision, it becomes what Plato referred to as opinion (*doxa*). The statement "mathematics is ontology" is a statement which belongs to the sphere of opinions.

But that surely doesn't mean that mathematics would be unable to express anything that comes within the realm of ontology?

No, not at all, it means that mathematics, or more precisely certain branches of mathematics, could philosophically serve what we refer to as ontology. I've already remarked that mathematicians aren't interested in ontology, and so to say that "mathematics is ontology" is somewhat contentious, especially when mathematicians themselves don't even know what ontology is. In short, mathematicians are interested in other matters. It rather concerns a certain circuit: a philosopher outlines a certain idea, and then uses mathematics, wherein this idea can be verified, and in the end returns to philosophy. The sentence "mathematics is ontology" is not a precise description of this circuit.

So what is the relationship between philosophy and mathematics? In your work you use mathematical terminology, which originates for example in the theory of categories, large cardinals and set theory, but at the same time it's possible to find purely philosophical decisions in your thought. What role do these philosophical decisions, which we could refer to as philosophical axioms, play for you? Could you specify these axioms, which shape the formalism of your philosophical system?

It's complicated, because philosophy can't be written the same way as mathematics. The only philosopher who attempted to write philosophy like mathematics was Spinoza, who used axioms, definitions etc., but ultimately this led to him being forced to explain what he had in mind in the so-called *scholia*. These scholia were non-mathematical, explanatory texts. I can only outline my basic theoretical decisions. For example, I'm convinced that the form of being *qua* being is plurality. This statement can be called a philosophical axiom. However, it's necessary to remind ourselves that philosophy resembles mathematics in the sense that when you embark upon some kind of idea, then you can't derive it from something that preceded it, because this is a beginning. The eternal question remains: what was the first philosophical statement. In Plato this time-honoured question took on the form of the statement: "The only thing I know is that I know nothing." But it doesn't work that simply, because at a certain moment it's necessary to distinguish precisely what I know, and to think what constitutes the beginning. And I can therefore say that the statement "being is plurality without one" is an initial statement which will then be vindicated by the actual results, just as usually takes place in mathematics.

What you're describing resembles Kurt Gödel's *incompleteness theorems*, which state that if we have a formal system, then this system always contains some kind of fundamental statement that cannot be demonstrated from within the system.

I'd say rather that the very construction of the system proves the statement. This means that this initial statement is a posteriori proven and vindicated thanks to the scope of its consequences. But we never have a demonstrative certainty which would resemble mathematical formalism. We have only the reader's conviction that if we begin with this statement and deduce precise consequences from it, then we'll come to a meaningful description of something and also arrive at the principles that orient our behaviour and thought. From this perspective it's evident that philosophy always contains unsubstantiated affirmations, which lead to consequences that motivate people to adopt one or another philosophy.

Your truth procedures, in which the subject always makes a definite decision, after which it is only the future that then confirms this initial decision, work on a similar principle.

Yes, definitely, I think that every truth functions on a similar principle. I use the word "truth" to refer to many different things. It might for example be a process of creating a work of art. When the artist begins to work on a new painting, this involves a process in which the beginning is entirely unclear. From the first strokes and sketches, everything takes shape gradually, but eventually the work reaches its final form, and it's precisely this work that then retrospectively vindicates the system of the artist's decisions. So I think that this concerns a general rule, that at the beginning there's always something like a decision, and this decision is often brought about by an event, something that has occurred, just as a great love poem is entirely clearly inspired by a romantic encounter.

This reminds us of the essential affirmative aspect of all thought. In other words, thought is not only deconstruction and criticism, but also an affirmation of something.

Precisely. I think that every true thought begins with affirmation. Of course, the result of this affirmation may be a whole range of criticisms. So for example, if I declare that being is pure plurality and from this I deduce the consequences, I immediately find myself in conflict with those who think that there is only one truth or that truth is an infinite divine unity. And I'll therefore have to criticise this stance. However, I believe that every criticism starts out from an affirmation and not vice versa. The idea that criticism proceeds affirmation could no doubt be called "philosophical ultraleftism." In politics this has led to the notion that destruction leads to construction. On the contrary, I believe that destruction leads only to destruction. However, certain constructions

require destruction, just as every philosophical affirmation requires criticism. I believe that negativity is always underpinned by affirmation in genuinely creative procedures, and not the other way round.

What you're describing is a certain internal dialectic of affirmative thought. And speaking of dialectics, I'd like to ask if you could say something about your own relationship towards Hegel's dialectics.

I think that all dialectics to a certain extent are an examination of the relationship between affirmation and negation. So it is ultimately based on recognition of the creative properties of negation. It's precisely this that places the dialectical position in opposition to the dogmatic position: the dogmatic position thinks that it's possible to go from affirmation to affirmation and avoid negation. I disagree. All those who believe that negativity has an essential function in thought are adherents of Hegel, as I am myself, but at the same time I'm convinced that in Hegel there's a kind of dogmatic faith in negation. Hegel believes that negativity itself is capable of constructing with the aid of consecutive overcomings and constructions, and thereby reaching the absolute by itself. On this point I disagree with Hegel, even if like him I retain the idea that we cannot do without negation. However, I don't believe that the essence of dialectics is negation, and I therefore reject, for example, Adorno's notion of negative dialectics. In fact, I proposed replacing this concept with the term "affirmative dialectics" in order to distance myself from him. And as regards my relationship to Hegel, you know, I think that there are only three great philosophers: Plato, Descartes, and Hegel, thus an ancient Greek, an early modern philosopher, and a philosopher of the modern age. I greatly admire Hegel, but I think that the actual relationship between affirmation and negation differs from the one put forth in Hegel's dialectics.

You mention Adorno, but it seems to me that you very rarely talk about the Frankfurt school…

I developed a critique of Adorno in my book on Wagner. There I tried to show that what Adorno sees in Wagner and what leads to him to believe that Wagner must be abandoned is a false vision, because Adorno's dialectic itself is false. The entire beginning of my book on Wagner is a critique of Adorno. It concerns a musical critique, but as we know Adorno attributed great importance to music and even considered himself a musician. And it's interesting that what Adorno advocated in the realm of music fell entirely within the realm of negative dialectics. Adorno's vision of music was that it's necessary to abandon the concept of form, that music should be *formless*, that it should be *in-formal* in the true sense of the word, that it should divest itself of form. I think that this is really a case of musical ultraleftism.

You are also rather a classicist, you usually give priority to form over formlessness.

Yes, because from a certain perspective all creative activity, whether it wishes to be or not, is a creation of form. In fact, even theorists of the formless (*l'informe*) give form to what lacks form. Even Adorno, if we look closely at his activity, merely desperately seeks a form which would express that which is without form. But the idea of the formless as such is an idea in which the will plays no role whatsoever. If you make a certain decision, this concerns form. No creative decision can be made without immediately becoming form. And for this reason I don't believe that it would be possible to create a theory of the formless as a real creative procedure.

In addition to this, in your book *Being and Event* you speak of the universality of truths, and in your as forthcoming book *The Immanence of Truths* you speak of the absolute nature of truths. This affirmation of the absolute and of universality is of opposing the cultural and linguistic relativism of ideological currents such as post-colonial studies. Why in your view is the universality or absolute nature of truths so important?

It's important because my conception of the whole of humanity is a figure of humanity's primordial unity. In the political arena too I believe that our ideal should not be bound to identities, as is the case with racism or nationalism. Historical experience shows that all politics defined on the basis of identity is conflict-ridden politics, in brief because it's impossible to define identity otherwise than through the aid of negation of the other. Identity is either one identity among many others, with which it must coexist, or it places emphasis on itself and can do so only through the negation of the other in this or that aspect. By contrast, the universalism involved in any true creative activity today serves the whole of humanity. I don't think it would make sense to speak of creation tied to a particular identity that would be acceptable elsewhere and represent a value for all. In other words, something can be valuable only if it is valuable to all, otherwise it is an identitarian value and as such is naturally suspect. For example, the history of jazz was originally linked to the demands of the black minority in the United States, and today we know that what was created therein has a universal value. Jazz expanded everywhere and became one of the great musical forms of the whole of humanity. The fact that its actual origin was identity-bound in no way prevents what remains of it from having a universal value. I think that even when dealing with post-colonial thought we can't do without this point, because if we take a closer look, the defence of the rights of minorities always takes place within the framework of a certain universalism. Nobody defends one or another identity merely in the name of this identity itself. We always defend it in order to demand for it the same rights as all others. This means that we demand the inclusion of our minority into humanity as such, without this identity thereby losing its own symbolism. On the contrary, its symbolism may enrich the whole

of humanity. A philosopher is always a defender of universality. After all, what sense would it make to speak of "Czech philosophy" or "French philosophy"? When we use the term "French philosophy," in America or elsewhere, everybody is interested only in the universal aspects of this work.

But at the same time this universality is located somewhere, and that location may be within a certain identity. This is just what you call the absolute…

What I call the absolute is the solution to the fundamental problem that every universal creation has a local origin. I'm a materialist. What's created is created somewhere with the aid of the resources of the environment in which it appears. For example, all great poetry is universal, despite the fact that it's written in a specific language, which then leads to problems with translation. Understanding how something universal can be created in an individual situation, and understanding the relationship between universality and particularity, is in my view one of the greatest philosophical questions. In fact, even the ancient Greeks posed the question of whether what they had written in Greek could be of interest to the Egyptians, and whether what had been written by scholars could be of interest also to the illiterate. Plato's dialogue *Meno* contains a famous scene in which it is shown that even a slave can understand a mathematical sentence. I'm convinced that in order for us to fully understand universal creation in a unique situation, it's necessary for the work to have qualities that transcend both these aspects, which go beyond both manifest universality and creative uniqueness. It's precisely this that I refer to, in accordance with philosophical tradition, as the absolute.

Over the course of your life you've often defended migrants and undocumented workers, you've empathised with the situation of colonised countries and have criticised the colonial, or today rather the neo-colonial, situation of people from the so-called "Third World," although this is a term I find somewhat problematic. You actively opposed the war in Algeria. Which is to say that in your political thought there's always been an attempt to break out of the strictures of one or another particular cultural sphere…

Yes, criticism of colonial wars, colonialism as such, and imperialism, all this is entirely necessary, as is criticism these days of the easy conscience of the capitalist and privileged West with regard to Africa and other countries. This attitude is intolerable, because it is a direct negation of universality. It suggests that its identity is superior to all others. Incidentally, Jules Ferry, who shaped modern French education, said that the mission of the superior races was to civilise the inferior ones, which was, after all, the colonial doctrine. Philosophy absolutely cannot tolerate such stances, philosophy must immediately take up a position which defends the rights of the whole of humanity, a position of the equality of identities. And the equality of identities means that an

identity as such must not be considered superior to another. It can only demand its recognition as an equal part of the whole of humanity.

Could you tell us more about your experience as an activist opposing the war in Algeria?

The opposition to the war in Algeria was my first political experience. It was the experience of my youth, and it immediately came up against unbelievable violence. It's necessary to keep in mind that during the war in Algeria torture was used in police stations in Paris; the war involved deporting immense groups of people, burning villages; illegal executions took place everywhere. We were in a situation which was distinguished by violence and injustice on a huge scale. It was a painful experience for me that during the initial years of this conflict the French public was on the side of the war. And I therefore understood two things: Firstly, that when something like that happens, it's absolutely essential to stand up against it, whatever the balance of power. And secondly, we must never underestimate the identitarian, dominating, and reactionary forces that are continually regaining the positions they have lost, continually crushing everything that stands against them. This dual experience was the foundation of my political life. If such flagrant injustice appears, it's necessary to rebel against it. But we shouldn't imagine that rebelling against something will be enough. We have to take up positions in a long-term battle, to give it form, methods of organisation, new aspects. This experience taught me two things: the necessity of revolt, or as Mao said "it's right to rebel," against the reactionaries, against injustices, and it's necessary to do so as soon as we understand that injustice is present, and not to wait until there are more of us, not to tell ourselves that it's a waste of time. No, it's necessary to rebel and at the same time to exercise great patience, because the enemy is always strong and overwhelming, and such a battle can't be over in five minutes.

We should also point out that when you speak of universality or universalism, this doesn't refer to state universalism but to a universalism which is internal to the subject, which follows from what you call a truth procedure…

Yes, universalism consists in creation, which is important for the destiny of the whole of humanity. For example, today we can still admire cave paintings created by people many thousands of years ago. This is a universalism of what humanity is capable of creating, by means of its own resources, for the whole of humanity. And the subject naturally experiences and feels this universalism when he or she is concerned with truth. So, for example, in the case of the war in Algeria, universalism was on the side of those who fought against the war, and by contrast on the side of the war there was no universalism, only the aggressive particularity of French imperialism. At every moment we must choose between an orientation which is in reality merely identity-bound and

conservative, and an orientation which is universal. This happens to us in numerous circumstances throughout the course of life, in which we encounter varying universal procedures.

In your work you mention four truth procedures: love, science, art, and politics. I'd now like to deal with one of these procedures and ask you the following question: Today many people say that within the sphere of art every new value is always quickly subordinated to the market. How in your opinion can an artist resist having his or her work overwhelmed by the finality of the market and financial value?

If I could provide a universal guide to contemporary artistic movements, I would have done so long ago. I think that every artist or creative figure today encounters a certain conservative resistance. This conservative resistance is different in every era. For example, in previous times religion prevented the emergence of certain artistic forms. In today's world, which is governed by capitalism, the chief force of resistance or subordination is the market. The church also previously employed artists, just as the market gives priority to or directly creates certain representations, while consigning other representations to oblivion. I don't think the problems of today's artists differ greatly from those of artists past. Each artist or group of artists defines the form of the creative intensity of art in a unique manner, with the goal of promoting some universal value. And the enemy today is not so much religious censorship (which naturally also exists), but rather the placing of art, in particular visual art, at the service of the market. This struggle has always existed for artists. Our enemy has merely changed its shape or form, but it has been with us since time immemorial.

I think that one problem of contemporary art is the predominance of a certain formalism. And here I don't have in mind mathematical formalism, but rather formalism in the negative sense of the word, in the sense of a creation of forms which are not linked to an idea. I think that capitalism today has the effect of depleting art, emptying it of meaning. Many artists today are incapable of speaking on a theoretical or intellectual level about their own work, because they have relinquished this activity to curators and other experts. It appears as if art has finally been stripped of any idea that could put up resistance, and as a result it can easily be appropriated by capitalism and the market.

Yes, but I think that this situation is new only to a certain extent, because the formalism you describe resides in a reduction of art to its decorative function. The battle between creative invention and the reduction of art to its decorative function has long existed. But what does this decorative art decorate? It always decorates the ruling class. And even today the formalism you mention, which is in the services of the market, merely decorates the ruling oligarchy, which alone has the resources to purchase such a dec-

orative system. If we take for example the academicism of the nineteenth century, this didn't concern formalist art so much as representative art, which ended up the same way as the majority of contemporary artistic production. All truth procedures are threatened with a similar fate. Genuinely universal truth procedures are in reality the enemy of all specific figures of power. And for this reason all systems of power, all ruling oligarchies, attempt to subdue truth procedures, and one form of this battle is always the endeavour to subordinate them to the ruling class. In art this takes place entirely openly, with the aid of financial corruption, art is pressured into becoming a mere decoration of the ruling class, or of the church, as I said. But in the case of other procedures also, exactly the same thing is taking place today. Today there's a dangerous controlling of science by the demands of technology, and these technological demands merely serve capital and profit. Science is threatened by its enslavement to the necessity of production. In politics also something similar is taking place. It's enough just to recall the remorseless everyday persecution of every emancipatory or collectivising politics by the ruling class. In fact even love today is an object of suspicion, because it doesn't fit into consumer society. Love has a universal power, because it can't be halted and constrained by identities. It's enough just to recall the asocial nature of the love of Romeo and Juliet in Shakespeare. And it's therefore possible to say that every hierarchical society to a certain degree attempts to subordinate truth procedures to itself, which in any case is possible only when these procedures cease to be truth procedures.

That's true. Here in Prague we need only look out the window at the Topičův dům building across the street from us, and we immediately recall all the critical remarks of Adolf Loos, who declared that ornament was a crime, and the polemical comments of the constructivists, all as if it were written down right here in the streets… But let's deal further with these artistic questions. In *The Immanence of Truths* you define the "work" (*oeuvre*). In your view the work (*oeuvre*) is something that by the nature of its own definition cannot be superimposed by finitude and constructible sets. This means that the *oeuvre* as such is always finite, but at the same time, thanks to its anchoring in the absolute or in various infinities, it cannot be reduced merely to finitude. You place the work in opposition to what you term "waste" (*déchet*). Could you explain to us precisely what this opposition of *oeuvre* and *déchet* means, as you describe in *The Immanence of Truths*?

The book offers several formal definitions of the opposition between these two terms, because *"déchet"* is something that is finite in a passive way, such that its functioning principle is to be the waste of the active infinite. So therefore any employee today is for example a waste product of global capitalism. And this isn't anything insulting, employees know that they themselves are waste, and as a result they also revolt from

time to time. The academic art of the nineteenth century is a waste product of the decorative ambitions of the ruling class of the nineteenth century, and so on. In this sense of the word, we could say that *déchet* is finite existence, which is a direct product of the hegemony of a certain infinite. By contrast, the *oeuvre* is something that eludes this suspicion, and which cannot be covered over by figures of the ruling finitude. The *oeuvre* eludes superimposition. And eluding superimposition means above all touching another infinite. Touching an infinite which is not an infinite of the structured hegemony. I therefore define the *oeuvre* as something finite. So for example, a painting is always finished, a musical composition has a beginning and an end, it is something completed, which nevertheless touches an infinity that differs from the infinity of the ruling system, it is the friction of two different infinities. And precisely this leads to the fact that the *oeuvre* can have universal capacities and is not merely a passive product of a certain identity-bound figure, but on the contrary eludes hegemony. And everything that eludes hegemony ultimately has a universal direction. The *oeuvre* is a manner in which humanity, within the framework of finitude, can touch an infinite that differs from the structural infinity of hegemony.

At the same time, these two concepts, which we could describe as form and the formless, assume a mutual dialectical relationship. I recall one of your lectures in New York, where you spoke about the fact that the artist always grasps something which comes within the realm of the formless and *déchet*, and transforms it into an *oeuvre*, giving consistency to something that was previously merely *non-form*, shapelessness.

Yes, definitely, this battle between form and the formless, the shifting of the boundaries between shape and shapelessness, is a general property of all creative endeavour. This can be seen very well in visual art, but it can also be observed in other areas. I could say that this battle between shape and shapelessness is something like a touch of the new infinite, which transcends the ruling infinite.

During the Prague conference you took a swipe at aesthetics, which you consider an academic monster. In opposition to this, you've written a book about so-called inaesthetics. What is inaesthetics?

Inaesthetics is merely an acknowledgement of the universal function of the artistic procedure, and it doesn't fall within the category of art criticism that would aim to influence the circulation of this or that work. Inaesthetics is a way to penetrate the artistic *oeuvre* and go right to its roots, in order for us to understand what makes it a truth procedure. Inaesthetics therefore inquires directly into the universality of the *oeuvre*; it involves a philosophical inquiry into what creates universality in the artistic sphere. So this is a philosophical approach, a kind of search for examples.

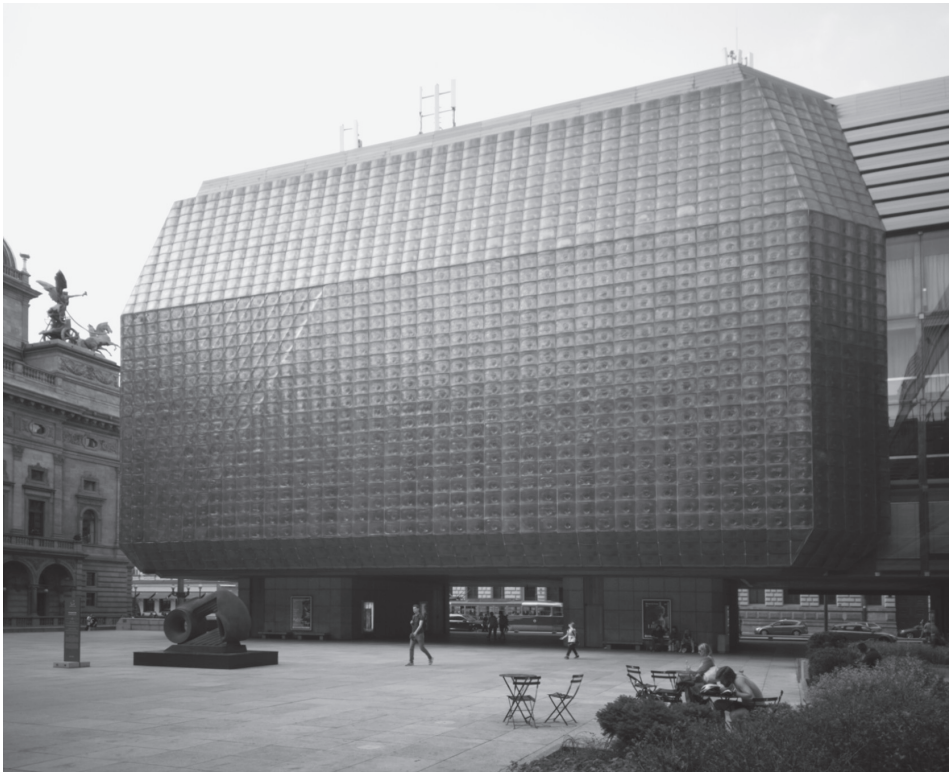
If we take architecture, for example, we've met here today to record this interview at the New Stage of the National Theatre, which is a superb building constructed by Karel Prager at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. It's always seemed to me that this structure reflects the political situation in Czechoslovakia at the time it was built. It has baroque features, which attest to a period in which the state apparatus was distancing itself from the political movement. We refer to this period here as "normalisation." Could you respond to this location and say something about your impressions of it?

What surprises me here and strikes me as very beautiful is the endeavour made with this building to find a way out of the orthodoxies of its time. It eludes both the orthodoxy of Soviet monumentality and the orthodoxy of Western modernism. I'm very impressed by this, because it creates a novel temporal relationship between what is new and what is old, which appears to be somehow inscribed into the building itself. So, for exam-

Karel Prager
National Theater of the Czech Republic, New Stage (interior), 1977–1983
Photo Jana Beránková

ple, the abundance of marble in Prager's architecture is very surprising, because it's not something that we find in the contemporary reign of concrete. Therefore the very materials here, wood or marble, are used in an entirely new way, and at the same time this building is distinguished by the complexity of its internal layout, which, as you say yourself, may give a somewhat baroque impression, and which is nevertheless brought into harmony with the functioning of the straight lines and large glazed walls, signs of ascendant modernity. This building has a synthetic character, and also the beauty of a certain vacillation. As if it were vacillating between a number of different styles, without descending into eclecticism. As if it were creating its own further allure out of this vacillation. And I'd say that this vacillation is in fact the uniqueness of the history of Czechoslovakia. It's enough to recall the Prague Spring and Dubček, also a time of political-historical vacillation. The New Stage of the National Theatre is a monument to this vacillation.

Karel Prager
National Theater of the Czech Republic, New Stage (exterior), 1977–1983
Photo Jana Beránková



Does this building not in fact contain something like an attempt to locate a socialist modernity?

Yes, it contains a modernity that is expansive and doesn't try to be a hard break with the past. It's not marked by the mere stylistics of formal destruction, but by something which retains various transformed elements of the past, and it reconfigures them. We could quite possibly name this building a palace of the new politics.

How was the Prague Spring viewed in its time by French students? Did you see these two struggles, the Prague struggle and the Parisian struggle, as pursuing the same goals, or taking different paths?

I think that there was a fundamental point of convergence between them. Today we don't remind ourselves often enough of the fact that May '68 was also a revolt against the French Communist Party. And the party too regarded it as such. Those who opposed the movement included not only the police and the state, which is understandable, but also the leadership of the main Communist unions. When we tried to reach the factories in order to speak with the workers, we were often directly physically prevented from doing so by interventions of the French Communist Party. The French Communist Party was an obedient pupil of Soviet power. The fact that a revolt, which after all was demanding communism and socialism, found one of its most important obstacles to be official communism, brought May 68 close to the situation of the Prague Spring. Whereas in Prague it all ended violently with the military intervention, it's necessary to recall that in France also the intervention of the union leadership and the disciplinary measures of the Communist Party were an obstacle to the emancipatory will of the people, such as our movement represented. In both cases it was about destroying the birth of a new socialism.

Except for the fact that in Czechoslovakia this rupture took place to a certain extent within the party, even if the people's movement naturally exceeded the expectations of the party members. The party as such was divided between the reformist wing, Dubček, etc., and the conservative wing, which was more oriented towards Moscow.

Yes, naturally, but at the same time there were reformists also in the French Communist Party. That division existed there too. However, the predominant and official stance of the Communist Party played a role similar to that played here by the conservative position that was oriented towards the Soviet Union. And so I think that both events are analogous. Each consisted in an attempt at political transformation located within the framework of communism and socialism, but which at the same time transgressed the boundaries of the official International. This point connected both events. And for this reason also we viewed the Prague movement as a movement which was on our

side. When we discussed Dubček's pronouncements, naturally we didn't agree with everything, but in general it can be said that this movement was on our side.

You promote what you call "the communist hypothesis," and therefore I'd now like to ask you Lenin's question: "What is to be done?"

I think that we find ourselves at a moment when it's necessary to rebuild everything. Sometimes it appears to me that our age is similar to the 1840s. It resembles Europe after Napoleon. We are experiencing a period of restoration. The entire world is now living under a regime that's restoring the supremacy of capitalism. Capitalism has now won even in the Soviet Union and China. We've returned to a situation in which the world powers are competing for hegemony, and in many regions there is war. We should rewrite the Communist Manifesto, rewrite and once again propose the idea that another possibility exists. And to do so we must construct our own evaluation of what has happened in the past. This is very important. We mustn't avoid criticism, we mustn't simply say that the past was good and become guardians of the past. This would get us nowhere, and furthermore it would be false. On the contrary, we must construct our own evaluation in Czechoslovakia, Russia or in France, in brief we must write down an actual evaluation that doesn't serve the governing order. All of these tasks today are mainly of an ideological and theoretical nature. However, political movements always begin with the creation of new ideological or theoretical concepts. This is important, because as Marx said, we take part in all struggles against the existing order.[1]

This means that we find ourselves in a time of rupture between the experience of so-called real communism and your hypothetical communism. The problem of Central Europe is that communism became an indigestible past, which creates a somewhat reactionary subjectivity. During your last lecture in Prague, which I organised together with my colleagues from the Prague Axiomatic Circle in 2014, you spoke about the need to affirm a certain communist modernity. You said that it was necessary to link modernity with communism rather than with capitalism, and to rid ourselves of what you called the "longing for the West." What did you mean then by the word "modernity?" Isn't this term ultimately too vague?

[1] Here Badiou is most likely referring to *The Communist Manifesto*, in which Marx wrote, "The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole." Karl Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 469–500, here 483. And later: "[…] the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things." (*Ibid*., p. 500.)

Yes, it's a vague term, but if someone says that a certain term is vague, then they themselves should propose a more precise term, otherwise it's even more vague than the original vague term. Many words today are naturally too general, and in fact even in 1847, when Marx wrote the Communist Manifesto, the Communist Party didn't yet exist and his work met with no reception. The fact that one experiment which attempted communism foundered within a mere seventy years of human experience doesn't mean that we shouldn't rebuild a communist hypothesis. And it's possible to define this communist hypothesis entirely precisely and robustly, there's nothing vague about it. We can demonstrate why a whole range of communist principles were never applied at all. The communist social order merely implemented the first principle of communism, which was the removal of the means of production and communication from the hegemony of private ownership. But this wasn't the full programme of communism. It was only its beginning. It was a condition rather than a goal. Communism also promoted other things, such as a fundamental transformation of the hierarchy of labour and sufficient education for the masses, so that the opposition between manual and intellectual labour would disappear. It required genuine internationalism and not a return of identities. Incidentally, the very idea of a "homeland of socialism," which was meant to be the Soviet Union, entirely contradicted what Marx said: that the proletariat has no country. And in addition to this, there was also Marx's notion that it's necessary to organise the abolition of the state. However, what happened was rather a reinforcement of state power and its police aspects. Today we know the principles of communism entirely precisely. We know which of them weren't applied or tested, and as a result experimentation with the principles of communism appears as something entirely modern. We have behind us only the first rough and primitive experiments, and first experiments are always somewhat primitive. For me modernity is an experimental and progressively expanding application of all the principles of communism, and not only their limitation to state ownership. This limitation is in itself contradictory, because according to communist logic the state should wither away. State ownership was not collective ownership. We can find experiences of genuine collective ownership in certain aspects of the Chinese Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, or earlier, for example in some of the anarchist attempts in Catalonia during the Civil War.

So there are four principles: the abolition of private ownership, genuine internationalism, the abolition of the state…

And above all a new organisation of labour according to a non-hierarchical model. That's an absolutely fundamental point. That irreconcilable conflict between employees performing manual work on the one hand and engineers, managers or intellectuals on the other must be entirely transformed. This abolition of great inequalities may be the very most important aspect of communism. We mustn't forget that Marx considered

communism to be primarily a new organisation of labour, which was meant to create a new worker, which he referred to as the polyvalent worker.[2] This means that every division of labour, specifically its hierarchical division, should be abolished. This proposal was never applied or promoted in the experiments of so-called real socialism.

These four principles must always be applied simultaneously, because today we know that capitalism is capable of accepting one of these principles, such as the polyvalent worker, but only in isolation from the other three principles.

But I think that the notion that we have polyvalent workers here is merely a fiction. In this age I haven't seen the appearance of a polyvalent employee who would perform intellectual activity and receive a wage, and at the same time would dig ditches in the streets. On the contrary, today Asian or African workers are lured here only to be given the worst jobs for miserable wages. That's our real situation. What's termed a polyvalent worker today is a reference to the fact that an employee has to be prepared to change his or her job several times during the course of life. This means that the worker has merely to follow the vicissitudes of capitalism as such, and when a bookshop starts selling televisions instead of books, the employee has to adapt with immense mobility to the new product. This is a completely different thing, it's an intensification of labour flexibility on the part of employees. Let's not forget that one of the principles of communism was the abolition of the employment relationship. Employees shouldn't merely receive a wage from a private company. They should contribute to a common endeavour, for which they receive remuneration on the basis of the very nature of this labour. And for this reason it's necessary to say this: the communist revolution hasn't yet begun anywhere. Only the rudiments of socialism, the rudiments of a nationalised economy, have appeared. And these rudiments of a state-run economy have shown us that if we limit ourselves only to them, then in reality they will be subordinate to the capitalist economy. And therefore we have been defeated by the competition. Now I'll paraphrase Saint-Just, who said that happiness is a new idea in Europe. Communism is a new idea in the world.

[2] Marx does not actually seem to have used the term "the polyvalent worker" (in French *le travailleur polyvalent*). But Marx did develop in numerous texts the idea of the worker freed from the strictures of profession and specialization that are imposed by the division of labor.

TRANSLATION

MARX AND FREUD

Robert Kalivoda

We print below the first half of the essay "Marx and Freud," which forms the second of three chapters of the 1968 book Modern Mental Reality and Marxism[1] *by Czech Marxist philosopher, historian, and aesthetic theorist Robert Kalivoda (1923–1989). The chapter is preceded in the book by an essay entitled "The Dialectics of Structuralism and the Dialectics of Aesthetics," which offers a critique of the Hegelian basis of Marxist aesthetics and attempts to supplement Marxism with principles drawn from Kantianism and structuralism. The book's third chapter, "Marxism and Libertinism," presents a genealogy of the Marxian ideal of freedom and equality, the sources of which the author finds – perhaps surprisingly – in the cultural paradigm of Romanticism and in the ideology of libertinism. Throughout the book, Kalivoda pursues two primary goals: to philosophically investigate the meaning of (modern) reality, and to offer a systematic basis for a humanist Marxism. Kalivoda argues that Marxism overcomes the metaphysical conception of human existence and can be used as a robust methodological basis for a general dialectical theory of human existence.*

[1] Robert Kalivoda, "Marx a Freud," in *Moderní duchovní skutečnost a marxismus* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1968), pp. 45–101; the translated section appears on pp. 45–64, 87–95.

Generally speaking, "Marx and Freud" offers a Marxist interpretation and critique of psychoanalysis akin to the well-known treatises by such classic thinkers as Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Erich Fromm. In Sigmund Freud's later writings, this originally therapeutic method gained a philosophical and anthropological dimension. According to Kalivoda, this justifies attempts to revise psychoanalysis from a philosophical perspective. However, it is typical of Kalivoda's dialectical method that the essay presents not only a Marxist critique of Freudian psychoanalysis, but also that Marxism itself is extended into the psychoanalytic dimension. Kalivoda argues that human existence contains important "natural" elements in addition to those socioeconomic and historical determinants that had been rather one-sidedly accentuated by most Marxist materialists. Kalivoda interprets the sixth thesis on Feuerbach in this sense: the human being cannot be reduced to a "social" dimension, because there are "natural" elements that are irreducible. Kalivoda attempts to situate Marx's conception of these elements within the context of his Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, which preceded the "Theses on Feuerbach," and* The German Ideology *(1845–6), which immediately followed them. The reader of Contradictions may note that in this respect Kalivoda was engaged in comradely polemics with other reform-Communist authors like the more radically historicist (and more Hegelian) Karel Kosík, whose essay "Classes and the Real Structure of Society" we printed in our 2017 volume.*[2] *Kalivoda lays out a vision of humanist Marxism that does not rely on what he regards as a metaphysical conception of alienated human essence, but is based rather on a notion of inalienable human* nature*, above all on the human's need to satisfy hunger and sexual desire.*

Kalivoda's efforts to dialectically combine the early Marx and the late Freud took place, of course, against a specific historical-cultural backdrop – Kalivoda's open approach to Marxism had several domestic predecessors. He attaches special importance to the work of Bohuslav Brouk (1912–1978), Záviš Kalandra (1902–1950), Karel Teige (1900–1951), and the Czech Surrealist Group, with which Brouk, Kalandra and Teige all collaborated. Robert Kalivoda's presentation and reinterpretation of this tradition of Czech critical thought, much of which is unavailable in English translation, lends additional value to this seminal study of Eastern European Marxism.

"Marx and Freud" appears here for the first time in English, in a translation by Ashley Davies.

Roman Kanda

[2] Karel Kosík, "Classes and the Real Structure of Society," *Contradictions* 1 (2017), no. 2, pp. 187–204.

Psychoanalysis was established as a therapeutic method, which gradually became a general psychology, and in the work of Freud and other psychoanalysts later acquired a dimension of philosophical anthropology.[3] The very fact that psychoanalysis was progressively transformed into philosophical anthropology calls naturally for a philosophical interpretation and evaluation of psychoanalysis. Yet even if this were not the case, philosophical interest in psychoanalysis as a certain academic discipline would be no less natural. After all, philosophy, out of which all academic fields have historically emerged – both the sciences of non-human nature and the human sciences – does not lose its "raison d'être" even after specialised sciences have become independent of it.

The progressive and constantly crystallising specialisation of individual academic disciplines is of an extremely contradictory nature. Specialised science, precisely thanks to its independence, brings an immense sum of extraordinarily important observations. Nevertheless, its ability to interpret these observations is limited precisely by the borders within which it has established its independence. The need for deeper and more holistic interpretations, the need for a broader structural delineation of the actual object of investigation – this requirement is an entirely integral component of any scientific knowledge – necessarily leads specialised science beyond its specialised limits: because otherwise it would not be able to interpret even certain contextual conditions of its specialised subject. There is only one structure of reality, however differentiated, and the links and moments in this structure pass into and mutually shape one another. As a result, a general theory of reality and philosophy, seriously endeavouring to attain philosophical scientific knowledge, is not antiquated by the development of specialised scientific knowledge; on the contrary, as the specialisation of the sciences proceeds, the need for a philosophical interpretation of reality only becomes and will continue to become more urgent.

And if it is said, with subtle or "unsubtle" scepticism, that philosophy merely "totalises" the results of specialised knowledge, then it is evident that this conception of "totalisation" has not yet transcended the limits of the positivist understanding of the relationship between philosophy and specialised science. Scientific philosophy cannot merely *summarise* what has already been observed elsewhere. It must itself contribute to concrete knowledge through an endeavour to interpret the *structural relationship* of the elements of the structure formed by the topics of the specialised sciences. In this way it can contribute not only to knowledge of the whole structure, that is, the totality, but also to knowledge of its elements. Herein resides the actual sense of the "totalisation" of philosophical knowledge.

If we turn to that object of knowledge that is the human being, then it is evident that "somatic" anthropology, psychology, sociology, and historiography form the four

[3] Throughout this essay Kalivoda will use the term "anthropology" in the sense of *philosophical* anthropology, the investigation into the fundamental nature and meaning of the human being. (Editors' note)

fundamental academic fields in which the study of human existence is conducted. Let us leave aside the fact that these fields are becoming subdivided and will likely continue to be subdivided into a whole range of further specialised disciplines. The need for philosophical anthropology now resides in the fact that the knowledge of human existence in all its totality – and it is only thus that human existence can be known in the full sense of the word – necessarily requires an investigation of the entire structural relationship and structural transitions of those instances and spheres of human life that are the object of investigation in these four fundamental fields of the human sciences. If the scholarly activity developed by specialists in these fields eventually achieves "totalising" focus, then this will be wonderful. Philosophers can only welcome such a liquidation of philosophy. A range of specialised scientists have already made a positive contribution to this "liquidation" of philosophy – specifically by becoming philosophers themselves. This is the case with Freud, who during the course of his work became a philosophical anthropologist "par excellence." Nevertheless, this entrance of specialist science into philosophy is barely beginning; in fact it appears that it will never be a "mass phenomenon" and that the advancing specialisation of scientific knowledge will on the contrary extend the sphere of the "unknown," in which quite fundamental processes of social-human life are played out. Shockingly, these processes do not manifest a need to fit into the work plans of the specialised human sciences. The human being is evidently incorrigible, and although it has been, up to now, ever more bludgeoned by the division of labour, it at least resists the division of scientific labour.

For this reason it is also not possible to cast philosophical anthropology onto the scrapheap. Quite the opposite. Naturally, it is necessary to view its possibilities with detachment. Bakunin was correct when he expressed this reservation towards the human sciences one hundred years ago. The human being did not choose the "classic path" to liberation, which at the time glittered in its "Hegelian" purity. It stubbornly refuses to break "the yoke of its alienation." Why?

If contemporary philosophical anthropology, which is only now beginning to take shape, sheds over the course of time at least a little light on the historical situation of the contemporary human being, then perhaps it can assist us somewhat in specifying also the human being's further historical prospects.

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It was necessary to state these initial comments in advance also in order to clarify that there is nothing unnatural in a critical philosophical investigation of psychoanalysis, even if certain analysts have raised categorical objections to this action on the part of "uninitiated non-analysts." It is an objective fact that psychoanalysis has ceased to be mere therapy and has become at the very least general psychology; this considerably alters the situation precisely in the area of methodology: the method of analysis applied in therapy, which is temporally, physically, and mentally extraordinarily demanding, is technically inapplicable where we have a psychoanalytic interpretation of the psy-

cho-social facts of the "normal" human being in its mass social occurrence. In this sphere it is necessary to turn to the methodology of psycho-sociological investigation.

Where psychoanalysis, with Freud as its chief exponent, develops into an interpretation of broader socio-historical contexts and a general theory of humanity, there is no alternative than to turn to the methods of historical investigation and to philosophical analysis. Philosophical analysis, much as it may appear to be speculative, is often the only way of shedding new light on the concrete interpretation of concrete material, and thus of marking out new, quite relevant problems and new, quite concrete methodological tasks for the concrete methodology of specialised science.

The following reflections primarily concern the significance of the fundamental theorems of psychoanalysis for the development of philosophical anthropology – more precisely speaking, the anthropological-philosophical significance of Freud's theoretical work, especially in the final form into which it crystallised in his last work, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*. Although not everyone may share the feeling that such a reflection could have reciprocal significance also for psychoanalysis itself, in this it loses nothing of its plausibility.

The interpretation that follows is not some kind of "universal philosophical" interpretation. Here too a concrete delineation is required: it is an attempt to outline a critical interpretation of psychoanalysis from the perspective of the Marxist philosophy of the human being, which is nevertheless at the same time an attempt to critically integrate psychoanalysis into the Marxist philosophy of the human being, to further develop the central problematics of this philosophy precisely by means of this critical integration.

This endeavour is far from extraordinary; it adds itself to an old tradition and consciously updates this tradition. Psychoanalysis has been and is to some or other degree and by various means utilised and absorbed in other philosophical conceptions – for example, in existentialism. However, it is possible to state without hyperbole that a mutual "compulsion" and attraction has been manifested most pronouncedly in the relationship between psychoanalysis and Marxism.

This statement may appear paradoxical only if we consider those forced, rationally "ungraspable" and rather amusing criticisms of psychoanalysis that have abounded in "Marxist" publications over the last decades to be a critical stance of genuine Marxist thought. However, these excesses had essentially nothing in common with creative Marxism. Genuine creative Marxist thought was rendered heretical in the past decades by Stalinism, and the fate of its exponents was arduous, painful, and often tragic.

Such a tragic fate befell for example Wilhelm Reich, the first psychoanalyst to seriously attempt a synthesis of Marxism and psychoanalysis, who at the beginning of the 1930s was excommunicated by both the German Communists and by psychoanalysts, and who ended his life in an American prison a number of years after the Second World War. Around this same time, the Czech Marxist Záviš Kalandra, who made remarkable use of psychoanalysis in order to interpret old Czech legends, was one of the first victims of Stalinist repression in Czechoslovakia. Bohuslav Brouk, a member of the Prague

surrealist group, systematically attempted to accomplish the same thing in Bohemia before the Second World War as Reich was endeavouring to do in Germany. He was unable to cope with the severe blows of historical developments, and after the war he became an anti-Marxist, eventually emigrating from Czechoslovakia.

The activity of the surrealists and the adherents of the Frankfurt School of philosophy has involved above all a long-term systematic endeavour to critically integrate psychoanalysis into the Marxist conception of the human being; for entire decades they have been the constant target of harsh criticism; it is only recently that these sweeping, mostly uninformed and frequently malevolent and insulting condemnations have begun to abate. Among the surrealists, an exceptional role in the creative Marxist interpretation of psychoanalysis was played by the recently deceased André Breton, especially in his book *Communicating Vessels*, which he wrote at the beginning of the 1930s, when he himself arrived at a Marxist position. The representatives of the Frankfurt School include primarily Erich Fromm, a psychoanalyst who since the early 1930s has based his concept of the human being on the works of Marx and Freud, and also the philosopher Herbert Marcuse, whose 1955 book *Eros and Civilization*[4] represents to this day the indisputable highpoint of highpoint of endeavours so far to arrive at a mutual integration of Marx and Freud, and is an essential springboard for every further work in the field.

It is impossible not to see that Czech intellectual activity is becoming a significant component of this international endeavour. In Bohemia, this work is carried out above all in connection with the Prague surrealist group, of which Bohuslav Brouk was a member and with which Záviš Kalandra closely collaborated. The leading exponents of Czech surrealism, Karel Teige and Vítěslav Nezval, in the course of their wide-ranging activity also made a highly significant contribution to the creative utilisation of Freud's discoveries in the development of a modern Marxist conception of the human being. And it is impossible not also to emphasise the very interesting fact that among the founders of Czech Marxist historiography, a prominent position is occupied by the historians affiliated with the "Historical Group" (Václav Husa, Jan Pachta, Jaroslav Charvát, and others), who at the end of the 1930s published the compendium *History and the Present*,[5] and who introduced us to the idea of a second "Marxist-Freudian" centre encompassing the "Frankfurt School" and in particular, of course, Erich Fromm.

The Marxist integration of Freud therefore has a long tradition not only on an international scale, but also in the Czech lands. It is even possible to say that this Czech component is a quite fundamental phenomenon within this international tradition. This tradition represents not only a certain historical continuity – as shall be evident from

[4] In the original, Kalivoda incorrectly referenced Marcuse's book as *Eros and Civilisations*. Kalivoda may have read the book in German translation. (Editors' note)

[5] Václav Čejchan et al., eds., *Dějiny a přítomnost: sborník Historické skupiny*, 2 vols. (Prague: Družstevní práce, 1937). (Reference added by editors)

the following analysis, there also originates also within it an intellectual continuity, a certain method of posing the problem.

The following reflection consciously adheres to this continuity. At the same time, this reflection grows out of a conviction that the critical absorption of Freud by Marxism is not an eclectic blend of heterogeneous elements, but that on the contrary Marx and Freud are of a similar order. Precisely with regard to other philosophical conceptions it is possible to speak of eclecticism in the utilisation of Freud. The absorption of Freud can even be a form of "transubstantiation" of a certain philosophical approach, a kind of transformation of that philosophy's "essential nature" – as is the case for example with regard to Sartre's existentialism. However, the "essential nature" of Marxism does not "transubstantiate" with the critical absorption of Freud; rather, it becomes enhanced.

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Over the last century, the Marxist theory of the human being has focused predominantly on socio-historical factors, on class-social, class-economic, class-political, and class-ideological factors, which have played a decisive role in the development of society. This is understandable, since the "natural components of the human being," which indisputably operate within the human being in all societies and at all times, have entered the historical process more or less exclusively in a form pre-shaped by social class. It did not appear to be particularly necessary to conduct an investigation, for example, into whether the category of "class interest" or "economic interest" reflected another, underlying layer which somehow further conditions class interest: to ask how class economic interest can emerge in the first place; economic interest and class interest are after all indisputably attached to the elementary, naturally human components of the human being, on what is natural in the human.

If it was necessary, in forming the materialist theory of history, to shatter the abstract anthropological-naturalist conceptions that stood in the path of creating a historical-genetic conception of the development of the human being, which revealed the role of class forces in the entire history of human society, then today it is necessary to devote far greater attention precisely to those "natural components" of human existence. At a time when the human being is beginning to emancipate itself from the class conditions within which the individual as well as species being have appeared for entire centuries and millennia, these natural components of human existence are acquiring ever more significance. Circumstances which in the development of class society were, so to speak, on the periphery of history – circumstances which relate to general forms of human existence and human subsistence, to general forms and manifestations of life-style, to general forms of ethical interest and ethical values, to the "natural foundations" of human culture – these circumstances come unstoppably to the fore of the historical process at the moment when this historical process ceases to be a "prehistoric"[6] matter.

[6] "Prehistory," of course, does not refer here to the time before written history. It refers to the time

A new situation thus arises, which in a certain sense confronts Marxist philosophy with problems entirely opposite to those that were addressed one hundred years ago.[7] It is precisely the pressure of these problems that forces us to return once again to Marx and Engels and to *determine precisely* the method by which they approached these questions. In such a reassessment, a matter emerges which – although it is of quite fundamental importance – has been entirely sidelined and for the most part entirely misinterpreted over the last century: the fact that Marx and Engels, in overcoming Feuerbach's "anthropologism," *never entirely dissolved* the "natural" human being into a "social" human being that historically produces its objective life necessities, that is, into an essentially "economic-social" being.

With regard to Engels, his conception of materialism from the preface to the first edition of *The Origin of the Family*[8] is in any case rather well known.[9] However, it is Marx's position that is of cardinal importance, for the very reason that for contemporary adherents of the "Marxist philosophy of praxis," the value of Engels is reduced practically to nought, and Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" are for them practically the only point of departure for Marxist philosophy – naturally in connection with the entirety of Marx's work. Yet it appears that this conception of the philosophy of praxis, in which

before communism, when human developments are limited by class conditions. Yet even when these socially specific limitations are removed, Kalivoda argues, history will still be limited by the universal natural components of human existence, such as the need to satisfy hunger and sexual urge. (Editors' note)

[7] I emphasise that this applies only in a certain sense. It would be a cardinal error to assume that the philosophical investigation of human society could be limited to this issue, or that it is possible to resolve this issue independently of the classic sets of problems of historical materialism. These continue to be of fundamental importance and topicality. What is necessary with respect to these problems is a deeper investigation into the fundamental laws of motion of the transition from capitalism to socialism and the fundamental laws of motion of the socialist formation, which to date we know entirely inadequately (and in certain respects do not know whatsoever). A deeper knowledge of these questions is essential also for a real and realistic solution to the anthropological issue we are concerned with here – though here the mutual interdependence applies also in the other direction. The materialist theory of history, in its traditional historical-materialist dimension, has basically still not been *concretely* elaborated. It remains an immense, uncompleted task to penetrate into the *concrete dialectics* of history – and this applies even to the epoch of capitalism, which Marx analysed in a certain extreme "essential" purity in his *Capital*.

[8] I.e., *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. (Editors' note)

[9] "According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life. But this itself is of a *twofold character*. On the one hand, the production of the means of subsistence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools requisite therefore; *on the other, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species*. The social institutions under which men of a definite historical epoch and of a definite country live are conditioned by *both* kinds of production: by the stage of *development* of labour, on the one hand, *and of the family* on the other." Friedrich Engels, *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 26: Engels 1882–89* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 129–276; here pp. 131–132; emphasis by R. K.

the human being is reduced to its historical dimension, rendered the architect of history and practically stripped of natural components – this conception, despite its great importance for the renaissance of creative Marxist thought, is not entirely adequate to Marx's conception of the human being as it was shaped from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, through the "Theses on Feuerbach" and the *Grundrisse* to *Capital*. It is necessary, of course, to acknowledge the Marxist ethos behind this conception – its "Marxian" pedigree nevertheless resides in the fact that it is not sufficiently critical of Marx: today's "philosophy of praxis" has not as yet been capable of delimiting those romantic-metaphysical elements that are evident in the young Marx, and which can be felt even in the "mature" Marx; rather it adopts them in its somewhat metaphysical conception of human "alienation."

In general it is possible to state in advance that Marx, when he criticised Feuerbach for his "anthropologism," never denied that the human being, even as an "ensemble of social relations,"[10] is more than a mere point of intersection and creator of these social relations. Marx's renowned sixth thesis on Feuerbach, which up to now has ordinarily been understood in this sense, has evidently been entirely incorrectly interpreted from a semantic point of view, because it is not understood within its developmental context, in relation to the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* which preceded it and *The German Ideology* which immediately followed it.[11]

However, in the nineteenth century the natural component of the human being was so downplayed in Marxist theory – including the works of Marx and Engels – and the socio-historical and class dimensions of human existence were so emphasized, that the synthesis of Freud's "biologism" with Marx's "historicism," which the surrealists and the

[10] Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 145. (Reference added by editors)

[11] One way of understanding the sixth thesis on Feuerbach is to see it in relation to the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, where social-human essence is identified with the optimal development of human forces under communism. In this case the concept has a genuinely concrete content. We may then genuinely understand alienation to mean alienation from the "human essence," as Marx presents it in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. Nevertheless, such an interpretation is not only pure anthropologism but is also metaphysical anthropologism, which Marx later abandoned; it is thus irrelevant if at the same time we declare our endeavour to overcome not only metaphysics but also "anthropological philosophy." A second option is to link Marx's sixth thesis to *The German Ideology* and to understand the social "essence" of the human being as an "ensemble of social relations" for the entire period of the historical existence of the social human. This interpretation is not true to *The German Ideology* or to the entire subsequent work of Marx, because during this period Marx no longer worked with the term "essence" in the *positive* sense, even if the meaning of the term is latently contained in certain formulations on alienation and certain uses of the concept of "nature." This latent meaning is however bound to Marx's original concept of human essence from the *Manuscripts* and has absolutely nothing in common with some kind of neutral designation of the "ensemble of social relations" of any historical epoch. To understand this "social-human essence" is a rather naïve attempt to maintain a certain term which conceptually and in terms of its content is reduced to a trivial tautology.

"Frankfurt" philosophers attempted at the beginning of the 1930s, must have appeared to the regular and historically fixed Marxist consciousness of the time to be deeply erroneous, if not reprehensible. It seemed like an attempt to combine fire with water.

Nevertheless, the work conducted from the beginning of the 1930s by thinkers from both currents is of exceptional significance not only for the actual integration of psychoanalytic discoveries into the Marxist conception of the human being; it was in direct connection with this endeavour that the fundamental prerequisites were lain *for re-establishing an essential proportionality* in the Marxist view of human existence itself, for authentically interpreting this view and for further developing it, which will no longer be solely a development of Marxist *social* theory, but also a development of Marxist *anthropology*.

The surrealists performed this re-establishment by a kind of peculiar rational intuition, whilst they mostly did not engage in a detailed historical study of the development of Marx's opinions, although one exception to this was Karel Teige.[12] Nevertheless, the formulations at which they arrived may, in spite of their obviousness and "lack of academic cultivation," provide a more immediate point of departure for further work than the philosophically erudite study by Erich Fromm on Marx's concept of Man, which in our opinion can be utilised for further work only after certain, quite fundamental critical revision.

Fromm's study *Marx's Concept of Man*[13] is nevertheless, despite this – or perhaps rather precisely for this reason – one of the most fundamental works on Marx's humanism that has in recent years been presented from a Marxist perspective. Its exceptional significance consists in the fact that it *clearly demonstrates* the deep continuity between the thought of the young Marx and the "mature" Marx, and thus enables us to definitively repudiate those opinions which, in various forms and to varying degrees, have not acknowledged this continuity. Within the context of our interpretation, we are naturally interested above all in the fact that Fromm, who as a psychoanalyst has worked fruitfully since the beginning of the 1930s with the concept of elementary

[12] In his systematic study of Marx and especially Marx's early writings, Teige was exceptional not only among the surrealists, but also among the Marxists of the 1930s in general. Precisely through this creative utilisation and application of Marx's early writings, on a range of important issues Teige was able to take positions which transcended the ordinary and represented a revelatory intellectual contribution which, in contrast to the views of many of his contemporaries, have retained their validity to this day.

[13] This book is a voluminous introductory study to the English edition of Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, which thanks to Fromm's efforts was published in New York in 1960. A Czech translation of *Marx's Concept of Man* was published in a slightly abridged version by Milena Jetmarová-Tlustá in her *Anthology of Texts from Contemporary Western Philosophy*: Erich Fromm, "Marxovo pojetí člověka," trans. Jiří Neděla, in *Antologie textů současné západní filosofie*, vol. I, edited by Milena Jetmarová-Tlustá (Prague: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1966), pp. 5–40. [In 2004 a new, unabridged Czech translation of the book was published: Erich Fromm, *Obraz člověka u Marxe*, trans. Michael Hauser (Brno: L. Marek, 2004) – editors' note.]

psychic energy, which he understands as a certain general motive force in the human being, succeeded in rediscovering a perspective in the work of Marx which points to a regular affinity between Marxist humanism and Freudian psychoanalysis. Fromm therein demonstrated not only that Marx in his early phase worked with the category of a *general and constant human nature*, but also that this category is a constant category *throughout the whole* of Marx's work.[14]

[14] As evidence Fromm presents the "mature" Marx's polemic against Bentham: "To know what is useful for a dog, one must study dog nature. This nature itself is not to be deduced from the principle of utility. Applying this to man, he that would criticize all human acts, movements, relations, etc., by the principle of utility, *must first deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch*." Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 23; citation from *Capital*: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 35: Karl Marx, Capital Volume I* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), p. 605.

At the same time Fromm demonstrates that here the "mature" Marx of *Capital* practically repeats after the "young" Marx of the early writings; since Marx had already differentiated between

> two types of human drives and appetites: the *constant* or fixed ones, such as hunger and the sexual urge, which are an integral part of human nature, and which can be changed only in their form and the direction they take in various cultures, and the *"relative"* appetites, which are not an integral part of human nature but which "owe their origin to certain social structures and certain conditions of production and communication." (Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, p. 24; citation from Marx: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 1/5, ed. Vladimir Adoratsky [Berlin: Marx-Engels-Verlag, 1932], p. 596-597 Fromm's translation.) [Although Fromm incorrectly cites his source here as *The Holy Family*, he references the volume of the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* containing *The German Ideology* (vol. 1/5); yet the page he cites (p. 359) does not actually contain the quoted line (see Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, p. 35). Kalivoda evidently corrected Fromm's mistake. – editors' note]

This concerns a passage from *The German Ideology*, from the section "Saint Max," which was crossed out in the manuscript. It is nevertheless an authentic text by Marx and Engels, who themselves edited the manuscript and made the definitive corrections of style and content. It was a great achievement of Erich Fromm to have identified the core of the fundamental thesis of this passage in Marx's *Capital*.

Because this is an exceptionally momentous passage, which is of fundamental significance for an understanding of Marx and Engels' conception of the elementary factors of human existence and of the relationship between communism and human nature, it is necessary to present it in its entirety, even if it is relatively voluminous:

> Since they attack the material basis on which the hitherto inevitable fixedness [*Fixität*] of desires and ideas depended, the Communists are the only people through whose historical activity the liquefaction of the fixed [*fix werdenden*] desires and ideas is in fact brought about and ceases to be an impotent moral injunction, as it was up to now with all moralists "down to" Stirner. Communist organization has a twofold effect on the desires produced in the individual by present-day relations; some of these desires – *namely desires which exist under all relations, and only change their form and direction under different social relations* – are merely altered by the Communist social system, for they are given the opportunity to develop normally; but others – namely those originating solely in a particular society, under

Marx's thesis on the *constant* within human nature, namely *hunger and sex*, which may be merely *modified* within a certain historical epoch with regard to its form and focus, and which is a *permanent* component of Marx's conception of the human being,

> particular conditions of production and intercourse – are totally deprived of their conditions of existence. Which of the desires will be merely changed and which eliminated in a Communist society can only occur in a practical way, by changing the real, actual "desires," and not by making comparisons with earlier historical conditions.
>
> The two expressions: "fixed" [*fix*] and "desires" [*Begierden*], which we have just used in order to be able to disprove this "unique" fact of Stirner's, are of course quite inappropriate. The fact that one desire of an individual in modern society can be satisfied at the expense of all others, and that this "ought not to be" and that this is more or less the case with all individuals in the world today and that thereby the free development of the individual as a whole is made impossible – this fact is expressed by Stirner thus: "the desires become fixed" [*fix werden*] in the egoist in disagreement with himself, for Stirner knows nothing of the empirical connection of this fact with the world as it is today. *A desire is already by its mere existence something "fixed"* [*etwas "Fixes"*], and it can occur only to St. Max and his like not to allow his sex instinct, for instance, to become "fixed" [*fix werden lassen*]; it is that already and will cease to be fixed only as a result of castration or impotence. *Each need, which forms the basis of a "desire," is likewise something "fixed"* [*"Fixes"*], and try as he may St. Max cannot abolish this "fixedness" [*Fixität*] and for example contrive to free himself from the necessity of eating within "fixed" [*fixer*, meaning "certain"; note R. K.] periods of time. The Communists have no intention of abolishing the fixedness [*Fixität*] of their desires and needs, an intention which Stirner, immersed in his world of fancy, ascribes to them and all other men; they only strive to achieve an organization of production and intercourse which will make possible the *normal satisfaction* [*Befriedigung*] *of all needs, i.e., a satisfaction which is limited only by the needs themselves*. (Karl Marx – Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works Vol. 5: Marx and Engels 1845–1847* [London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976], p. 21–539, here p. 255–256, emphasis and original German terms added by R. K. [we have eliminated other brackets from the English translation in order to avoid confusion with those inserted by Kalivoda himself; we have also eliminated several notes by Kalivoda that referred only to inadequacies in the published Czech translation – editors' note].)

From this passage it follows not only that Marx and Engels characterise sex and hunger as fixed demands and needs, which thus form the *constant* layer of human existence; one page earlier in *The German Ideology* we read:

> The only reason why Christianity wanted to free us from the domination of the flesh and "desires as a driving force" was because it regarded our flesh, our desires as something foreign to us; it wanted to free us from determination by nature only because it regarded our own nature as not belonging to us. *For if I myself am not nature, if my natural desires, my whole natural character, do not belong to myself* – and this is the doctrine of Christianity – then all determination by nature – whether due to my own natural character or to what is known as external nature – seems to me a *determination by something foreign*, a fetter, compulsion used against me. (*Ibid.*, p. 254, emphasis by R. K.)

However, from this it also follows that Marx and Engels criticise Stirner's concept of "*fix*" in the sense that they reject Stirner's *fixation*, his *fixing* of the fundamental natural needs of the human being to certain "worldly conditions" (*ibid.*, p. 255). Therefore, precisely in opposition to this

entirely refutes the view that Marx in his mature phase understood the human being merely as an "ensemble of social relations."

However, the case is different with Marx's conception of "human essence," which it is necessary to differentiate sharply form Marx's concept of "human nature," and which the "mature" Marx genuinely abandons. Precisely the fact that Fromm erroneously identifies Marx's concept of "human nature" with "human essence" evidently prevented him from tracing the continuity of Marx's conception of "human nature" up to the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. Yet in the *Manuscripts* we find the most accomplished and developed formulation of Marx's conception of human nature, which is also of central significance for recognising the relationship between Marx's and Freud's conceptions of the human being:

> *Man* is directly a *natural being.* As a natural being and as a living natural being he is on the one hand endowed with *natural powers, vital powers* – he is an *active* natural being. These forces exist in him as tendencies and abilities – as *instincts.* On the other hand, as a natural, corporeal, sensuous objective being he is a *suffering,* conditioned and limited creature, like animals and plants. That is to say, the *objects* of his instincts exist outside him, as *objects* independent of him; yet these objects are *objects* that he *needs* – essential *objects,* indispensable to the manifestation and confirmation of his essential powers. To say that man is a *corporeal*, living, real, sensuous, objective being full of natural vigour is to say that he has *real, sensuous objects* as the object of his being or of his life, or that he can only *express* his life in real, sensuous objects. [...] *Hunger* is a natural *need;* it therefore needs a *nature* outside itself, an *object* outside itself, in order to satisfy itself, to be stilled. [...] Man as an objective, sensuous being is therefore a *suffering* [*leidend*] being – and because he feels that he suffers, a *passionate* being. Passion [*Leidenschaft*] is the essential power of man energetically bent on its object.[15]

relativisation of constant human demands, *against their derivation from "the relations"* (thence the significance of "fix werden" "fixing"), *Marx and Engels posit* the *actual*, proper *fixedness, i.e., the fixity, permanence, constancy*, of these fundamental natural needs. These fundamental needs *are not bound* to social relations; they are not *created* thereby; they can only be *modified* by them. Understood in Stirner's terms: though needs "fixed by certain relations" also have a genuine existence, they belong to the *second* group of motivations, *precisely those that are not fixed*.

This argument is of fundamental significance to an understanding of Marx's anthropology. In fact, it is a classic testimony of how in a work that allegedly "dissolved by historical-materialist means" the constant anthropic phenomena of the human being into "social relations," these constant anthropic phenomena *are on the contrary conceptually specified* in the polemic against their "historical-materialist dissolution into social relations," as was performed by Stirner.

[15] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 3: Karl Marx, March 1843–August 1844* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), pp. 229–346; here pp. 336–337.

Immediately after the quoted passage there follows a paragraph beginning with the sentence: "A being which does not have its nature outside itself is not a *natural* being [...]," in which Marx sharply differentiates this *human* nature from the *direct*, *natural* nature of the human being, which he succinctly characterised above (*ibid.*, p. 337). The fact that there is a deep qualitative difference between these two natures ensues entirely unequivocally from another passage in the *Manuscripts*, where it is stated that

> As a result [of the alienation of the worker under capitalism – note R. K.], therefore, man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his *animal functions* – eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his *human* functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an *animal*. *What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.* Certainly eating, drinking, procreating, etc., are also genuinely human functions. But taken abstractly, *separated from the sphere of all other human activity and turned into sole and ultimate ends*, they are *animal* functions. (*Ibid.*, pp. 274–275, emphasis by R. K.)

From the central discussion of the *Manuscripts* on "communism as a *positive* transcendence of private property as *human self-estrangement*" (*ibid.* p. 296) it follows entirely unequivocally that only the development of the total, naturally social human being under "positive" communism that will mean "the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man" (*ibid.*).

This distinction between the human being's *direct nature* and human essence, which Marx makes absolutely consistently and unequivocally in the Manuscripts, is of cardinal importance for an understanding of Marx's conception of the human being and of the developmental dynamic of this conception. We will touch upon this more in the third study [i.e. the third chapter of the book in which Kalivoda's essay appeared – editors' note]. For the purposes of this reflection it is necessary merely to note that the evidently *metaphysical* understanding of the communist human essence from the *Manuscripts* cannot be carried over into *Capital*, that the concept of human essence from the *Manuscripts* cannot be identified with the concept of human nature in *Capital*. The concept of human nature in *Capital* follows directly from the concept of *direct* human nature in the *Manuscripts*.

Fromm makes his incorrect identification of the two categories into one of the fundamental elements of his study (see Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, p. 23 and several other places). He is right in stating that it is possible to sense in places within *Capital* how the "human essence" of the *Manuscripts* finds its way into the "human nature" of *Capital*; for example in the celebrated passage from the 3rd volume where Marx writes that associated producers under communism "govern the human metabolism [...] in conditions *most worthy and appropriate* for their human nature" (Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 3, trans. David Fernbach [London: Penguin, 1991], p. 959, emphasis by R. K.). Nevertheless, this superlative attests to the fact that this concerns a mere "forcing" of the human essence into fields which have become lost to it. The issue of "alienation" is naturally more complicated, as we shall touch upon in the concluding study of this work [i.e. in "Marxism and Libertinism," the final essay in Kalivoda's book – editors' note].

Fromm is also right that Marx's sixth thesis on Feuerbach does not represent an absolute turn to a mere sociological assessment of the human being (cf. Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, pp. 63–64). However, his concrete argumentation is not adequate to the matter at hand. Fromm again incorrectly mixes "essence" with "nature" and does not see that in Marx's conception of "human essence" as "the sum of social relations" and in his view that with Feuerbach "human essence [...] can be comprehended only as 'genus,' as an internal, dumb generality which merely *naturally* unites the many individuals" (Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," p. 145), Marx still quite unequivocally cleaves to the conception of human essence from the *Manuscripts*. This is substantiated fairly convincingly also by the tenth thesis, in which Marx states that "The standpoint of the old materialism is '*civil*' society; the standpoint of the new materialism is '*human*' society, or socialised humanity" (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, Fromm is again absolutely right that the entirely

This superb explanation of human nature[16] by Marx illuminates a clear path to the key elements of Freud's theory of human existence. And if we remind ourselves once more that according to Marx, universal human nature may be merely modified by society and history, persisting in its constancy throughout the course of history, then we shall be unable to deny that it was precisely the surrealists who in the 1930s renewed, updated and enhanced this forgotten fundamental premise of Marxist anthropology.[17]

erroneous and exceptionally widespread idea that the sixth thesis on Feuerbach represented the final end of Marx's "anthropologism" is entirely refuted by the fact that Marx, independently of his superficial interpreters, maintains the category of constant human nature.

It is necessary to appreciate the absolute openness and directness with which Fromm interprets *Capital* in the spirit of the *Manuscripts* and attempts to apply the ethos of the *Manuscripts*' human essence. The tendency towards a similar conception exists also in other Marxist "philosophers of praxis," even if they lack Fromm's openness, purity, and consistency. We shall touch upon the consequences of what we consider to be this incorrect conception and these incorrect tendencies further in the concluding study. Within the given context it perhaps remains only to draw attention to the fact that the refined communist "human essence" of Marx's "Manuscripts," which is evidently the definitive point of departure also for Fromm's conception of humanism, clearly also led Fromm as a psychoanalyst to distance himself greatly from Freud's original standpoint and to become one of the leading exponents of "neo-analysis" [also known as "neo-Freudianism" – editors' note], which in our view does not have the explanatory power of authentic Freudianism. This secession of Fromm, who was a protagonist and excellent exponent of the endeavour to integrate psychoanalysis into the Marxist philosophy of the human being, a secession evidently motivated by a consistent and honourable devotion to the ideal humanist vision of the young Marx, can only be genuinely regretted.

[16] If we are to accumulate further evidence that this conception from the Marx of the *Manuscripts* persists in the work of the mature Marx, let us recall also this laconic formulation from another of Marx's essential writings, one from which *Capital* was born, the *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*: "*anderseits, soweit ich bestimmt werde, forciert durch meine Bedürfnisse, ist es nu*r meine eigne Natur, die ein Ganzes von Bedürfnissen und Trieben ist, da*s mir Gewalt antut* [...]" Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Berlin: Dietz, 1953), p. 157, emphasis by R. K. [Kalivoda quotes the text here in German. In English, the passage reads "if I am determined, forced, by my needs, it is only *my own nature, this totality of needs and drives*, which exerts a force upon me." Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 245, with Kalivoda's emphasis – editors' note.]

[17] André Breton expressed this in his inimitable poetic language in *Communicating Vessels* at the beginning of the 1930s:

> In the clamor of crumbling walls, among the songs of gladness that rise from the towns already reconstructed, at the top of the torrent that cries the perpetual return of the forms unceasingly afflicted with change, upon the quivering wing of affections, of the passions alternately raising and letting fall both beings and things, above the bonfires in which whole civilizations conflagrate, beyond the confusion of tongues and customs, *I see man, what remains of him, forever unmoving in the center of the whirlwind*. Abstracted from the contingencies of time and place, he truly appears as *the pivot of this very whirlwind*, as the mediator par excellence. (André Breton, *Communicating Vessels*, trans. Mary Ann Caws and Geoffrey T. Harris [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990], p. 138, emphasis by R. K.)

It was expressed most precisely and in the most Marxian way, albeit with additional elements, by Karel Teige:

> The poetic revolt advances beneath the banner of human freedom and human love; it is therefore an appeal to primordial dreams, to that "eternally human," *pre-social human existence* that "with flesh and blood and brain belongs to nature" (Engels); it is a tendency to develop *in their integrity* the desires of the eternal *human, modelled, cultivated and simultaneously deformed and imprisoned by the historical development of society*. It is therefore also a tendency to break down the material and ideological barriers that teach the human to submit to the powerful of this world, to forsake pleasure and to put off the day of reckoning.[18]

And it is from these surrealist standpoints and formulations that Jan Mukařovský extracted the quite exact category of *anthropological constitution*, which he applied in his theoretical work.[19]

However, is it possible to consider Marx's constant natural human nature as an anthropological constant in the full sense of the word? In order to clarify this issue, it is necessary to address a question to Sigmund Freud.

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[18] Karel Teige, "Revoluční romantik K. H. Mácha" [The revolutionary romantic K. H. Mácha], in *Ani labuť ani Lůna*, ed. Vítězslav Nezval (Prague: Otto Jirsák, 1936), pp. 10–28, here p. 27, emphasis by R. K.

[19] See Mukařovský's study "Can There Be a Universal Aesthetic Value in Art?" from 1939 [Kalivoda incorrectly lists the date as 1941, when the originally French-language article was first published in Czech – editors' note], reprinted in Mukařovský's *Studie z estetiky* (Prague: Odeon, 1966), pp. 78–84, here pp. 82–84. [The article has since been translated into English: Jan Mukařovský, "Can There Be a Universal Aesthetic Value in Art?" in Jan Mukařovský, *Structure, Sign, and Function*, trans. John Burbank and Peter Steiner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 57–69, here pp. 68–69. – editors' note] Here Mukařovský employs a number of further terminological variants in addition to the term "anthropological constitution": "general anthropological make-up," "universal human anthropological foundation," "constant," and even "anthropological essence"; these are all expressions, however, of the *same concept*, which has nothing in common with metaphysical "human essence"; here the human constant is understood *structurally* (it is a matter of the constant "make-up" of the human being).

Oleg Sus, in his very valuable study "Člověk trvající a člověk náhodný v surrealistické estetice" [The enduring human and the chance human in surrealist aesthetics] (*Orientace* 1966, no. 3, pp. 28–36, here p. 28 and subsequent), held up Mukařovský's "anthropological constant" as a fundamental designation, over and above its terminological variants. We believe that this is entirely justified, since it really is a matter of expressing that which is *enduring*; the term "constant" also helps prevent a confusion with metaphysical "essence." And the *structural* character of this constant must ensue from its *conceptual delineation*.

Precisely this conceptual delineation of the human being's "anthropological constant" is one of the fundamental goals of our current reflections.

We must not be too hasty, however, in seeking a response. Only a gradual examination of the concept of human nature will make it possible to attempt a definite answer. Most importantly, this reassessment necessarily leads us once again, in connection with the question concerning the character of human nature, to inquire into the nature of the *material structure* of human existence.

We have noted that Marx's pithy characterisation of human nature in his *Manuscripts* illuminates a clear path to key elements of Freud's conception of the human being. However surprising it may seem, Freud, in his conception of the elementary forces of human existence, in fact *objectively* follows Marx. He follows him primarily where Marx characterises drives as *life forces*, forming aptitudes and abilities of the human's *active* natural being, as well as where Marx understands the human being as an *object-oriented* being, a *suffering* being who is limited by the fact that precisely the objects of his need, without which he cannot live, which are fundamentally essential for him, are independent of him.

Essentially *this same* position of interpretation can be found in Freud's specific conception of impulses and in the fundamental Freudian principle of *life necessity* (Ananke), the fundamental conflict between the human being and reality as uncovered by Freud, between *the pleasure principle and the reality principle*.

However, at the same time Freud concretises and develops upon this shared conception of theirs. This concretisation then enables us also to resolve the dilemma we came upon in the *Manuscripts*, of the contradiction within which the young Marx understood direct human nature as *completely* animal and refined human essence as *completely* noble.

The immense significance of Freud's theory of drives for the general theory of the human being lies above all in the fact that Freud's drives – especially in the later phase of Freud's doctrine – have *absolutely nothing in common* with mere physiological instincts. The entire sphere of the psyche, including its fundamental layers, the sphere of drives, the sphere of the id, is *precisely a psyche* that, though it has its physical organ and staging ground (*Schauplatz*) in the brain and in the nervous system, is not related to them in any *direct* way; although science may eventually be able to precisely localise mental processes within the nervous system, this localisation can contribute nothing to the *understanding* of these processes.[20]

This conception of the psyche has led and continues to lead many to qualify Freud's teaching as idealist. Such an evaluation however results from a gross misunderstanding of the matter, since an understanding of the psyche as a relatively autonomous sphere which does not have a *direct* relationship to the nervous system does not mean a denial of the *mutual* interconnection in which the nervous apparatus plays the role of a certain

[20] Cf. Sigmund Freud, "An Outline of Psychoanalysis," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 21 (1940), pp. 27–84, here p. 30. Unless sources are explicitly indicated, the following interpretation refers to this last work of Freud's. The interpretation is however primarily an attempt to reach a "critical symbiosis" of Marx and Freud.

vessel (*Schauplatz*) for psychic processes; it is precisely such a mutual interconnection that has been demonstrated by psychoanalysis in a range of cases, in which psychic processes have influenced even neurophysiological processes.

However, the essence of psychoanalytic *materialism* consists in the fact that the primary layer of the psyche, the instinctual layer – Freud several times clarified this with regard to sexuality – is not bound to a definite physical organ, but finds its material source *in all* the physical zones. It is therefore a product of the object-oriented human being as a *biological totality*. At the same time, however, the psyche is *irreducible* to the physical organisation of the human being, because it lives its *own psychic* life.

We ourselves are of the opinion that the most appropriate term for conceptually grasping and delineating these specific features of the material instinctual layer of human existence is the term *biopsychic energy*. It appears that this represents a fundamental factor of the *natural* existence of the human being.

However, is this a natural factor in the ordinary sense of the word? Does this mean that the human being and the animal are absolutely identical? It is necessary to point out in advance that a certain idiosyncrasy in the way the human is compared to the animal often arises due to a somewhat metaphysical understanding of human greatness, uniqueness, and nobility; here too dialectics would not hurt, since the human being – stated briefly – is an animal and at the same time not an animal: this shall undoubtedly be the case also under communism, and has undoubtedly been thus also throughout the entire historical existence of the human being. As far as human nature goes, the pre-communist human does not differ from the future communist human.

Yet the human being differs from animals in its primary instinctual sphere. It is the *variability* of human instinctual energy, its conflictual dynamism, its *capacity for metamorphosis*, which differentiates human existential drives from animal instincts. Psychoanalysis, and above all Freud, has played an enormous role in this qualitative advance in the knowledge of the human being precisely by concretely analysing the mobility and transformative capacity of human instinctual energy, in particular human sexuality.[21]

The controllability of drives and the possibility of transforming their energy is a specific feature of human nature. This primary layer of the human psyche demarcates a certain differential dividing line between the human and the animal. Although this layer is the foundation, and it *constantly* remains the foundation, although it is historically *primal*, it cannot be explained and understood in *isolation*. In order for this regulation and variation of the instinctive forces of the human being to take place, a further fundamental component of human psychic structure must appear on the scene, namely the ego principle.

[21] This mobility is not in conflict with the "conservatism" of drives. It is precisely the conflict between this conservatism of drives and the necessity of their regulation, precisely the necessity of transforming instinctual energy, that creates the specific dialectical quality of human life. Here, within the human being, the "animal" eternally clashes with the "human."

In other words, the humanising of animal instincts into human drives does not take place automatically. It is forced by a certain organising and organisational power of the human psychic apparatus, which Freud located precisely in the ego principle. However, what is important is that this ego does not fall from the sky, but is itself necessitated by a conflict between the pleasure principle and the reality principle referred to above.

In Marx's and Freud's conceptions of the conflictual situation of the object-oriented human, we have uncovered a fundamental intellectual accord. Freud further concretised Marx's idea, developing it by taking it as a point of departure for understanding the *regulative principle*, the ego principle. *It is only with the emergence of the ego that the human emerges* from the animal; it is only with the inception of this principle that animal instincts are transformed into a new quality, into human drives. An animal becomes extinct when a critical situation has made it unable to meet its life necessities and or to find objects in objective nature to satisfy its natural requirements. When this animal develops the capacity for *adaptation* with regard to its life necessities and finds a *new way* of satisfying its existential needs, this moment, or more precisely this historical epoch, is the turning point at which the animal does not die, but the human being is born.

The principle of *variation*, which is related to the origin of the ego, is what brings the human being into the world. It is necessary to supplement our reflections here with a certain crucial remark that must be addressed to Freud. We have seen that Marx delineated hunger and sex as the fundamental instinctual needs of the human being. We consider this delineation of the instinctual sphere of human existence to be absolutely correct. Freud concentrated on the examination of sexual energy, as he found that the satisfaction of the need for food offered none of the type of variability that is offered by sexual energy, and which forms the axis of human libidinousness. There can be no doubt that the need to satisfy hunger is difficult to sublimate. However, in the manner of satisfying hunger we find a *different type of variability*, which is of immense significance for the existence of the human being and for the destinies of human libidinousness.

Above all it is reasonable to assume that the situation of life privation which gave birth to the human being was generated by a fundamental requirement for satiation, and that the human being *varied* the animal method of satisfying hunger by inventing *labour*, that is, by inventing *economy*. However, this was not a "one-off" act connected solely to the actual genesis of the human. Hunger, to be sure, is not sublimated even later, but *transformations in the method of satisfying hunger* – similarly to those that took place in the actual genesis of the human being – continue to be of *decisive significance* for the further destinies of human libidinousness, and they form the foundation of the libido's existence and transformations. Labour and economy, through which the human has been satisfying its hunger since the moment of its origin, create the conditions not only for the human being to humanise and develop its erotic life – both in non-sublimated and in sublimated form; labour and economy also create the possibility for the human being to realise itself and develop its aggressive forces, which we, together

with Freud, consider a component of the human instinctual foundation. The principle of power and control, within which human aggression is realised in sublimated form, emerges only upon the background of labour and economy, created by a human method of satisfying hunger. Hunger, in our view, along with the specific variability of the method of satisfying hunger, forms one of the fundamental components of the human instinctual sphere.

We thus arrive at a point from where it is perhaps possible to draw certain partial conclusions. In the materialist interpretation of the human being, there has hitherto predominated a tendency to interpret the motivations for human behaviour with reference to material-social, that is, economic, conditions, or to seek a human neurophysiological substrate. The material thread of human existence is constructed in the connection between these two points. Two factors are therefore in play: on the one hand the human being as a certain higher – in fact, the highest – organisation of matter; on the other, society and its economy. This framing of the problem then gives rise to various reflexological theories, which locate the key to human consciousness and to the fundamental manifestations of human life in the impulses that humans take from society or from non-human nature, and which they then process by means of the neurophysiological, cerebral apparatus.[22]

Materialism has been measured based on whether one understands thought and conscious activity as a product of matter (the brain) and whether one acknowledges moreover economic agency as a decisive force in the social-human determination of the human being. Because only these two factors existed for the materialist conception, Freudianism was declared "biologism," and thus idealism. The notion that for the materialist conception of the human being it might be necessary to reckon with certain elementary biological forces, which are located somewhere in between the human neurophysiological organism and its social existence, but at the same time form an independent and particular unity – this notion has somehow been unavailable to this manner of thinking.

From the preceding interpretation it is perhaps evident that this "two-dimensional" form of the materialist interpretation of the human being is entirely inadequate and in principle entirely erroneous. Human existence is materially conditioned not only physiologically, not only socially, but above all *bio-psychologically*. In fact, it appears that bio-psychological factors are contained directly *in the foundation* not only of the

[22] The disappearance of the psyche as an independent factor has led in recent years also to the practical liquidation of psychology. Psychology has been reduced to a mere component of the physiology of higher nervous activity. Freud has been "expunged" by Pavlov. The method by which Pavlov was set against Freud, however, was absolutely inadequate and did not correspond whatsoever to the logic of work in the two scientific disciplines that these thinkers represent so significantly. Freud and Pavlov are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary they exist in parallel and in correlation to one another.

natural but also of the social conditions of human existence. We have however attempted to intimate that in their variability these bio-psychological factors are no longer simple natural factors, but are *natural-human* factors.

The material structure of human existence is therefore a structural whole, in which the *physiological-biological, bio-psychological, and socio-historical* dimensions of the human being function in mutual interplay. We must not simply overlook the bio-psychological energy that is within the human being, since such an oversight would evidently be an oversight of the central nerve of human object-orientedness.

Although the neurophysiological processes that take place within the human being *absolutely* condition its human existence, they do not operate directly and immediately on the formation of the human's *content*.[23]

The fundamental interaction in the social-human life of the human being takes place between the bio-psychological and the social-economic dimensions. The key importance of the social-economic factor in human life is naturally beyond all doubt. Nevertheless, we have suggested in the preceding analysis that human economic activity, however much it may be in a certain sense a "base," is also in another sense a "superstructure." In relation to the bio-psychological forces of the human being, it is *secondary*; it is a certain social projection of *human* instinctual need.

Plainly speaking, it is not possible to consider the economic activity of the human being to be the material factor of the final instance. In the sense of content, the factor of the final instance is precisely human bio-psychological energy. This also means that the origin and development of layers of civilisation and culture cannot be explained materialistically only with reference to the economic-class interests of the historical person, despite the fact that these interests exert a decisive influence on the *direction* of cultural and civilisational activity and pronouncedly influence its social-ideological content. In addition to the fact that these very class interests are again merely certain transitional modes of deeper anthropic forces and pressures, the social person's bio-psychological energy is directly and unambiguously projected into the immediate life contents of its civilisational and cultural layers.

Finally, it is also necessary to emphasise that bio-psychological energy is *itself a source of human activity*. The reflexological interpretation of human history was entirely incapable of understanding and interpreting human activity precisely because it eliminated or ignored the internal bio-psychological forces of the human being. It is not sufficient merely to reflect that I perceive something, that I react to certain external stimuli and

[23] The search for physiological-chemical correlates of psychological processes is certainly an important and praiseworthy task, in which it is undoubtedly necessary to continue. Nevertheless, for a *content*-orie*nted* study of the human psyche, the results of this research will evidently continue to be more or less irrelevant; and it is also possible that these correlates will never be found. If, for example, Lenin was not too enamoured of the poetry of Mayakovsky, the chemical correlate of this feeling would evidently not be found even if Lenin had lived a thousand years later.

that I process these stimuli in some manner. By this method I completely fail to explain why I do everything that I do. Only if I understand that internal instinctual energy forces me into a permanent conflict with reality, that it forces the human to permanently occupy reality, and thus constantly to absorb and regenerate its existential modus vivendi, and that the sensory perception of the human being is a mere tool *of this internal life need*, only then can I understand that the human being is not a mere object and point of intersection of certain influences, but on the contrary *itself* operates within the sum of these influences as a *fundamental kinetic unit*.

A fundamental turn against this reflexological conception has been brought about recently by the "philosophy of praxis," which after a long time has again elevated creative human activity to where it belongs: in the centre of Marxist philosophy. Nevertheless, even this "philosophy of praxis" so far generally suffers from abstraction in its conception of human praxis. To the question of how to understand human praxis, it responds with the assertion that practical activity is the fundamental determining factor of the human being; its response is therefore that the human is simply practically active; it adds that the human also remoulds nature and in doing so also remoulds itself; Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" are in various ways elaborated as evidence. Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" are an excellent thing, but they do not explain whatsoever why the human being is practically active.

This is clarified by Marx himself in the *Manuscripts* and by Freud in his conception of human nature and the reality principle. In the *Manuscripts* Marx succinctly demonstrated that the object-oriented, sensuous human being is object-oriented and sensuous precisely in the fact that in satisfying its fundamental needs and desires it must resort to *objects independent of it*. As a result it is a *suffering* being,[24] constantly forced to resolve its life privation. The human being indisputably remoulds and humanises both nature and itself, but it is nevertheless, as an object-oriented, natural being, *in the first place unilaterally dependent* upon non-human nature. In this also lies the deepest existential[25] source of human activity, and for this reason human bio-psychological energy is *the driving force of the human being*.

We have attempted to outline a certain understanding of the material structure of human existence. It is evident that this material structure must be understood as a totality of *natural-human* and *social-human* phenomena.

[24] Marx incisively illuminated the semantic dialectic between the meanings of "suffering" and "passion" by intentionally employing the German words "*leidend*" and "*Leidenschaft*," in which this dialectic clearly shows forth.

[25] As is perhaps evident, the term "existential" is not used here in the sense given to it by existentialist philosophy. This applies also to the use of this term elsewhere in this work.

MATERIAL

ON "JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE POEM"*

(The genesis of the polemical value of imaginative expression in the work of Vratislav Effenberger)

Šimon Svěrák

In his theoretical essay "Journey to the Center of the Poem," Vratislav Effenberger engages with the semantic character and dynamic of the artistic work whose nature we could designate as irreal, irrational, or absurd.[1] The text contains, in a nascent stage, many of the concepts that Effenberger was to develop into a more conceptually concrete and systematic form in his later theoretical works. In a relatively clear-cut manner, Effenberger outlines in the essay a perspective on the basis of which the author will later

* Translated from the Czech original by Greg Evans.

[1] To be consistent with the terminology of Karel Teige, we shall also utilize the term "poetry" (*poesie*) for the imaginative artistic production. The identification of all types of imaginative (and not just literary) expression with poetry is not something we consider to be an avant-garde provocation but rather the result of an insight into the underlying principles of the work. For that matter, in the text we generally approach visual and literary creative expression on an abstract level. For our purposes, the specifics of varying modes of expression are not important.

analyze psychological and psychosocial problematics, above all with regard to human imaginative activity (dreams, inspiration, artistic creation, and so on) and its functions.

Effenberger's peculiar style – in which the line of reasoning isn't always clear and the very construction of the sentence is sometimes in conflict with the logical sequence of the argument, which nontheless features forceful metaphors and imaginative observations – may succeed in opening up the reader's consciousness to various creative associations and feelings, but nevertheless strongly complicates the reader's ability to orient him or herself in the text.[2] The essay nevertheless progresses rather unambiguously from (1) the standard interpretation of poetic expression and its dynamic, towards (2) the delineation of a theoretical model of poetic inspiration, followed by (3) a description of the transformations of poetic expression during Effenberger's own time leading up to (4) an attempt to grasp the semantics of absurdity and its relationship to reality and, finally, (5) to an outline of the semiotic structure of imaginative poetry (*poesie*). Throughout, Effenberger repeatedly emphasizes the meaning of the conscious, reflexive components of the poetic creative and interpretive process, as well as the (polemical) relationship of the artistic work to reality. According to Effenberger, it is by way of these coordinates that the "Journey to the Center of the Poem" proceeds.

The author composed the article in June of 1966. Its contents, however, are made up of material that he had already written in 1961. Effenberger formulated "Journey to the Center of the Poem" as his contribution to an international anthology that was being put together on the occasion of the seventieth birthday of Roman Jakobson. For the purposes of the article he made use of an older, extensive work (more than a hundred pages long), titled *Pohyby symbolů* (*The Movements of Symbols*),[3] selecting some passages from it that he slightly revised in a few places and then assembled into a new text. He did not write any additional material for the article. In a letter dated January 15, 1966, addressed to Peter de Ridder, who had approached Effenberger in the matter, he explains the meaning of the work and the reason he had just chosen it for the anthology:

[2] One factor in this was no doubt the fact that Effenberger became accustomed to writing most of his texts for the so-called "drawer" (i.e., due to potential censorship, they were not likely to be published in the proper sense of the word), so that the reader was usually only a secondary consideration.

[3] This work remains unpublished to the present day; it has been however extensively cited and commented upon by František Dryje in his afterword to the second volume of Effenberger's *Básně* (*Poems*): František Dryje, "Útěk do reality" [Escape into reality], in Vratislav Effenberger, *Básně 2* (Prague: Torst, 2007), pp. 827–878. Tomáš Glanc has also addressed *Pohyby symbolů* in his article "Gramatický versus imaginativní dynamismus (Effenbergerova transgrese strukturalismu)" [Grammatical versus imaginative dynamism (Effenberger's structuralist transgressions)], in Ivan Landa and Jan Mervart (eds.), *Imaginace a forma: Mezi estetickým formalismem a filosofií emancipace: Studie Josefu Zumrovi* (Prague: Filosofia, 2018), pp. 119–130.

> It seems to me, that from the work on which I am now concentrating, it would be most appropriate to select a theoretical article on internal and external symbols in poetry, painting, and life, for this most closely approaches Professor Jakobson's interests, and scholarly work.

In additional correspondence that touches on the publication of "Journey to the Center of the Poem," we also find references to the possibility of the future publication of an English translation of Effenberger's book – then in the process of preparation for publication – *Realita a poesie* (*Reality and Poetry*). This never came about, but the English version of "Journey to the Center of the Poem" was published in the aforementioned anthology.[4] We do not know with certainty who attended to its translation, but according to the information available to us it would appear that Effenberger himself prepared the first version of the translation, after which it was then extensively worked over by Lawrence Newman together with Svatava Jakobson.[5]

Although the work is dedicated to Roman Jakobson, in the background lies a polemic with surrealist views on the substance and function of the artistic work, principally as their views took shape in the interwar years (which is the period when Jakobson worked closely with the Czech surrealists). The text is conceived polemically even in those passages where Effenberger doesn't explicitly discuss surrealism. Although the author deals with the entirety of surrealist theory, his deliberations are above all a response to the ideas of Karel Teige, the leading theoretician of the Czech avant-garde and, in the 1930s, of the Surrealist Group. Effenberger was Teige's most significant successor. Of course, the theoretical methods and the general approach to the issues discussed in "Journey to the Center of the Poem" are also markedly influenced by the functional structuralism of the Prague School.[6] Effenberger's decision to publish the piece in a work dedicated to Roman Jakobson was not then out of place. Nevertheless, Effenberger was above all influenced by the theoretical concepts of Teige. In spite of the fact that he implicitly argued with Teige and criticized him root and branch, he didn't abandon Teige's *method* of approaching artistic work and social issues related to it. To the contrary, Effenberger acknowledged, developed, and worked through Teige's conclusions in light of new artistic and psychosocial conditions. We can therefore conclude

[4] Vratislav Effenberger, "Journey to the Center of a Poem," in *To honor Roman Jakobson: Essays on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, 11 October 1966*, Vol. 1 (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1967), pp. 615–629.

[5] The translation published in this issue of *Contradictions* (pp. 173–189) was additionally revised by Greg Evans.

[6] Effenberger studied aesthetics under Felix Vodička (who had studied under Jan Mukařovský and became the best-known of his students) from 1945 to 1948.

that his critique of the surrealist worldview remained surrealist. It was not a matter of destroying surrealism but of reappraising it and developing it further.

So that we can more deeply grasp the meaning of Effenberger's article, we must discuss at least some of Karel Teige's theorems regarding creation of an artistic work, its functions, and its semiotics. We will purposely set aside the development of Teige's thought and the transformations that took place within it, only engaging with those of his ideas that we consider to be most fundamental from the point of view of "Journey to the Center of the Poem."

Teige, very much in harmony with the foundational views of surrealism, believed that an artistic work was the most direct expression of the unconscious (repressed) tendencies contained in the psychic life of a human being.[7] Nonetheless, the information that a modern work of art should communicate isn't of the same nature as the rational meaning that flows from a classical work of art. When Teige develops his concept of the semantics of the imaginative work, he emphasizes the way this imaginative work evolutionarily differentiates itself from the primarily realistically- or rationalistically-oriented works of art of previous eras. In the sphere of the transfer of information, Teige distinguishes rational *comprehension* (*rozumění*) from irrational, inspirational *communication* (*sdělení*) or *sharing* (*sdílení*). *Comprehension* can be achieved by means of the traditional art work. The meaning of such works relies on the existence of an external idea or on conventional symbolism of the allegorical type.

Communication or *sharing* does not, however, function the same way as to *comprehension*. The subject matter of *communication* is irrational information, which should be produced by unconscious tendencies. Such a message does not differ from the rational, conceptual one only because it has this different, irrational content. It is not a transfer of unconscious content from one consciousness to another. Such a message is different *essentially*.[8] Its meaning has a potential and dynamic nature:

> We must see the artistic work and the viewer in a dialectical relationship; we must view the work and the contemplation of it as dialectical antitheses, and we

[7] "[The modern artistic work should be] a direct expression of the mental life of the work's author, an expression of his unconscious lyricism." Karel Teige, "Úvod do moderního malířství [Introduction to modern painting]," in Karel Teige, *Zápasy o smysl moderní tvorby: Studie z třicátých let* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1969), pp. 253–267, here 264.

[8] We will leave aside the plausible and legitimate criticism that it is not possible to lay down such a direct and radical opposition between the semantic formations of classical and modern art as the differentiation between "comprehension" and "sharing" forces upon us. Teige's deliberations are here historically conditioned and restricted by the influence of avant-garde radicalism. This fact does not, however, call into question the basis of his thinking. We believe, in addition, that in the later phases of Teige's theoretical system it would be possible to confront such an objection with, e.g., his thesis about the trans-historical existence of "fantastic art."

> must seek the proper, true living poem in the synthesis of the two antitheses. If it is said that a poem, even if it goes unread, remains a poem, it is necessary to fulfill this potentiality with the Mallarméan edict that that the poem is only made complete and fully poetic in the reader's mind.[9]

What, it might be asked, is *communicated* in this way? And how is the possibility of such *communicability* guaranteed? We already indicated that, in the classical painting, the guarantor was the existence of an exterior theme. In the imaginative work, the guarantor is the communicability founded on the existence of unconscious individual and collective complexes. Even individuals who are not directly affected by such complexes have a predisposition to them.

> To the question as to how it is possible for an artistic work to be communicable even outside of the sphere of universal primitive complexes and their universal allegories, and how it is possible for the viewer to react to the artists' individual, private complexes, we respond by saying that in art it is not about individual trauma but about the propensities from which the trauma is born, and these propensities are shared by a great number of people, perhaps even the majority them (Jean Frois-Wittman, "L'Art [sic!] et le principe du plaisir," *Minotaure*).[10] The stronger the sense in an artistic work of the secret, the latent, and the instinctive, the stronger will be the viewer's emotions.[11]

Note that Teige is not saying here that these complexes themselves or the tendencies towards them are the subject-matter of communication! Unconscious tendencies and complexes are only *that which is common*, which assures the possibility of irrational communication, and which intensifies it. To the contrary, the viewer or reader draws the concrete "content" of the transmission directly from their own subjectivity in a dialectical relationship with the work (see above). In Teige's concept, the semantic dialectic of the subjective and the objective formally duplicates the dialectic of the particular and the universal.[12]

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 266.

[10] Teige misquotes the title of the article, which should read "L'Art moderne et le principe du plaisir," *Minotaure* 1 (1933), no. 3–4, pp. 79–80.

[11] Teige, "Úvod do moderního malířství," p. 271.

[12] Here, of course, we can open up the possibility of a comparison between Teige's models and the structuralist differentiation between *langue* and *parole* and with the corresponding, rich philosophical implications and development of those concepts. This opportunity we must regrettably leave aside for the time being.

> The particular concrete and abstract images, which might in each receptive viewer awaken personal, subjective ideas, feelings, or memories, are generally and therefore "objectively" effective, forming a common ground of communication between the reader and the poet, a terrain where even the reader feels at home in his own lyricism of ideas, memories, and inner life. Certain images, forms, metaphors, words, and objects act in an appealing way on the imagination of both poets and readers, both viewers and painters, *without their being universal symbols* as they are understood by psychoanalysis.[13]

In this way the irrational, imaginative meanings of the modern artistic work are *shared*. Their message isn't primarily discursive, but emotional. It would however be a mistake to suppose that their value lacks a social function. For Teige, the principal meaning and value of art rests precisely in its social impact. Karel Teige was one of the most important interwar Czech Marxist theorists. He saw society in its historical and economic concreteness as deeply unjust due to the influence of capitalist exploitation. Contrary to many of his contemporaries, he emphasized that the poverty caused by capitalism isn't only economic, but broadly human; it is a poverty at the expense of the richness of humanity's relation to the world.[14]

Teige's communist modernism of the 1930s assumed that, in the future, a classless society would mean the *integral* freedom of man. Humanity will not only rid itself of economic misfortune, but it will also become possible for it to fully utilize its own abilities, to engage in a rich intercourse both with the world and with itself. This integral modernist idea, which posits a homology between psychological and social freedom, represents the horizon of Teige's thinking about the value and social functions of poetry.

> It is from philosophy that we receive the most basic criterion [for attaining scholarly knowledge of the value of an artistic work]: freedom. Hegel conceived of the history of humanity as a pathway to freedom. Marx sketched out the upward, serpentine path from the "realm of necessity" to the "realm of freedom." And Šalda[15] showed that the totality of the evolution of art made freedom larger and higher! Freedom in the conception and choice of a theme, freedom in the creative methods, the freedom of fantasy and imagination. What is necessary is to [...] ascertain whether a certain work or artistic movement fulfills a progressive mission in the sense laid out by the pathway to the *realm of freedom*! [...] Face to face with

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 272.

[14] Teige came to this conclusion before the publication in 1932 of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, which he naturally began making use of in his own theories as soon as he became familiar with them.

[15] František Xaver Šalda (1867–1937), often considered the leading Czech literary critic of his day.

> the artistic work, we shall ask how to effectively make the path to that freedom ever broader and higher. How to free ourselves from inherited conventions and how to free the mind of the artist and reader. We shall ask whether in a given work we can find out – and it will scarcely ever be an unequivocal matter – if it is governed by a progressive or a regressive tendency and function. How and if this work points to the liberation of the human mind, not forgetting that the general precondition of the freedom of the mind is, on the sociological-economic plane, the social emancipation of the human being. At this point the critique transcends the boundaries of art and crosses over into the critique of life.[16]

He describes in an uncommonly vivid way the force and diversity of the psychological freedom that the making of a surrealist work brings to bear:

> Surrealist pictures and poems demand that the viewer and reader perceive them as though they too were poets; during the quiet contemplation when we hear the agitations of the unconscious, the images reverberate in the viewer like the strings of a musical instrument whose music, in daily life, has been forgotten or renounced; the images loosen the interplay of memories and associations; they are born from the glimmerings that emanate from imagination and fantasy, whether they be tender or cruel, tranquil or frenzied, illogical or destructive, awakening imaginative currents in the reader's imagination.[17]

In the sense, discussed above, of the homology of psychological and social freedom operating under the assumption of the integral freedom that would prevail in a classless society – which still, in the 1930s, seemed a real historical possibility[18] – Teige's theory of the surrealist revival of emotionality could appear as an authentic, socially subversive act. And not only subversive, but also as a literally *revolutionary* act that is concrete to the extent that concrete future freedom is assumed in the communist revolutionary project.

> Imagination and fantasy evidently play a subversive role in surrealism, putting into effect the most improbable things without it being possible to deny them: the miracles of fantasy are an effective indictment of desolate societal reality, and

[16] Karel Teige, "K aktuálním otázkám kulturního života," in Karel Teige, *Osvobozování života a poezie: Studie ze čtyřicátých let* (Prague: Aurora 1994), pp. 138–139.

[17] Teige, "Úvod do moderního malířství," p. 274.

[18] In the post-war phase of his thinking, Teige moved from the concept of "freedom" (*svoboda*) to the more dynamic concept of "becoming free" or "liberation" (*osvobozování*). He nevertheless maintained the assumption of a homology between social and psychological freedom. Cf. Karel Teige, "K českému překladu Prokletých básníků [On the Czech translation of the *poètes maudits*]," in Teige, *Osvobozování života a poezie*, pp. 140–148.

> their revolutionary character resides in the fact that they render institutions and the realities of the social order deeply suspect, for they supply a person with the suspicion that in the imaginary world there resides a freedom that has been driven out from our despotic social reality, and that it is necessary by way of revolutionary transformation to also make the real world into a *realm* of this *freedom*."[19]

In Effenberger's "Journey to the Center of a Poem," the word "freedom" – used in this sense – is not to be found anywhere. A fundamental shift takes place between Effenberger's and Teige's views in regard to the purpose of imaginative creation. While in Teige's conception freedom is the specific, ultimate meaning of art, and the artistic work is in this way a means of liberation, Effenberger's formulation in this context refers to an epistemological function – that is, to attaining knowledge of reality, penetrating into "raw reality" ("It is necessary…that subjective deformation become a means of realization" [p. 183]; "[…] suddenly capable of perceiving the precise and astonishing relations surrounding the most innocent stimulus, which leads – in the discharges of black humor – to a more profound orientation within that which is designed to drown the spirit" [p. 185]; "[…] poetic mystification is one of the most effective ways by which, within the human intellect and imagination, the sense of reality, that irreplaceable motor of life and poetry, is sharpened and strengthened,"[20] and so on). The element of freedom and liberation is of course a part of the polemical function of the artistic work, but it is a freedom mostly realized by way of cognition.[21] It naturally does not have any sort of discursive quality but is rather a special type of signal for consciousness:

> After the great hope for a symbiosis of the revolutionary forces of reconstruction in art and in society, disillusion had to set in for us to realize that artistic creation had the same signal function in social life as does a high fever in the human organism, and that consequently it is incapable of taking over any tasks which ensue from any organized effort whatsoever. All systems of the association of imaginative ideas, in so far as they can be considered authentic, are subjected to a signal function which is both provoked and provocative, through which the imagination claims its social significance. (P. 184)

[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 269–270.

[20] This passage was omitted from the English version of "Journey to the Center of the Poem" that Effenberger prepared for publication. The original passage appears in the Czech/Slovak part of Contradictions 2018, p. 141.

[21] For Effenberger's later views on the possibility of human freedom, see František Dryje and Šimon Svěrák, "Zpověď dítěte svého vzteku [The confession of a child of anger]," in Vratislav Effenberger, *Republiku a varlata* (Prague: Torst, 2012), pp. 271–320, especially 307–319.

It is just this "disillusion" that is a source of the transformation of artistic creation after the Second World War; it was also one of Effenberger's motivations for reassessing surrealist conceptions, including those of Teige. This disillusion led indirectly both to a greater emphasis on the conscious element of the creative process and to a reworking of the relationship of art to reality .

When Effenberger observes that "[p]oetic value is not identical with emotionality, for it is of a more active, more imperative nature" (p. 176), he implicitly turns against Teige. The "active" and "imperative" nature resides in the fact that the poem transforms our perception of reality. It is not only a matter of more fully and more authentically experiencing reality, as was the case with Teige, but also of semantically rearranging reality and reassessing it (the poem "conquers the world in order to lend it new meanings" [*ibid.*]). Further on in the text Effenberger will write in this regard about the "polemical stimuli" contained in the work (*ibid.*)[22] and precisely there, in them, he will find the meaning that is specific to poetic expression.

> The true value and meaning of the artistic work does not reside in some specific qualities of external or internal models, nor even in the authenticity of the expression itself, but rather in the way the work polemicizes with its era.[23]

We showed that for Teige the assumption of the homology between psychological and social freedom secured a direct connection between the authenticity of expression (the work as a "direct expression of the mental life of the author") and its subversive, revolutionary tendencies. The homology he presented was mediated by the eschatological understanding of communistic, classless society as a space of absolute, integral freedom. For Teige, each *true* liberation must be liberation in the sense of the realization of socialism because, according to him, only under communism will true freedom be achieved. The prospect of a future, just society, socially concreticizing psychological authenticity, opens an artistic semiosis in the direction of the politically unambiguous liberation of the human mind.

In Teige's interpretation, the semantic stabilization of the imaginative artistic object was implicitly mediated by a Marxist worldview, which was heteronomous to the artistic work.

[22] In his later writings, Effenberger adopts the terminological designation "the critical function of concrete irrationality" for all of these "stimuli."

[23] This passage too was omitted from the English version of "Journey to the Center of the Poem" that Effenberger prepared for publication. The original passage appears in the Czech/Slovak part of Contradictions 2018, p. 141.

Although Effenberger didn't give up on an underlying Marxist point of view,[24] the failure of communism in the Soviet Union, the experience of the Second World War, and also his later experience with the real functioning of the politics of the Eastern and Western Blocs, absolutely discredited all of Marxism's eschatological and utopian dimensions – as reported above, "disillusion" set in. The idea of a truly historically attainable integral freedom was gone, and with it were the prerequisites for postulating a direct connection between psychological authenticity and the creation of a societal space for the maximum self-realization of the individual and humanity.

Just as artistic work changed in reaction to this situation, so did theoretical models reflecting to the genesis and interpretation of this work. Effenberger's model from "Journey to the Center of the Poem" shifts the social, subversive aspects of art from a sphere heteronomous to the creative process into the very structure of this process. For Effenberger, a poetic manifestation in the sense of an imaginative expression founded in unconscious, that is, repressed, tendencies (Teige's concept, and also the traditional surrealist concept), only represents the background or one pole of the process of the semantic formation of an artistic work. The second pole is mediated by a critical consciousness of social reality, that is, by human discontent with that which is to the detriment of what could be. According to Effenberger, the seemingly unbound images racing through our consciousness function as a means thanks to which we can concreticize our discontent with the world, a discontent which would otherwise remain unexpressed and so outside of awareness. It is conscious, but it lacks language, a code, speech – it is too indistinct for us to become aware of it other than through the language of the imagination.

> The emotional and consequently also the social efficacy of the symbol does not result from a free automatic movement of the imagination. It results from a determined, more or less conscious critical eliminative effort by which a polemic relationship is realized between the artist and social reality, a relationship which activates not only the mental attitude but also the very life orientation of man. […] [P]erceptual material which invites every psychologically active person to project into it his own contemplative, even if poetically conceived, impulses, or to project them from it elsewhere. Every real creation is conscious to the extent to which its inspiration is a protest against a concrete evil, even when it intends to be nothing more than a confession. (P. 181)

[24] Effenberger continually reassessed his position on Marxism throughout the whole of his life. As he approached the end of it, a decidedly reserved approach held sway (cf. Effenberger, *Republiku a varlata*). From today's perspective we would conclude that, in light of the evolution of Marxism in the Western Bloc (which, due to the political circumstances of the time, Effenberger had little possibility of interacting with), in the whole of his work Effenberger never in any substantive way broke with Marxism.

The revolutionary function of art in Teige's thinking becomes, for Effenberger, a polemical function. That is to say that polemic, as opposed to the revolutionary endeavor, need not be conscious of its final purpose. The polemic may arise from disputes or inhospitable situations, to which it reacts without offering an explicit, alternative solution. In Effenberger's theoretical conception, its entrance into the creative process concreticizes the work of art to such a degree that its effect is no longer described as only being "emotional"; rather – as we already mentioned – Effenberger attempts to comprehend it with the concepts "imperative" and "active." For Teige, writes Effenberger, this imperative resided outside of the work (in the heteronomous sphere of Marxist ideology). The viewer or the reader would see the discrepancy between the fullness of the world and the human relationship to it being expressed in a poem or painting and the shabby, daily reality of capitalist society. In "Journey to the Center of the Poem," Effenberger argues that this discrepancy should already be contained in the semantic structure of the work itself.

These fundamental shifts in the semantic shaping of artistic work – brought about by the "disillusion" from the actual possibility of fulfilling revolutionary hopes and achieving integral freedom and, at the same time, motivated by the continued need to react to social reality – are not of course without influence on the general relationship of artistic work to reality. Effenberger noticed that when a work is affected by a conscious, polemical tendency, its absurdity exhibits a special type of logic, a certain inner order; it reaches closer to reality, it closely resembles reality's conventional form so that the work, as a certain form of *poetic mystification*, can recognize and discredit this conventional reality. Such a poetic mystification should "lend its subject the appearance of objectivity, adjust reality such that it appears as little deformed as possible."[25] Its own sense then rests in being "one of the most effective ways by which, within the human intellect and imagination, the sense of reality, that irreplaceable motor of life and poetry, is sharpened and strengthened." The poetic expression as mystification does not want to abandon the significant features of reality. Reality there then looks rational and absurd at the same time.

The semantics of the imaginative work is understood in this model of Effenberger's to be socially and historically determined. Effenberger also follows Teige in his attempt to capture the work's general semiotic structure. He cites Teige's study on Toyen's graphic series *Střelnice* (The shooting gallery) and further elaborates his theory of the symbol. Worth noting here is that Effenberger describes the dynamic meaning in the artwork as an "impulse" which does not convey the meaning as such but, in the reader's or viewer's mind, creates "*very conductive tensions* into which even mutually contrastive

[25] This passage and the one that immediately follows it were, again, omitted from the English version of Effenberger's article. The original passages appear in *Contradictions* 2 (2018), no. 1, pp. 140-141.

symbolizing meanings can be introduced" (p. 189, emphasis mine). Here then we are very much in the realm of Teige's *sharing*, placed opposite *comprehending*. In "Journey to Center of the Poem," however, *sharing* is internally worked out by the polemical moments of poetry.

In this stage of the development of his theoretical system, that is, when he wrote *Pohyby symbolů* (1961), Effenberger considered the emphasis he was placing on the role of consciousness in the creative process to be incompatible with surrealism as such. He only considered surrealism to be a point of departure for his deliberations, as a phenomenon that had been historically surpassed was still in the process of being surpassed, but which opened up a certain new problematic. By the time he condensed his study into the form of the article being discussed here, in 1966, he once again considered himself to be a surrealist. He did not however change any of the theoretical models described in *Pohyby smbolů*. He only weakened some of the formulations that had been aimed against surrealism.[26] It was not a capricious change of heart, but rather an intensive five-year period during which Effenberger came to the conclusion that "the refurbishment of imaginative expression is feasible in its [surrealism's] own structure or, more precisely, by its own structure."[27]

In "Journey to the Center of the Poem," the author develops the meaning of the concept of consciousness quite freely and poetically, and it isn't quite clear what exactly should be included within it. It is, however, apparent that the polemical moments of artistic creation originate from it. From the context of Effenberger's deliberations we can surmise that "consciousness" does not so much represent the reflected moments of a mental life as it does the mental contents that are somehow reflectable (probably with the help of the imagination) and that have most likely a predominately concep-

[26] For example, let us take the following sentence in *Pohyby symbolů* (1961): "If, in his definition, Nezval identifies poetic image with symbol – 'the free movement of the imagination is nothing but a movement of symbols directed by the subconscious' – we have no doubt that there Nezval is paying for the *faith* that surrealists *of that era* placed in the omnipotence of chance and of the subconscious." In "Journey to the Center of the Poem" (1966), Effenberger changes this to: "If in his definition he identifies in his definition poetic image and symbol – 'the free movement of the imagination is nothing but a movement of symbols directed by the unconscious' – we have no doubt that there Nezval is paying for his *much too mechanical* surrealist *trust* in the omnipotence of chance and of the subconscious." (This issue of *Contradictions*, p. 181, in both citations the emphasis is mine.)

[27] "'Opustíš-li mě, zahyneš' přestává být v surrealismu tupým bonmotem (rozhovor Martina Stejskala s Vratislavem Effenbergerem) [In surrealism, 'If you abandon me, you will die' ceases to be an empty phrase (interview with Vratislav Effenberger by Martin Stejskal)]," *Analogon* 16 (2004), no. 41–42, pp. 62–65, here 65. My extensive essay on Vratislav Effenberger in *The International Encyclopedia of Surrealism*, edited by Michael Richards, et al. (forthcoming), addresses in more detail the problematic of Effenberger's assessment of the continuity of surrealism.

tual nature. This surmise is to a certain extent confirmed by the further evolution of Effenberger's system.[28]

This radical emphasis on consciousness represents an extreme theoretical attitude in the framework of the evolution of surrealist views. Effenberger will progressively work through and dialecticize the role of consciousness in relation to the imagination and its manifestations.[29] Somewhat in conflict with the Teigean point of departure, "Journey to the Center of the Poem" denies the unconscious a more substantial, meaning-generating capacity. Its irrational manifestations are understood as mere "material" that enables us to formulate, on the boundary between the conceptual and the imaginative,[30] our own polemical point of view regarding the world. As we have seen, Effenberger's greater emphasis on the conscious component was brought about by the need to reflect on the transformation of the subversive meanings of the imaginative work in its historical and social situation, when it could no longer simply rely on a modernist-conceived Marxist historical perspective, as was the case with Karel Teige. We are convinced that these ideas of Effenberger's have a wider validity and are of use beyond the boundaries of the surrealist worldview, especially in that area of the theory of art that builds on dialectical principles and for which the art work is, above all, considered to be of interest for its social and political functions.

[28] Cf., e.g., Vratislav Effenberger, *Realita a poesie* [Reality and poetry] (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1969); see, above all, the concluding section of the book, also titled "Realita a poesie," pp. 275–351.

[29] Cf. Šimon Svěrák, "Strukturalistická inspirace v surrealistické (psycho)ideologii Vratislava Effenbergera [Structuralist inspiration in the surrealist (psycho)ideology of Vratislav Effenberger]," in Landa and Mervart (eds.), *Imaginace a forma,* pp. 131–150.

[30] We should remember here that the opposition imaginative – conceptual does not, of course, map onto the opposition unconscious – conscious or irrational – rational. All three areas mutually overlap.

JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE POEM*

Vratislav Effenberger

It is true that some attention has been given to the methods of poetry interpretation. This attention, however, was not so great as to eliminate, even partially, those notorious inanities which begin "what did the poet mean" or, on the other hand, to eliminate the imperative professional deciphering of symbols which jealously wields the universal master key to all the poetic treasures of the world. The very vague assumption that there exists some mysterious code which one is able to acquire only gradually and with difficulty has a soporific influence, as does the notion that one is capable of grasping the lapidary message of the poem only to the extent that one has mastered this code. The poet himself has been separated here from his poem by a barrier of aesthetic conventions. What is decisive is not what he says, but rather what I – a literary

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somnabulist – think he meant to say. There is a general "professional" mistrust of the literal meaning of a poem.

He who is again and again ready to rush to the window whenever he hears "it's going to rain cats and dogs," certainly has a more active imagination and greater poetic disposition than those who simply note that it will pour rain. He is capable of respecting the original meaning of words and things and is not imprisoned by language conventions whose models condemn him to move with dulling passivity in front of their barrier. He has the capacity to draw reality nearer, undistorted by habit or by established literary or aesthetic attitudes. He has the capacity at any moment to find reality in its critical relationship to these customary adaptations, to see it each time for the most part anew in order to project his own self onto it and into it more accurately and penetratingly from the spillways of the imagination and intellect. The numerous testimonies of poets seem to indicate that this very state of mind, this permanent readiness of the imagination, is a necessary prerequisite and predisposition for a politically uncommitted, yet socially and psychologically aggressive poetry.

A stand against poetic license, against a vague and limiting aesthetic convention, against the literarily mechanical captivity of poetry, is one of the basic functions of a free poem. This stand, manifested in a spontaneity of contact between the poet and the reader, is brought about by that spontaneity of contact between the poet and reality which is marked by an almost ruthless inspiration. It is in these spaces that the discharges take place between the poem – which is after all a fact of art – and reality, to which the opposite pole of the poem is connected; such discharges between unifying opposites give life both to the poem and to our awareness of reality. We have to yield to the poet and not impose our own abstract aesthetic criteria. Poetry is not algebra, whatever the poets themselves may say about it. What does it matter if it can be attested that the poet was a symbolist or that he considered himself one. His poems in their magical space, and he himself, live solely by the fact that they are able to focus upon themselves ever new interpretations and investigations that might be mutually dissimilar but which usually repeatedly inspire us into further mental and sensate directions, thus setting in motion further developmental cycles.

> When it comes to language, the point, so they say, is to make oneself understood. Understood? Understood by myself no doubt, when I listen to myself as children do when they clamor for the next installment of a fairy tale. Make no mistake about it, I know what all my words mean and syntax comes to me *naturally* [...] There was once someone unscrupulous enough to include a note in an anthology that listed some of the images that occur in the work of one of our greatest living poets; it read:
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> A *caterpillar's morning after in evening dress* means: a butterfly.
> *Breast of crystal* means: a carafe.

> Etc. No, my gentle sir: *does not mean*. Put your butterfly back in your carafe. Rest assured, what Saint-Pol-Roux meant to say, he said.[1]

What can Louis Aragon say to oppose Breton's viewpoint if, in *Le Musée Grévin,* he asserts that scholarly commentators dealt a sharp blow to the mystery which enshrouded the poetry of Nerval, Rimbaud, Lautreamont, Mallarmé, and Apollinaire, a mystery that stemmed from the mistakes in the text and inaccuracies in the copies! It was evidently only those errors and inaccuracies which made the names of these cursed poets so renowned that Aragon the editor thought them worth rescuing for the purposes of the Literature of Engagement. His "scholarly commentators" crept up to these works long after the works had set in motion a whole new cycle of poetic thinking. In spite of the extreme nature of his expression, Breton's approach to interpretation is more sober and realistic than the pompous explanations of busybodies who try to distil from flexible reality a modicum of conventional pathos.

The problem of interpretation deserves our particular attention in more respects than one. The existing artistic movements have concentrated too much attention on the problems of composition. They have not tried to penetrate into that interesting area where a work of art acquires its meaning, where for the first time it becomes an actual message and where there seems to prevail an omnipotent anarchy of opinions. Although interpretative viewpoints are latently contained in the more or less evident social aspects of theories of creative systems, there is a method of interpretation that is, for the most part, merely presupposed if these theories are generally to be concerned with nothing more than an introduction to the problems of writing, an elucidation of viewpoints, or an a priori influencing of the public. Of course this has little in common with the way in which the work is received by the public at different times and places. Interpretative processes are very complex, live, and subject to change, and it is by way of this very nature of theirs that they are analogous to the actual creative process, at least in that part where the interpreter's active imagination or intellect takes over from the work some stimuli and from them builds its own interpretation almost to the point of being a further artistic expression. It suffices to mention as an extreme but characteristic case the high poetic intensity which Freud's imagination gave to *Gradiva*, a rather insignificant novelette by Jensen who escaped oblivion only because his work happened into the hands of the great poet of psycho-analysis at the right moment. A work of art changes and multiplies in time, space, and causality: it ceases to be itself and absorbs all the relationships by which it has been and is being realized so long as it is so configured by its complex relation to reality, and so long as it is binding, authentic,

[1] André Breton, "Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality," *October* 69 (1994), pp. 133–144, here 141.

and thus inspiring, and contains polemical stimuli. It is not some abstract, atemporal, and defining value stipulated by the "artist's genius," a value which can be guaranteed by authoritative judgments, but rather currents of intellectual and emotional interests which seize the work from the moment of its publication. If we were able to strip Shakespeare's *Macbeth* of the thick layer of these authoritative interpretations, of its own history in the development of art, there would remain in the hands of our "scholarly commentators" a rather lengthy and uninteresting play, hardly remarkable from the viewpoint of dramatic structure or poetic composition. Without changing a single word, there would remain in our fingers, instead of a beautiful medusa, only some small bit of slime. Fortunately for the worshippers of Shakespeare's genius, nothing of the kind is possible. Shakespeare's myth, the relations and interpretations through which his work has passed in the course of its distant journeys, are more powerful than our scholarly commentaries. We are in its power, we are in the power of a particular ritual in the creation of which we participate. We become its poets even if we should turn against it.

Being in the power of a poem does not mean giving up that individual system of thought from which our imagination is formed. Poetic value is not identical with emotionality, for it is of a more active, more imperative nature. Poetic value has its own firm order, its flexible yet well-defined structure. It is endowed with an individual formative ability through which it is continually involved with the polysemous contexts of reality. It has its own pros and cons, conflicts in which it conquers the world in order to lend it new meanings; it has its conscious and unconscious zones which connect it to our present life. It has its complex of active and passive attitudes which mutually exclude both the pathos of activity and the pathos of passivity. Through it we define ourselves.

Just as ideas combine with one another even at the moment when we are not directly occupied with their verbal expression (which has nothing to do with the particular function which the word-objects or work-fetishes within these ideas might have), the words combine to evoke – if we believe their original meaning – ideas of unusual emotional intensity. Idea-association does not yet mean word-association. If I see in a forest *a tree which resembles a gamekeeper*, it is not the same as if I suddenly recall the sentence *the girls were bending the wires*. Let us leave aside for the time being an attempt to compare the emotional values of these two statements. Instead we are interested here in their genetic definitions. At first glance, it is obvious that their origin is different. The first example is a simile – bold, yet still sufficiently suggestive to be considered a discovery in a certain context. In the other example, however, a rather complex transformation is at work, a real metamorphosis whose origin is usually attributed to psychic automatism or endophasy,[2] which is of far greater importance in poetry than the simple metaphor to which older poetry devoted a great deal of attention. This metamorphosis covers

[2] "[...] the habit of thinking in words, for in most cases it is speech itself, whether uttered aloud or silently, that gives birth to thought." Tristan Tzara, *Grains et issues* (Paris: Les Editions Denoel et Steele, 1935), p. 19.

a far greater and more variegated field of associations, forcing the active and the passive participants in the work of art (both the poet and the reader) to concentrate more intensely and to use their imagination more extensively. That is, this metamorphosis does not emerge from a continuous variable stream of associations which suddenly and without any context take on a more or less verbal shape. It comes to the fore and becomes more distinct than others by effecting a flash circuit between the subjective mental and objective exterior situations, thus becoming – within the range of its meaning – the bearer of their emotional value. The metamorphoses of authentic, not superficially "engaged" poetry presuppose a permanent readiness of imagination and an intellectual integrity. To the extent that we are able to give them such attention as they demand, we are inspired by them to discern their latent meaning on our own conceptual plane. We are inspired to determine their potential place in the global context of the poem, to determine their structure which reflects the structure of reality or into which the structure of reality is shifted if it is to have emotional importance for us. This idea, magic in its latent content and aggressive in its sudden and novel factuality, awakens us from the lethargy of conventional thinking to which practical life condemns its credulous penny-pinching savers. Conventional thinking becomes a deadening prison for the intellect if it is not overcome by the discharges of an imagination which, compared to it, has all the courage. The seeming unintelligibility of authentic poetry ensues first of all from the fallacious belief that the sentence which has suddenly emerged contains some concrete message which – however difficult it may be – can be deciphered. What did the poet want to say? That which he just said. If we shed that mistrust of the poet which makes "literature" out of poetry and add our imagination and intellect to the potential tension of an unexpected idea, letting ourselves be inspired in this way, we are no longer eager to translate the irrational message into rational speech. What we want is to develop this message further in its own designs as long as it stays in contact with what actually excites us. We participate in the poem in order to secure new dynamic positions toward factual stimuli.

I once had an occasion to watch a boy of perhaps five years sitting on the floor of a dark room in front of a big mirror. He was looking into the mirror – not at himself, but rather at the room beyond it. He sat motionless for a very long time and seemed fascinated with what he saw, with his own ideas. After a while he whispered: "And it was quiet like in a mirror." There was no exterior impulse motivating him to attract attention. He was all alone with his own impressions and ideas. Was he perceiving reality? Yes. He was finding stimuli which magnetized his cognitive ability, and he was focused, with no obligation towards any ready-made sophisticated intellectual categories, with no obligation towards organized thinking. He was perceiving reality and discerning exterior stimuli as they combined in his observational experience. Some might say that this observational experience was not extensive, while others would say that it was not marred by the depression of everyday life, which often pointlessly forces a person to translate every perception as fast as possible into clichés of "sensibility," the

value of which is subject to doubt, especially if we have an ever decreasing opportunity to admire it in actual life. What could be the difference between the child in front of the mirror and a poet? Perhaps only the fact that the poet can discern with greater certainty where to put those explosive charges of the imagination.

In its essence, perception is a classification. According to the way they classify, we may distinguish active types of people from passive types. The former tend to seek new connections, whereas the latter are content with the practical, conventional use of that which they perceive. This doesn't mean that the unveiling of new connections stands in opposition to their practical use; the function of this unveiling in the course of life, however, is more complex, more involved, and in a certain sense more fundamental.

A definite point of departure, a psychic situation, is essential for perception. Contrary to those inclined to be practical, the active and productive types with developed emotionality (whether it is applied in the field of art or elsewhere) perceive with greater and more varied care than the passive types. Of course, these active types needn't lose track of the factual meaning of the perception in the given plane of reality to which they more or less consciously relate everything that their imagination does with the apperception. The fact that we do not perceive everything that reality offers our senses and that only some of its components are capable of attracting and holding our interest is enough to expand infinitely the problems of the "theory of reflection." The impulse for perceiving ensues from our perceptual predisposition, which in no way ceases to be a result of external influences or psychic experience, whether we attribute to it a rational character or not. This very impulse is a component of mental activity which may be designated in terms of the theory of art as inspiration. For the most part, every act of perception is a subjectivization of that which is perceived, even if by immediate apperception we can verify the existence of a representational series which continually develops in our mind from every external stimulus. If we simultaneously integrate ourselves into reality through this subjectivization, this would constitute a dialectical unification of opposites which represents one of the most fundamental expressions of the dynamics of mental life.

For the problems of invention it is not decisive whether the object on which we concentrate is situated in an aesthetically conditioned environment (a painting, an exhibition, a book) or if it lies outside it, as an aesthetically unarranged component of so-called objective reality. The decisive factor of invention is a predisposition to place this object in a definite system of the imagination. We are unable to change reality; but we can incorporate a certain part of it into further contexts which mark us, which are an expression of our ways, our attitude towards the world.

A representation is an apperception which has passed through the individualization and subjectivization process of our conceptual system and has thus become a creative component of our intellect, our style. If we can consider a representation as completed at a certain moment, it contains all stylistic components which individualize not only our expression, but also our way of thinking.

A representation as a subjectivization of reality is the basis of remembering. It is this basis because remembering incorporates still further variable mental activities which as a rule are not permanently connected with a definite idea. In this sense, the idea brings a distant reality nearer to us through "the eyes" of our own "invisible" person, similar to what happens in a dream.

A representation consolidated in our mind through any influence whatever becomes a fixed idea which no longer retains the conditions of its origin, but is capable of becoming an independent bearer of the most varied affects, often contrary to those which brought it into being and consolidated it. In such cases the radius of the representation – most frequently open to receiving a new representational series – becomes set, and in this state it is capable of playing a special role in composition and style. The fact that a fixed representation with its closed character isolates itself from the current of transforming mental activities, and thus to a great extent becomes objectivized anew, prepares it to enter again the subjectivization process. This time, however, it no longer enters as a new apperception, but as a stylistic phenomenon which can assume further communicative functions.

Often there is no direct dependence between a representation and its expression. The search for proper wording or additional stylistic arrangement attests that the representation is a kind of internal model, so that anyone who wants to express the representation strives to cast it as accurately as possible. However, this internal model, even in the form given it by surrealism, is not a concept sufficiently elastic to depict or even characterize the complexity of mental activities touched off by the creative interaction between the representation and its expression. The representation is not static; moreover, often it may not be definite or conscious at the moment when an already-begun sentence or verse evokes a certain atmosphere whose full plasticity still lacks something: the author seems to have this within reach, but he cannot express it just then, and the idea overtakes him before the completion of the sentence. Jan Mukařovský once drew attention to Vladislav Vančura's statement about the far reaching stimuli which the poet discovers in a dictionary: "If we knock at the spine of a dictionary with our finger, the splendid semantic isolation changes and a great many of these words will relate to some context."[3]

Naturally, only an impulse may be involved here because even when he yields to chance, the poet yields only seemingly: actually, he selects. This selection is not without a defining relationship to the representational environment in which his imagination happens to find itself in the moment. This means that the current of representations, momentarily interrupted, seeks allies in the defense against that stylistic regulation which naturally leads from reality into literature. Chance, an external intervention, is supposed to renew the contact of the poet with raw reality: not for the embellishment

[3] Jan Mukařovský, "Jazyk, který básní [Language that Makes Poetry]," in Bohuslav Havránek, Jan Mukařovský, and Felix Vodička (eds.), *O básnickém jazyce* (Prague: Svoboda, 1947), pp. 7–17, here 13.

of a verse, not for aesthetic considerations, but out of a need to refresh contact among representations in the interest of improving their plasticity and capturing a deeper communicational position. "In the poet's consciousness the sentence intonation – a purely linguistic matter – precedes the content of the sentence,"[4] adds Mukařovský. However, this sentence intonation is not without an important relationship to the preceding content of the representation; it is evoked by the rhythm of the content which we shall consider, with less assurance than Mukařovský, to be a linguistic phenomenon, for it is too closely connected with the representational environment that can be separated from which the linguistic viewpoint only by force and after the fact. In an extreme case, we can understand it as a psycho-philological formation, while its philological component could be judged independently only if the old positivist premise of the dualism of content and form were revived.

In his book *Modern Trends in Poetry*, Vítězslav Nezval tries to characterize the difference between a simile and an image in poetry:

> A poetic image is an association of two representations both of which are of equal importance [...] the way a chord in music is the result of a simultaneous sounding of several tones. [...] In the case of a simile, the comparing representation is of shorter duration in our imagination than the compared representation; it colors the compared representation and then disappears so that the compared representation stands out even more.[5]

What was valid for classical poetics is less and less valid for modern poetry. In the course of time both the image and the simile have multiplied their functions so much that if we have to recognize this multiplication, we cannot avoid replacing the obsolete terms with more accurate ones. In the course of newer symbolization processes, both the image and the simile lose their former functions as the chief bearers of the message. The verse becomes a sentence, although in a poem this sentence-verse has a different semantic structure than in speech or other verbal forms. At present, the symbolization process operates with more everyday and less aestheticized material than the older poetry did. Images and similes, to the extent they still occur, have a meaning that is no longer direct but rather secondary, and which may be ironic or sarcastic or may debase literary style. Nezval is mistaken when he thinks that "a poetic image is a result of a free automatic movement of the imagination, controlled by the requirements of our unconscious [...] it is thus a symbol, and its logical uncontrollability is not at all to its detriment but to its benefit."[6]

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[5] Vítězslav Nezval, "Dvojí obraznost [Double Imagination]," in Vítězslav Nezval, *Moderní básnické směry* (Prague: Dědictví Komenského, 1937), pp. 9–25, here 13–14.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

If in his definition he identifies poetic image and symbol – "the free movement of the imagination is nothing but a movement of symbols directed by the unconscious"[7] – we have no doubt that there Nezval is paying for his much too mechanical surrealist trust in the omnipotence of chance and of the unconscious. The emotional and consequently also the social efficacy of the symbol does not result from a free automatic movement of the imagination. It results from a determined, more or less conscious critical eliminative effort by which a polemic relationship is realized between the artist and social reality, a relationship which activates not only the mental attitude but also the very life orientation of man. What Nezval considers the motive essence of poetry is nothing but perceptual material which invites every psychologically active person to project into it his own contemplative, even if poetically conceived, impulses, or to project them from it elsewhere. Every real creation is conscious to the extent to which its inspiration is a protest against a concrete evil, even when it intends to be nothing more than a confession.

The calloused hand of the poet completes the dramatic form. The verse tries in vain to attract attention. Nothing can be heard. Once more Josef Dobrovský's scrutinizing ear stoops to listen. Nothing. The verse is dead. The tradition of noble amalgams, those frolicsome or tragic aggregates, as remarkable as they are soothing – all that sank into the darkness of literary history. The structure of the classical verse could not bear that subtle yet brutal load with which the reality of the twentieth century inscribes itself into the poets' imagination. With what satisfaction we were able to follow here František Halas's intense mutilation of verse forms, those pastorals played on a broken organ.

The artificial rhythm of poetic composition, given by one dominant prosodic system, has become the antithesis of another natural rhythm whose character is determined not only by the nature of the language but also – and above all – by a special type of emphasis that is one of the communicative functions of the poem. The verse which has changed into a sentence, into a certain reflection of the emotional level, had to lose its connection with classical prosody if it was to come nearer to the sweeping current of affective thinking and become its bearer.

For a long time I thought that the use of bound, rhymed verse in Czech poetry terminated with Nezval. He made it contemporary by the naturalness of language, freed it of the deposits of license and alliteration, and made it navigable for a free stream of imaginative thinking. The conflict between this thinking and the prosodic order, which he ingeniously destroyed, was the contribution of the Nezval period. It was Karel Hynek in the *Little Lord's Diary* who discovered that the rhyme, as an essential component of bound verse, as a literary and aesthetic phenomenon, could also be used in an anti-literary and anti-aesthetic sense. Here literary aestheticism is criticized by an ironic attitude towards its elevated style, that is, criticized by means of cynicism. In this work, the aesthetic function of the rhyme and bound verse, as it was left by Nezval,

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

is dragged by the hair; it is degraded, and this degradation itself becomes a part of the communicative function. The ironic attitude taken toward prosody makes the poetic message more profound and gives it a characterizing mission.

Rhyme as a mnemonic device lost its original meaning long ago. When the poetists[8] attributed to it an associative efficacy that could "connect distant wastelands, times, breeds and castes with harmony of word" and could "create miraculous friendships,"[9] in no way did they affect its traditional significance, for this associative and inventive ability was brought about not by the rhyme alone, but rather by the provocative courage to form metaphors for which the rhyme was but a means. In this sense, the poetists stressed the mere decorativeness of the rhyme, which they enlivened through topical associations. These inventive kinships escape their aesthetic lot only when the cadence of the rhymed poem creates some sort of emotive, grotesquely hyperbolic vibrations whose associative faculty spreads like an echo through the imagination of the reader. The power of inspiration exceeds the limits of the poem and penetrates to further sources.

The diction of Apollinaire's verse made such an impact on the development of poetry that it opened up a new epoch. It destroyed the former artificial unity of the poem in order to replace it with a far more substantial integrity. It contemporized sensibility. A narrative tone and accidental rhymes, a new interrupted rhythm which became the new rhythm, an aggressiveness of poetic imagination and a feeling for its concreteness – all of these new elements of post-Apollinaire poetry could no longer be related to classical prosody, just as it is impossible to adapt classical prosody to this development of poetic creation. It became necessary to define new concepts.

The surrealist intervention shifted Apollinairian diction into the area of the unconscious, into the current of the so-called psychic automatism which the poets of Breton's movement believe evokes, as a dream does, latent symbolism, through which the lower strata of our ego speak. They were willing to yield completely, or at least for the most part, to creative passivity. Originally they intended to limit their creation to a mere recording of what they thought represented unconscious mental action, and they concentrated all their poetic activity upon the interpretation of these records. The poem was to become an expression, a spontaneous product of emotionality minimally deformed by creative will, whereby the emotionality was controlled by the significant power of unconscious mental processes. Although the participation of consciousness in poetic creation was to be eliminated, it was impossible, at least in the most intense

[8] Poetism (1923–1932) was an avant-garde movement in Czech poetry influenced by Apollinaire and his conception of poetry. In the early thirties it fused with surrealism. Its representative poet is Vítězslav Nezval; its representative theorist Karel Teige.

[9] Vítězslav Nezval, *Parrot on a Motorcycle: On Poetic Craft*, trans. Jennifer Rogers (Brooklyn, NY: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2010), eighth page (unnumbered).

surrealist manifestations, to suppress conscious intervention entirely. It is more and more evident that no manifestation of emotionality can do without the participation of consciousness, even if it yields to all the hard blows of the imagination. It is necessary, it seems, that the agitated consciousness hold this manifestation up against external, rational conditions in the moment when they are already ceasing to exist as bearable conditions of life, in order that subjective deformation become a means of realization. Under these circumstances, the poem shed the last prosodic considerations and changed into a state of open thinking.

To be able to follow a free current of ideas, the poem maintains seemingly loose ties between sentences. This is contrary to prose which is based on a firmer context and which, in comparison with the inspirational flashes of the poem, represents a more systematic form of thinking.

If absurdity were only nonsense, that which within a certain expression has no limits, if it were nothing but a jumble of words or a dispersal of an image in the void of external fortuities, we could believe that imagination in art is nothing but various forms of metaphoric arrangement of the elements of reality which flourish into a style. It would be then possible to analyze this style with regard to given aesthetic criteria, to separate its correct constructions from inaccurate and false ones as teachers of shorthand or literary shepherds imagine it. However, what makes absurdity shocking is not what supplements the idyllicism of literature. Absurdity as an individually conditioned shift in attitude towards generally recognized values – potentially present in all forms of conflict between imagination and reason, keeping watch over the past and the future even as it leaves to reality all of its painted doors – has a firm order of its own which occupies a sort of paraposition relative to formal logic as well as to all forms of formal logic's negation. The order of absurdity is neither illogical or a-logical. It determines for the logic of situations a causality where the emotions are freed of accumulated conflicts which – even if they did not arise in opposition to a logical arrangement – are momentarily insolvable within the framework of this arrangement. It is probable that an ingenious analysis which subjected innumerable factors to a minute investigation might renew our belief in the shaken authority of "common sense"; but only at such time as we have also become convinced that we have acquired by this a universal code for deciphering any situation, which in itself is, of course, an absurd assumption. A peculiar type of immobility, together with involuntary humor create an optimum atmosphere for the imagination of present-day man. They incite the imagination against the Gordian Knot of insolvable situations in which we are supposed to live and which are supposed to beat up on us so that we become digestible to the blunting mechanisms of life.

Anonymous authors of absurd anecdotes are usually remarkable poets. It is of no consequence whether or not they are aware of what they are doing. They have invented a game, given it form and suddenly everything else becomes magnetized. They play, giving full reign to a mysterious logic and bringing the natural encounters of logic into

play with that which passes it by in real life. From the standpoint of the type of creation under consideration here, there ensues from this game a rare futile irreconcilability with absurd phenomena. These phenomena, although blessed by the highest authorities, are unacceptable to man simply because their fantastic nature is not a product of human imagination but instead of some unintelligible predicaments; it is the residue of bygone functions. The danger of disorientation concealed in such phenomena is probably strong enough to incite the imagination to remarkable feats. Absurdity and fantasy, unless controlled by poetic imagination which uses them to defend a human orientation, are either treacherously depressing or provoke poetic inspiration.

Those conditions have disappeared that allowed giants of Goethe's type – who might defend, for example, a totally false teaching about color with unremitting persistence – to acquire the feeling that they have outgrown the globe and that their ideas were conquering the universe. The aristocracy of the mind disappeared with feudal society. Two of the most outstanding tendencies of 19th-century art gave the problem of artistic creation an importance commensurate with that which would be later attached to it by other approaches: (1) the romantic motifs of landscapes, rich in shapes and colors, from which emanated a charming calm and a yearning for loveliness, and which the painter sold to the ever-swelling bourgeoisie; (2) the illusions of horror with which the dark romanticists, who had the opportunity to feel the moral and material weight of that affluence on themselves and on their surroundings, defended themselves. But it was not until much later that any attempt was made to solve the problem of artistic creation, particularly in theoretical terms. After the great hope for a symbiosis of the revolutionary forces of reconstruction in art and in society, disillusion had to set in for us to realize that artistic creation had the same signal function in social life as does a high fever in the human organism, and that consequently it is incapable of taking over any tasks which ensue from any organized effort whatsoever. All systems of the association of imaginative ideas, in so far as they can be considered authentic, are subjected to a signal function which is both provoked and provocative, through which the imagination claims its social significance.

> How mysterious is imagination, that Queen of the Faculties? It touches all the others; it rouses them and sends them into combat. […] It is both analysis and synthesis […] It decomposes all creation and with raw materials accumulated and in accordance with rules whose origins one cannot find save in the furthest depths of the soul, it creates a new world […] As it has created the world, […] it is proper that it should govern it.[10]

[10] Charles Baudelaire, "From *Salon of 1859*, III in Art in Paris: 1845–1862: Baudelaire's Reviews of Salons and Other Exhibitions," in Stephen Prickett and Simon Haines (eds.), *European Romanticism: A Reader* (London, New Delhi, New York, and Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2010), pp. 91–93, here 91.

This new world of Baudelaire's imagination is nothing but the real world under a new interpretation brought about not by the anarchy of fantasy but by a mysterious and profound law, which has more or less obvious reasons for its ability to be transformative.

There are the *abstractionists*, worshippers of a disquieting Beauty. The beauty of nature has been decomposed into its original elements: color harmonizations, controlled disharmony, and equilibristics of form. These are the paths of the clouds along which one can disappear from reality into the materialized fragrances to which the art industry adapts itself so well that it can trap us in merciless luxury and unyielding expediency, which we have to use if we are to prove our identity in a future that has become the present. Even the adherents of miserablist aesthetics (neo-dada, pop-art), who organize shocking but hopelessly passive confrontations of incongruous elements, leave no doubt whatsoever that their jokes – in spite of all their brutality – demand a very keen sensibility in questions of taste. Unfortunately, we are not able to shake off our impotence as a snake sheds its skin. We do not hibernate, but live in what we create for ourselves. Somber reality is somber reality. We have to bear it in everything that we are, all on which we sleep, all we wish to change. We do not want to subordinate ourselves to it, but we know that it exists. We do not imitate it. And if we throw at it images of its own fossilization, these images correspond only to the amount of anger with which we try to tear down that which encircles us.

If we consider Camus's statement that the effect of absurdity depends on the use of exaggerated logic, then we must add that, in this instance, instead of exaggerated logic it depends rather upon very accurate logic applied in unusual places. This unconventional and anti-conventional logic often manages to illuminate reality with such an intensely bright light that we are suddenly capable of perceiving the precise and astonishing relations surrounding the most innocent stimulus, which leads – in the discharges of black humor – to a more profound orientation within that which is designed to drown the spirit.

> We shall be forced to admit, in fact, that everything creates and that the least object, to which no particular symbolic role is assigned, is able to represent anything. The mind is wonderfully prompt at grasping the most tenuous relation that can exist between two objects taken at random, and poets know that they can always, without fear of being mistaken, say of one thing that it is *like* the other; the only hierarchy that can be established among poets cannot even rest on anything other than the degree of freedom they have demonstrated on this point.[11]

[11] André Breton, *Communicating Vessels*, trans. Mary Ann Caws and Geoffrey T. Harris (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), pp. 108–109.

So writes Andre Breton in his *Communicating Vessels*.

> To compare two objects as far distant as possible one from the other or, by any other method, to confront them in a brusque and striking manner, remains the highest task to which poetry can ever aspire. Its [...] power should tend more and more to practice drawing out the concrete unity of the two terms placed in relation and to communicate to each of them, whatever it may be, a vigor that it lacked as long as it was considered in isolation. What must be undone is the formal opposition of these two terms [...]. The stronger the element of immediate unlikeness appears, the more strongly it should be surmounted and denied. [...] So two different bodies, rubbed one against the other, attain through that spark their supreme unity in fire [...].[12]

What Breton describes here is the formative process of a metamorphosis, the origin of a poetic image. He implies that the motive force of this creative process, of this change in values, is the mechanism of unconscious mental sources. If this poetic image is to become an effective act of communication, however, if it is to be at all communicable, then potentially it cannot do without symbolic functions; it is not only an image but also a semiosis contained within this image. However, this would give rise to the rather monstrous assumption that symbols form a latent language of poetic images and that their communicative ability is based on some general linguistic convention between the poet and his public. We know that in reality – at least in powerful poetic situations – no such convention exists, and if in the course of time it forms as a secondary sediment it is in the very nature of these symbols to violate such convention. What then is a symbol if not an established sign of communication? Maybe it is just a momentary result of the dynamic symbolization process, a very distinct impulse in whose semantic formation participates the whole context that precedes and follows it. At best, the poet is too absorbed in and focused on the creation of the poem for the series of impulses evoked by the poem to be merely arbitrary or void of content. In this state of absorbed concentration, in this activated cause, in this necessity to provoke the imagination to take a certain course, conscious critical activity plays a significant role. That higher unity of fire, if it is really to kindle the flames, does not result from a clash of any two bodies – no matter how distant they may be from each other – if the poet is only playing with them, if they are not given power by what preceded them and what will follow them. Without signifying a return to apriori subject matter, it is necessary to grant an active role to the poet's critical consciousness in the creation of poetry, even if it be only

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 109–111.

with regard to those systems of the human mind to which the principles of dialectics and analogy apply.[13]

Whether we consider a metamorphosis in poetry to be a product of the unconscious forces of mental automatism, or whether we see in its formation an act of a more or less conscious revolt against the depressive features of life determinism, its resultant meaning is not a vague aesthetic pleasure or, more drastically, an imagined exoticism, but a communication directed towards the concretization of sensations and impressions; and this tendency to communicate cannot do without certain symbolizing meanings. However, for this symbolizing meaning, for this type of symbol, there exists no dictionary of fixed meanings which could be used to decipher a poem or painting:

> A symbolizing thing also contains, in itself, qualities other than those which characterize the symbolized meaning. The secret of symbolic works which defy conceptual rational interpretation, the inability to provide an accurate and complete answer to the question of what paintings of this type represent and mean, lies in the fact that a symbol is never entirely identical with its meaning. A symbolic picture always represents something more than the symbolized content, remaining at the same time also a direct, non-figurative denotation of the thing. In any case, doubts can arise about whether the shapes of the individual components and motifs of the pictures are to be considered as symbols or not.[14]

These special qualities, in which Teige sees the secret of symbolic works, defy rational explanation; however, their effect is not at all weakened by this. This secret can be a real secret only if it is not *hopelessly* unintelligible. This intelligibility, although it does not move within rational concepts, is inseparable from what Teige calls symbolized content. The secret of a symbolic picture is given by the dynamic and variable meaning of the symbols; this mobility and variability is partly evoked by the context, by the relation of one symbol to another and to the whole atmosphere of the picture, and partly by the relation of the whole work to reality, on which its individual interpretations are based. The title of the whole work can also play a special, suggestive role. The picture *An Old Man Beating an Old Dog* can be a mere description of an event which forms a part of the whole whose meaning – or to be more exact, whose communicated message – can be most varied. If, however, the context in which the picture is found directs our attention to an increased sensitivity to symbols, there can be no doubt that here we have

[13] Gérard Legrand, "Analogie et Dialectique," *La Brèche* (1964), no. 7, pp. 17–30.

[14] Karel Teige, in his preface to Toyen's cycle of paintings, published in *Střelnice* (Prague: František Borový, 1946), pp. 3–6, here 4–5. (Later republished as Karel Teige, "Střelnice," in Teige, *Osvobozování života a poezie*, pp. 87–98, here 92–93. – Editor's note.)

an idiotic foolishness of senility, as cruel as it is pathetic. The picture became a symbol only by the fact that it was granted a symbolic character by its semantic context. Also, interpretations in which a message is created whose bearer is a picture or a poem do not take the meaning of the symbol over from the work of art in a definitive state but supplement this suggested meaning or may even change it.[15]

A number of external factors apply here which may have only a very indirect and distant connection with the interpreted work, yet which nonetheless modify the meaning of the symbol and by consequence the message of the artistic expression itself. Even if it is evident that the fundamental expansion of the complexity of the symbol differs considerably from that conception of it that is characteristic for classical or romantic symbolism, it is difficult to give up this concept as long as we are dealing with the problems of the social or psychological effect of a work of art. We are still dealing with semiosis, yet a semiosis more and more marked by the newly acquired knowledge of the complexity of reality.

These symbolization dynamics modernize and change values in the evolution of art. Because of their static nature, conventional symbols lose their real symbolizing significance and become merely artistic ornaments. In this state they can become material in and of themselves for new and entirely different symbols: a poem, in its tendency toward spontaneous, living contact with reality, defends itself against the literary atmosphere by treating the conventional symbols in an ironic way (for example, the poetics of Karel Hynek).

Anything can become a symbol for a psychologically active observer. Any object or action can be discerned as symbolic if we are able to understand and develop the very subtle dialectic of the intellect and the imagination in the process of perceiving real connections or works of art. There is no symbolic meaning of things given once and for all. A real stack of wood can just as well become a symbol (for example, in the paintings of Mikuláš Medek), just as we may be unable to discern an intentional symbol in heraldry if we do not know its conventional interpretation. The symbolic character of things and actions is due to the latent or manifest needs of our changing states of

[15] In his book, *Sláva a bída divadel* [*The glory and misery of the theater*] (Prague: Družstevní práce, 1937), Jindřich Honzl mentions Stanislavsky's surprise when during a performance of Ibsen's *Stockman,* the crowd burst out in tumultuous protest. He says: "The crowd interpreted the words about a ragged coat like a sick man afflicted by interpretational lunacy" (*ibid*., p. 55). He then adds: "There are concentrated in the audience suppressed complexes of revolt. It is not only the dramatic story and the idea of the play that are spoken from the stage; so too is everything which can find a connection with life's reality; Stockman's ragged coat is interpreted differently by Ibsen and Stanislavsky, and differently by the revolutionary psyche of the audience. However, the very obscurity of this image-reality lends great emotional force to it. The spectator's interest, imagination, and desire upsets the realistic description and takes the logic out of the meaning of people and things. They make *irrelevant facts*, rather than the action and the hero of the story, into the bearers of desire" (*ibid*., pp. 56–57).

consciousness and of the impulses that consciousness can be given by a work of art. Whether we are the inspirers of symbols by creating poetry in the broadest sense of the word, or whether we are inspired by them as members of the public, who complete in our minds the formation of the symbolization impulses which are contained in artistic or real objects, in neither of these functions – which have a tendency to merge anyway – do these impulses have a generally or permanently valid meaning, for they only represent very conductive tensions into which even mutually contrastive symbolizing meanings can be introduced.

It is natural that in these states poetry is not something that can be connected to any general aesthetic order or agreed-upon values – things with which every authentic work of art is in permanent conflict. A perception which we have experienced as symbolic presupposes no given attitude to beauty, pleasure, or culture whatsoever. In this detaching yet simultaneously systematizing and consequently also objectivizing ability, in this ever recurring and newly conflicting appearance, in which poetry protects the most valuable core of human individuality and imagination, poetry can resist all monstrous mechanisms, even those which cybernetic laboratories cunningly promise to it.

REVIEWS

KARL POLANYI'S HUNGARIAN WRITINGS

Karl Polanyi, Karl Polanyi: The Hungarian Writings, ed. Gareth Dale, trans. Adam Fabry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 256 p. ISBN 9781784994259.

This collection of short writings, most of them penned by Karl Polanyi in the early twentieth century, is a timely foray into the powerful thinking of a young and passionate intellectual who was morally and practically wrestling with the social and political conditions of his time. The reason these meditations appear so relevant and prescient is because they haul us back into a historical period in which the great battles between progressive and reactionary forces were staged; battles that, perhaps, belong to the past but to which new generations, much to their chagrin, find themselves thrown back. And, like Polanyi, the engaged intellectual today must – yet again – work through subjects such as the paradoxical popular fascination with fascism, and separating the inspiring promises of socialism and the irrefutable discoveries of Marxist theory from dogmatic belief. Blending acute reflections on the ironies of history with an unrelenting search for the right praxis, Polanyi provides a template, as it were, for rethinking our own time.

In the introduction, Gareth Dale expertly engages the connections between Polanyi's biography and the vicissitudes of Hungarian politics of the early 20th century. Besides contextualizing these short writings, it also serves to illustrate an enormous flux of political ideas, disaffections, and inspirations that seemed to converge in representative personalities. Polanyi did not identify either with communism or liberalism, and relentlessly sought a third way – "a social arrangement in which democracy could be extended into the workplace" without completely abolishing markets (p. 24). Dale locates this desire in the divergent influences that shaped Polanyi's thinking: the romantic anti-capitalism of his mother Cecile, his father Mihály's British liberal creed, the anti-positivism of Georg Lukács, the revolutionary syndicalism of Ervin Szabó, and perhaps, most importantly, the Fabian socialism of Oscar Jászi. Another defining factor in Polanyi's intellectual and political trajectory was the fact that he, like many other radical intellectuals who grew up in *fin de siècle* Hungary, was Jewish. Dale brilliantly exposits the "peculiar dilemma" of the Jews who – although dominant economically and in the professions – had a pariah status if they remained Jews. If they converted, however, they could instantly become part of the establishment. But this was a morally troubling

compromise. Haunted by their intimate experience of oppression and marginalization, and oscillating between their parvenu and pariah status, Jewish radicals often chose the path of a "conscious pariah" to become advocates of a universal humanism (p. 4).

Albeit products of a historical and biographical context, these writings are by no means constrained by the particular. To the contrary, the good faith struggle with concrete historical and social conditions elevates them to a universal significance that resonates a century after they were penned. Dale has separated the interlacing threads of the writings into four different concentrations: religion and ethics; political ideas; world politics; and Hungarian politics, capped by some of Polanyi's related correspondences. In the first section, one finds Polanyi comparing and contrasting religion and metaphysics and emphasizing their common failings. He is unapologetically critical of the hollowness of metaphysics and what he calls the "useless and mystifying concept" of truth (p. 44). For a materialist such as Polanyi, it is perhaps obvious that so-called truth is not innate to the thing but fundamentally shaped by an *interested* agent.

Polanyi finds echoes of his assertion of a dialectical relationship between mind and matter, of thought as the activity of an organism embedded in the world and pursuing its particular mode of enjoyment and survival, in the ideas of the physicist and philosopher, Ernst Mach. Thinking, he argues in his preface to Mach's *Analysis of Sensations,* is "the process through which our thoughts adapt themselves to the facts" toward self-preservation, and in an economical way in view of the inherent limits of the consciousness (p. 46). While communist orthodoxy may have been critical of such "reactionary" philosophy,[1] for Polanyi, Mach's work only demonstrated the material conditions of knowledge production. This critique of metaphysics foreshadows the tectonic critiques of Western philosophy and Cartesian rationality which were to soon appear in the form of Heidegger's concept of "Being-in-the-world," and later Husserl's "lifeworld." These critiques also worked their way into the associations of power and knowledge, painstakingly demonstrated by French poststructuralism and psychoanalysts such as Jacques Lacan.[2] And yet, we continue to live as much under the moral and intellectual suzerainty of fetishized truth/power today as we ever have, paradoxically proving these critical assertions and maintaining Polanyi's nascent interrogations in their compelling freshness.

Polanyi's diatribe against religion is even more acerbic as he accuses it of betraying the lofty values of morality and corrupting "the wondrous resources of faith and trust" by treacherously blending them with zealous credulity, thereby poisoning the "mainsprings of human growth" (p. 49). Faith and trust are the very basis of moral being, of community and a caring self that is capable of empathy. Religion colonizes

[1] See chapter V of Vladimir Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism: Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy*, in Vladimir Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 14 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), pp. 17–362. Available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/mec/six5.htm.

[2] See Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (London: Norton & Co, 2007).

these most cherished qualities of the human being and deviously lends them to the most unthinking zealotry and superstition, stifling the growth of human society and civilization. Instead of a moral order inherited from religion, or based in inherited fallacies, Polanyi calls for a creative moral order founded by a free will that incorporates the lessons of historical materialism. Against the common accusation that free thinkers destroy the existing moral order without providing any alternative, Polanyi retorts that instead of following the dogma of a neurotic and classist inherited order, free will takes responsibility for not merely choosing between good and evil but also declaring "*what* is good and *what* is bad" (p. 54). No less inane, inoculating, and harmful, however, is the pervasive modern fatalism that society progresses and develops of its own accord, and that the role of politics is merely "to facilitate this development" (p. 57). This kind of *scientia occulta*, Polanyi argues, construes our own moral commands as but the "empty echoes of unfolding events." He questions the circular belief that would have us incessantly defer the execution of social goals, apparently derived from society, to the development of society itself. Instead, Polanyi exhorts his audience to recognize the limitless value of conviction, and the immense power of a will that freely chooses what it ought to do. The solid mass of human convictions "acts not as a mirror to the world, but its foundations, walls, and cupola" (p. 59).

Polanyi's genius in juxtaposing the moral will with historical events is demonstrated particularly well in the essay, "The Calling of Our Generation," an eloquent analysis of the moral crisis of the First World War. The great evil of this war, he reckons, was not the destitution, injuries, or sickness, but the boredom, the torment of souls over existence deprived of its meaning. It was a time of utter irony: from governing circles faking determination when in fact it was impossible to govern; opposition parties pretending to be against the war while disguising their support for the war as self-restraint in the national interest; peasants who were continuously shedding blood even as they got richer; and merchants whose craft had become as risky as the soldiers', where they traded in scarce, inferior goods that could as easily earn them a medal as land them in prison. But nothing, says Polanyi, was more disappointing than the conduct of the proletariat, which could alone be held to a higher moral standard. While the world waited expectantly for it to rise to the challenge, it too was found "burning in the sinful fevers of war" (p. 70). There was to be no repentance for this tragic moral failure either: the working class found itself in a privileged position and workers were able to keep their jobs as long as they kept the war industry going.

Polanyi repeatedly underscores the importance of reflecting on these events as these lessons from the depressing meaninglessness, which only appear in fleeting flashes of recognition, must not be forgotten. The witnessing must be committed to memory as it unfolds in the present, since, in retrospect, everything can be given meaning and glorified. But Polanyi feared – and who could blame him – that the true lessons of the war would be forgotten and the rulers would continue in their way "without faith and conviction," silencing everyone who would search for the truth (p. 73).

For all his exasperation, Karl Polanyi of the "Hungarian writings" is at heart a believer and a romantic, qualities that he longs to inspire and applaud in the new generation – the youth from whom he dreams of tidal waves of change. His faith is revolutionary, Jesus of Nazareth being a towering example of such revolutionary love. He cites the Gospel: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the Earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have *come* to turn the man against his father, and the *daughter* against her *mother*" (p. 75; Polanyi's emphasis). And it is precisely this revolutionary love that he sees in the poetry of Endre Ady, in creative labor awakening the soul to the "seismic rumblings" of society. It was also at the core of his passionate involvement with the Galilei Circle, a putatively apolitical group of radical free thinking youth that sought "to learn and to teach" towards creating a new Hungary. However, like many a knight of faith–to use Kierkegaard's eloquent phrase–Polanyi's inspired imagination is left flummoxed by reality, particularly by what he saw as the failings of Bolshevism. Polanyi cannot help being discouraged by the Bolsheviks' dogmatic insistence on the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat. He finds such assertions of faithfulness to Marx opportunistic, as the Bolsheviks had quite willingly ignored Marx in other regards. For example, they had adhered to the old order of nationalism, ignoring Marx's radical globalism, and continued to follow a capitalist economic model that ignored the central tenet of the internal contradictions of capital accumulation.

Polanyi has no tolerance for dictatorship, whether of the proletariat or as an intermediary measure. Socialism is to be cherished only insofar as it stands for greater equality and freedom than exists, and is based on faith in the human ability to morally change, progress, and flourish. The Russian communists, he believed, failed because they gave in to the false idea of an immutable selfish human character, and only had "*confidence in the enforced laws of development*" (p. 102, Polanyi's emphasis). This for him was a "hopeful fatalism," practicing a politics based on the incitement of hatred, envy, and profiteering instead of reaching out to the forces of human ideals and morality (*ibid.*). The social democrats fell to the same methods, adopting brutal tactics of violence, intimidation, and overbearing political power and terror, defiling the universal moment without a clear road to moral transformation.

Unlike the theoretical artifice of the eventual withering away of the state, Polanyi favored the British Labour Party's propositions of guild socialism. This proposal suggests the evolution of trade unions along the lines of guilds during the Middle Ages. It envisions a federation of hundreds of millions of workers – including peasants, industrial workers, and administrators across the world – bound in solidarity by respect for one another's craft. Trade unions would have to change into associations based on industrial sectors (instead of professions) and would have legislative and executive powers, with the state having its own attenuated role. These inspirations reflect Polanyi's uninhibited search for a new politics and new answers, while at the same time expressing his political loyalties, which are split between an appreciation for Marx's presentation of the revolutionary character of the proletariat and a distaste for Marx's deterministic

inclination for excessive bureaucratization and forced centralization. Instead, he betrays a soft spot for Bakunin's burning love of freedom and of a society organized "from the bottom up in completely free and independent associations [...] without governmental paternalism" (p. 125).

These essays on religion and political ideas are followed by an interesting collection of essays on world politics and the philosophy of history, beginning with a critical reflection on the politics and possibility of pacifism. Polanyi emphasizes the incompatibility of durable peace in a world where sovereign nations struggle for narrow self-interests. Any legal order based on conciliation between contending powers in such a context would be short-lived, even when compared to a militarist truce at the terms of the victorious powers. Asserting the fundamental irreconcilability of nations with the realized unity of modern humanity, Polanyi warns of wars to come, where peace is only guaranteed by deterrence and the strength of armies. Polanyi's ability to see events that will unfold in the decades to come is evident in a foreboding essay on "fear," where he warns of the fears that drive the powerful, whether they be classes or nations, to resist change. They fear the vengeance of the hitherto downtrodden. There is no way out of this great fear, except for a sturdy and honest democracy that will not tolerate any tyranny, even if directed against past tyrants. Only then could humanity renew itself with a fresh start, and a true democracy to come.

Progressive change, however, is also thwarted by the lack of trust, whether between classes or between peoples, as evident in the comic jostling between post-war European powers, more or less clueless about their own politico-economic status. Driven by a mish-mash of principles and narrowly defined interests, they alternately bragged about their economic strength and their resolve to pay their debts, and warned of looming bankruptcy in a chaotic state of affairs. This bedlam was reflected in the confused laws and demands of the League of Nations, its sorry overtures for peace in a Europe primed for war. There was a clamor for dictatorship, particularly in countries traumatized by defeat and humiliation. The weaker the institutions of democracy in a society, the greater seemed its faults and shortcomings, and the louder were cries for the abolition of universal suffrage. But Polanyi keeps his hopes in the idea of democracy and its ultimate triumph alive, while bemoaning the widespread apathy about historical progress that had left the great minds troubling themselves with minor questions and lesser ones to deal with the fundamental problems of society as a whole. While technology and the physical powers available to humans had grown tremendously, social structures had been left woefully inadequate such that humanity resembled a group of toddlers supplied with acids, razors, and bombs.

Polanyi's faithful romanticism flows out most convincingly in his appreciation for the utopian socialism of the British writer H.G. Wells. Like Wells, he cherishes the ideal of a world state where a cacophony of mutually destructive petty interests is replaced by a politics integrating the world. Yet, as a sociologist, he is well aware that such dreams are closer to religious belief than to concrete political projects capable of sublating

the challenges of class, racial conceits, and hypocrisy. Polanyi describes with élan the duplicity of racist corporatists and politicians in the Weimar Republic as they inflicted suffering and profiteered off the very "race" they extolled. They would extinguish the democratic freedoms of their people, and spy and murder for anyone, "so long as they could build their own class rule on the ruins of the German republic" (p. 160). He is no less observant about the racist maneuvers of the British Empire in India as much as in South and East Africa, where politicians effortlessly changed their cloaks. The exploited became exploiters, the defenders of democracy abroad turned into defenders of racist privileges in domestic politics, thus playing into the cynical politics of British imperialism.

But is Polanyi himself immune to the temptations of ethnicity, and able to get past the politico-analytical dead ends of identity? There are no easy answers to this question that consumes a social body "like a feverish inflammation." Indeed, it is sobering to find such an undoubtedly well-meaning and careful scholar brazenly prescribe Magyar cultural hegemony as the only viable path to democratic modernization for Hungary (p. 189). Minorities must submit, against their will if necessary, to the cultural domination of the Magyars as they are the only group with progressive traditions. Moreover, Polanyi's emphasis on a radical bourgeois party as the leader of a progressive political coalition, as opposed to the leadership of the working class, appears even more unorthodox for a left intellectual. At that stage of Hungary's development, he believes in the importance of a bourgeois party to fight against feudalism and for basic freedoms and welfare, thereby allowing the socialist party to focus on workers' interests. But this is not merely a tactical issue for Polanyi because he disagrees with any idea of a revolution or *Zukunftsstaat* under the dictatorship of the proletariat or even the priority given to the industrial working class in Marxism. To the contrary, Polanyi is a firm believer in the institutions of democracy, the importance of private property, and he focused on reforming *this* society in the here and now with intellectual workers playing the leading role. As the founder of the Radical Party, he advocated an internationalist social order based on transcendence of ideological illusions, where labor, including intellectual labor as the most "exhausting, excruciating, and productive" form of labor, receives its full reward (p. 193). But intellectual workers, Polanyi acknowledges, are no more immune to selfish, blind interests and irrational passions than the industrial proletariat. Nationalistic ideology lures the proletariat, industrial and intellectual alike, even more than the capitalist insofar as the former "possesses nothing but this; he owns nothing but the people's song that he whistles [...] of which he has been taught to be proud" (p. 198). Polanyi believes that true social transformation is only possible through a rejuvenated camp where intellectual and manual laborers unite and work together.

Whether one agrees or not with these ideas (though they surely warrant reflection and debate, and they remain pressingly relevant), Polanyi stands tall among the great intellectuals of the twentieth century who turned politics into an act of aesthetic judgment as much as one of practical reason. He inhabits a liminal space, traversing and

participating in global, historical social processes while having the most sympathetic regard for subjective time. Both these elements shine in the short collection of letters that caps this wonderful book. The letters to Georg and Maria Lukács show Polanyi's aesthetic side, a person contemplating, listening, and staring at life's paradoxes. A couple of them written in mourning reported the funeral of Leo Popper who died at the tender age of 25, and are vivid and overwhelming in the description of the parents' melancholia.

Hungarian Writings is an impressive illustration of Polanyi's intellectual triumphs as well as his disquiet at the agonizing ridiculousness of historical events as they unfolded about a century ago. While Polanyi's intellectual insights are inarguably compelling, Dale points out a utopian sentiment, a "casual jostling" of "utopian" and "realist" commitments, which makes him treat the state as a neutral platform for the double movement.[3] Perhaps this is no more than echoing Polanyi himself who, in an extraordinary letter to Oscar Jászi written from a hospital bed in 1950, excoriates himself for letting down a whole generation of Hungarian youth by taking the Galilei Circle in an "anti-political direction" due to his shortsightedness and "lack of realism" (p. 228). "Who bears responsibility for this? I do." But perhaps this is overly harsh; we are also wiser today to the failings of the so-called realists as well as to the tragic social and human costs of realism in the 20th century. Instead, it is precisely the unfettered passion and freshness of his idealism, the courage of youth, faith that wills to move mountains, and candor that comes not from received dogma but revolutionary love, that are most compelling and timeless about these writings.

A century after most of them were written, *The Hungarian Writings* remind us of the inertia of history and the difficulty of progress, of the habitual pettiness of nations and groups, and of the suicidal temptations of fascism. These are accounts of depressing and dreary repetitions. Yet, the thrilling sharpness of the writings and the indomitable faith of their author fills one's heart and calls to action. For, as Camus put it, and Polanyi wouldn't disagree, the struggle itself is enough. "One must imagine Sisyphus happy."

Vikash Singh and Sangeeta Parashar

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[3] Gareth Dale, *Karl Polanyi: A Life on the Left* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), pp. 284–285.

BABYLON TO BREXIT: GARETH DALE'S POLANYI

Gareth Dale, Reconstructing Karl Polanyi: Excavation and Critique (London: Pluto, 2016), 288 p. ISBN 9780745335186.

Gareth Dale's *Reconstructing Karl Polanyi* opens with a survey of recent political developments and cites the Polish-American journalist Anne Applebaum's anxious prediction that we may be "two or three bad elections away from the end of NATO, the end of the European Union and maybe the end of the liberal world order" (p. 2). The same phenomena that are panicking Anne Applebaum (a Corbyn government is one of her nightmares) are driving others to revisit more serious alternatives to neoliberalism than have been on offer from mainstream social democracy in recent years. In a book that simultaneously makes interventions into debates about Ancient Mesopotamian trade and the current crisis of the European Union, Gareth Dale shows that a critical, properly contextualised reading of Karl Polanyi's work can provide resources for such a quest.

Interpretations of Karl Polanyi's thought vary wildly, from those who see him as essentially a liberal thinker to those who see him as a radical anti-capitalist. Dale argues (p. 10) that this is for three key reasons. Firstly, the existing literature has tended to concentrate on Polanyi's English-language writings from the 1940s and 1950s without taking into account his earlier writings or his later interventions and correspondence in other languages. Secondly, the intellectual and political contexts with which Polanyi was engaging need to be better understood. Thirdly, Polanyi's tendency to draw on ideas from different intellectual traditions, to splice sometimes incompatible concepts and theories together, leaves him open to misinterpretation.

Dale has set out to address all of these problems across a wide range of publications including, in 2016 alone, a new biography of Polanyi and an edited volume of texts by Polanyi never previously published in English.[1] The latter presents articles, lectures,

[1] Gareth Dale, *Karl Polanyi: A Life on the Left* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 2016); Gareth Dale (ed.), *Karl Polanyi: The Hungarian Writings* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

and letters, largely from Polanyi's early life in Budapest and the first years of his exile in Vienna, as well as samples of his continued engagement with Hungarian émigré politics, all translated from the Hungarian by Adam Fabry. In *Reconstructing,* Dale focuses his critical attention on a series of issues, such as European integration, that Polanyi addressed or inspired others to address. This enables Dale to foreground the contemporary relevance of his discussions. At the same time, Dale is also evidently keen to minimise the overlap between this and his other publications, in particular his biography of Polanyi. Readers should therefore be encouraged to read *A Life on the Left* alongside *Reconstructing*. However, there are moments when the odd extra date or biographical detail in parentheses would provide helpful preliminary orientation too.

As an example, chapters two and three of *Reconstructing* draw on an earlier article, "Karl Polanyi in Vienna."[2] The new structure partially obscures arguments Dale made there and in the biography regarding the intellectual relationship between Karl Polanyi and his wife, the communist revolutionary Ilona Duczyńska. In the original article, Dale dedicated a special section to Duczyńska's view of Austrian Social Democracy, which was much more critical than that of Polanyi. This discussion is folded into the new book without making the contrast so explicit, and without mentioning until much later (p. 139) the fact that the two were married. In this book Dale also makes no mention of Ilona when considering the reasons why Polanyi's attitude to Marxism "rapidly thawed" in the course of the 1920s. The issue is addressed explicitly in the biography. There, Dale cites their daughter, Kari, who excludes the possibility of mutual influence between her theorist father and activist mother (whom she heard talk about "Lenin or the Communist Party, yes. Training workers to fight in Spain, yes. But not Marxism."). Dale argues that this must be an exaggeration ("Ilona's writings include incisive and theoretically informed discussion of the Marxist terrain"), but has "little doubt" that the "ambient political culture of Red Vienna" had a greater influence on Polanyi's engagement with Marxism than Duczyńska.[3] This issue would have been worth at least a passing mention in *Reconstructing* too.

However, the reworking of the earlier article also allows Dale to build on its arguments in important ways. Dale had previously showed Polanyi's relationship to four different trends within Marxist thought and reiterates the argument here. Polanyi was hostile to Kautsky's determinism and, like his mentor Oszkár Jászi, was sympathetic to Bernstein's "liberal socialism." However, despite his hostility to Bolshevik political practice, he also engaged with the alternative "revolutionary humanist" tradition of Luxemburg, Lenin, and Trotsky, in particular through his friendship with Lukács.

[2] Gareth Dale, "Karl Polanyi in Vienna: Guild Socialism, Austro-Marxism and Duczynska's Alternative," *Historical Materialism* 22 (2014), no. 1, pp. 34–66.

[3] Dale, *Karl Polanyi: Life*, p. 98.

The latter's *History and Class Consciousness* was the most thumbed book in Polanyi's personal library (p. 208, n. 40).[4] Polanyi was especially impressed by a fourth trend, represented by Austro-Marxists such as Otto Bauer. In the current book, Dale additionally spells out the weaknesses of Polanyi's critique of Marx's value theory. Here he also points to a paradox in Polanyi's intellectual development in 1920s Vienna: as Polanyi began to elaborate a theory of the sociology of capitalism influenced by Marx and Lukacs's theories of commodity fetishism, he simultaneously adopted the ideas of Austrian marginalist economics.

The relationship between capitalism and democracy formed the basis of a crucial tension in Polanyi's work. Dale charts Polanyi's own intellectual development alongside changes in wider social democratic attitudes. He shows that the assumption of mainstream social democrats after WWII, that democracy could be used to tame the capitalist beast, was not necessarily shared by interwar social democrats. In Red Vienna, Polanyi was influenced by the practice and theory of the SDAP. The latter's leadership worked from the premise that the expansion of democracy would ultimately mean a transformation to socialism, not simply the reform of capitalism. However, it also took the view, shared by Polanyi but not Duczyńska, that the balance of forces in Austria made a direct challenge to capitalist power futile at that time.

If Polanyi rejected what he saw as revolutionary adventurism, he was also clear about the hostility of traditional elites to democracy. In *The Great Transformation*, Polanyi pointed to how capital flight could be used as a weapon against democratisation. Dale shows how the sharpness of Polanyi's sense of the incompatibility of capitalism and democracy, developed in the interwar period, resonates with the demand of recent social movements for "real democracy." In this context, Dale responds to Wolfgang Streeck's writing about a "*capitalist-democratic* crisis," which he sees as a partial revival of the earlier social democratic thesis although stripped of its optimism about the socialist future.

A chapter on the EU also takes up the issue of the clash between capitalism and democracy. In the 1940s, Polanyi had speculated on whether post-war Britain would help Washington establish a universal capitalist order (as it in fact, did, at Bretton Woods) or whether it would aid in the construction of a regionalist social-democratic counterweight. Although Polanyi did not devote much attention to the early stages of Western European integration himself, some of his followers have subsequently argued that the EU represented the potential to construct a "regionalised world order" that Polanyi had envisioned could be a counterweight to Washington-led liberal capitalist universalism. However, Dale shows how Polanyi's own political economy can be used to challenge rosy pictures of a "social Europe."

[4] Dale presents an interesting selection of Polanyi's letters to Lukács, spanning from 1908 to 1964 in *Karl Polanyi: The Hungarian Writings*.

Central to the reconstruction of Karl Polanyi's wider thought is, of course, a reconstruction of his major work, *The Great Transformation*. With admirable clarity, Dale presents its central thesis, namely that the multiple crises of the 1930s were all ultimately related to "the utopian liberal attempt, in Britain initially, to construct a self-regulating market system" (p. 96). Polanyi saw the "disembedding" of the economy from a wider set of non-economic values and institutions as a peculiar, and peculiarly corrosive, feature of modernity. In the 1930s, he saw fascist regimes, Stalin's Russia, and Roosevelt's New Deal as alternative attempts to restore social unity. Polanyi was clear about the "trick" purveyed by fascist regimes by identifying liberalism with capitalism, and then attacking liberalism while leaving capitalism "unscathed under a new alias" (cited p. 122). However, Dale suggests that Polanyi often fell into the very trap that he had identified: the centrality of the liberal market economy to his conception of capitalism undermined his ability to see the range of "new aliases" under which capitalism could develop and survive. This undermined his ability to understand the post-war boom, but it also inflected his approach to Stalin's Russia, to which Dale dedicates a special chapter.

If Dale sees a weakness in Polanyi's tendency to identify the liberal market economy with capitalism in general (in spite of his critique of the fascist "trick"), he also shows the power of Polanyi's conception of the historical specificity of the economy as a separate sphere of human activity. Dale has written elsewhere about the flattening out of Polanyi's conception of "embeddedness" in subsequent social theory with the idea that "all economies are 'embedded.'" This has obscured the political motivation behind the original argument. As Dale puts it here, Polanyi "sees all economies as 'instituted' but only some as 'embedded'" (p. 135). In *The Great Transformation*, Polanyi discusses the institutional process through which the objective of establishing a self-regulating market system had been pursued in Britain and around the world from the mid-nineteenth century. He distinguished institutional arrangements to stabilise that system, which left the economy disembedded from counter-movements designed to re-embed the economy in a more fundamental way.

Polanyi's sense of the specificity of the modern conception of the economy motivated his researches into ancient economic history. The two final chapters of *Reconstructing*, the last of which was co-written with Matthijs Krul, discuss Polanyi's theory of trade, markets, and money in Ancient Mesopotamia and Ancient Greece. These chapters give a balanced assessment of how well Polanyi's arguments stand up in the light of subsequent empirical research, but they also tell a story once again of the subsequent political trajectory of Polanyi's original arguments. The chapter on Mesopotamia concludes with a discussion of Polanyi's influence on members of the Mundial Upheaval Society, set up by colleagues and graduate students at Columbia in 1950. To a greater degree than Polanyi, many of these emphasised social stratification and conflict within ancient societies, but they also saw the political significance of Polanyi's intellectual assault on the "economistic fallacy" of assuming the universal applicability of modern economic concepts. As Polanyi's mentee Marshall Sahlins put it in the introduction to

his *Stone Age Economics* (1972), "formal economics flourishes as ideology at home and ethnocentrism abroad" (pp. xiii– xiv).

In subsequent decades, the New Institutional Economic History (NIEH) developed by Douglass North has claimed to supplant the debates between formalists and substantivists through the application of adapted neoclassical theory to the study of the whole range of social institutions. Given the current hegemony of this approach in ancient economic history, Dale and Krul's critique is especially welcome. They show that the treatment of institutions in NIEH is predicated upon rational-choice models of individual behaviour that simply return the debate to its original modernist-formalist position. In this field as well, *Reconstructing Karl Polanyi* argues that Karl Polanyi's work can continue to offer a powerful challenge to complacent neoliberal ideas. Gareth Dale has excavated Karl Polanyi with pressing relevance for our times.

Nick Evans

THE ECONOMIC STRUGGLE FOR POWER IN TITO'S YUGOSLAVIA

Vladimir Unkovski-Korica, The Economic Struggle for Power in Tito's Yugoslavia: From World War II to Non-Alignment (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2016), 304 p. ISBN 9781780763286.

The Economic Struggle for Power in Tito's Yugoslavia. From World War II to Non-Alignment by Vladimir Unkovski-Korica is an outstanding contribution to research on real socialism in Eastern Europe. In addition, it has a very important role to play in the contemporary debate on workers' self-management and participation, a debate that has recently heated up in the context of the crisis of neoliberalism and the "return to Marx" in the humanities and social sciences that this crisis has provoked.

Yugoslavia, the country where workers' self-management became "a state paradigm,"[1] has always been a unique case in the landscape of real socialism. Once enthusiastically adored by the Western leftist intelligentsia – who enjoyed what Henri Lefebvre referred to as the "Dionysian" quality of Yugoslav socialism, which appeared more expressive and sensitive to human emotions than the socialism established elsewhere in Europe[2] – it became, in the aftermath of the country's bloody collapse, the object of negative stereotypes of underdevelopment and violence, for example, what Todorova has called "Balkanism"[3] but what has also been called "Yugonostalgia."[4] However, this book not only avoids falling into any of those traps but, in attempting to break with ideologized currents in the historiography of Yugoslavia, it offers a new look at the "Yugoslav road to socialism." At the same time, it makes a vital contribution to the analyses of the

[1] Goran Musić, "Workers' Self-Management as State Paradigm," in Immanuel Ness and Dario Azzellini (eds.), *Ours to Master and to Own: Workers' Control from the Commune to the Present* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2011), pp. 172–207.

[2] Henri Lefebvre, "Socijalizam za vrijeme ljetnog odmora," trans. Sonja Popović-Zadrović, *Praxis: Filozofski dvomjesečnik* 2 (1965), no. 2, pp. 164–166, here 164.

[3] Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[4] Nicole Lindstrom, "Yugonostalgia: Restorative and Reflective Nostalgia in Former Yugoslavia," *East Central Europe* 32 (2005), no. 1–2, pp. 227–237.

collapse of the state, which other authors, in a Balkanist manner, "all too often [...] discuss in terms of primordial ethnic hatreds" (P. 231).

Questioning conventional interpretations presenting Titoist Yugoslavia as an alternative to both Western capitalism and Soviet bloc real socialism, it is argued that the Yugoslav model and its evolution "cannot be viewed as idiosyncratic" but as being closely tied to the global economic system:

> Indeed, rather than seeing Yugoslavia as a challenger to the world market, and driven primarily by ideological commitment to equality, full employment or the withering away of the state, the book will identify the battle for catch up, played in Eastern Europe over the *longue durée*, as the main driving force of Yugoslav economic policy (p. 9).

Similarly to many post-colonial states (*ibid.*), the Yugoslav system, from its very beginning, "showed [...] a tendency towards the dependency on foreign capital for development" (p. 220). It was mainly Western and especially US capital that was the reason why Yugoslavia was "non-aligned but tilting West" (p. 230).

Adopting the theory of real socialism as state capitalism, as developed by such Marxist authors as Tony Cliff, Chris Harman, or Alex Callinicos, this book sees the Titoist regime, along with all other real socialist states, as a variant of a regime of capitalist exploitation of the working class. Analyzing this regime, the book refers to the works by Susan Woodward, an analyst of the Yugoslav economy, who as early as in the 1990s elaborated an argument that in Yugoslavia "[t]he primary objective of worker self-management was to have workers accept the consequences of declining productivity or net revenues and limit their incomes, and to have them decide which of their peers were not sufficiently productive."[5] Therefore, "[i]n fact, a primary goal of the introduction of workers' councils in 1949–50 was to deprive unions of their bargaining power over wages" (p. 261).[6] Once controversial,[7] her works have recently gained great popularity among Marxist researchers working on the theme of the former Yugoslavia, and Unkovski-Korica defines them as "ground-breaking" (p. 220).

Adhering to this theoretical framework and based on detailed archival work, the book analyses in depth the conflict between the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička Partija Jugoslavije* – KPJ) and the working class, with the former striving to assure economic development through the growing exploitation of the latter, and the

[5] Susan L. Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment: The Political Economy of Yugoslavia, 1945–1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 220.

[6] See Musić, "Workers' Self-Management."

[7] John R. Lampe, "*Socialist Unemployment: The Political Economy of Yugoslavia, 1945–1990.* By Susan L. Woodward," *The Journal of Economic History* 56 (1996), no. 3, pp. 723–725.

latter resisting it. This conflict is dated back as early as the very moment of the country's liberation by the Partizan Movement (*Narodnooslobodilački Pokret*) (p. 32).

The theme is approached chronologically. The first chapter is a careful reconstruction of the political and economic conditions of the period preceding the famous Tito-Stalin Split, exposing the developmental policy of the KPJ and the relatively independent character of that policy: "Even before the Tito-Stalin Split, it was clear that the Yugoslav Communist leadership believed it was building a 'Yugoslav Road to Socialism.' [...] The KPJ's domestic moves and economic plans were never dictated from Moscow" (p. 67). The chapter reveals disagreements between the KPJ and the USSR on the developmental question, the autonomy of the first Yugoslav Five Year Plan, and the fact that "Yugoslavia never underwent sovietisation" (p. 69).

The title of the second chapter clearly summarizes its content: *Tilting West: Self-Management in the Service of the Market, 1948–53*. This chapter provides a comprehensive study of the complex position of the working class. It carefully examines the relations between the Party, factory management, unions, and workers (skilled and un-skilled) on the shop-floor, exposing the intersections of their interests and their reactions to the process of implementing self-management, landmarked with the *Basic Law on Management of State Economic Enterprises and Higher Economic Associations by the Workers' Collective* in 1950. The Yugoslav workers' self-management is conceived here merely as an instrument serving to solve economic difficulties through the binding of Yugoslavia to the West and its market economy (p. 104). "New archival sources [...] reveal the extent of the intertwining of workers' councils, market reform and an open economy in the minds of the policy makers, at least a decade earlier than recognized in the historiography" (p. 87) writes Unkovski-Korica, stating that "[s]elf-management became the ideological *sine qua non* for the world market turn" (p. 99).

In the third chapter the position of labor in the period between the Stalin's death and the famous seventh Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (SKJ)[8] is studied, especially in the context of the policy of non-alignment. The political role of unions as "a [...] major but unacknowledged force in politics" (p. 225) is emphasized and scrutinized. Following the complex foreign political and economic relations of Yugoslavia and their impact on the national economy, "the interplay between international events and domestic adjustments to market mechanisms" is examined (p. 115). Attention is paid to "the call for greater devolution of power" coming from below and being expressed by the unions (p. 126), but repudiated by the conservative tendencies which, especially, became stronger after the *Đilas Affair*.[9] It is demonstrated that the workers' councils "had the function not only of empowering layers of skilled workers

[8] Savet Komunista Jugoslavije; the name of the party was changed in 1952.

[9] The expulsion of Milovan Đilas from the party leadership following his fervent criticism on the alienation of the party bureaucracy from the population.

within the workplace, but, ironically, further legitimating the turning of one workplace against another in market competition in order to raise overall productivity" (p. 164).

The fourth and last chapter focuses on the clash between the conservative and reform factions in the leadership, following the miners' strike in Trbovlje in 1958 and Tito's attempts to advance decentralization and at the same time to hold tight political control on the federal level. It is argued that the process of the integration with the world market, along with the difficult balancing between the USSR and the USA, was deepening the domestic problems and finally led to Yugoslavia turning to the International Monetary Fund.

Those domestic problems included the looming, national tensions between the different republics of Yugoslavia: "As external pressure intensified, the republics closed off against each other more and more. Not only did they therefore develop different specializations with different markets in the Cold War, but superpower contestation also made the republic a primary site of the superpower struggle for supremacy" (p. 219).

The book provides an audacious, thoroughly documented, and comprehensive interpretation of self-management in Yugoslavia during its early years. It is therefore a must-read not only for historians interested in South-Eastern Europe but for anybody interested in workers' self-management. At the same time it provokes a discussion, as it questions those Marxist anti-Stalinist analyses of Titoist Yugoslavia that unequivocally valorized workers' self-management as a revolutionary achievement, "a bright manifestation of the socialist revolutionary tendencies in action"[10] that was ultimately "perverted."[11] And again, the discussion this book provokes is not limited to Yugoslavia – it brings back to the fore the fundamental question of the nature of real socialism. Last but not least, herein lies another great merit of this book.

Katarzyna Bielińska-Kowalewska

[10] Ernest Mandel, "Tito et la révolution yougoslave," *La Gauche* Mar. 20, 1980 (online at http://www.ernestmandel.org/fr/ecrits/txt/1980/tito.htm [accessed Oct. 25, 2015]).

[11] Catherine Samary, *Yugoslavia Dismembered* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1995), p. 135.

CULTURE AND SURREALISM IN THE MANIPULATED WORLD

Ivan Sviták, The Windmills of Humanity: On Culture and Surrealism in the Manipulated World, ed. Joseph Grim Feinberg (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Co., 2014), 148 p. ISBN 9780882861272.

In 2014 the American publisher Charles H. Kerr published an anthology of texts written by the Czech philosopher, critic, poet, and theorist of the Surrealist movement Ivan Sviták, titled *The windmills of humanity: On culture and surrealism in the manipulated world*. Sviták, born in 1925 in the town of Hranice na Moravě in Czechoslovakia, emigrated to the United States after the suppression of the Prague Spring in August 1968 and lived there until the end of communism in 1989. He returned to Czechoslovakia in 1990 and died four years later in Prague.

In his wide ranging work, Sviták dealt with various themes, such as the history of utopianism and the future of love. He undertook social analyses of television and sports, polemicized on contemporary politics, and reflected on "automobilology" (a "philosophy of the automobile"). He undertook some critical forays into modernist poetry, the *nouveau roman*, variety theatre, and new wave film (p. 14). He also wrote and published a short history of early Christianity, sociological studies of atheism in Moravia, renaissance alchemists, and edited an anthology of love poetry (*ibid.*). Additionally, Sviták wrote some surrealist essays, compiled in this anthology. His surrealist work revolves, as we can see in this volume, around the themes of "love, poetry, and revolution" (p. 21).

Formally, the 148-page volume is divided into four main parts. The extensive introductory essay (pp. 7–26) by the book's editor and translator, the American sociologist, philosopher, and essayist Joseph Grim Feinberg, represents at the same time a tribute to Sviták. This is followed by the main section (pp. 27–137), comprised of essays with illustrations by Andy Lass, an authority on Czech culture. This part is followed by editorial notes (pp. 138–144) and by a bibliography of selected writings from Sviták (pp. 145–147). So the anthology fulfils all the formal standards and demands of such a work.

This collection is primarily but not exclusively published for English-speaking readers. This can be inferred from the two main objectives of the volume. In general, Feinberg strives "to *reintroduce"* the reader "to a radical writer whose renown has unfairly faded

from both mainstream and leftist political thought" (p. 8). Specifically, Feinberg would like to introduce Sviták as a cultural critic, a defender of experimental literature, an analyst of mass media, a philosopher of love, and as a theorist and poet of surrealism. This aim is justified by the fact that these topics represent the largest part of Sviták's output during the crucial 1960's (p. 9). Both objectives are interconnected. In the English-speaking world Sviták is known first and foremost as an "abstract philosopher and a biting political commentator" (*ibid.*). He "never received the same recognition" for his critical essays, published in this book (p. 25). This is reason enough for Feinberg to publish this well-edited book, containing useful editorial notes and background information on the respective essays (the translation, first publication date, and journal).

The charm of this anthology, which combines an interesting idea with a precise execution, results from the division of the selected texts into two categories: eleven essays are presented with an equal number of anti-essays, which are directly opposed to their corresponding essays. The noteworthy result of this is a comprehensive anthology with 22 texts, many of which appear in English for the first time. The more extensive essays numbered with Roman numerals are, as Feinberg explains, "ordinary essays" (*ibid.*). The Arabic-numbered shorter anti-essays "are fairly conventional short stories and poems, didactic and philosophical treaties in verse, prose poems" (p. 25). The texts included in the anthology were written in different political as well as situational constellations and contexts.

Apart from one exception (essay III), the essays originated in the 1960s. They were written in Sviták's native country, that is, Czechoslovakia. The anti-essays on the other hand were written after 1969 during his exile. The exception is the anti-essay 2, which originates from the late 1950s or 1960s. It should be pointed out that the essays and anti-essays are not ordered chronologically but thematically. The newer anti-essays are more or less reacting to or interpreting the older essays. Sviták would no doubt agree with Feinberg's idea of arranging it so because it is an interesting idea and bears witness to Feinberg's deep knowledge of Sviták's writing.

Essay V "The civilization of the Eye" (pp. 68–70) and anti-essay 5 "Feeling" (p. 71) correspond to each other in a very interesting way. While the essay deals with film and cinema, that is with pictures, and for Sviták "the history of film is the history of pictures in which words played a secondary role, because the language of the film related to the visual aspects of the world" (p. 69), the anti-essay is a written dialogue between a man and a woman. In the foreground are words not pictures, but the dialogue's words evoke pictures or a film in one's head. Thus, it is not in fact, on the one hand, possible to separate the language from the picture, but on the other hand, as Sviták says, one can separate the picture from the language. The next (sixth) essay, "Evolutions in the Structure of Film Languages" (pp. 72–78) indirectly corresponds to Essay V and also anti-essay 5. Here Sviták examines the meaning of language in films. Interestingly, anti-essay 6, "The monologue of a human shadow" (p. 79), hardly evokes pictures at all. So the interaction between picture and word is not as easy as one might think.

Essay III, a loose collection of separate articles on related themes that was first published in 1988, raises the question as to whether there is something like a "Conscience of the Nation." For Feinberg, this essay is an interesting one because it describes the prominent place that writers occupy in politics in Central Europe compared to the United States and Western Europe (p. 139). Sviták answers this question by arguing that, despite their being politically and socially fully developed, the subordinate position of the Central European nations in the 19th and 20th centuries within multinational kingdoms (like the Hapsburg monarchy) or under bureaucratic dictatorships in the Soviet Bloc meant that these nations had no opportunity to act politically in the narrow sense. Writers took the place of parliaments in terms of speaking for the people (p. 48); as a result, writers become the consciences of the nation. Anti-essay 3 fits very well with Essay III because in a way it describes the relationship between the writer (in Central Europe) and the political system he or she lived in during the 19th and 20th centuries.

As already noted, the volume starts with a twenty-page introductory essay titled "Human, All Too Human." It contains six parts of differing lengths. In the first, "This book," Feinberg makes reference to Franklin Rosemont (1943–2009), the American artist and co-founder of the Chicago Surrealist Group, who was in touch with Sviták and who is described by Feinberg as the driving force and moving spirit for this anthology.

The following three parts are quite affirmative and relatively uncritical. In the second part, "Sviták's Road from Nowhere to Nowhere" (p. 9–14), Feinberg introduces the reader to Sviták's life. The convincingly written CV illustrates the moving lifecycle of Sviták as a witness of the eventful "short" 20th century. Feinberg emphasizes that Sviták had been a staunch supporter of democratic socialism for the entirety of his life. He remained faithful to this belief even when the idea of socialism in Czechoslovakia had lost its once enormous power of attraction because of the experience of forty years of Communist rule. Here the reader might expect some critical distance. This insistence on outdated ideas can also be interpreted as stubbornness, especially since Sviták did not have to experience the harsh life of real socialism on his own, albeit only because he was forced into exile by the new established regime. However, Sviták distinguished two forms of socialism, a true – democratic – socialism and a false socialism, the "real socialism" in the Eastern bloc. After returning to Czechoslovakia he tirelessly criticized the newly emerging free market economy, which he had learned about in the USA with all of its advantages and disadvantages. It is not surprising that after 1989 Sviták's attitudes were little understood by the Czech public, who had experienced the "harsh reality of real socialism."[1] As a deputy of the Federal Assembly and representative of the Left Bloc (Levý blok), he soon became, as Feinberg notes, one of the most unpopular politicians in the country (p. 13). This section also explains the chosen subtitle of

[1] Miroslav Kusý, "Charta 77 a reálny socialismus," in Miroslav Kusý, *Eseje* (Bratislava: Archa, 1991), pp. 5–33, here 6.

this anthology. "Manipulated world" illustrates how Sviták kept some distance from his home country as well as from his exile. In speaking about "manipulated worlds," Sviták stands in the tradition of Egon Bondy, the Czech philosopher and writer, who, at the end of the 1940s and at the beginning of the 1950s, was engaged in the Czech Surrealist group and who, in the 1970s and 1980s, accused the socialist Eastern as well as the democratic and capitalist Western world of manipulating the people.

The third part (pp. 14–19), "Human, all too human," is the most extensive section of the introduction. Feinberg tries to integrate Sviták with specific ideological movements. Thus, he characterizes Sviták as a "pure philosopher of humanism" (p. 14). According to him, Sviták in his writings expressed "the insights of revolutionary humanism to an ever-expanding range of human activity" (*ibid.*). At the same time, Feinberg also states that Sviták had never pretended to be an "exceptional innovator." He instead "synthesized and forcefully reiterated the points of classic writers like Montagne, Voltaire, and Holbach, and he shared the general perspective of the wave of young Marxists who, during the years following Stalin's death in 1953, made socialist humanism into one of the most vigorous intellectual movements in the world" (*ibid.*).

Regardless of the fact that Sviták worked on many different topics, he always used the same fundamental approach, as Feinberg emphasizes, "to unearth the social and existential philosophies contained in ever-changing genres of human expression, to laud the 'human potentiality' realized therein, and to condemn structures of alienation that inhibit this realization" (p. 15). Again, at this point a more critical consideration would have been desirable. It raises the question of whether Sviták was an ideologist rather than a scientist. On the other hand, this introduction is an homage and not a critical essay. The part that follows (pp. 19–23), "Towards a Surrealist Humanism," is connected directly with the texts selected for the main section of this book. Feinberg traces Sviták's (limited) involvement in the surrealist movement. He emphasizes that surrealism "underlies nearly all that he wrote" (p. 21).

In the next two sections one sees a more critical approach. In the fifth part (pp. 23–24), "Master of Paradox," Feinberg accuses Sviták of inconsistency: "He would at the same moment describe the human being as fundamentally rational, while at another moment he would describe human meanings founded on 'an irrational act,' and he would look to the surrealist unconscious for salvation from abstract rationalized domination" (p. 23). In the closing section, "This Book, Again" (pp. 24–26), Feinberg discusses the difficulties which he faced in editing the book, noting that it was often the case that the same essay "would appear in two different collections under different titles; at other times the same title would appear in different collections above completely different pieces" (p. 24). But he has passed this test with flying colors. For this reason especially the anthology does not claim to be complete. Finding the "real versions" of the essays appears a Sisyphean task "since many of the pieces were originally written as samizdat" (*ibid.*). The translations, which required a considerable amount of imagination, were done by Feinberg himself. Other, already translated texts, he "reviewed

and improved, if necessary" (p. 26). Because of the imperfection of Sviták's English, this task was a tricky one.

The volume concludes with a bibliography (pp. 145–147) covering the years 1954 to 1994 and orientated to a large extent towards Sviták's surrealist work. Again, Feinberg faced some serious problems when compiling this: "Many of the books below can also be found under other imprints, with other dates of publication, and sometimes under different names" (p. 145).

The Windmills of Humanity is an attractive book that is both well edited and translated. The affirmative and yet not uncritical introduction acquaints the reader with the person and the work of Ivan Sviták and underlines Feinberg's skills as an essayist. The editorial notes facilitate considerably the handling of the texts both in form and content. It is to be hoped that this volume will get some attention, not only in the English-speaking world but also in Sviták's home country.

Dirk Mathias Dalberg

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TIME FOR A NEW WAY OF READING PATOČKA?

Francesco Tava, The Risk of Freedom, trans. Jane Ledlie (London and New York: Rowman &Littlefield, 2016), 179 p. ISBN 9781783483785

Originally published in Italy in 2014,[1] this is an excellent book on a very important thinker that provides a new way of reading Patočka's work which is particularly sensitive to the practical implications of his theories. It is not the first time that freedom is emphasized as a central issue in Patočka's thought, but this is probably one of the best efforts at showing how the whole of Patočka's thought is built on his understanding of freedom as being our ability to transcend the realm of objectivity. This book is not only an excellent presentation of the main ideas of Patočka, but also a powerful argument about their relevance for our present.

Every philosopher of the magnitude and complexity of Patočka demands a close reading and beckons scholars to do a careful analysis. In the beginning it was the work of Patočka's disciples, both inside and outside the Czech Republic, to explain the complex work of their teacher. Kohák, Bělohradský, Rezek, Šrubař, Chvatík, and others went about fulfilling this necessary task while the works of Patočka began to be translated into several different languages. Although the English reader already has some very helpful works to illuminate them,[2] the translation of Tava's book is a significant step

[1] This book is a translation from his *Il rischio della libertà* (Milano: Mimesis, 2014), which followed in the wake of Jan Patočka, *La superciviltà e il suo conflitto interno: Scritti filosofico-politici*, ed. Francesco Tava (Milano: Unicopli, 2012), Tava's translation of an anthology of Patočka's writings. Tava has been researching Patočka's work for many years and continues to do so. He recently published a new anthology in Italian: Jan Patočka, *Platonismo negative e altri frammenti*, ed. and trans. Francesco Tava (Milano: Bompiani, 2015).

[2] Erazim Kohák's philosophical biography of Patočka in the introduction to his anthology *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989); Aviezer Tucker, *The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patočka to Havel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000); and Edward F. Findlay, *Caring for the Soul in a Postmodern Age: Politics and Phenomenology in the Thought of Jan Patocka* (Albany: University of New York Press, 2002), were, before the publication of Tava's book, the most helpful to the English reader and are still required reading for any scholar dealing with this thinker.

that may mark a new phase in the ongoing discussion of Patočka's insights. This new book might be evidence of the fact that Patočka doesn't need to simply be presented anymore and that we can move on to a new level of discussion in which a group of readers already familiar with his most significant contributions can discuss Patočka's place among the main thinkers of the last century. He was not only a disciple of Husserl and Heidegger but was as much an original thinker as Merleau-Ponty or Hannah Arendt, and the interest that he has awakened is still growing.

Tava's book is extraordinary in many senses: not only because of its richness and density, (every paragraph is full of insights and information and every single page deserves a close reading, something that is not usually the case with essays today), but also because of the angle at which Patočka's work is approached: by focusing on his idea of freedom and opening his study with a reading of "Negative Platonism," Tava manages to show the link between the most apparently technical or theoretical parts of Patočka's phenomenology and his practical, political, and biographical aspects. While the French commentaries of Patočka tend to remain on a very abstract level, Tava's approach is closer to the way most disciples of Patočka read him.

It is also important to notice that Tava emphasizes the ethical meaning of Patočka's works not only out of philological fidelity but also because he is aware of their relevance for today's readers. This is one of the reasons why this book might not only be of interest to the growing number of those already familiar with Patočka but also to the majority of people who are still not fully aware of the actuality of a thinker who was among the first to examine the possible fates of Europe in a post-European world. Patočka's alternative to traditional metaphysics is a negative path which, as Tava asserts, might be "a possibility of philosophical survival in the context of post-European humankind" (p. 3), a path worth exploring since it may be one of the most originals contributions of phenomenology to post-metaphysical thinking.

Through the experience of freedom, "the non-negative nature of the negative can emerge" (id). It is a difficult freedom, as Patočka emphasizes, because it demands that we accept our fragility, that we abandon the false securities of a non-examined, *naïf*, ordinary life.

Last but not least, Tava is also familiar with Kosík's works, which he has presented to the Italian public in an excellent anthology,[3] and so he is in the position to acknowledge the links between these two authors, links that have gone unnoticed for too long. Actually, if there is any limitation in Tava's book, it is precisely in the one that he himself imposed – the fact that some of the insights he has sketched are not more fully developed. Several times the reader has the feeling that the author could easily develop some of

[3] Tava was one of the editors of an excellent anthology in Italian of Kosík's articles and the author of a long introduction about his work, see Karel Kosík, *Un filosofo in tempi di farsa e di tragedia: Saggi di pensiero critico 1964–2000*, eds. Gabriella Fusi and Francesco Tava (Milano: Mimesis, 2013).

the issues he touches on and feels that the book's 150 pages are too few in comparison with all that Tava could still say considering his knowledge of Patočka's works.

Here we find the author assuming the familiarity of the reader with Patočka's main texts and developing new insights through a masterful knowledge not only of the published books but of all the manuscripts recently edited in the new Czech edition[4] and with constant references to studies published in Czech, English, French, German, and Italian.[5] Tava is not alone in this effort to reintegrate Patočka's thought into contemporary debates. Among the contributions to this new way of reading we should mention many authors, most of whom come from phenomenology like R. Barbaras, M. Richir, and E. Tassin, but also J. Arnason, R. Gasché, or M. Crepon,[6] to name just a few. It is worth remembering that before Derrida or Ricoeur two Italian thinkers were among the very first interlocutors of Patočka – Enzo Paci and Guido Neri. It is not by chance then that another Italian thinker offers us a new bridge between the Czech and the Western debates.

Avoiding any introductory remarks or biographical and contextual commentaries, the author goes directly to one of the main works of Patočka, his article on "Negative Platonism" that was, as Tava reminds us, a sketch of a wider project. As we said, we must congratulate the author for choosing this text as a starting point: by exploring the link between the notion of a dangerous freedom and the idea of Platonism – of Negative Platonism that Patočka developed at various stages of his work – Tava has the opportunity to show the link between Patočka's philosophical anthropology and his philosophy of history. It is a link which Tava unfolds in each of the five chapters as a red line, the link between freedom and some of Patočka's own concepts like "exposure," "distance," or his comments on the philosophical attitude and his difference with metaphysics

[4] It is worth remembering that texts which were never published in Patočka's lifetime make up by far the largest part of the ten volumes of the *Sebrané spisy*.

[5] Tava's effort to take into account the growing bibliography on Patočka is another one of this book's virtues. Unfortunately, however, some absences need to be mentioned. For an Italian reader with Tava's expertise, reading in Spanish or Catalan should not be a problem, and several articles, books, and dissertations on Patočka have already appeared in both languages by Spanish and Latin-American researchers like Esquirol, Fernandez Ramos, Garrido, Llorca, Ortega, Serrano Haro, and Walton. Two books dealing with the same issues as Tava's must be kept in mind, one being Tardivel's book *La liberté au principe* (Paris: Vrin, 2011), which Tava didn't have the opportunity to read because it was written around the same time as his book, and Findlay's *Caring for the Soul*, which could have been very helpful since it explores the same topics as Tava's work.

[6] Jóhann P. Arnason uses Patočka's ideas on modernity to build a highly suggestive work in his own *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003). Rodolphe Gasché has recently published *Europe or the Infinite Task: A Study of a Philosophical Concept* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), with two chapters devoted to Patočka. Marc Crépon has explored Patočka's thoughts on war in his book *Vivre avec: La pensée de la mort et la mémoire des guerres* (Paris: Hermann, 2008).

or ideology. Every important contribution of Patočka is mentioned and related to the whole of his thinking: his theory of the supercivilization, of sacrifice, war, dissidence…

The second chapter deals with Patočka's theory of sacrifice, his idea of exposure, and, from these, his notion of the "solidarity of the shaken." Questioning tests the certainty of what may have once been taken for granted and, in Patočka's terms, it "shakes" our presuppositions and causes us to live in increasing uncertainty.

The small but dense third chapter offers an excellent account of the affinities between Patočka and the younger Kosík. As we have said, Tava is especially well prepared to present this discussion since he has also a deep knowledge of Kosík's work. His analysis of Patočka's admiration for and critique of Kosík[7] allows the author to deepen and enrich our understanding of Patočka's conception of action as praxis and links it to his own personal praxis of dissidence as well as to their reflections on sacrifice, remembering in this case the figures of Palach or Sakharov.

Another chapter that adds further value to this remarkable book is the fourth one, in which we find a badly needed confrontation between two remarkable Italian thinkers, Enzo Paci and Guido Neri, both of whom were not only acquainted with Patočka but present in Prague at certain crucial moments. Patočka himself mentioned[8] Paci's contribution to the renewal of phenomenology as one of its most promising developments along with the work of Merleau-Ponty. It is worth remembering that Paci gave a presentation in Prague about his confrontation of Marx and Husserl that would later grow into a whole book, one of the most important contributions to the dialogue between phenomenology and Marxism. Paci's book[9] was translated into English[10] by another unforgettable figure, Paul Piccone, the director of *Telos*, the magazine that had such an important role in the renewal of Marxism in the United States. Neri became a friend of Kosík and invited him to Italy were he lectured twice. It was precisely Neri who first[11] showed the importance of Kosík in the last works of Patočka, in which Kosík is discussed twice by Patočka, whose late thoughts on labor can be understood as an answer to Kosík and an effort to develop his own position.

[7] Considering the importance that Patočka attaches to Kosík in two articles in which he discusses at length Kosík's work ("Heidegger am andern Ufer," devoted to contemporary Eastern European philosophy, in which he puts Kosík above Lukács as the main force coming from Eastern European Marxism dedicated to the renewal of philosophy; and his article on Czech philosophy, "Česká filosofie," 1969, in which he describes Kosík as the main Czech philosopher of his time), it is surprising how rarely Kosík is mentioned in most of the published texts about Patočka.

[8] In Josef Zumr's interview with Patočka from 1967 (translated into French and Italian).

[9] Enzo Paci, *Funzione delle scienze e significato dell'uomo* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1963).

[10] Enzo Paci, *The Function of the Sciences and the Meaning of Man*, trans. Paul Piccone and James E. Hansen (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972).

[11] Guido D. Neri, "Il mondo del lavoro e della fática," *Aut Aut* (2000), no. 299–300, pp. 167–76.

The book ends on the topic of dissent. It is here that Patočka's thought becomes most concrete and political, although always on the basis of his fundamental ethical insights. Patočka formulates the task of dissent as being "the translation into terms of a political fight of the *shaking* which characterizes the experience of the spiritual person who is prepared for sacrifice" (p. 143).

It would take too much space to do justice to every issue raised by this excellent book. We will simply insist in our conclusion that the focus on freedom and on the philosophical roots of Patočka's dissidence is not only very fruitful but also necessary to counteract a trend among some recent commentaries,[12] though it was already the angle chosen by his own disciples to present the meaning of Patočka's project. It is no accident that Bělohradský, explaining the ideas of Patočka[13] for the first time in the West, chose a very special text from Kosík's participation in the Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union in 1967, in which he quoted Hus' answer to the Concile, those famous words in which Hus explains that his reasons for heresy were grounded in his personal conscience ("my conscience would not allow me to accept it"). Reason and conscience must go together, adds Kosík, recalling what we may consider the *Leitfaden* of Patočka's thoughts from his early writings of the thirties to his "heretical" and dissident thoughts of his later years.

By presenting the ethical and political meaning of the whole of Patočka's work, including the original linkage between his ontology, his anthropological views, and his philosophy of history and ethics, Tava has made explicit the reason why we need to keep on reading the work of the "Socrates of Prague": his ideas not only have an historical meaning but are particularly relevant to the thinking of the post-European era that he was among the first thinkers to acknowledge.

Sergio Mas Díaz

[12] Tava is not alone in being opposed to the trend of reading the Czech philosopher in an excessively Heideggerian way: in his remarkable book *Unendlichwerden durch die Endlichkeit: Eine Lektüre der Philosophie Jan Patockas* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008), Filip Karfik emphasizes the main divergence between Patocka and Heidegger, which lies in the central issue of the care for the other.

[13] Václav Bělohradský, *Il mondo della vita: Un problema politico*, trans. Gianlorenzo Pacini (Milano: Jaca Book, 1980).

PATOČKA'S ASUBJECTIVE PHENOMENOLOGY
Toward a New Concept of Human Rights

James R. Mensch, Patočka's Asubjective Phenomenology: Toward a New Concept of Human Rights (Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann, 2016), 165 p. ISBN 9783826057748.

Although Jan Patočka's philosophy centres mostly on the topics of phenomenology and the philosophy of history, much of his work throughout the 1970s comprises a clearly defined political philosophy. Patočka approaches this discipline from an unorthodox perspective, eschewing the examination of political establishments and spending little time extolling the virtues of democracy over totalitarianism.

Patočka offers his account on the issue of human rights in two essays.[1] However, in these essays he does not explicitly show how his idea of asubjective phenomenology corresponds with the issue of human rights. Rather, Patočka focuses on formulating the importance of human rights and Charter 77 in the time of communist Czechoslovakia.

The significance of Mensch's book resides in his eloquent reconstruction of the relationship between asubjective phenomenology and human rights. He successfully bridges two seemingly unrelated sides of Patočka's philosophy – asubjective phenomenology and political philosophy – and creates room for a new conception of human rights. Mensch, following Patočka, highlights the primacy of absolute morality as a measure of one's actions and undermines the conventional subject-object dichotomy as a source of meaning. In his examination of Patočka's thought, Mensch implicitly casts light on less obvious issues of human rights that confront us in today's liberal democracy – the problem of the misconception and misuse of human rights.

[1] See: Jan Patočka, "The Obligation to Resist Injustice," in Erazim Kohák, *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 340–342; Jan Patočka, "What We Can and Cannot Expect from Charta 77," in Kohák, *Jan Patočka*, pp. 343–345.

In his book *Patočka's Asubjective Phenomenology: Toward a New Concept of Human Rights*, Mensch explores two realms. Firstly, he offers a very detailed reconstruction of Patočka's novel concept of *asubjective phenomenology*. Secondly, he demonstrates how it is possible to anchor the idea of human rights in this particular model of phenomenology.

Mensch thoroughly and attentively guides his readers through the various stages by which the idea of asubjective phenomenology took its form. He focuses on Patočka's critique of Husserl's *transcendental phenomenology*. Patočka moves beyond "Husserl's persistent quest for a ground of certainty in subjectivity,"[2] the result of which is, as Mensch argues, the effort to "replace transcendental subjectivity with the lawfulness of appearing as such" (p. 57). Further, Mensch explores the impact of Heidegger's thought on the formation of Patočka's own model of phenomenology. Through the analytical lens of *Dasein*, he compares both Patočka's and Heidegger's understandings of *care* (p. 39) and their accounts of *nothingness* (p. 74–75).

Mensch observes that Patočka's philosophy introduces the "unconditional character of morality" (p. 11). As Patočka formulates it in his essay: "If human development [...] is to be possible, humankind needs to be convinced of the unconditional validity of principles which are, in that sense, 'sacred,' valid for all humans and at all times, and capable of setting out humanity's goals. We need [...] a morality that is [...] absolute."[3] In his essays from the 1970s, absolute morality represents a horizon for human rights, the grounds upon which human rights originate.[4] Unconditional morality stands for a certain essential measure (an ideal) that acts as a guideline for human actions and without which any moral action or development towards human perfection would be merely relative, if not entirely impossible. Patočka also points to the obligation of human beings to link their actions to the realm of absolute morality when "setting humanity's goal."[5] He proposes that, despite the historicity of human beings (despite their being finite), they have an unconditional moral obligation.

Mensch, in this context, introduces the key concepts of Patočka's asubjective phenomenology that preserve and support the idea of the unconditional character of morality: "the *soul*, its *care*, and [...] *living in truth*" (p. 11). Mensch argues that human rights are supposed to defend the unconditional character of morality (*ibid.*). However, if human rights need to be anchored in the idea of asubjective phenomenology, this will be possible only through the soul, its care and the agency of the soul to live in truth. Mensch thus points to a stark contradiction in Patočka's endeavour to ground human rights in his model of asubjective phenomenology. It appears that Patočka, by introducing the

[2] Kohák, *Jan Patočka*, p. 6.

[3] Patočka, "The Obligation to Resist Injustice," p. 340.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

soul into the discourse of human rights,[6] aims to propose a new subject that through care – the agency of the soul – preserves and exercises human rights. The ambiguity of this position opens up a series of questions: "How is he [Patočka] able to speak of human rights and deny the subject of such rights?" (*ibid.*) How is it even possible that human rights can be anchored in Patočka's idea of asubjective phenomenology?

As Mensch emphasises in his work, for Patočka unconditional morality is not a realm created by human beings. Absolute morality is not the result of human activity and efforts, not something that a human being modifies and amends. Absolute morality, so conceived, exists independently of the interference of human beings and represents a horizon that guides human actions and defines humans' beings.

Mensch presents an analogy with regard to this idea and argues that, if unconditional morality represents the grounds upon which human rights originate, "human rights are not a result of our humanity – that is, something we postulate" (p. 153). Human rights are not a set of rules that arbitrarily suit human needs, wishes, and aspirations (p. 12), nor do they give testimony to humankind having reached a certain level of maturity. Human rights represent a sacred set of rules ("far more significant than the usual treaties among nations which deal only with the interests of countries and powers, since it extends to the moral, spiritual realm")[7] that originates in unconditional morality, reaching far beyond the subject's immediate and temporary needs.

However, although Patočka denies the idea that human rights are a result of direct human intervention and elevates human rights to the realm of absolute morality, both Patočka (in his essays from the 1970s) and Mensch (in his book) point to human beings' responsibility with regard to human rights, which resides in the effort to safeguard such rights (p. 153), because only by safeguarding these rights do we acknowledge and protect the realm of unconditional morality and, as a result, "preserve our humanity" (*ibid.*). Mensch thus argues that human beings have an unconditional moral obligation with regard to human rights. Human beings become the guardians of these rights, safeguarding them and guaranteeing that they align with unconditional morality.

As Mensch points out, Patočka, in his reconstruction of the model of asubjective phenomenology, introduces the concept of the soul as a non-metaphysical concept: a soul that avoids regarding itself as a *substance* (p. 146). In Chapter IV, Mensch provides a very detailed analysis of the soul and its *ontological motion* – a concept that originates in the thought of Aristotle. By ontological motion Aristotle does not mean the spatial movement of subjects and objects, but rather motion as actualisation (*entelechia*) (p. 89).

The weight is not put on the soul itself (on the soul as a substance, the soul as the subject), but on the agency of the soul, on its motion as actualisation (*entelechia*): the

[6] Being the translation of unconditional morality into the realm of everyday life.

[7] Patočka, "The Obligation to Resist Injustice," p. 341.

movement of human existence, which in this context is decisive. This motion is intrinsic to the soul, as it represents a fundamental "principle (*arche*) of living beings" (p. 148) and is vital for the living body to be alive (*ibid.*). By this set of arguments, Patočka suggests that the soul, in order to be alive, is called upon to undertake the constant movement of actualisation (*entelechia*). By implication, a soul that does not continually actualise itself (that does not care for itself) cannot be seen as a living soul. "Understood in these terms, 'motion,'" as Patočka writes, "is what makes the existent what it is. It realizes the existent" (p. 95). "Such actualisation makes something stand out and, hence, appear" (p. 157).

In the final chapter, Mensch explains how it is possible that the new concept of human rights is grounded in the model of asubjective phenomenology. He explains how the soul, through its agency of care (restless motion as *entelechia*), safeguards human rights. Mensch demonstrates this by approaching human rights from the perspective of Patočka's idea of the three movements of human existence.[8] He proposes that safeguarding human rights is possible only through these three movements. Mensch depicts how care for the existential movement of the soul leads to its actualisation, and how this movement corresponds with the idea of human rights. He argues that personal human rights (the rights to life, privacy, and property) result from the first movement of human existence – the "sheltering environment" of home and family (p. 154). Economic rights (which define our relations to others) (*ibid.*), according to Mensch, result from the second movement of human existence, which is associated with work (*ibid.*). Finally, political and social rights relate to the third movement of human existence – the motion of *problematisation* (movement towards the truth as freedom, which Patočka refers to as *living in truth*) (*ibid.*).

In more concrete terms, when Patočka speaks about safeguarding human rights, he speaks about the movement of human existence within the horizon of absolute morality, which in the political realm is translated as the agency of citizens to resist any form of violation of human rights: "the obligation to resist any injustice done him."[9] Mensch agrees with this thesis of Patočka's and further develops the argument: "The imperative to resist them [violations of human rights] comes, then, from this humanity. The truths that define our humanity [...] are unchanging. As unaffected by the fashions of the times, they stand as a clear guide for our moral obligations. Our relation to them is part of our 'living in the truth,' that is, our maintaining the relation to the unchanging that preserves us" (p. 14).

Mensch believes that citizens resist injustice only if they align their actions with the truths that define humanity – with unconditional morality. The realm of unconditional

[8] Jan Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing, 1998), p. 148.

[9] Patočka, "The Obligation to Resist Injustice," p. 342.

morality represents a universal horizon that does not change with time and that prescribes guidelines for moral action.

Still, Mensch points to a peculiarity in Patočka's call for the movement of the soul: "Human rights [...] are essential for the self-directed motion that expresses our *entelechia* as historical and as fully human. As determining the 'style' of this motion, they are, Patočka thought, worth dying for. When we sacrifice ourselves for them, we express our obligation to the ground of the possibilities of our humanity" (p. 157). And this kind of sacrifice, Mensch emphasises, does not represent an act of heroism or an act that would reciprocally bring a certain (material) gain for an individual or society. Rather, it stands for the highest expression of one's being human. Quoting Patočka, he calls it a sacrifice that "is significant solely in itself."[10] Through this call for sacrifice, Patočka implies the absolute dedication of a human being to absolute universal morality which, at first, appears to be a human being's weakness but is in reality an expression of absolute freedom, limited by nothing but the horizon of one's own death. By the emphasis on the concept of sacrifice, Mensch implicitly reacts to the most common misconceptions of human rights – their replacement with "the right to dedicate one's life to the pursuit of pleasure"[11] – which substitutes the genuine call for freedom and leaves behind the call for sacrifice for a cause in line with the primacy of absolute morality.

Patočka, as Mensch highlights in the opening chapter of his work (p. 11), developed his ideas regarding human rights while living in communist Czechoslovakia during its era of post-1968 "normalisation." His appeal for human rights was the testimony of someone living under an oppressive regime where freedom was restricted and there was no room for human rights, since human rights (for example, freedom of thought, religion and belief, free speech and peaceful protest, and the right to free elections) could have potentially jeopardised the fragile regime. Mensch is aware that neither Patočka's emphasis on movement as the actualisation (*entelechia*) of the human soul, nor his call to resist any injustice regarding the violation of these rights, is accidental in this context. Patočka introduces the idea of asubjective phenomenology so as to point to a hidden power among seemingly powerless citizens, which stems from their agency to care for the soul and their ability to live in truth.

Reading Mensch's analysis, it remains an open question what "afterlife" can actually be attributed to Patočka's ideas on human rights (in terms of their being grounded in asubjective phenomenology) in the liberal-capitalist society of today, where human rights are incorporated into the constitutions of democratic states. Mensch's analysis does not examine whether Patočka's concept of human rights can offer an alternative answer to the misuse of human rights by authorities, where human rights serve as

[10] Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing, 1996), p. 130.

[11] Slavoj Žižek, "Against Human Rights," *New Left Review* no. 34 (2005), pp. 115–131, here 115.

a tool of political power to achieve particular political ends (for example, to justify war in the name of democracy, to cover up for de-politicisation, or to conceal the root of a political problem).

However, precisely by not explicitly delineating the difference between Patočka's time and ours, Mensch suggests that the problem of the misconception and misuse of human rights is not only an issue related to the lack of recognition of human rights by political authorities. Totalitarian regimes were unwilling to uphold human rights, as doing so may have posed a danger to the political system. Democratic establishments do uphold certain human rights and yet in some cases refuse to acknowledge the overarching horizon of absolute morality – the essential core of these rights. Human rights, so conceived, even in the democratic regimes in which they are acknowledged, turn into a formal treaty deprived of their spiritual and sacred content. Suddenly, there is no measure for one's moral actions, and human rights start to reveal a grey area that makes them vulnerable to relativism.

Through his emphasis on Patočka's *asubjective* phenomenology, and on the concept of sacrifice in particular, Mensch suggests an alternative solution to the problem of the misconception and misuse of human rights today. By anchoring the idea of human rights in asubjective phenomenology, Mensch casts light on Patočka's central idea of the movement of the soul (*entelechia*), which takes on the form of the responsibility and obligation to resist injustice when human rights are violated and abused.

Michaela Belejkaničová

THE END OF POST-COMMUNISM?

Boris Buden, Zone des Übergangs. Vom Ende des Postkommunismus (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009), 213 p. ISBN 9783518126011.

The iconic image of the fall of the Berlin Wall could have been a succinct starting point for Boris Buden's *Zone des Übergangs. Vom Ende des Postkommunismus* [The zone of transition: On the end of post-communism] – and in a way it, indeed, is. The discussion of the "image"[1] of this historic occurrence sets the point of departure for part one of the book and opens up one of the book's driving questions – why is the gaze of the actual actors of the 1989/90 revolutions, of the people who *felled* both the wall and the communist regimes whose oppressive nature it has come to symbolise, *missing* from the image? The author then sets out to describe the political consequences of a forced infantilisation of those very same Eastern Europeans who, after having themselves effected the democratic revolutions that brought about the collapse of the regimes in their countries, were stripped of historical agency and captured by the hegemonic effects of the discourse of post-communism.

It is worth asking, then, why Buden strategically chooses in fact *not* to begin with his critique of this image, opting instead for a kind of formal and temporal displacement. In lieu of an introduction, he retells a traumatic story which took place in the aftermath of the breakup of Yugoslavia. The 1993 event, which provides the point of departure for the book's preamble, chronologically comes after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and for Buden it represents one of several propositions for conceptualizing and narrating the "end" of post-communism. In order to understand the book's political and theoretical commitments, it is important to take seriously Buden's decision to *start* from the "end" – one of the book's central motifs is precisely a preoccupation with the "end" of post-communism (which is fittingly reflected in the book's subtitle). Post-communism's "end" alternately becomes a diagnosis, a matter of historiography, and a political demand for a refusal of collective immaturity and innocence.

[1] An image which need not be tied to any specific illustration in order to instantaneously summon all kinds of affective and narrative commonplaces related to the conditions and consequences of the historic event.

For Buden one of post-communism's possible ends came on a February night in 1993 when a Serbian paramilitary group stopped and searched a train en route from Belgrade to Bar. Twenty passengers were "disappeared" that night, after having been robbed, tortured, and executed by a group that had been given license by the Serbian government. We know that eighteen of the victims were Muslim – either from Montenegro or Serbia – and one was a retired Croatian from the Yugoslav army. Thanks to testimonies and information obtained by NGOs and the families of the missing, we have since learned the names and former workplaces of nineteen of them. The twentieth passenger remains, however, nameless and unidentified. The only thing we know of him is that he was "black" and heavyset, that he was beaten up "less" than the rest of the group and that one of the murderers kissed him and called him "little brother." To the present day it is still not known whether the twentieth man managed to escape or ended up in the Drina river along with his fellow passengers. "Dead or alive, 'the black' is insignificant because he is without a society"[2] (p. 11), concludes Buden.

We will come back to the point about the lack of society in post-communism, but for now it is crucial to ask why precisely this episode was chosen to set the tone for the entire book? It is against its backdrop that we need to consider the stakes involved in examining and dismantling post-communist discourse. One of its symptoms, as Buden writes, is a jargon which persistently uses the metaphor of a child. A significant part of his book is devoted to exposing the political effects of the subjectivisation of Eastern European actors – actors of the democratic revolutions that toppled regimes from Warsaw to Bucharest and from Berlin to Sofia that were seen to be oppressive, as well as the actors of the so-called "transition" period. They are subjectivised as children who need guidance, patronage, and education. The figure of the child, with its characteristic traits of innocence, naivety, and immaturity, becomes the "ideal subject of a democratic restart" (p. 35), but its future-oriented optimism masks a fundamental structural inequality, while naturalising the logic of domination inherent to the child-parent relation. This seemingly natural and benign relation can produce extremely violent effects, and this is perhaps why one can read Buden's proposition of an end to post-communism as a call to put an end also to the narrative of innocence: how can one come to terms with events such as the ones which took place on the Belgrade – Bar route and still claim that their perpetrators were only children? Buden writes that the child as a governing figure of post-communism not only is an instrument of control but also has a structural meaning – indeed, the child is "freed *a priori* from any guilt for the crimes of communism" (p. 48), but the figure of the child also absolves those of the post-communist period who were complicit in its criminal privatisation projects, "nationalisms and fascisms, bloody civil wars and even genocides" (*ibid.*). These

[2] This and all other translations from German that follow are mine.

things can only appear as unavoidable infantile disorders in the teleological narrative of post-communist discourse.

If one part of the dangers involved in perpetuating the children's narrative of post-communism includes stripping its subjects of agency and, consequently, of historical responsibility, then what might be the motivation for enforcing and maintaining this oppressive infantilisation? Buden is suspicious of the euphoric enthusiasm with which the Eastern European revolutions were met in the West, which he reads as a symptom of Westerners' narcissistic self-identification with their own position within and attitude towards a liberal democratic order whose faults are well perceived even by its most vehement proponents. The figure of the liberal ironist, brought forth by influential liberal thinker Richard Rorty, is precisely one which, as Buden writes, is aware of the *gap* between the democratic ideal and its realisation, and yet stoically keeps maintaining that *democracy* is (to put it in Winston Churchill's words) the *worst* form of government, except for all the others. This sober, ironic attitude becomes partly suspended (only to then be stabilised) in the image of populations toppling communist regimes across Eastern Europe. Rather than acknowledging the heterogeneous, democratic character of movements such as Perestroika, Glasnost, and Solidarność, which managed to radically politicise the foundations of society as it was given to them, Buden writes that:

> . . . in the revolutionary acts of Eastern European actors, the Western audience found only an objective confirmation of its own passivity towards the already established. (P. 57)

This kind of narcissistic self-identification not only produces an asymmetrical situation in which the Eastern European actors can only ever be seen as "catching up" with Western modernity (whose incarnation is envisioned to be liberal-democratic capitalism [p. 59]); it also ultimately means that Western populations themselves fall victim to the logic of this narrative, while the possibility of revolting against the already established, the *status quo*, remains foreclosed: "The so-called catching-up revolution in the East is the counterpart to the absent revolution in the West" (p. 72).

In line with thinkers such as Chantal Mouffe and with explicit reference to Oliver Marchart, Buden draws a distinction between politics and the political: while the former is considered to be a clearly delimited, separate sphere that operates within pre-existing formal boundaries and never explicitly asks what constitutes the foundation of a society, the political moment appears precisely "in the *rift* between the collapsed ground of an old society and the ground of a society which has not yet been laid out" (p. 81; italics mine). The driving question of the political – which Buden identifies as a feature of the democratic movements that brought about the collapse of communist regimes across Eastern Europe – is directed at the foundations of a given society. In the post-communist context the political emerges in the moment of realisation of the

absence of such a foundation. The subjective experience of a loss of society thus appears as one of post-communism's defining features.

One crucial aspect of Buden's critique of the post-communist discourse of Eastern Europe "catching up" with the West in a process of an endless transition to liberal democracy is the way in which this catching up is translated into cultural terms. The logic of the teleological narrative presupposes two counterparts which are constitutive of each other: on the one hand, a culture presenting itself as universal and, on the other, a culture that is particular, immature, inferior (cf. p. 60f). Buden writes of an inherent paradox in the apparent purpose of the process of inclusion: in order to level out differences, these first need to be construed in cultural terms. Culture here appears as a reactionary discursive ground:

> An oversized notion of culture has absorbed everything which had previously articulated itself as political and social experience. (P. 61)

The language of cultural difference appears seemingly harmless and yet can have very violent effects – similarly to the child metaphor discussed above. Its apparent benignity precludes an engagement with issues ranging from social inequality, poverty and the experience of a loss of society, to religiously motivated violence and the consolidation of power – all these being features of the post-communist condition. Instead, each of these essentially social and political issues is flattened out and presented in the language of culture and cultural difference. Rather than being a matter of popular struggle and a politicisation of the foundations of society, democracy itself then becomes a matter of cultural acquisition, to be achieved when "catching-up" societies and cultures learn to absorb universal Western civilisational "values."

The question of cultural difference is a recurring motif in Buden's book, and in its second part Buden examines the relationship between politics, the "return" of religious faith in post-communism, and a conservative notion of culture.

According to Buden, religious discourse has also come to adopt the language of cultural difference and thus has dispensed with the possibility of offering a social critique. By examining the accounts of two Serbian Orthodox priests, Arsenije and Ćulibrk, Buden shows how the re-discovery of religious faith is meant to offer consolation for the hardships of life on Earth and the broken promises of a better life (p. 116). The language of these priests, who have each crafted a narrative of their conversion to God by appraising cultural phenomena such as rock 'n' roll or debauchery and drug use in communist Belgrade, is in fact driven by a double negativity: "a retroactive negation of communism and a current negation of liberal-democratic capitalism" (*ibid.*). The two priests, however, systematically eschew the necessity to translate the conditions of these earthly hardships into social and political terms. Buden demonstrates the impotence of the newly discovered religiosity as a medium of critique:

> The post-communist return to God is mute as a critique of concrete social reality. [...] [This new faith] is proclaimed as a socially superior culture *vis-à-vis* another, decadent culture. (P. 117)

Buden argues that God's "return" in post-communism actually constitutes his re-socialisation and integration into the public sphere after having been relegated to the private sphere during communist rule. This "banishment" can in fact be seen as continuous with efforts dating back to the Enlightenment. However, the subsequent post-communist "liberation" of God and his "release from the privateness of the church into public life, into the media, schools, and barracks, into the political parties [...], into the artistic and cultural scene, and, finally, also into the market" (p. 110) necessarily means that God would "want more back than has been taken away from him by the communists" (*ibid*.). This statement can be read as an earnest warning – indeed, the voracity of this liberated religiosity can be identified in the effortlessness with which, for instance, the priest Ćulibrk's discourse moves from a discussion of world history as a history of rock 'n' roll to an explicit siding with Serbian national-fascism in the concrete politico-historical context of the destruction of Sarajevo.

Buden adopts Habermas's notion of a "postsecular society" to describe the entry of religion into the public sphere; he then vehemently critiques Habermas's proposition for coming to terms with this new epochal situation. Habermas suggests that religious language needs to be translated into the language of the official discourse used by secular citizens, the rationale being that a conversation between religious and secular communities could actually turn profitable for liberal democracy. An attempt to apply this strategy to the language of the two Orthodox priests, however, quickly makes clear that there is not really much to translate – their languages are already hybrid, and they are already a product of political translation (p. 141). The problem, according to Buden, lies in the reductionist character of Habermas's notion of translation, which betrays a faith in homogenous and clearly separated languages:

> By placing the authority to translate [*Übersetzungsvorbehalt*] at the border between an informal community and a formal, or rather a "proper," political community, [Habermas] reduces his notion of translation to the function of linguistic purification and homogenisation. (*Ibid*.)

Not only does this notion fail to grasp the complexity, hybridity, and impurity of any language, including religious language; it also places the power over translation in the hands of elites, who would have privileged access to the mediation of the "true word" (cf. p. 138f). What is more, the postsecular condition is primarily defined, according to Buden, by a persistence of religion in the form of a cultural translation (p. 148). In this realm too we can observe how trust in the possibility of a completely transparent

articulation of cultural identities and differences turns out to be complicit in precluding the articulation of social conflicts in political language and in stabilising religious fundamentalism, which comes to play the role of society itself (p. 150).

Buden's sceptical appraisal of Habermas's notion of translation is crucial to Buden's overall critique of the discourse of post-communism, and to his insistence that translation can't be simply a matter of rendering different "cultures" commensurate – it is rather necessary to think both language (including religious language) and society as hybrid and impure. Furthermore, the adequate grasping of their driving logics necessitates an engagement with the historical experience of their political actors and the conditions of possibility of the (dominant) social phenomena of the present.

The final part of Buden's book looks at the contemporary role of culture from yet another point of view, focusing on the question of utopia and on the reconfiguration of the relation between past and future in post-communism. He picks up the previously formulated diagnosis of the experience of a loss of society and, through a discussion of Charity Scribner's *Requiem for Communism*,[3] he shows how the collective mourning of this loss again articulates itself in cultural terms, namely in the form of cultural translation and cultural memory. While Scribner sees the workings of cultural memory as bearing emancipatory potential and making it possible to re-evaluate what has been lost with socialism (both in the East as well as in the West), Buden is warier of the implications of delegating social hope solely to a depoliticised sphere of culture (cf. p. 168). This is not to say that he presupposes two clearly separated, homogenous realms (of culture and politics), but instead that these need to be investigated from the point of view of the strategies of translation and articulation occurring between them. There is also need to consider the ways in which these strategies pose questions of the social, of the future, or, as it were, of the value of what has actually been lost with the past.

Hence, utopia as a discursive and imaginative ground where such issues are continually relayed seems to be a suitable point of departure for examining the specificity of the ways in which the hope for social transformation is posed differently in post-communism in comparison to other historic moments. Buden writes that the utopias of both capitalist and socialist modernity have always been oriented towards the future and driven by a hope for a better one (p. 170). Unlike these old, but necessarily *social* and *prospective* utopias of modernity, the new utopias are, according to him, *cultural* and *retrospective*: "The possibility of a better world currently opens up only from a utopian retrospective" (p. 171). Buden discusses artistic movements of the 1980s such as the retro-avant-garde of the Slovenian art scene and Russian post-utopianism of the same period, as well as the shift in the relation to utopia which can be discerned in the emergence during the 1990s of yet another movement, *retroutopism*. The latter's

[3] Charity Scribner, *Requiem for Communism* (Cambridge & London: MIT Press, 2003).

main artistic strategy, argues Buden, is to approach the past "in order to extrapolate its unrealised ideas in the future" (p. 178); this detour through the past is thought to bear an imaginative potential. The main difference between the new retroutopism and the classic utopian phantasies of the past (such as those of the Russian avant-garde) lies in retroutopism's capacity for and interest in social articulation. Whereas the old utopias sought to actively partake in the reconfiguration of the world, Buden sees no such social articulation or desire for transformation in the artistic retroutopist movement of the 1990s (p. 181). Its translation of unexplored potentials of the past into the present and future occurs solely in cultural terms:

> [...] the future itself has become a category of the past – not in a post-utopian but in a post-social sense. [...] In other words, a social experience of the future is only possible in a cultural retrospective. (*Ibid*.)

If the ideological narrative of post-communism as a transition to liberal democracy considers the question of the future to be settled once and for all (p. 46), then what does it mean to put an end to this teleological narrative? How to release the question of the future from its position as a cultural artefact of the past and let it exert a politicising force in the present? Is it possible to turn the issue of the future into a question of and for the social? Can the concern with an absent future become a shared ground and point of departure for an investigation into the social and political conditions of inequality, indebtedness, poverty, systemic exclusion from the public sphere both in the so-called West as well as in the East – and that without flattening out crucial historical and geo-political differences?

It seems that Buden proposes at least two possible scenarios for putting an end to post-communism. One of them, involving a rejection of the narrative of innocence, was already mentioned at the very beginning of this review. The second also implies a rejection of a different kind – that of shame. To articulate its necessity, Buden engages with the final lines of Dušan Makavejev's 1971 film *W. R.: Mysteries of the Organism*, spoken by the severed head of the film's main heroine: "Comrades! Even now I am not ashamed of my communist past!" Despite the critical stance towards the failure of communism's emancipatory project that it voices (p. 100), the film according to Buden is post-communist without being anti-communist (p. 101). This already distinguishes it from the dominant discourse of post-communism. What is more, the explicit and radical rejection of shame also makes the film appear, to Buden, as a radical critique of post-communism (p. 102) – even though it is set and shot well before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Buden writes that:

> One should never be ashamed of one's struggle for freedom. This concerns all those who brought down the Wall twenty years ago, but even more so those who are facing new walls today. (P. 103)

Both episodes that tell stories of alternative ends to post-communism – the traumatic, violent event that took place in February 1993 on the Belgrade – Bar route and the fictional account contained in Makavejev's 1971 film – effectively put us at a time *after* the end of post-communism, that is, in post-communism's lived future. They put a halt to the narrative of an endless transition towards a predetermined, yet always elusive, point in the future, and they provocatively state that we are *past* this point already. This means that one of the crucial tasks today is not only to imagine other possible presents and futures, but also to actively critique, interrogate, and transform of the political conditions that make these presents and futures possible.

Neda Genova

REPORT

ON THE CONFERENCE "TWO CENTURIES OF KARL MARX"

On May 5, 2018 we commemorated the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx's birthday as a part of a conference titled "Two Centuries of Karl Marx" that was held in the *Prague Creative Center* on May 4th and 5th. The conference was organized by Aleš Novák and was *solely* dedicated to the thinker's *philosophical* influence and heritage.

Petr Kužel was the keynote speaker with his lecture on "Marx's Philosophy and Its Critical Function" on May 4. The main aim of his presentation was to elucidate the most important features of Marx's critical approach. The author first examined methodological and epistemological aspects of Marx's theory, explaining Marx's distinction between the so-called "object of knowledge" and "real object" on the one hand and the "exoteric" and "esoteric" levels of investigation on the other. He then discussed Marx's critique of empiricism and outlined a link between this approach and the approach of French historical epistemology, and used Marx's critique of political economics to show how Marx's method of the historization of categories and their "denaturalisation" may serve as a powerful tool for de-ideologization. It both (i) exposes the social and historical constitution of certain phenomena and rids them of their semblance of naturalness and (ii) explains, in accordance with the principles of critical theory, why systematically flawed beliefs arise concerning certain social phenomena that are nevertheless then established by society as "knowledge." In the end, Kužel also introduced the method of symptomatic reading with regard to the concept of ideology and ideology deconstruction. According to the French philosopher Louis Althusser, Marx discovered this method while reading political economics and later applied it to his critique of the same.

Jan Bierhanzl opened the second day of the conference with his talk on "Marx's Ontology of the Sensuous." The *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1864* are usually interpreted as a transitional work between elements of Feuerbach's and Hegel's philosophy, both of which remain strongly present in Marx's early thought, and the historical materialism of Marx's mature thinking. Bierhanzl, referring to the recently renewed French discussion on "the young Marx," aimed to show that the *Manuscripts* contain an ontology which is non-reducible either to the remnants of German classical philosophy or to the materialistic conception of social life. He described this original

ontology as an ontology of the sensuous, alternatively as an ontology of the finitude of human sensuousness.

This opening presentation was followed by Michal Hauser's lecture on "Marx's Non-Identical Conception of Nature. How to neither Be a Natural Determinist or a Cultural Constructivist." According to Hauser, there are two entrenched positions in today's social sciences: for one of them, "nature" (evolutionary or genetic determinism) is the term of the last instance from which social and cultural phenomena can be derived. For the other one, "nature" in man is merely a cultural construct whose manifestations must be understood as a result of certain ideological practices (the imperative to command nature). In his lecture, the author tried to demonstrate that Marx's conception of nature creates a bridge between the two camps.

Martin Kolář took to the podium next, speaking on the topic of "The 'Inversion' of Marxist Theory of Superstruture in the Aesthetics of Karel Kosík." Marx's analysis of the relations of production, as described in his now classic *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), stresses society's economic structure. This emphasis serves as a starting point for Karel Kosík's thought, especially in regard to the problem of the theory of reflection and so-called "realism." Using Marxist conceptions of the "base" and "superstructure," Kosík applies a specific "inversion" that causes a shift in the concept of art which, in turn, liberates a work of art from the function of reflection. A work of art thus becomes an expression of reality and is a social driving force capable of creating the "world."

Jakub Chavalka launched the afternoon's set of lectures with his lecture on "Marx's Conception of the Proletariat as a Species Being." Chavalka's contribution traced the practical strategies Marx used to constitute the proletariat as a realization of his conception of the figure of man: *the species being*. How or in what ways does the worker have to create himself so as to make the birth of the proletariat possible? And to make it possible not in its immediate – that is unconscious – form, but as a permanent revolutionary practice? Such a reading is based on a hypothesis that Marx saw in revolution not only necessary social change, but also and most importantly an anthropological transfiguration of a being which has throughout history more or less wrongfully appropriated the name "human."

David Rybák then spoke on the subject of "What Kind of Consciousness Knows of the Production of Consciousness?" Rather than being some comprehensive presentation of Marx, this lecture focused on the formulation of the issues related to the general outline of Marx's theory: according to Marx, production is a way by which a man appropriates nature through historic social change, that is, *Produktionskräfte* and *-verhältnisse*. However, man himself is a natural being, which implies that in production nature appropriates itself. But where does the source of the legitimacy of such a statement lie? How does Marx *know* that it is the relations of production and productive forces that produce consciousness? How does he *know* about the relations of production? What kind of consciousness is it that *knows* that consciousness is produced? In other words,

is it not "production" (*Produktion*) and "life process" (*Lebensprozess*) that Marx uses to explain everything, which is not itself, however, explained? Is it not all an exegetic operation of inversion, anchored as such in the metaphysics of consciousness (as a source of Marx's knowledge)?

The conference closed with Aleš Novák's contribution on "Marx's Place in Heidegger's 'History of Being': A Thought Experiment." The author's thought experiment, inspired by this year's 200th anniversary of Marx's birth, tried to find Marx's place in Heiddeger's "History of Being" and thus demonstrate, in concrete terms, the application of this thought. Novák then used Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* to consider the benefits of this thought experiment for understanding Heiddeger and his thinking.

An audiovisual record of the conference's entirety is available on the YouTube channel of the "Společnost pro filosofickou antropologii."

Aleš Novák
Translated by Tatiana Badurová

IN MEMORIAM

MOISHE POSTONE (1942–2018) ANTICAPITALISM WITHOUT SHORTCUTS

On March 19 of this year, Moishe Postone passed away at the age of 75. I don't think it will be controversial to call him one of our age's most important interpreters of the work of Karl Marx. He was also an important influence on the editorial board of this journal. He was also my teacher.

It would be an overstatement, though, if I said that I was his student. He was my teacher the way he was the teacher of all of us graduate students in the social sciences and humanities at the University of Chicago who had some sense that in our academic work we wanted not only to interpret the world as it currently is, but also to understand its processes of change and, possibly, to participate in those changes. We wanted to criticize the contemporary world, but we weren't satisfied with immediate, purely activist resistance to whatever first appeared before us. That was why we had gone to grad school, after all – we wanted to look for, and perhaps strike a blow against, the deeper social and cultural structures that lay beneath superficial phenomena. Moishe Postone, with his critique of capitalism as a totalizing structure of the modern world, was for many of us a revelation.

A revelation and a warning. To those of us who held on to romantic visions of the moral purity and power of ordinary people and the working class, Postone observed that nothing about the critique of capital guarantees that oppressed people are made better by their oppression. From this point of view he arrived at a thoroughgoing reevaluation of the entire history of critical social theory. Critical theory, he said, should not be based on the critique of capitalism from the standpoint of labor, but on the critique of labor within capitalism. What Postone called "traditional Marxism" looked on capital as if it were only one part of society, its bad part, which could be separated from a second part of society called "labor," which was noble and good. Capital appeared as a parasite,

* An earlier version of this text appeared in Slovak in the monthly *Kapitál*: "Moishe Postone a antikapitalizmus bez skratiek," *Kapitál* (2018), no. 5, p. 8.

and all that was necessary was to eliminate the parasite, allowing labor to free itself and create a new society of good, hard workers. A workers' government would hand out medals to Stakhanovite workers, and singing anthems to the "honor of labor," we would praise the value of our sweat.

Postone, instead, made labor itself into an object of criticism. He understood labor as a historically specific phenomenon that emerged together with capital as a part of capitalist society and would necessarily cease to exist if capital were ever overcome. Labor is not the worker's badge of pride, but the worker's great misfortune. And if we want to understand the society that created work, we should not look at it from the perspective of labor itself (as if labor were an autonomous actor that determined the course of history), but from a perspective that encompasses the fundamental structure of which labor is an expression: capital. If history has some subject, spirit, *Geist*, this is only so because capital is its motor. The dialectics of history were born with the birth of capital and would end with capital's end. We can be Hegelians now only thanks to the fact that capital made a world that has a motor of history that attempts continually to overcome itself. In the dialectics of history, the working class cannot win. At best it can dissolve itself as a class.

Did Postone exaggerate when he implied that no one before him, with the exception of Marx himself, had really understood Marx's work? Certainly. But exaggeration can contain a moment of truth. There were many people before Postone who criticized various aspects of "traditional Marxism" and emphasized those aspects of critical theory that Postone considered a part of Marx's proper legacy. But I know no theorist who so clearly and powerfully characterized the problem and drew from it such broad consequences. Because if capital, through the medium of the commodity, is a central structuring element of modern society, then our understanding of capital affects more than purely economic phenomena. The fetishization of honorable work against parasitic capital can lead not only to the ideology of workerist socialism. It can also lead to a reactionary nationalism that blames all social problems on whatever can be seen as a parasite on the hard-working national core: not only the bourgeoisie, but especially the foreign bourgeoisie; not only bankers, but especially Jewish bankers; not only the leisure class, but also the effete intellectuals, the lazy bohemians, the unemployed, the welfare-dependent poor. It divides the world between an abstract part and a concrete part, and against the domination of abstraction it seeks salvation in the concrete, in work, in blood, in soil.

Not all of us in Chicago were Postonians. But Postone articulated problems to which we all reacted. I wasn't always convinced. When he warned against the conservative tendencies that could emerge with the left of the day, the critique struck me as unfair. I never doubted that the left was full of contradiction, like any political grouping. But that from fragments of the antiglobalization movement there might emerge xenophobic forces that would invoke the traditions of socialism and the honor of hard-working citi-

zens against immigrants and "global capital"?[1] A bit alarmist, surely.... Maybe prophets are always alarmist. But someone needs to sound the alarm.

Still, as I said, I didn't consider myself a Postonian. Now I say that I wasn't a Postonian the way Marx said he wasn't a Marxist. It was possible, on the basis of Postone's analyses, to devise a schematic framework that enabled one to identify reactionary politics according to a few superficial signs: anyone who expressed a romantic affection for pre-modern community, anyone who defended cultural particularity in the face of globalization, anyone who defended anti-imperialist resistance without ardently enough criticizing the anti-imperialists' own shortcomings – such people had embarked on a road that led to atavism, nationalism, and a fascistic cult of will and violence, regardless of whether their flag was red or brown. Maybe, I thought. But what was the progressive alternative? How should we conceptualize a politics that neither fetishizes the concrete (labor, community, land) nor turns up its nose at the concrete modes of existence that the dominating forces of the world seem poised to wipe out? That doesn't replace the longing for old community with a cult of modernity, speed, and domination (such fascisms have also been known to exist, I've heard)? How can we defend the principle of universal solidarity (the historic answer to particularist division) without falling for a universalism that is false and premature?

Postone formulated his observations more carefully than many of his followers did. He wrote about the danger of fetishizing the concrete, but he never called on us to fetishize the abstract over the concrete. Both fetishisms, after all, amount to incomplete critiques of capitalism, holding up one expression of capital as the answer to a problem posed by a second expression of capital, without questioning the whole. If the first fetishism can lead to romantic nationalism and anti-Semitism, the second can lead to enlightened imperialism. Progress can be imposed in the name of a universal idea, without the idea *practically* integrating into itself all particularity. Particularity, then, is not dialectically overcome but forcibly suppressed. Social problems are not solved by society as a whole, but by a part of society that is placed above the rest, without acknowledging its own particular position. This kind of false universalism propagates itself as a correct idea above society, without following the motion of ideas *in society*.

Postone's best-known essay is called "Anti-Semitism and National Socialism." It was there that he most clearly articulated his analysis of modern anti-Semitism as a "foreshortened anticapitalism" that identifies capitalism with abstract, parasitic capital and fights against it in the name of concrete, productive, locally rooted work. But I was most taken by this concluding passage, where Postone writes not about anti-Semites, but about the people whom the anti-Semites exterminated:

[1] See, for example, Moishe Postone, "History and Helplessness: Mass Mobilization and Contemporary Forms of Anticapitalism," *Public Culture* 18 (2006), no. 1, pp. 93–110.

> The Nazis lost the war against the Soviet Union, America and Britain. They won their war, their "revolution" against the European Jews. They not only succeeded in murdering six million Jewish children, women and men. They succeeded in destroying a culture – a very old culture – that of European Jewry. It was a culture characterized by a tradition incorporating a complicated tension of particularity and universality. This internal tension was duplicated as an external one, characterizing the relation of the Jews with their Christian surroundings. The Jews were never fully a part of the larger societies in which they lived; they were never fully apart from those societies. The results were frequently disastrous for the Jews. Sometimes they were very fruitful. That field of tension became sedimented in most individual Jews following the emancipation. The ultimate resolution of this tension between the particular and the universal is, in the Jewish tradition, a function of time, of history – the coming of the Messiah. Perhaps, however, in the face of secularization and assimilation, European Jewry would have given up that tension. Perhaps that culture would have gradually disappeared as a living tradition, before the resolution of the particular and the universal had been realized. This question will never be answered.[2]

The article does not end with an immediate call to the universal, but with a defense of the dialectic between the universal and the particular. Emancipation takes place *through* this dialectical process, not by stopping it short. There are no shortcuts.

In April 2016, when Moishe was in Vienna on an academic stay at the Institute für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen (IWM), we at the Czech Academy of Sciences' Institute of Philosophy (under whose auspices Contradictions *is published) were able to bring him to give a talk in Prague. His work wasn't well known here at the time, and he was eager to connect with an intellectual sphere that had once given birth to the Prague Spring and perhaps had not entirely forgotten it. The Czechoslovak attempt to create a democratic socialism had made an important impact on him, he confessed – and this meant something coming from a man usually hesitant to lend his endorsement to specific political tendencies and events. I should have asked him more about his views on 1968, but I left it for another day.*

Since that visit, interest in Moishe's thought here has grown. Plans are in the works for a Czech translation of his magnum opus Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, and this July the cultural magazine* A2 *devoted a whole special issue to his legacy. In 2017, when Moishe was headed back to Vienna for another stint at the IWM, he suggested that we might arrange another lecture for him in Prague. I enthusiastically agreed, but I wasn't*

[2] Moishe Postone, "Anti-Semitism and National Socialism: Notes on the German Reaction to 'Holocaust,'" *New German Critique* no. 19 (1980), Special Issue 1, pp. 97–115, here 114–115.

quick enough in making it happen. When I got back in touch with him this January in order to bring the plan to fruition, he told me that his health had taken a turn for the worse, and that he would have to put off the visit until later in the year. That later never came. His ideas are making the trip without him. They've never been needed more urgently.

Joseph Grim Feinberg

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