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Parallels and Divergences in Marxist Humanist Approach to Art in Croatia during the 1960s and 1970s: Praxis School and Matko Meštrović

Paralele i odstupanja u marksističko-humanističkom pristupu umjetnosti u 60-im i 70-im godinama 20. stoljeća u Hrvatskoj: Praxis škola i Matko Meštrović

ABSTRACT

Based on reading and interpreting the key texts on the topic, the article explores the parallels and divergences between Matko Meštrović's theory of the Neo-Avantgarde art practices of the New Tendencies and the Marxist Humanist intellectuals of the Praxis school of thought, in relation to different Marxist approaches to art in Yugoslavia. Both currents were critical, utopian, and avantgarde in nature, advocating for radical social transformation towards a new society and a new human, which they shared with the Yugoslav experimental model of self-management socialism in its initial phase. Despite these common approaches, the article argues that there was no direct connection between Yugoslav Neo-Marxists and Neo-Avantgarde artists and theoreticians. This assertion is reinforced by their different approaches to art and art history.

Keywords: Marxism, Marxist Humanism, Neo-Avantgarde, Matko Meštrović, New Tendencies, Praxis School

SAŽETAK

Članak razmatra analogije i odstupanja između teorije neoavangardnih umjetničkih praksi (Novih tendencija) Matka Meštrovića i marksističko-humanističkih intelektualaca Praxis škole mišljenja, u vezi s različitim marksističkim pristupima umjetnosti u Jugoslaviji. U oba je slučaja riječ o pobornicima radikalne društvene transformacije usmjerene prema novom društvu i novom čovjeku, što su dijelili s jugoslavenskim eksperimentalnim modelom samoupravnog socijalizma u njegovoj početnoj fazi. Unatoč tomu što je riječ o pojavama kritičkog, utopističkog i avangardnog karaktera, u radu se tvrdi da nije postojala izravna veza između jugoslavenskih neomarksista i neoavangardnih umjetnika i teoretičara, što je dodatno ojačano njihovim različitim pristupima umjetnosti i povijesti umjetnosti.

Ključne riječi: marksizam, marksistički humanizam, neoavangarda, Matko Meštrović, Nove tendencije, Praxis škola

Introduction

The article explores two distinct approaches to art within the framework of Marxist Humanism during the 1960s and 1970s in Yugoslavia. The first approach stems from the philosophical perspective of Marxist Humanism, based on a very limited number of articles about art written by philosophers from the Praxis circle (the Praxis School),¹ while the other centres on art theory and involves a Marxist reading of Matko Meštrović's writings, primarily his "Ideology of New Tendencies."

Matko Meštrović is a theorist of the international Neo-Avantgarde art project known as the New Tendencies, which thrived in Zagreb from 1961 to 1973. In contrast, the Praxis School was a philosophical current within the realm of creative, non-dogmatic Marxism. Linked to the heterodox group of Yugoslav and foreign (both Eastern and Western) philosophers, this school gathered around the *Praxis* magazine published in Zagreb from 1964 to 1974, along with its multilingual international edition published between 1965 and 1974.²

Both perspectives gained prominence during a pivotal period when classical Marxist-Leninist thought, which considered art as a reflection of the material social base (i.e. real production relations),³ was evolving into Marxist Humanism, which marked a departure from the rigid base-superstructure determinism. Both currents held art to be a site of struggle (critique) playing a crucial role in the emancipation, transformation, and humanization of society. However, as explored through selected texts, their models of social mediation of art differed.

The ideological groundwork for these perspectives can be traced back to the events of 1948 and the split between Tito and Stalin. Consequently, Yugoslavia partly shaped its socialist identity on its anti-Stalinist politics and critique of Stalinism,⁴ including the Stalinist interpretation of Marxist-Leninism. The latter was juxtaposed with Marxist Humanism, manifesting in terms of art and aesthetics in a moderately modernist type of abstract art as the "official" art,⁵ as well as in different forms of radical modernist Neo-Avantgarde art practices. Thus, art and philosophy played an important role in the process of de-Stalinization and later, from the early 1960s, in the liberalization of the Yugoslavian cultural sphere.

This process unfolded in several phases and, as suggested by Srećko Pulig, following the Soviet model during the period of administrative socialism (1945-1950), which was later abandoned in 1952, those phases included a period of formal and actual introduction of self-management (1951-1965), which retained a strong state and bureaucratic influence through central planning despite the introduction of workers' self-management, and a period of self-management market socialism (1966-1971), marked by the economic reform of 1965, which diminished the influence of bureaucracy in favour of the market.⁶

Marxist Humanism in Yugoslavia did not constitute a homogeneous intellectual position. However, it can be characterized, at least nominally, as the ideological backdrop for the so-called self-management socialism or, as Una Blagojević argues, a "political language which included a diversity of philosophical positions that were also adapted to their context," thus proposing a pluralist form of Marxist Humanism.⁷ In terms of its de-Stalinisation of Yugoslav philosophy, Gajo Petrović proposed a provisional periodization for its post-war transformation from dogmatic to creative Marxism, identifying three main phases: 1) the era of Stalinist, dogmatic Marxism (1945-1949); 2) the period of transformation from dogmatic to creative Marxism (1950-1958); and 3) the stage of anti-dogmatic, creative Marxism (after 1959).⁸

In their writings, both the philosophers associated with the Praxis circle and Matko Meštrović highlighted persistent remnants of dogmatic Marxism in socialist Yugoslavia. However, while Praxis heavily criticized these remnants, Meštrović's

critique focused on their lingering presence in technocratic-bureaucratic ideology and structures. Regarding aesthetics, the writings of Praxisists frequently referenced Zhdanovism, even though it had been officially abandoned long before. Ljiljana Kolečnik, in her thesis on the “socialist-realist mentality,” further argued for the continuity of socialist realism despite the break with the USSR. According to her analysis, socialist realism endured in Yugoslav cultural space for decades, as evidenced by the functioning of art education organizations, the structures of professional associations, the system of annual exhibitions, the financing of visual production, and the organization of various administrative bodies, all of which were adopted from the Soviet social model.⁹ In this sense, it can be posited that despite de-Stalinizing the state and its institutions, and “even though Yugoslav self-management socialism, by deviating from the Soviet model, made a ‘creative’ contribution,”¹⁰ bureaucratic forms reminiscent of the Soviet model persisted in the practices of Yugoslav state Marxism and party politics.

Praxis and the Neo-Avantgarde movements in Yugoslavia thus shared a similar social situation, centred around an emancipatory self-management project at the core¹¹ of Marxist thought, aimed to propel Yugoslavia away from the USSR and real socialism without reverting to pre-war capitalist social relations. Non-alignment, serving as the foreign policy counterpart to this project, facilitated cultural politics that encouraged international collaborations between Yugoslav/Croatian artists and philosophers with those from the political West and East.

At the same time, Yugoslav artists, theorists, and philosophers were considered rightful and necessary participants in the Yugoslav revolutionary project, so its success or failure had historic significance for them. Matko Meštrović articulated this sentiment in his 1963 article “Osobitost i univerzalnost” (“Particularity and Universality”), where he stated the following: “All the values which we encountered and highlighted in this brief overview of the Yugoslav painting of the past decade manifest as an emanation of the actual present of a country which, in a historical rift between the general and the individual, finds strong reasons for its identification and consequently also its active participation in the unfolding of the human destiny of the world.”¹²

A similar and pronounced awareness of Praxis’s importance for Yugoslav and global socialism is evident in Gajo Petrović’s article published in the first issue of *Praxis*, titled “Čemu Praxis” (“Why Praxis?”): “For example, the primary task of Yugoslav Marxists is to critically discuss Yugoslav socialism. Through such critical discussion, Yugoslav Marxists can contribute the most not just to their own but also to global socialism.”¹³ Critique, as envisioned by the Praxis philosophers, who were still staunch communists at that time, and often former partisans as well, was loyal and constructive. As Petrović described their philosophy, it embodied “the inspiring strength of the revolution.”¹⁴ To paraphrase Mislav Žitko, the loyalty of Praxis members was directed towards the idea of workers’ self-management socialism rather than the existing socialist/Party regime.¹⁵ According to this idea, decisions regarding general social affairs and relations would be made by those actively involved in these affairs, thereby eliminating the division between the political and economic spheres, as well as all other reified forms of human alienation from freedom and creative essence. Their radical critique extended to the antagonisms that jeopardized the self-management project and idea,¹⁶ both the Stalinist-etatist tendencies and the proliferation of commodity-monetary relations, which also permeated the writings of Matko Meštrović. As previously mentioned, in the 1950s, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia initiated a critique of Stalinism and sought to reformulate the official ideology of Marxism-Leninism. In the same decade, future Praxis philosophers contended with Stalinist Marxism

primarily through a philosophical reframing of Marxism. They drew on Marx's early work, particularly his theory of alienation, classical German idealism, critical theory, and other contemporary schools of philosophy. This process resulted in the autonomy of philosophy, freeing it from direct submission to the political sphere, which allowed philosophers to critically assess various models of politics and approaches to political issues related to the problems of developing socialist self-management.¹⁷ Praxis philosophers advocated extending the same principle of philosophical autonomy to other disciplines, including sociology and art, although this would happen only gradually, over different periods.¹⁸ In this context, Veselin Golubović noted: "Analogously to philosophy, science, culture, and art transitioned during that period from being instruments of an ideological programme and political will to independent spiritual creativity that served as its own judge, and social activities, especially material production, became relatively independent social subjects."¹⁹ Similarly to the Praxisists, Matko Meštrović criticized the persistent forms of alienation in socialist Yugoslavia. However, unlike them, who believed that all "great" art inherently possessed revolutionary potential, Meštrović advocated for the unity of art, science, and society with the precondition that art should undergo radical transformation.

Praxis Philosophy and the Autonomy of Art

Praxis magazine, in circulation for a mere decade in Zagreb, from 1964 to 1974, published the works of some of the most prominent philosophers and thinkers of the time, such as Bloch, Lukács, Goldmann, Lefebvre, and many others. The magazine served as a valuable forum for the convergence, conflict, and exchange of ideas between philosophers from the Eastern and Western blocs,²⁰ as well as those unaligned, notably Yugoslav philosophers. *Praxis* published pieces presenting a developed and mature antidogmatic humanist Marxist philosophy rooted in the writings of young Marx, Bloch, and Lukács, as well as thoughts and deeds of Lenin as the antipode of Stalin and Stalinist tendencies. Unfortunately, *Praxis* was discontinued in 1974 due to a loss of funding, which coincided with heightened internal antagonisms within Yugoslavian socialism and a diminished appetite for critical and philosophical examinations of political models aimed at overcoming those antagonisms.

Although the Praxis philosophers did not explicitly delve into art theory or the contemporary art movements such as the Neo-Avantgardes, their ideas on art found implicit expression within Praxis philosophy, which addressed both the act of creation and self-creation. Drawing on Milan Kangrga's perspective, the artist and their artwork could be seen in relation to a role that had already been defined by Kant – the concept of the artist as a creator, a mediator between being and needing (what something is and what it is yet to become) as a foundational idea underpinning the utopian position of the artist and art. A significant counterpart to Praxis philosophy was therefore the concept of poiesis, previously delineated from the *praxis* and *theoria* of ancient Greek philosophy, which encompassed both the artistic act and production. Before Kant, *theoria* had supremacy over *praxis*, but he sought to reconcile this duality through the paradigm of the spontaneous artistic act, ergo, using the very term of spontaneity as fusing all aspects of human activity, including self-creation or, to put it simply, practice (*praxis*).²¹ In other words, Kant understood spontaneity as an intrinsic motivation – a will that is not determined by external causes.²² According to Danilo Pejović, "This is why artistic creation is a very peculiar form of production, not of something that has already been produced but of the production itself: it follows the prototype of nature itself when it

produces beings.”²³ This notion in the Praxis philosophy negates the possibility of artistic production being predetermined, replacing it with the idea of autonomous creation. This brings to mind, although not directly related, a statement by Jackson Pollock, an icon of modernist abstraction, who, in response to Hans Hofmann’s suggestion that he should paint from nature, reputedly declared: “I am nature.”²⁴

The notion of self-creation determines humans as practical beings, deriving as such from the notion of production. In essence, practice is creation, a principle inherent in Marx’s concept of praxis. This implies that a work of art is a product or outcome of such practice. The poietic understanding of praxis significantly shaped Praxis philosophy, albeit with certain deviations from classical Marxism. Nikola Dedić highlights that classical Marxism perceives art as 1) a product or mimesis of the material relations of production (Marx); 2) a reflection of objective reality, a means and constituent element of the class struggle (Lenin); and 3) a reflection of historical changes, which not only mirrors the current condition, but also “promotes optimal projects in surpassing that reality” (Lukács).²⁵ In contrast, Praxis viewed art as an autonomous creative force, rooted in revolutionary potential. Art, within that perspective, generates human productivity and self-creation within the sphere of freedom, and as such, has the critical and transcendental potential towards reality. In that sense, art functions as a critique of the “theory of reflection,” which posits art as merely fixating existing relations and inhibiting progress and freedom.

Vjekoslav Mikecin interprets this dynamic as a transition from a heavily gnosologically oriented aesthetics, rooted in the theory of reflection, to an ontologically directed concept of art within the context of Marxism:

“The work of art, unlike other aspects of human production, has its own specific ‘language’ and meanings, and therein lies its specific difference with regard to other forms of production (scientific, philosophical, etc.). Art is, among other things, a specific form of ‘social consciousness,’ which cannot be reduced to a special, sensational, or intuitive form of cognition. [...] Art is a form of human practice that by its origin and highest determination is its own purpose: a free play of human creative powers. In art, man shows and affirms the play of these creative powers; in art, man shows and affirms his own original freedom, his creative nature.”²⁶

Within the aesthetic realm, this process aligned with the affirmation of high modernist art, whose non-representational current Marxist philosophers juxtaposed it against Zhdanovist aesthetics. Unlike modern art, Zhdanovism shaped aesthetics through representational arts and a certain form of objectivity, while abstract art eliminated the object (extra-artistic elements) as a degree of mediation between matter and spirit, emphasizing its own artistic core. As Focht stated, “Modern art, regardless of its ontological structure, wanted to separate the pure artistic element and offer it in extraction.”²⁷

And further:

“The most significant characteristic of all forms of Zhdanovism, serving as the backbone around which all other positions are organized and stemming from a natural necessity, is that the artistic aspect – what makes art truly artistic – is neither required nor appreciated. Instead, Zhdanovist thinking disregards art entirely and is inherently incapable of feeling it. As if by some immutable law, it views art only in terms of external influences, neglecting the intrinsic artistic impulse and growth under artistic principles. Within the Zhdanovist circle, art is not enjoyed but exploited.”²⁸

Thus, by scrutinizing the ontology and aesthetics of art, Marxist theory approached certain high modernist concepts of the autonomy of artistic creation (as exemplified by figures like Jackson Pollock and Edo Murtić after 1953). Yet,

it maintained a belief in its revolutionary, transformative, and creative potential, thus resembling a type of discourse on art that was somewhat characteristic of the “young” Greenberg and, indirectly, Trotsky in the 1930s.²⁹

As Ivan Focht put it, “Experience relentlessly demonstrates that the relationship between art and society, which Marxist thought often grapples with, can genuinely be seen as Marxist only if it respects the principle of a work of art’s autonomy. This presupposes the autonomy of research, criticism, and creation. This principle does not imply that such an act, as envisaged by Romanticist, idealistic aesthetics, is a product of an extra-historical, supra-societal, divine emanation. On the contrary, it is very much conditioned and mediated by the historical-societal situation.”³⁰

In this context, I would argue that for Praxis philosophers, the function of art was not merely ideological justification and reflection of the existing, but rather a force for revolutionizing and transcending the existing. Consequently, art needn’t undergo its own revolution; it is an integral part of every revolution, provided its autonomy is preserved. Only ideological and externally imposed criteria and principles can render art reactionary and counter-revolutionary. Despite their alleged criticism of everything existing, Praxis members never subjected art to systematic criticism. Quite the contrary, to save it from Zhdanovism and dogmatism, they uncritically accepted art as an expression of human nature, a realm of freedom and play.³¹

Matko Meštrović and the Quest for Scientification and De-Alienation of Art and Society

Matko Meštrović’s text “Ideologija Novih tendencija” (“Ideology of New Tendencies”) marks a distinct departure from humanist ontologization concerning object-based art production, shifting away from the ideal modernist autonomy of art towards a radicalized modernism operating at the intersection of art and science. This shift is evident in the broader context of humanist theory, art history, and new media art theory.

The international movement known as the New Tendencies comprised six exhibitions/events held in Zagreb, attracting a heterogeneous group of artists, gallerists, and theoreticians. Different terms such as visual and kinetic art, Neo-Constructivism, Neo-Concretism, programmed art, and optic art were used to describe the movement, all reflecting a shared essence emanating from a common intellectual climate and disposition.³²

The first New Tendencies exhibition was held in 1961 at the suggestion of Almir Mavignier and was organized by Matko Meštrović and the Contemporary Art Gallery in Zagreb. A total of five New Tendencies exhibitions were held until 1973, while the sixth exhibition planned for 1978 was replaced by an international symposium. The first New Tendencies exhibition presented various Avantgarde tendencies, ranging from Neo-Constructivist and Concrete Art to monochromatic and tautological paintings, algorithmic artworks, and the incorporation of light and movement as topics and materials, which remained a defining characteristic of the New Tendencies in their subsequent exhibitions. Through meetings held during this exhibition, artists self-organized to set up biennial exhibitions, and by the second New Tendencies exhibition in 1963, the movement had already acquired an international character.³³ This trend continued with the third exhibition in 1965, after which an increasingly broad circle of second-wave supporters called for greater heterogenization and ideological flexibility. In the New Tendencies Manifesto, the movement’s emergence was succinctly described by Karl Gerstner, one of its members: “Arriving from the four corners of Europe, where they worked alone or in

small groups, the participants of the exhibition were a little confused as they sensed mutual similarities, noticing that their problems are comparable although they did not claim they were completely identical. The exhibition in Zagreb was a real revelation for all of them. The result of the Zagreb experience was: one provisional shared name gave rise to a more concrete feature, one improvised exhibition led to an organized movement.”³⁴

The unity of artists that allows us to refer to it as a movement primarily stemmed from ideological convictions, their view of and position in the world, both “real” and artistic, and from matching ideas on the function of art in that world. The text “Ideology of New Tendencies,” first published in the catalogue of the second New Tendencies exhibition, was an attempt to establish such an ideology. It reflects the modernist notion of progress, emphasizing scientific rationality as a condition for the humane scientification of society, which also includes art. The starting point is the materialist theory of art and culture, and consequently the Avantgarde hypothesis about the transgression of art and life, with the objective of the final transcendence of art in the classical sense by erasing the boundaries between art and society.

According to Meštrović, that process occurs through the world’s awareness of the transformation of a social act into an artistic one, and vice versa, which actively and progressively affects world change. The central idea is the need for the scientification of arts, which assumes: 1) the fusion of arts and science; 2) the demystification of the bourgeois concept of art; 3) the elimination of political control over art (in the East), and the suppression of the art market (in the West); and 4) collective rather than individual creation.³⁵

Meštrović asserts that the role of art and its goal is to expose the mechanisms of ideology, wrong conceptions about social relations, and human alienation. He believes that art has the power to demystify itself if it makes the process of creating artworks visible. Meštrović’s suggestion for accomplishing this goal is primarily a synthesis of art and science/technology, which must lead to a long-term process of the all-out scientization of all human activities if it is to be successful. To accomplish this, it is crucial to change the current comprehension of science and art, as well as the perception of their roles and statuses in society. In other words, art and science as individual spheres are being erased and embodied in a society based on new and “correct” relations, which, according to Meštrović, implies “a division of all material and spiritual goods in equal measure.”³⁶ He argues that the role of science in society has not reached the level at which it can generate new knowledge according to which human society will eventually have to reshape and reconstitute itself. Instead, science “has expropriated itself from human control and has lost the measure of humanity’s needs and the totality of its purpose at the same time.”³⁷ The same criticism was directed towards art, implicitly based on Marxist criticism of the theory of the autonomy of art, as well as on Marx’s general claim that all philosophical ideas are mediated, meaning that they do not exist outside of reality but are conditioned by and products of historical and materialistic relations.

In practice, this manifested as a tendency to criticize bourgeois taste based on the stance that art is independent of ideology and that its sources and manifestations include (modern) tradition, unmediated individualism, sentimentality, and the transcendence of art form. Therefore, the theory and practice of New Tendencies were directed against aesthetic and ideological categories that solidified existing social relations and the artistic discourse established by the dominant class.

To shatter the classical art form and the classical way of thinking in fixed shapes, the art form now evolved into an open, indeterminate, and complex structure that surpassed the narrow confines of the human emotional sphere and individual in-

terests. The new society, rather than romanticizing the individual, now emphasized the necessity of the collective. Hence, Meštrović asserts that one is nothing, and only everyone is everything.³⁸

The continuity of phenomena that, through a positive relationship with scientific knowledge, determined the trajectory of art that, according to Meštrović, relativized both the structure and perception (the sphere of experience) of a work of art and art in general, had existed since the proto-Avantgarde tendencies in the late 19th century. Rooted in an analytical approach to the medium, these tendencies continued through various artistic avantgarde movements. Characterized by rational geometric shapes, they aimed at creating a new perception of the world and contribute to its new spiritual and material transformation.³⁹

As Meštrović wrote, “The ‘New Tendencies’ appeared spontaneously in the climate that old Europe was the first to feel.” The positive attitude towards scientific achievements was a tradition carried on from the pioneers of modern architecture, Neoplasticism, and the Bauhaus. Confidence in the transforming power of technology and industrialization persisted, while deep-rooted Marxist thought fostered a constructive approach to social change, resulting in the first critique of corruption and alienation in Europe. There was a resolute demand for the demystification of art and artistic creation, unmasking the dominant influence of the art market that speculated in art and treated it in a contradictory way – as both myth and commodity. The tendency towards suppressing individualism and promoting the spirit of collective work also became possible. A progressive political orientation was clearly expressed, and art focused on the problem of plastic and visual research, striving to establish objective psycho-physical principles of the plastic phenomenon and visual perception, thus excluding a priori any possibility of interference from subjectivism, individualism, and romanticism, which burdened all traditional aesthetics. Understandably, the principles of industrial production were also resolutely embraced as the most effective instrument and method for the rapid socialization of material and spiritual values. Consequently, artworks were conceived in those terms to ensure they were easily duplicable and accessible.⁴⁰

New Tendencies aimed to reveal the principles of modern society’s functioning and the ideology of high modernism’s paradigm and art’s status within it, but as two inseparable processes. These goals were derived from Meštrović’s claim about the parallelisms between the processes of industrialization and socialization throughout the 20th century, characteristic of capitalism and bureaucratic socialism. The only solution, according to him, was to establish a “scientificated”, de-alienated society. For this to occur, both art and science had to undergo the necessary process of scientification, as indicated in the following sentence: “How can we, by defining schematically a historical situation as a phase in which the classical formations of capitalist society are corroding and being dismembered by the inner evolution of production forces, which are increasingly and against their will drawing closer to understanding the necessary process of socialization to be a global historical perspective; and by understanding the conceptual implications of that process in the problem of alienation as an obstacle to perceiving the true face of the period, regardless of whether the alienation comes from the dominant laws concerning the value of goods or the privileged value of a position in the state apparatus; how can we, then, analyse, resolve, and address the main social problem – division of all material and spiritual goods in equal measure?”⁴¹

Further on in the same essay, he wrote:

“At that level, the very concept of art must logically suffer a decisive change and be erased as such, while art should undergo a necessary scientification. It must take a course which shall advancingly reduce the components of expres-

sion, just as its psychological and social aspect shall ever-lesseningly result from a necessary emotional confrontation with the conditions of the society. In other words, it shall recompensationally break out as an incarnation of the fundamental opposites in which an individual proves helpless and unprotected. A new step, big enough to traverse and rise above that state would be the one that includes these elementary social opposites non-subjectively into the cognizance of general principles, which in and of themselves can and must become the main object of artistic and scientific interest and be integrated into an activity which surpasses the static term 'art piece' and all the determinants of its nature as unique and singular, and become important constituents of that activity, i.e. the activity itself. The difference between art and science is in a way abolished. It is abolished in its current expression, although perhaps not completely. A problem arises when the issue of the purposefulness is examined, not only of art but also of science. It is clear that the very distinctiveness of art's purposefulness declines as the concept of art declines or vanishes, but all of that can only happen to the extent to which science's social purposefulness is realized. It is this main demand of current history, this process as the only one to pave the way towards a full awakening of the world, that the possibility of transforming an artistic act into a social act and consequently a social act into an artistic one depends upon: the possibility of abolishing the necessity of art as a separate social phenomenon."⁴²

This quote makes it clear that in opposition to the aesthetic canon of modernist creation as a superstructure of social forms of life, Matko Meštrović, unlike the proponents of Praxis philosophy, advocated the idea of abolishing art as a separate social phenomenon.

Furthermore, he criticized the current methods of cultural practice, blaming them for "still not being revolutionary enough to allow a complete identification of cultural and social interests, and to prevent the disparate movement of the potential forces of culture and society."⁴³

Divergences

The Praxisists' perspective reveals an inability or unwillingness to follow the ideas of contemporaneous radical art practices, as evident in Focht's article titled "Umjetnička tehnika i tehnifikacija umjetnosti" ("Art Techniques and Art Technicization"),⁴⁴ in which the author discusses whether the multiplication and advancement of machines pose a threat to art, either with regard to its cultural-historical mission or to its quality. Rooted in the idealistic, Neo-Kantian theories of Gehlen's, the article criticizes the fetishization of technique in contemporary art, explicitly dismissing both the materialist theories of art, which seek to interpret it in terms of social circumstances, and technocracy, which reduces art to the exploration of "materialized" techniques. Thus, in contrast to Meštrović's previously outlined hypotheses on artistic activity as a social endeavour, Focht initially based his approach on the separation of art from social trends. This is justified by the notion that these trends have already been absorbed by the positive sciences, which is why philosophy can only engage with the most general trends in contemporary art.⁴⁵ Focht builds upon this idealistic foundation by refuting the possibility of knowing the genesis of an art image in a specific age:

"There is no strict relationship between the attitude of a person in a specific period and their realistic possibilities (i.e. power), nor between the development of styles and the evolution of the concept of art. Even less is there a connection between the attitude of society and the style of its era, or the possibilities of that society and the development of the concept of art. If we agree with Marx that hu-

manity always sets itself only those tasks that it can realistically solve, that should not be applied to this case, because this is not about tasks, but about attitudes.”⁴⁶

The flows of art and flows of society, according to Focht, *correspond strikingly* but cannot be explained by each other; instead, the relationship is more akin to a pre-established harmony. The styles are derived from one another according to their internal, artistic, and formal-technical logic. The atomization of society corresponds to the atomization of art, but the atomization of art occurs as a consequence of past styles that began to erode objectivity, not as a consequence of the atomization of society. Intending to criticize the fetishization of technique, in the very premise of his research Focht mystifies art as something outside and independent of social circumstances, repeating the bourgeois concepts that Meštrović and the New Tendencies contested. Identifying as a significant problem the strict division into rational and irrational, science and art, Focht does not see it as a consequence of the wider problem of social alienation, but as a Romanticist and Hegelian invention: “The Romanticists as a whole are most to blame for this split and the rigid division of two indivisible human abilities and activities, including Hegel among them, where, of course, it should be allowed that the childish Romanticist division of man into heart and reason was elevated to a higher level in Hegel’s terminology: the heart was referred to as ‘immediacy’ and the head as ‘mediation.’”⁴⁷

Finally, the independence of technique, in the sense of art dealing with its means of expression, is a form of alienation as such: “This will always happen when the technical becomes the starting point instead of the final one. When techniques are considered, combined, and invented *in abstracto*, isolated from specific artistic content, it happens that in practice they become independent and thereby materialize. Objectified, they become petrified movements, and it is not known what started them or what they are moving towards – sound patterns, colour patterns. But it is from patterns that we make suits. It is because these techniques become independent that they become ontically non-independent: the rules lose their meaning if we don’t start playing by them.”⁴⁸

What Matko Meštrović and the New Tendencies considered to be a radical dissolution of the concept of art and artwork, Ivan Focht sees as the closing of technique, i.e. its materialization. According to him, art should stand aside from the technicization of the world and serve as a refuge for the spirit, an activity of the rare for the few, as it has always been, instead of being an activity that actively changes the world and in which the masses can be involved.

So, in the context of socialist society, the Praxisists took a poetic approach towards art’s emancipation from the state’s (Party’s) demands, which was rooted in the high modernist idealization of the autonomy of art. Contrary to this, Meštrović was an advocate of an experimental and exploratory way of art’s emancipation.

As Miško Šuvaković has pointed out, Neo-Avantgarde artistic, cultural, and aesthetic processes stepped out of the modern discourse by highlighting borderline zones of modernity in the pursuit of permanent aesthetic and artistic emancipation. This emancipation was linked to a critique of the ontology of art within autonomous modernity and the accelerating technological progress that led from analogue to digital media, i.e. from a complete and closed work of art to an open one.⁴⁹

Although the Praxis philosophy and Neo-Avantgarde art were both (radical) critical occurrences within the context of Yugoslav self-management socialism, when comparing their texts and analysing the Praxisists’ Marxist positions when it comes to aesthetics, art, and art history, it turns out that the Praxis philosophy was closer to the idea of modernism as production of an autonomous core of artistic modernity than to the transgressive art practices of the Neo-Avantgardes.

While Praxis philosophers sought to provide a philosophical foundation for Yugoslav self-management, it can be argued that the New Tendencies were more consistent in representing the ideals of self-management and Marxism in the art sphere, even if not evoking them directly. Meštrović's call for a more fundamental reform of science and art through a merger of the two, leading to the disappearance of both in their traditional forms, echoed an old Marxist demand to end the division of labour and make science and art the general principles of society and societal activities involving everyone. The separate existence of science and art as social phenomena indicated that a self-management communist society had not yet been achieved. In fact, it could not be achieved as long as guided by the principles of the division of labour, inherited from capitalism.

While the Praxis group recognized the revolutionary potential in art, its core members believed that technology had not only alienated humans from their labour but also from their creative essence. It can be inferred that they idealized art as a form of non-divided labour in which the human/artist is immersed in the entire production process, from the idea to the final product, avoiding alienation from both labour and the product. In the 1966 issue of the *Praxis* journal titled "Umjetnost u svijetu tehnologije" ("Art in the World of Technology"), which comprises seven articles by different authors, some parts suggest that the Praxisists did not move significantly beyond 19th-century debates related to industrial versus artistic production and, consequently, high and mass art (kitsch). This was happening almost at the same time as the discovery of new digital technologies in contemporary art, with central events in Zagreb, led to the emergence of a completely new field of new media art. The New Tendencies movement saw the potential for transforming the world through the democratization of art, through the fusion of visual arts, design, architecture, and new media. Moreover, they supported industrial art production, multiplication of art, and a rational approach to demystifying art.⁵⁰ In contrast, the Praxis group, in their conception of art, remained somewhat elitist.

Although the Praxis philosophy, as previously discussed, occasionally touched upon the theme of creativity through the idea of creationist Marxism, there are very few, if any, articles that specifically explore visual art or any other form of contemporary art practice. Notably, there was only one instance of collaboration between the proponents of New Tendencies and the Praxis philosophy, when Rudi Supek, the chief editor of *Praxis* at the time, contributed a text to the New Tendencies catalogue in 1965 titled "Humanizacija ljudske sredine i ljudskog stvaranja" ("Humanization of Man's Environment and Man's Creation").⁵¹

In line with the Praxis philosophy, Supek's main question in that text is, "... does the contemporary industrial and artistic production meet the needs and demands of human creative capabilities?" He provided the following answer: "If we consider mastering new energies, creating new matter, analysing new structures, and expressing new relations in the material structure of an object on the level of artistic production, then the answer is yes. This is because there has never been so much experimenting with expressive possibilities and so much understanding that this experimenting is necessary if people are to reach their full creative potential and to adapt their works to the demands of a humanized world."⁵²

It can be concluded that, if the Praxis school ever showed any interest in art at all, the focus was always on modern art that expressed humanity's new horizons.⁵³ However, their philosophy seemingly struggled to decode and engage with the language of radicalized modernist art practices, and it failed to address the subsequent transcendence of the limits of modernism.

Danko Grlić, for instance, described the shift in the character of artistic expression and production in the following words:

“Perhaps Heidegger was correct in asserting that the time we’re living in is scarce. On one hand, it seems as if aesthetics and science revolve, whether in the role of an apologist or just by negating it, around art which, on the other hand, is itself displaying suicidal tendencies. Some may find this portrayal overly bleak, but I do not believe it should be artificially embellished. Everything points to the conclusion that art is distinctly expressing a willingness to liquidate itself. For example, when Fontana slashes his canvas, leaving it as a document of his own artistic expression, or when Burri displays scorched rags and wood – just to mention a few somewhat innocent attempts to adequately express the modern spirit – how can we understand that in any other way than as some, perhaps very real and adequate, but nevertheless suicidal manifestations? To be clear, I am a staunch opponent of every kind of academism in art and every form of conservatism. The academic spirit considers itself immortal just because it was actually outside of time when it was already creating. Nonetheless, I believe I can discern signs that in many manifestations of the contemporary tendencies, a certain morbidity will prove victorious, a morbidity that is just a pendant of rationalistic technical guile and its standards. One can get the impression, although perhaps only from a certain number of modernists who continuously reproduce the same thing (albeit perhaps technically more refined each time), that in those tendencies, feeling, imagination, and every personal effort somehow become redundant, and fantasy seems to be drying up. It can come close to extinction because if art is moving in just one way, towards the technification of its object, it can never match the speed, perfection, or performance of a machine. Imagination always lags behind everything technology can achieve; technical art is behind technology, man is behind a machine.”⁵⁴

When talking about “suicidal tendencies,” Grlić expresses concern that contemporary art, “in its attempt to perform the so-called humanization of the world and things, could dehumanize and reify itself.”⁵⁵ In his texts, he focuses more on contradicting the theory of reflection and dogmatic Marxist stances on the imperative of art to serve an ideology. His analysis of contemporary art at that time shows that the modern aesthetics of a Marxist, Praxisist character was not able to keep pace with the fundamental changes in the art of the 1960s and face the necessity of revising aesthetic theory in accordance with a fundamental shift in the concept, methodology, and effect of art practice concerning art itself and the society. As Miško Šuvaković stated, a change in the “object of pursuit” had occurred – a change that demanded a revision of aesthetic thinking in relation to current philosophies and reversals from philosophy to theory and theoretization. New Tendencies caused the concept of art to open, shifting the focus from the object, i.e. the work of art, to research, and the relation between concepts and percepts, i.e. emotion and effect in relation to art, was reconstructed as art moved from an artisanal/industrial field into the information field. This means that a shift had occurred, and art was no longer treated as the production of an object but as a process, activity, or practice.⁵⁶

Frank Popper articulated it succinctly, stating in his description of the GRAV group’s activities that the “disappearance of the work” is what mattered to these artists.⁵⁷

The effect of the physical disappearance of the artwork can be explained through its morphology, encompassing various forms of induced kineticism and dematerialization, ranging from engine-powered works to those creating motion on the eye’s retina, all the way to light and sound installations. Ultimately, an artwork’s physical features are relegated into the background, overshadowed by its effects and perception. The latter is contingent on the observer, who now assumes the central role in the artistic process, displacing the artist and becoming inevitably entwined in it.

The observer is no longer a distant consumer, but an active participant, a co-creator activating the artwork with their sensory abilities. In this sense, the “disappearance of the work” implies art’s complete integration into the environment where it is both created and dissolved. In other words, art must reduce the components through which, by its intrinsic features, it is understood as art in the first place. These are expressions and emotional responses to social reality. Attempting to bring the ideas of the Praxis philosophy closer to these new tendencies in art, Supek, in the aforementioned catalogue text, remarks: “We are today very preoccupied with the creation of a more humane social order. However, we do not consider the fact that this humane order is more closely related today than it ever was, and will become even closer in the future, to the humanized metamorphosis of the outer material world.”⁵⁸ He adds, “Art in its concept strives towards bringing the illusionistic space born in human imagination closer through human perception and the laws of harmonious perception. It introduces this space into real space, reviving all of that as a part of real civilization, as a part of the world to which we are inextricably and intensely linked because we cannot escape to it only in our moments of deliberate idleness. Such art, necessarily transcending the sketch or model of its idea to concrete spaces with the ability to be multiplied endlessly, has a huge responsibility today and is constantly working on the humanization of the human environment.”⁵⁹

This fundamental divergence between Praxis’s (Grlić’s) apprehension of “suicidal tendencies” and the New Tendencies’ embrace of transgressive practices encapsulates the conclusion that, according to Miško Šuvaković, the effort to distance art from the functional demands imposed by the party/state aims to achieve art that is in and of itself autonomous and beyond the state’s dictates. Still, one could also argue the opposite – that art adopted an exploratory, not a poetic stance, challenging every idealization of its autonomy.⁶⁰

Conclusion

I concur with Šuvaković’s assertion that Neo-Marxist tendencies in Yugoslavia aligned with humanist-oriented, emancipatory and dissident new left movements as exemplified by the Praxis philosophy. This movement, “influenced by critical theory, interpreted early Marx in a humanist light, establishing connections between Marxism and contemporary philosophical schools (existentialism, phenomenology, structuralism, and philosophy of language), and laid the groundwork for the theoretical liberalization of dogmatic Marxism in real-socialist societies.”⁶¹ However, I diverge from the subsequent claim that “Neo-Marxism is connected to the Neo-Avantgarde in art movements” such as the New Tendencies, “which emerged as a critique of ideologically neutral, individualistic, subjective, and egocentric art of Informalism and abstract Expressionism, i.e. the dominant moderate modernist bourgeois aestheticism and art market, by advocating for a utopian and critical project of transforming life and the living environment through a synthesis of art, architecture, and modern technology (Enzo Mari, GRAV, Gruppo N, Matko Meštrović).”⁶²

Contrary to this assertion and based on the analysis and comparison of texts, this paper posits that when it comes to art, its positioning, and its role in the society of socialist Yugoslavia, there were no considerable overlaps in the views of the Praxis members and the chief ideologue of the New Tendencies, Matko Meštrović, and that there was no direct connection between Neo-Marxist and Neo-Avantgarde tendencies in Yugoslavia regarding the theory of art.

Given the almost complete lack of direct contact between the academic circle of Praxis philosophers and art theoreticians, their shared viewpoints emerge in the

alignment of similar concepts, beliefs, and ideals within the broader framework of intellectual and cultural history in socialist Yugoslavia. In this article, the New Tendencies movement is observed in the context of contemporary theoretical debates and interpreted through materialistic theory, i.e. Marxism, as a reference point for socialist art scenes.

While the approaches of these two currents regarding art were radically different, the role that the Praxis philosophers attributed to philosophy in the socialist society was largely equivalent to the role that the more progressive among art theoreticians (in this case Matko Meštrović) ascribed to art. In the context of Yugoslav self-management socialism, this role was, I would say, to serve as its corrective. Although the texts of Praxis members might imply that the “autonomy” enjoyed by art and the freedom of artistic creation should be extended to the entire society, their approach to art remained more traditional, Neo-Kantian. Translated into art historical terms, it resembled what is known as high modernism, the officially promoted socialist aestheticism in Yugoslavia.

NOTES

¹ The core elements of the Marxist Humanist perspective can be found in the article by MIHAJLO MARKOVIĆ, *Socijalizam i samoupravljanje* [Socialism and self-management], *Praxis* 2 (1966), 172-188.

² In the article, there will not be any references to the *Praxis International* journal, published abroad (in Oxford) from 1981 to 1994 with a reduced editorial board.

³ More about theory of reflection in: LINO VELJAK, *Marksizam i teorija odraza, Filozofijski temelji teorije odraza* [Marxism and the theory of reflection: Philosophical foundations of the theory of reflection], Zagreb, 1980.

⁴ Although 20 years had passed since the break with Stalin, in the works of Praxis members, Stalinism and Zhdanovism represented a collective determining feature and rhetorical figure

for marking those who had etatist and reactionary aspirations in socialist Yugoslavia.

- ⁵ The key term used by certain theoreticians and critics to explain this type of official art was “socialist aestheticism,” introduced by Sveta Lukić in his literary theory. For Lukić, socialist aestheticism is the immanent opposite of socialist realism, by which the latter is not surpassed, but only abandoned. Thus, Lukić concludes that unlike Soviet dogmatism in which the bureaucracy imposes work methods on artists, in Yugoslav society “politicians and ideologues negotiate with artists or recommend them to do something.” Consequently, “many products of the new Yugoslav art are compromises (...) Aestheticism dulls the edges, rounds things off, stifling further divergence. Theoretically empty, in any case loose, in practice it enforces more neutral works.” In other words, aestheticism produced works whose neutrality corresponded to the Yugoslav bureaucracy, and as such they expressed both the social position and the true essence of bureaucracy. SVETA LUKIĆ, *Savremena jugoslavenska literatura 1945-1965* [Contemporary Yugoslav literature, 1945-1965], Belgrade, 1968, 199. Lazar Trifunović applied the term to fine arts, considering that aestheticism was the official artistic ideology of the 1950s, supported by the political and bureaucratic structures of the time, to which “art that does not disturb or ask inconvenient questions” corresponded. In other words, “directed towards the laws of form and the pictorial problems of the image, (socialist – K.L.) aestheticism was modern enough to appease the general complex of openness to the world, traditional enough – the reshaped aesthetics of intimism of the fourth decade – to satisfy the new bourgeois taste that grew out of social conformity, and inert enough to fit into the myth of happiness and unified community...” LAZAR TRIFUNOVIĆ, *Enformel u Beogradu* [Informal in Belgrade], exhibition catalogue, Umetnički paviljon Cvijeta Zuzorić, 1982, 11. The processes of “revitalizing” modernism in the post-revolutionary phase of Yugoslav socialism were retrogradely interpreted by several theoreticians, whereby the rejection of the doctrine of socialist realism was primarily analysed through the affirmation of the concept of the autonomy of art. The interpretation of this phenomenon by Lidija Merenik and Ljiljana Kolečnik partly coincides with Lukić’s thesis about a conservative and depoliticized artistic phenomenon. Kolečnik thus identifies two stages of affirmation of autonomous art in the Croatian cultural environment. One is of a local character, implementing the demand for autonomy on a rather declarative level (“traditionalist modernism”), while the other was international. The latter was manifested in the institutionalization of the high-modernist concept of art, mainly in the form of lyrical abstraction, and, in Kolečnik’s interpretation, almost coincides with Lukić’s thesis on soc-aestheticism. It was, as Kolečnik writes, “a compromise, a ‘golden mean,’ which was sufficiently ‘modern’ to serve as an argument for a true break with the aesthetics of socialist realism, but also conservative enough to prevent accusations of radical formalism.” LJILJANA KOLEŠNIK, *Prilozi interpretaciji hrvatske umjetnosti 50-ih godina. Prikaz formativne faze odnosa moderne umjetnosti i socijalističke Države* [Remarks on the interpretation of Croatian art in the 1950s: The formation phase of the relationship between art

and the socialist State], *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 29 (2005), 311-313. In the exhibition catalogue *Socialism and Modernity: Art, Culture, Politics 1950-1974*, Kolečnik stated that the label “socialist aestheticism” was rather problematic, as it was “increasingly used as a synonym for ‘socialist modernism’ and applied to different artistic phenomena even if they functioned differently in different Yugoslav environments and had different historical genealogies.” Kolečnik maintains that “neither before nor after the foundation of the new state was it possible to define a group of artistic practices built on a common tradition, identical formal and substantive premises, or common aesthetic and poetic starting points.” Hence, she believes that the term Yugoslav art is an “empty signifier” and that the expression “Yugoslav art scene” referred to a series of art phenomena loosely connected by a certain understanding of modernity, which within Yugoslav cultural space retained a normative value until the late 1960s.” LJILJANA KOLEŠNIK, *Hrvatska poslijeratna moderna umjetnost u jugoslavenskom kontekstu* [Croatian postwar modern art in the Yugoslav context], in *Socialism and Modernity: Art, Culture, Politics 1950-1974*, (ed. Ljiljana Kolečnik), Zagreb, 2012, 134-135. In the same catalogue, Dejan Kršić argues that “for the most part of the period we are talking about, Socialist Republic of Croatia was a part not only of the Yugoslav (socialist, self-governing, non-aligned, federative, multinational, multi-ethnic) state, but also of Yugoslav society, i.e. its cultural, artistic, and design scenes. Regardless of the extent to which these were determined by the specific cultural climate of cities or local cultural scenes, all the protagonists of the art scene and their artworks were simultaneously participants in the wider social scene of the socialist self-governing Yugoslavia. Production, influences, communication, information, and partly also competitions between various authors and their poetics were defined by the dynamic relations between the cultural centres of the Yugoslav federation... The unfolding of that life was defined by numerous personal and institutional bonds among the protagonists of the Yugoslav art scene at that time.” DEJAN KRŠIĆ, *Grafički dizajn i vizualne komunikacije, 1950.-1975.* [Graphic design and visual communications, 1950-1975], in *Socialism and Modernity: Art, Culture, Politics 1950-1974* (ed. Ljiljana Kolečnik), 2012, 213. According to Merenik, it is possible to speak about a critique of soc-aestheticism from the point when post-war modernism lost its conflicting meaning, i.e. when it lost its ideological effect and was reduced entirely to an aesthetic effect: “Modernism, assimilated into the corpus of official cultural policy, of which it became a representative symbol, had no choice but to repeat its already constructed aesthetic discourse and its own work as aesthetically accomplished.” LIDIJA MERENIK, *Umetnost i vlast: Srpsko slikarstvo 1946-1968* [Art and authority: Serbian painting, 1946-1968], Belgrade, 2010, 96. Miško Šuvaković’s interpretation is also close to Lukić’s. Šuvaković argues that socialist aestheticism emerged at the moment when socialist realism lost its international support (after 1948) and the socialist revolutionary society entered a post-revolutionary period. The revolutionaries were replaced by bureaucrats and technocrats in important, even if not leading positions, which means that socialist aestheticism was an expression of the interests and tastes of the new management layer, which was no longer there just

- to change the world, but also to live in it. In other words, art was no longer expected to depict possible and optimal realities, but to have an autonomous aesthetic function. MIŠKO ŠUVAKOVIĆ, *Umetnost posle socijalističkog realizma. Prilozi kritici istočnoevropskog modernizma na uzorcima socijalističke Jugoslavije, Srbije i – uže – Vojvodine* [Art after socialist realism: A contribution to the critique of Eastern European modernism on examples from socialist Yugoslavia, Serbia, and – more narrowly – Vojvodina], <http://www.republika.co.rs/440-441/20.html> (last accessed on March 14, 2023).
- ⁶ SREČKO PULIG, Vrijeme samoupravljanja [The era of self-management], *Novosti* (2018), <https://www.portalnovosti.com/vrijeme-samoupravljanja> (last accessed on April 15, 2023).
- ⁷ UNA BLAGOJEVIĆ, *Reconstructing Marxist Humanism(s) in Yugoslavia*, <https://www.iwm.at/publication/iwmpost-article/reconstructing-Marxist-Humanisms-in-yugoslavia> (last accessed on November 3, 2023).
- ⁸ VESELIN GOLUBOVIĆ, *S Marxom protiv Staljina: Jugoslaven-ska filozofska kritika staljinizma 1950-1960*. [With Marx against Stalin: Yugoslav philosophical critique of Stalinism, 1950-1960], Zagreb, 1985, 6.
- ⁹ LJILJANA KOLEŠNIK, *Između Istoka i Zapada: Hrvatska umjetnost i likovna kritika 50-ih godina* [Between East and West: Croatian art and art criticism in the 1950s], Zagreb, 2006, 308.
- ¹⁰ Marksisti protiv markista u Jugoslaviji – Zabrana jedne sveske časopisa *Praxis* [Marxists against Marxists in Yugoslavia: Banning an issue of the *Praxis* journal], in *Filozofija: rasprave, suočavanja, odjeci*, Belgrade, 1972, 145-146 (a translation was published in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, July 29, 1972, 4).
- ¹¹ While self-management was one of the foundations of Marxist (and generally left-wing) visions of the future society, its construction in post-war Yugoslavia was ambivalent and often contradictory (as indicated by the criticism of *Praxis* itself). Susan Woodward, in her book *Socialist Unemployment: The Political Economy of Yugoslavia 1945-1990*, argues that the Yugoslav system was neither market socialism nor a planned economy, but a hybrid system. Like other communist parties in Central and Eastern Europe, the KPJ took power in an agrarian country, with remnants of feudal systems, on the edge of global capitalism and with great regional differences. Therefore, Yugoslavia, like other socialist countries, was primarily a developing country, and the task of the Party as the vanguard of the working class was to lay developmental foundations that the domestic bourgeoisie had not been able to provide, which would ensure continuous economic growth at any cost. In the conflict of two principles necessary for the maintenance of the socialist project, strengthening the army and defence as a guarantor of independence and exports as a generator of economic growth on the one hand, and improving the living standards as a guarantor of the political alliance of workers and peasants created in the war on the other, according to Woodward, the party leadership had to combine different strategies. She calls these strategies the “principle of Slovenia” and the “principle of Foča,” both of which have their roots in the experiences of the Second World War. The “principle of Slovenia,” developed during the war in the western regions and countries, implied the application of “economic” methods such as the central regulation of wages and the authority of experts and managers, while the “principle of Foča,” developed from war experiences in the south-eastern regions, implied the application of “political” methods such as the mobilization of workers through labour brigades and the public supervision of managers and bureaucracy. The combination and tension between these two principles characterized Yugoslav self-governance throughout its entire existence. In Woodward’s interpretation, self-management was not so much about highlighting Yugoslav peculiarities in the socialist world or yielding to democratic pressure from below. Instead, it is seen as a strategic manoeuvre of the party elite to remove obstacles to the fundamental goal of continuous economic growth: “The purpose of the workers’ councils introduced at the end of December 1949 was thus to gain workers’ assistance in the wage restraint and employment cuts necessary to restabilize the economy and to restore the authority of enterprise management and technicians over production, including labor. The councils would combine the collective incentives and discipline of the production brigades with managerial accountability for enterprise budgets.” SUSAN L. WOODWARD, *Socialist Unemployment: The Political Economy of Yugoslavia 1945-1990*, Princeton University Press, 1995, 153-154. Vladimir Unkovski-Korica argues along the same line in his book *The Economic Struggle for Power in Tito’s Yugoslavia: From the Second World War to Non-Alignment*: “When the need for development is viewed in this way, world market standards become a factor that determine all production processes and come into contradiction with the idea of universal emancipation in the world. States can defend certain sectors and standards, however, the idea is ultimately that if we compete in the market, we have to produce cheaper and better, which has certain effects on production processes, i.e. it can lead to a class struggle because it is necessary to pressure the working class. The pace of production is set elsewhere, in an instance that has a much more developed economy, i.e. in a developed capitalist system.” (<http://slobodnifilozofski.com/2018/12/lekcije-jugoslavenskih-samoupravnih-praksi.html>, last accessed on July 20, 2023). Darko Suvin offers a more dialectical insight in his book DARKO SUVIN, *Samo jednom se ljubi: radiografija SFR Jugoslavije 1945.-72., uz hipoteze o početku, kraju i suštini*, Beograd, 2014, largely relying on the work of Susan Woodward. While reading Woodward, one can get the impression that changes in strategies and their combinations were exclusively the product of party elites responding to the existing situation, but Suvin sees the origin, development, and eventual demise of self-government in the tension between the Party’s monolithic, statist aspirations and attempts at integral plebeian rule.
- ¹² MATKO MEŠTROVIĆ, Osobitost i univerzalnost [Particularity and universality], in *Od pojedinačnog općem*, Zagreb, 2005, 81.
- ¹³ GAJO PETROVIĆ, Čemu Praxis [Why Praxis?], *Praxis: filozofski časopis* 1/1 (1964), 5-7.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ¹⁵ MISLAV ŽITKO, Praxis nakon ’68. Marksistička filozofija i proturječja jugoslavenskog socijalizma [Praxis after ’68: Marxist philosophy and the contradictions of Yugoslav socialism], in *Kriza i kritika racionalnosti*, (eds. Borislav Mikulić and Mislav Žitko), Zagreb, 2019, 343.

- ¹⁶ The Praxis school criticized the way socialist self-management was implemented in Yugoslavia.
- ¹⁷ MISLAV ŽITKO (as in n. 15), 347.
- ¹⁸ This is also characteristic of what Perry Anderson defines as Western Marxism. According to Anderson, what characterizes Western Marxism is the gradual abandonment of economic and political themes dominant in classical Marxism. In other words, it is characterized by the loss of the combative character and practical application of philosophy in favour of the academization of Marxist discourse. Related to that, in a formal sense, Marxism separated itself from the “world of necessity,” thus creating a gap between theory and practice. Anderson argues that Western Marxism was the product of *defeat* in the absence of the expansion of the socialist revolution outside of Russia and the impossibility of constituting Marxism as social emancipation. Anderson underlines two turning points for this hypothesis: 1) the importance of the Third International, which imposed the Stalinization of all party cadres, bureaucratically organized and ideologically subordinated to the policy of the Soviet Union; and 2) the end of the Second World War, when the main Marxist discussion moved away from political militancy and from the international horizon. This means that with the decline of revolutionary Marxism, it passed into the sphere of philosophy. In that sense, the most significant shift was towards the study of the superstructure, particularly its aspect that was furthest removed from the economic infrastructure: the realms of culture and especially art. See: PERRY ANDERSON, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1976).
- ¹⁹ VESELIN GOLUBOVIĆ (as in n. 8), 16.
- ²⁰ LUKA BOGDANIĆ, Čemu Praxis? Ili o historijskom porijeklu i mjestu Praxisa [Why Praxis? On the historical roots and place of Praxis], in *Aspekti praxisa. Refleksije uz 50. obljetnicu* (eds. Borislav Mikulić and Mislav Žitko), Zagreb, 2015, 1-45.
- ²¹ BORISLAV MIKULIĆ, *Milan Kangrga. Klasični njemački idealizam: predavanja* [Milan Kangrga on Classical German Idealism: Lectures], (ed. Borislav Mikulić), Zagreb, 2008, 68-87.
- ²² See IMMANUEL KANT, *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Judgment*, vol. 1 and 3 of *Immanuel Kant: Three Critiques*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis, IN, 2002.
- ²³ DANILO PEJOVIĆ, Umjetnost i estetika [Art and aestheticism], in *Svijet umjetnosti: Marksističke interpretacije* (eds. Vjekoslav Mikecin and Vladimir Štokalo), Zagreb, 1976, 229.
- ²⁴ LEE KRASNER, Interview with Bruce Glaser, in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews* (ed. Pepe Karmel), New York, 1999, 28.
- ²⁵ NIKOLA DEDIĆ, *Ka radikalnoj kritici ideologije: od socijalizma ka postsocijalizmu* [Towards a radical critique of ideology: From socialism to post-socialism], Belgrade, 2009, 27.
- ²⁶ VJEKOSLAV MIKECIN, Problemi marksističkog shvaćanja umjetnosti [Marxist understanding of art], in *Svijet umjetnosti: Marksističke interpretacije* (eds. Vjekoslav Mikecin and Vladimir Štokalo), Zagreb, 1976, 246-247.
- ²⁷ IVAN FOCHT, Put k ontologiji umjetnosti [Towards an ontology of art], in *Svijet umjetnosti: Marksističke interpretacije* (eds. Vjekoslav Mikecin and Vladimir Štokalo), Zagreb, 1976, 195-196.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 196.
- ²⁹ In his seminal early text “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” Greenberg made a distinction between two cultural spheres – the Avant-garde (individualistic) and kitsch (mass). He claimed that cultural Avantgarde could serve as a politically revolutionary force, because it corresponded to an individualistic consciousness, just as kitsch corresponded to the mass consciousness. An important starting point for Greenberg was L. Trotsky’s analysis of art, in which he argued that the spirit of emancipation must come exclusively from the individual. According to Trotsky, revolutionary ideas in art could not be imposed from outside, not even by the Communist Party. See: *Partisan Review* 6/5 (1939).
- ³⁰ IVAN FOCHT (as in n. 27), 196.
- ³¹ Cf. DANKO GRLIĆ, Čemu umjetnost [Why art?], *Praxis* 2 (1966), 160-161.
- ³² JERKO DENEGRI, *Umjetnost konstruktivnog pristupa, Exat 51 i Nove tendencije* [Art of constructive approach: Exat 51 and the New Tendencies], Zagreb, 2000, 195.
- ³³ DARKO FRITZ, Nove tendencije [New Tendencies], *Oris* 54 (2008), 178.
- ³⁴ JERKO DENEGRI (as in n. 32), 211.
- ³⁵ MATKO MEŠTROVIĆ, Ideologija novih tendencija [Ideology of New Tendencies], in *Od pojedinačnog općem*, Zagreb, 2005.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 213.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 213.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 215.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 216.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 213.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 216.
- ⁴³ MATKO MEŠTROVIĆ, Oktobarski salon u Beogradu – prilično tačna slika opće situacije [October Salon in Belgrade: A rather accurate picture of the general situation], in *Od pojedinačnog općem*, Zagreb, 2005, 154.
- ⁴⁴ IVAN FOCHT, “Umjetnička tehnika i tehnikacija umjetnosti” [Art techniques and art technicization], *Praxis* 2 (1966), 168.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.
- ⁴⁹ MIŠKO ŠUVAKOVIĆ, *Neoavangardna i konceptualna umjetnost u Hrvatskoj* [Neo-Avantgarde and conceptual art in Croatia], Zagreb, 2019, 46.
- ⁵⁰ “Pripremišvi i jednu javnu diskusiju s temom kako izmijeniti sadašnje stanje u likovnoj umjetnosti...” / “Having also prepared a public discussion on the topic of how to change the current state of art...” MATKO MEŠTROVIĆ, Umjetnost i kontemplacija u Palazzo Grassi [Art and contemplation at Palazzo Grassi], in *Od pojedinačnog općem*, Zagreb, 2005, 93.
- ⁵¹ RUDI SUPEK, Humanizacija ljudske sredine i ljudskog stvaranja [Humanization of man’s environment and man’s creation], in *Nova tendencija* 3, Zagreb, 1965, 13.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ MIŠKO ŠUVAKOVIĆ (as in n. 49), 48.

⁵⁴ DANKO GRLIĆ, Neki temeljni problemi suvremene estetike [Some fundamental topics in contemporary aesthetics], *Praxis* 3, 1970, 352.

⁵⁵ DANKO GRLIĆ (as in n. 31), 162.

⁵⁶ MIŠKO ŠUVAKOVIĆ (as in n. 49), 51.

⁵⁷ MARION HOHLFELDT, The Collective Oeuvre of the GRAV: the Labyrinth and Audience Participation, *Critique d'art* 41, <https://critiquedart.revues.org/8335> (last accessed on June 20, 2023).

⁵⁸ RUDI SUPEK (as in n. 51), 14.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ MIŠKO ŠUVAKOVIĆ (as in n. 49), 51.

⁶¹ MIŠKO ŠUVAKOVIĆ, *Pojmovnik suvremene umjetnosti* [Lexicon of contemporary art], Zagreb, 2005, 358.

⁶² Ibid., 358.