

NENAD STEFANOV

## ‘MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE’

### YUGOSLAV *PRAXIS* PHILOSOPHY, CRITICAL THEORY OF SOCIETY AND THE TRANSFER OF IDEAS BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

‘Message in a bottle’. That was how Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno saw the possible impact that their central work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, published in 1947 might have on society. There was no concrete recipient in mind at that historical moment – dominated by the experience of the National Socialist *Zivilisationsbruch*. Thus, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* would float along, and maybe the message would at some later time be by chance uncorked. One decade later, the ‘bottle’ reached a readership; recipients of the message not thought of nor intended: a group of philosophers gathering regularly on an Adriatic island off the coast of Yugoslavia. But how could it happen that Horkheimer and Adorno’s bottle would be uncorked, of all places, on a Yugoslav island?

Yugoslavia as a keyword is often connected with violent ethnic conflict, ‘the impossibility of different nations living together’. Therefore, Yugoslavia is a preferred topic for theorists who see culture predominantly as a field of ethnic conflict and as a medium of articulating substantial differences. Culture understood as a field of agency is rarely brought into connection with Yugoslavia.

Even a very brief glance at this period shows, however, that defining Yugoslav culture only by ethno-national clashes touches only one dimension of the country’s societal development. The dimensions of another concept of culture became visible in the development of a critical public discourse at the beginning of the 1960s.

There are few, if any, historical studies of Yugoslav *Praxis* philosophy and its ‘practice’ of holding annual summer schools on Korčula, the Adriatic island where the ‘message in a bottle’ was uncorked. Gradually a new interest is now developing, particularly in the social sciences as well as in

the context of the global historicization of the 1968 protest movement.<sup>1</sup> This essay contributes to this literature not by presenting definite findings, but rather by delineating central aspects which should be the object of closer investigation in the future. Another aim of this article is to underline the significance of a neglected field of analysis of this school: the contact, transfer of ideas and entanglement of intellectual currents between east and west. This article concentrates in particular on the philosophy of critical theory, as developed in the US and West Germany. To avoid the vagueness of the term 'transfer', I will rely on a definition offered by Jürgen Osterhammel. He argues that transfers of ideas or of structures of meaning (*Kulturtransfer*) should be seen as parts of transnational history only if 'the protagonists and institutions of the transfer can be named and documented and if it is possible to correlate specific processes of transfers with identifiable needs, interests and social functions as well as to explain the consequences of these transfers'.<sup>2</sup> With the journal *Praxis* and the discussions that the editorial board was able to generate in Yugoslavia and beyond, such a group of protagonists can be precisely defined.

Analysing the *Praxis* school from the angle of transnational exchanges and connections reveals, on the one side, the specific conditions under which an institutionalization of independent thought was possible in Yugoslavia and, on the other side, the interrelatedness of this process to western European trends of development. The journal *Praxis* and the summer school existed from 1964 to 1974, a period of upheaval in the history of socialist Yugoslavia. This decade witnessed political reforms that lessened party control on all spheres of societal life, the first experiences with a 'Yugoslav way of life', with modest prosperity and the broadening of contacts with the west. It ended with the first experience of economic crisis and a strengthening of authoritarian rule in the mid-seventies, accompanied by a profound federalization of the state. The main question of this contribution is how the transfer of critical theory functioned. The elements of critical theory that were of particular importance for these exchanges can be gleaned from the meetings and discussions on Korčula. The transfer of ideas to a new social context often leads to a creative appropriation and thus modification of those ideas. In addition to a brief sketch of social milieus and inner-Yugoslav entanglements out of which the *Praxis* school

---

<sup>1</sup> Boris Kanzleiter and Krunoslav Stojaković, eds., "1968" in *Jugoslawien: Studentenproteste und kulturelle Avantgarde zwischen 1960 und 1975: Gespräche und Dokumente* (Bonn: Dietz, 2008); Boris Kanzleiter, *Die "Rote Universität": Studentenbewegung und Linksoption in Belgrad 1964-1975* (Hamburg: VSA, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Transnationale Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Erweiterung oder Alternative?', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 27, 3 (2001), 464-479, at 477.

emerged, this contribution discusses three possible areas for researching transfers, appropriations, and modifications: the transfers of notions, the institutional dimension of transfer and the individuals involved in transfer and exchange.

### Transfers of Notions: *Praxis* – Conception and History

The connection between the critical theory of society and the Yugoslav *Praxis* philosophy is not an arbitrary one that has been constructed *post festum* and inspired by the present boom of approaches focusing on entanglements and transfers. Rather, this connection was already visible in the West German public sphere of the 1970s, the period with a very high awareness of the Yugoslav way of self-management and the *Praxis* school. Thus, the weekly *Der Spiegel* reported that

In the thoughts of this journal [*Praxis*], the orthodox left encountered a virus that they had already diagnosed in the shape of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School: the rebellion against their “dialectic materialism” (Diamat) that admits philosophy is only a reflection of the real conditions [der wirklichen Verhältnisse]. [...] In contrast to Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, however, the *Praxis* philosophers developed their critique of capitalism and socialism starting in a socialist country. Many of them, like Supek and Vranicki, had fought in the resistance and, after the war, suffered under the “influence of an external power in the name of a prospective freedom” [...].<sup>3</sup>

Five years later, one could read in this weekly that ‘it was the merit of the *Praxis* circle that Yugoslavia had become a Mecca of democratic socialism for the new left throughout the whole world. It seemed to prove that socialism and freedom are compatible after all’.<sup>4</sup> In this section, I will briefly introduce the societal and political context in which this current, so little appreciated by the orthodox Marxists, appeared on the intellectual scene and point out that transfers and exchanges were at the very core of its way of thinking.

Tito’s break with Stalin in 1948 led not only to a forced ideological reorientation which expressed itself in discussions about workers self-management, but also in the rehabilitation of sociology as an academic discipline. Hitherto discredited as ‘bourgeois’, it was now affirmed as a field of study at Belgrade University.<sup>5</sup> The need to develop a Marxist

---

<sup>3</sup> ‘Baldachin für Heilige’, *Der Spiegel*, 2 Mar. 1970, 169.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Der “Praxis-Kreis”’, *Der Spiegel*, 3 Feb. 1975, 81.

<sup>5</sup> Nebojša Popov, *Društveni sukobi – izazov sociologije*, 2nd edn. (Beograd: Centar FDT, 1990), 117. The first edition was forbidden in 1983. From 1950 onwards Sociology was taught at the law department.

theory distinct from Soviet ideology provided intellectuals with the opportunity to introduce western philosophical discussions into academic debates in Yugoslavia and to interpret them from out of a Yugoslav context.<sup>6</sup>

Essential for this reorientation were the notions of *alienation* and *Praxis*. Until 1948, Yugoslav theoreticians and party ideologues followed the thesis of dogmatic Marxism that alienation appeared only in capitalist societies. There, workers were separated from their means of production and could control neither the power of their labour nor the product of their work. In socialism the producer disposes freely over the means of production and surplus; thus, the problem of alienation ceases to exist according to this kind of interpretation. In the mid 1950s, the notion of alienation was reassessed in Yugoslavia in order to develop a critique of the growing influence of the state apparatus, namely the Stalinist bureaucracy, which gradually gained independence and alienated itself from society, negating the freedom of the producer. Not the bourgeoisie anymore but rather the state now appropriated the means of production and surplus.

In the evolution of the concepts of this philosophical current, one can observe a transfer and first and foremost an appropriation in the domain of ideas. The philosophers of the *Praxis* circle at that time, beginning in the mid-1950s, became deeply interested in the discussions that followed the ‘discovery’ of Marx’s *Frühschriften* two decades earlier. Particularly Herbert Marcuse wrote about these texts in the 1930s,<sup>7</sup> pointing out the genuine philosophical terminology that seemed to disappear in the later works of Marx – but most of all the term ‘alienation’ gained attention, strengthening a new approach to Marx as a philosopher.<sup>8</sup>

A wide range of thinkers, beginning with Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch and Ernst Bloch, used the term alienation in their interpretations in order to describe ‘forms of consciousness’ (*Bewusstseinsformen*) in capitalist societies in which the heteronomy and powerlessness experienced by the atomized individual was perceived as something given by nature and as existing necessarily.<sup>9</sup> The Yugoslav thinkers adopted this interpretation of the notion in order to better understand the dynamics of prejudices and to describe similar phenomena of internalization of domination in a different,

---

<sup>6</sup> First texts were written by Mihailo Marković (*Revizija filozofskih osnova marksizma u Sovjetskom Savezu* [Beograd: Naučna knjiga, 1952]) and by Gajo Petrović; cf. Popov, *Društveni sukobi*, 115.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert Marcuse, ‘Neue Quellen zur Grundlegung des Historischen Materialismus’, *Die Gesellschaft* 9, 2 (1932), 136-174.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Gajo Petrović, *Marx i Marksisti* (Zagreb: Naprijed and Beograd: Nolit, 1986), 24.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein: Studien über marxistische Dialektik*, 9th edn. (Darmstadt/ Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1986).

namely, state-socialist context.<sup>10</sup> A transfer of concepts and their appropriation to a particular context occurred.<sup>11</sup> 'Alienation' from the *Frühschriften* served to criticize the destructive potential of socialist state bureaucracy. Emerging out of an adaptation and modification in the Yugoslav intellectual context, this notion was the starting point for the creation of the crucial feature of the new Yugoslav critique: *Praxis*.

In classical 'Diamat' (dialectical materialism), history is seen as evolving according to objective laws with the individual and his actions being reduced to the subjective expression of these objective rules; revolution and the establishment of socialism are seen as resulting from supra-individual necessities.<sup>12</sup> Yugoslav social scientists and philosophers, in contrast, tried to formulate a theoretical counter-proposal to such a conception. This way a systematic possibility could be developed, acknowledging the existence of different interpretations of Marxist thought, as well as a theoretical foundation for the newly introduced workers' self-management, highlighting its universal democratic potential. Such reflection aimed at emphasizing the possibilities of autonomous *Handeln*, and defined 'man' as a free, creative person, creating a new societal reality.

Thus, *Praxis* was chosen as a title for the circle's journal because it best expressed its underlying understanding of philosophy.<sup>13</sup> *Praxis* pointed out the changeability of society and thus centred particularly on the sphere of human action.<sup>14</sup> *Praxis* meant, first of all, seeing man not in an exclusively contemplative relationship towards the objects surrounding him, but as capable of changing them through his action.<sup>15</sup> This aspect of changing and shaping the surrounding world by man, implied that *Praxis* as a notion meant primarily a revolutionary and critical form of action (*Handeln*).

It was not until 1960 that this current of thought could establish itself as at least equal to those Yugoslav theoreticians of Marxism-Leninism who were still attached to the Leninist 'mirror' theory. By this they meant that

<sup>10</sup> One of the founders of the *Praxis* circle was a particular protagonist of such appropriation. Cf. Predrag Vranicki, 'Marginalien zum Problem des Humanismus', in Predrag Vranicki, ed., *Mensch und Geschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969), 21; Predrag Vranicki, *Geschichte des Marxismus*, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), 1049.

<sup>11</sup> Gerson S. Sher, *Praxis: Marxist Criticism and Dissent in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Bloomington/ London: Indiana University Press, 1977), 66.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Boris Zihlerl, *Dijalektički i istorijski materijalizam*, 2nd vol., Biblioteka Prosvetnih radnika Jugoslavije, Knj. 12 (Beograd: Rad, 1952).

<sup>13</sup> Preface of the Editorial Board of *Praxis*, 'A qui bon Praxis?', *Praxis International* 17 (1965), 3-9, at 4.

<sup>14</sup> Branko Bošnjak, 'Ime i pojam Praxis', *Praxis* 1 (1964), 7-20, at 17; Gajo Petrović, 'Praksa i Bistvovanje', *Praxis* 1 (1964), 21-34.

<sup>15</sup> Vranicki, 'Marginalien', 29.

cognition – and in immediate connection subjective activity – was necessarily bound to firm rules of ‘objective reality’.<sup>16</sup> But by this time, as the attraction of the *Praxis* concept began to grow, the terrain of the discussion had broadened.

The *Praxis* circle opposed particularly all obstacles that prevented the involvement of man as a ‘free creative person’. Initially this led to the critique of the growing superiority of the state and its bureaucratization. The critique was first and foremost directed at the Soviet Union, demonstrating what dangerous effects Stalinist bureaucracy could have. But – as hinted before – the discussions of the *Praxis* circle made clear who it was that was actually being addressed: the relations of power in Yugoslavia where implicitly the issue. With its monopoly of power, the Yugoslav state, established by a revolution, was threatening the achievements of the revolution.

Such a description of the relations of power in Yugoslavia made *alienation* and *praxis* the crucial notions of a Yugoslav critical theory of society. Whereas the first critically re-examined the proclamation of the possibility of liberty in socialism, the second contained a blueprint of emancipation and freedom.

### Intellectual Milieus and Yugoslav Entanglements

In 1964, the first number of the journal *Praxis* appeared. A year later the publication of a parallel international edition began.<sup>17</sup> In this latter one, English, French and German translations of the texts in the Yugoslav edition, making up around 70 to 80 per cent of the text, were accompanied by texts from other Yugoslav journals such as *Naše Teme* (Zagreb), *Gledišta* (Belgrade), *Pregled* (Sarajevo).<sup>18</sup>

The history of the journal could be written as a process of inner-Yugoslav entanglements. Its founding was not intended by the state, but came from an autonomous initiative that many party functionaries did not support.<sup>19</sup> Initially, the journal – published by the Croatian Philosophical

---

<sup>16</sup> Gajo Petrović, ‘Praksa i Bistvovanje’.

<sup>17</sup> Gajo Petrović, ‘O međunarodnom izdanju “Praxis” (1970 – 1973): Izvještaj Redakcije “Praxis” podnesen na godišnjoj skupštini Saveza filozofskih društava Jugoslavije 29.6.1973 u Ljubljani’, *Praxis* 6 (1973), 745-758.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 747.

<sup>19</sup> Rudi Supek retrospectively wrote about the journal and the summer school: ‘It had a really all-Yugoslav character, although it was explicitly on voluntary basis to join us and driven exclusively by the wish and the abilities of everyone of us, personally to contribute

Society – ran theoretical blueprints of the 'Zagreb School', personified in the thought of Milan Kangrga, Gajo Petrović, Rudi Supek and Predrag Vranicki. The growing relevance of the journal resulted in the fact that articles from other similarly oriented Yugoslav journals were printed and a joint Yugoslav editorial board was established, composed mostly of theoreticians from Zagreb and Belgrade such as Veljko Korać, Zagorka Golubović, Ljubomir Tadić and Mihailo Marković. From then on, the journal was published by the Yugoslav Philosophical Society.

To some degree, Zagreb and Belgrade could be seen as symbolizing different philosophical traditions. Zagreb stood more for an orientation toward critical theory and ontology; in Belgrade, the philosophy of science and American pragmatism seemed to have a greater attraction. Nevertheless, such a generalization is not helpful in the long run, and it soon reaches its limits. What was, in fact, common ground for all the members of the journal was the effort to relate one's thinking to concepts that were discussed in the west and to ask how far these concepts could explain the contradictions of Yugoslav society. The divergent interpretations and controversies should not be identified primarily with a 'Belgrade' and a 'Zagreb School', as if representing two different concepts. Even less should they be ascribed to two republics representing a 'Croatian' or a 'Serbian' style of a critical approach towards society. The intellectual milieus of both cities were too heterogeneous to construct out of them a particular, homogenous, easily identifiable 'Belgrade' or 'Zagreb style'. *Praxis* provided a general framework for a heterogeneous group of intellectuals who definitely could contradict each other, and often enjoyed it.

Only *post festum* nationalist critics of this school attempted to expose its 'hidden and real' history: Croatian nationalists blamed the most prominent editors, Petrović and Kangrga, for their Serbian origin in order to unmask both a deep lack of 'Croatness' and thus the inherently Great-Serbian and cosmopolitan orientation of *Praxis*. On the other hand, a former member of the *Praxis* circle, Mihailo Marković from Belgrade, was convinced by the 1990s, that his former colleagues from Zagreb were nothing else than Croatian nationalists whose sharp criticism attempted to discredit the 'legitimate Serbian national movement' in the 1980s.<sup>20</sup> Those intellectuals of the *Praxis* circle were predominantly socialized within or in the context of the party structures. The generation of Mihailo Marković and Gajo Petrović had joined the resistance movement during the German occupation, particu-

---

to theoretical and educational work', Rudi Supek, 'Deset godina Korčulanske Ljetnje Škole', *Praxis* 5-6 (1973), 563-574.

<sup>20</sup> Mihailo Marković and Božidar Jakšić, 'Neobjavljeni intervju: Praxis – kritičko mišljenje i delanje', *Filozofija i društvo* 1 (2010), 3-16.

larly the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia, and had become members of the party after the war. The bigger part of the 'bourgeois opposition' was openly suppressed after the war. After 1948, however, and even more so after 1952, the split with the Soviet Union and the abandonment of the Soviet model of societal organization gradually opened a space for critics of Soviet authoritarianism; it also made it possible to found journals and to publish without needing to stick too closely to the party line. Nevertheless, self-conscious, individual criticism remained a risky endeavor. Gajo Petrović was expelled for the first time from the party in 1952 because of 'subjectivist arrogance and inattention towards Stalinist tendencies'. Later he was given his membership card back, only to be again expelled in 1968. He himself declined several later invitations to join the party again.<sup>21</sup> With the exception of Milan Kangrga, who never joined the party, the other intellectuals from the *Praxis* circle, although party members, were not trusted by their comrades as reliable.

#### Institutions of Transfer and Exchanges: The Journal and Summer School

The emphasis on finding audiences and generating discussions outside Yugoslavia was a genuine element of the theoretical orientation of the *Praxis* school. In the perceptions of the members of the editorial board, critique and emancipation were components of a common universal process. The aim to critically define societal contradictions in Yugoslavia was to be achieved in a broader discussion of those ideas in a universal perspective:

The aim of the international edition is not the "representation" of Yugoslav thought abroad, but the stimulation of international philosophical collaboration in the debate on the decisive questions of our time. [...] This way we represent Yugoslav philosophy as participants in the global happenings and not as a national specialty, satisfying the needs of an eccentric view from outside.<sup>22</sup>

The goal of the international edition was not the kind of representation or exhibition that characterized international scientific conferences between east and west, which served exclusively to demonstrate the pure and intact spirit of each side. The editors aimed at something entirely different. They were interested in an exchange; they wanted to discuss the possibility of

---

<sup>21</sup> Asja Petrović, Branko Bošnjak, et al., eds., *Zbilja i kritika posvećeno Gaji Petroviću* (Zagreb: Antibarbarus 2001), 4.

<sup>22</sup> Petrović, 'O međunarodnom izdanju', 751.



analyzing societal development in east and west critically as well as to participate in discussions as to what kind of notions could serve such an analysis best. *Praxis* understood itself as a forum beyond states for all those intellectuals who shared the mentioned perspective on society, and who saw themselves not as 'representatives' of a 'national school'. What the term 'transnational' would define today was an integral part of their intellectual endeavour: going beyond national boundaries, a discussion should be initiated about social change.

The international editorial board reflected this interest in transcending the limits of a world divided into east and west. It was comprised of nearly all relevant intellectuals who were interested in a Marxist philosophy beyond Stalinist dogmatism, or for whom Marx served as a point of departure for a critical revision of his concepts and for initiating a new mode of reflection about society. It ranged from Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas to Lucien Goldmann and later also to Zygmunt Bauman.

The, so to speak, sensual – or Dionysian – basis of the international journal's experiences were meetings on the Adriatic island of Korčula which took place every year in August between 1963 and 1974. Not only the members of the international editorial board participated in this summer school. The sessions were also attended by intellectuals and philosophers who usually did not have that much in common with Marxist Philosophy such as Eugen Fink, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Karl Löwith.

The summer school did not just invite prominent scholars and intellectuals. Students from abroad were also present in considerable numbers (up to 500 attended in 1968).<sup>23</sup> The central aim of the summer school for the *Praxis* philosophers was to extend discussions beyond the exchange of letters and take them to the level of direct communication.<sup>24</sup> This kind of communication was stabilized by publishing the majority of the contributions annually in the journal – of course, in French, German and English. At the same time – usually at the end of a summer session – a topic which had crystallized that year during the discussions in the panels and seminars was chosen as the main issue for the next year. The joint sessions of the international editorial board, as it decided together on the forthcoming issue, illustrate vividly the ways of entanglement within *Praxis*.

The summer school did not remain within the bounds of academic routine. Supek formulated it this way: 'instead of academic instruction in

---

<sup>23</sup> Nebojša Popov, et al., eds., *Sloboda i nasilje, razgovor o časopisu Praxis i korčulanskoj letnjoj školi* (Beograd: Res publica, 2003), 75.

<sup>24</sup> This school was founded out of the desire, to become acquainted with more distant regions of theory, to come in direct touch with the most modern and progressive thinkers and scientists, cf. Petrović, 'O međunarodnom izdanju', 567.

questions of education in a narrow sense, Korčula grew to be a societal happening, an origin of action of thought, going far beyond its formal limits'.<sup>25</sup> This was inherent in the summer school's 'principles', as Supek called them. A self-understanding of the participants became visible as 'deeply engaged persons, and not as disciplined functionaries'.<sup>26</sup> The openness towards different Marxian and other theoretical orientations, and also towards 'new ideas' that emerged in both western and eastern Europe was essential for this kind of self-understanding.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the conveners invited individual persons and not – as it was a usual custom at official congresses – national or state delegations. Thus Supek explained the fact that in the ten years in which the summer school took place, there were participants from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Hungary, but not a single philosopher from Bulgaria or the Soviet Union at the meetings on the Adriatic island.<sup>28</sup> The latter two preferred to send delegations and not individual persons to represent the 'newest achievements' on the field of philosophy in their countries. For Supek, it was important for the summer school to contribute not just to a better understanding of the newest trends of social theory in Yugoslavia or to introduce solely *Praxis* philosophy to the participants from abroad. Of equal importance was to initiate communication among the participants from western Europe who in their own 'home' context sometimes could view one another as opponents or as members of ideologically opposed currents. The challenge to enable understanding despite the various different languages and the lack of translators resulted in sections that were organized by language.

Those panels at times tended to reproduce (at least in the afternoon, whereas in the morning there were joint panels) local cultures of debate within this transnational context, as Arnold Künzli noted during the summer school in 1970: 'Thus, in the French section a passionate debate went on, whereas the section in English language discussed in complete serenity questions about Positivism and Leninism, while the German section grappled with the topic "Hegel"'.<sup>29</sup> The history both of the summer school and of the journal can be divided in three different phases: the first was from 1963-1968 when a 'humanist Marxism' from a Yugoslav perspective stood in the foreground, with a strong relationship to Ernst Bloch, who regularly

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 564.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 565.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 569.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Arnold Künzli, 'Verstörter Weltgeist auf Korčula: Zur 7. Internationalen Sommerschule der jugoslawischen "Praxis" Philosophen', *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 21, 10 (1970), 608-614, at 610.

joined the meetings at Korčula and wrote about *Praxis* for a broader audience – for instance in the weekly *Der Spiegel*.

The year 1968 symbolizes a kind of hinge between two distinctive periods. At the summer school of 1968, when the participants – with Jürgen Habermas and Herbert Marcuse among them – were informed about the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the limits of a humanist socialism were exposed, with a sobering effect. At the same time, the student rebellions in the US and Europe and their possible emancipatory potential drew everyone's attention. This contradiction between a scepticism concerning the possibility of emancipation within the 'real socialist' states and the debates related to the system-changing potential of the new protest movements, which no longer fit the old class-struggle scheme, dominated the following meetings on Korčula until the summer school was held for the last time in 1974.

In the issues of *Praxis* and at the summer school, the analysis of the new social movements as a global phenomenon came to the fore. On the other hand, a younger generation – represented by Nebojša Popov and Božidar Jakšić – was developing from a sociological perspective an innovative and explicitly critical analysis of the conflicts and contradictions in Yugoslav society. In contrast to the previous dominance of texts, which centred on an optimistic version of *Praxis* philosophy, the number of contributions to the journal grew which tried to figure out the new risks and threats connected with the newly emerging nationalism in Yugoslav society. This topic, then, characterized the third phase of *Praxis* when the conflict with the party officials, which had accompanied the publication of the journal since its beginnings, intensified.

The relationship between the party and *Praxis*, too, went through three different stages. It can be summarized briefly in the following way: First there was considerable scepticism and a fierce critique in the Yugoslav media towards *Praxis* predominantly from dogmatic currents. Although scepticism never ceased, in the years until 1968, it moved into the background, because of the international acknowledgement the journal and the summer school received. After 1968, it was particularly the federal level of the party which turned to open repression, considering the *Praxis* circle responsible for the student revolt in the Yugoslav capitals. The imprisonment of Božidar Jakšić was the first sign, followed in 1974 by the shutting down of the journal and summer school, and culminating in 1975 with the expulsion of seven professors and docents from Belgrade University who were members of the *Praxis* circle.

### Transfers and Demarcations – a Biographical Approach: Gajo Petrović

The steadily growing pressure, however, did not succeed in limiting the impact of *Praxis* on the Yugoslav intelligentsia or abroad. Actually it was to the contrary, as the following passage will show. One way of approaching the history of contacts, interrelations and transfers is through a biographical perspective. This helps to illustrate the specific position of intellectuals in Yugoslavia and their starting framework for transnational communication. This section, therefore, briefly sketches the career of someone mentioned previously: Gajo Petrović (1927–1993). Petrović was one of *Praxis*' editors-in-chief for an entire decade. Moreover, his intellectual biography is typical for the life story of a number of *Praxis* intellectuals as well as for the way *Praxis* entanglements worked – although the very different, heterogeneous theoretical concepts of each individual scholar should be kept in mind. What is important here is how contacts to intellectuals abroad were established and maintained.

Soon after the end of the war, Petrović, a participant in the liberation movement and prospective student of philosophy, went to study for two years in the Soviet Union. He was sent in 1946 to Leningrad and Moscow and returned in 1948, when the relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union seriously deteriorated. His correspondence and later published articles about his experiences there demonstrate that, from the very beginning of his stay, he had a distanced view of the Soviet Union and of the role philosophy was expected to play in this society.<sup>30</sup> Thus, when he intensified his contacts to western scholars, Petrović had already had an in-depth experience of the Soviet way of life and thinking. In 1957 he was invited by Alfred Ayer to conduct research in England on a one year grant. It was there that Petrović became acquainted with analytical philosophy.

In 1961 Petrović received a grant from the Ford Foundation, enabling him to establish close ties to American scholars and particularly to Erich Fromm, which also brought the beginning of a lifelong friendship.<sup>31</sup> The contacts to intellectuals in Western Germany were established and intensified through several grants by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, particularly in the 1970s.<sup>32</sup> Another way of establishing international contacts was through book reviews. Robert C. Tucker describes how he got in contact with the *Praxis* circle. Attracted by the idea of a Yugoslav journal dealing with global issues, he began reading it with curiosity:

---

<sup>30</sup> Asja Petrović, *Gajo Petrović*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

To my great surprise, when I opened the edition for 1965, I found on its pages a review of my book "Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx", published in 1961. I was surprised by the friendly although not uncritical approach of Petrović towards my book. As I already knew Gajo Petrović intellectually through this review in *Praxis* 1965, I got to know him personally the next year, when we both participated in a conference at Notre Dame University in the US.<sup>33</sup>

Thus began an intellectual friendship. The manner in which it was established was typical for the whole *Praxis* circle.

### The *Praxis* School's Reception of Critical Theory

Critical theory will serve as an example for the content of the transferred and appropriated ideas. It was particularly the early concepts of critical theory and their influence, visible in the works of Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm and Max Horkheimer,<sup>34</sup> that were increasingly gaining importance at the beginning of the 1960s.<sup>35</sup> The interest in this kind of critique of societal development was not limited to a small circle of intellectuals.<sup>36</sup>

The philosophers around *Praxis* published Serbo-Croatian translations of significant works of critical theory. Beginning in 1965, it was predominantly the books of Herbert Marcuse which were published, starting with *Eros and Civilisation*.<sup>37</sup> With remarkable timing, *One-Dimensional Man*

---

<sup>33</sup> Robert C. Tucker, 'Gajo Petrović i humanistički marxizam', in Asja Petrović, *Gajo Petrović*, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. John Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Gajo Petrović, 'Die Frankfurter Schule und die Zagreber Philosophie der Praxis', in Axel Honneth and Albrecht Wellmer, eds., *Die Frankfurter Schule und die Folgen* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), 59-88, at 61.

<sup>36</sup> 'Generally it must be stated that the "Frankfurt School" pushed doors open. This connection of Marxism and Psychoanalysis brought us new insights'. Interview with Alija Hodžić, 'Die Interpretation allein ist schon ein Ereignis', in Kanzleiter and Stojaković, eds., "1968" in *Jugoslawien*, 60.

<sup>37</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilisation* (1965); *Reason and Revolution* (1966); *One-Dimensional Man* (1968); *Das Ende der Utopie: An Essay on Liberation* (1972); *Kultur und Gesellschaft* (1977); *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1979); *Estetska dimenzija [Ästhetische Dimension: 10 Texte zur Kunst und Kultur]*, (1981); *Hegels Ontologie und die Grundlegung einer Theorie der Geschichtlichkeit* (1981); *Prilozi za fenomenologiju historijskog materijalizma [Beiträge zu einer Phänomenologie des Historischen Materialismus]* (1982), *Soviet Marxism* (1982); with Robert P. Wolff and Barrington Moore, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (1984). Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (1968); *Drei Studien zu Hegel* (1972); *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit* (1978); *Negative Dialektik* (1979); *Filozofsko-socioloski eseji o književnosti [Philosophisch-soziologische Essays über die Literatur]*, (1985). Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (1963); *Traditionelle und kritische Theorie*

was published exactly in June 1968. A more intensive discussion of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* developed during the 1970s.<sup>38</sup>

In 1982, Gajo Petrović defined the relationship between the different representatives of critical theory as asymmetrical.

Within this outlook at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s the Frankfurt School was discovered as the older sister who had been overlooked at the beginning. It was an admirable elder sister with manifold talents that had already seen and understood some important problems which had only recently been noticed by the younger sister. The older one had well before already achieved many meaningful insights, for which the Zagreb philosophers needed to expend great efforts to achieve themselves. The fascination was decidedly great, comparable only to that which accompanied the discovery of Ernst Bloch at the end of the 1950s. From this time on, the Frankfurt School remained for the Zagreb *Praxis* philosophers (and naturally for other philosophers from Yugoslavia) a permanent source of instruction and inspiration.<sup>39</sup>

The image of the two sisters which Gajo Petrović uses here highlights a common point of departure: a critical revision of classical Marxism. But it also hints at different paths to achieve this aim. Among others, Critical Theory developed out of a rejection of philosophy as a system of thought without connection to societal experience. In his early works, Horkheimer dismissed academic philosophy or an understanding of philosophy as a completely detached 'queen of all other sciences'.<sup>40</sup> In Yugoslavia, in contrast, an insistence on a classical understanding of philosophy served to preserve the possibility of autonomous thinking; it was directed against the transformation of the philosophical dimension of Marxian thought into a doctrine legitimating power.

The different attitudes towards classical philosophy did not necessarily evolve out of different theoretical premises, but out of different social

---

(1976); *Kritische Theorie*, 2 vols (1982). Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1974); *Soziologische Exkurse* (1980). Walter Benjamin, *Eseji* [Essays] (1974); *Zur Kritik der Gewalt* (1976). Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1969); *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (1975); *Theorie und Praxis* (Beograd 1980); *Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus* (1982); *Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus* (1985). Alfred Schmidt, *Geschichte und Struktur* (1976); *Begriff der Natur in der Lehre von Marx* (1981); with Gian E. Rusconi, *Die Frankfurter Schule* (1974). Franz Neumann, *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State* (1980). Cited after Gajo Petrović, 'Die Frankfurter Schule', 85.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Nadežda Čaćinović-Puhovski, 'Die Dialektik der Aufklärung und die aufgeklärte Dialektik', *Praxis* 2-3 (1973), 253-270.

<sup>39</sup> Gajo Petrović, 'Die Frankfurter Schule', 68.

<sup>40</sup> John Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 52.

experience. While both modes of reflection shared a common non-dogmatic Marxian approach towards societal experience as crucial for the development of theory, the different societal contexts and epochs led them to different conclusions concerning the place of philosophy in society. It is instructive that the closest dialogue was maintained with Herbert Marcuse, who, in the early stage of his theoretical reflections, had been attracted by Heidegger, but then gradually (particularly in the 1930s) lost any interest in this direction.<sup>41</sup> Also Jürgen Habermas was a regular guest at the summer school on Korčula. No ongoing personal contact was established with the authors of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.<sup>42</sup> Particularly Alfred Schmidt, one of the representatives of the younger generation, remained highly reserved about the theoretical foundations of *Praxis* philosophy, although the editors of *Praxis* tried to set up a dialogue with him with a review of his thesis in the very first issue of the international edition, which shows the importance of his work for the Yugoslavs:

With more sympathy than appreciation, the older sister observed the theoretical attempts by the younger one. She observed with affectionate concern the repetition of errors of her own youth (particularly the so called 'error of the young Marcuse'). Thus, sometimes the Zagreb philosophy of *Praxis* was viewed as a phenomenological variant of Marxism, sometimes as a Heidegger-izing of Marx, and sometimes also as an anthropocentric philosophy, which by pretending a de-stalinization, threw overboard essential positions of Marxism.<sup>43</sup>

The reasons for this asymmetry could be found, first of all, in the question of how far a particular understanding of philosophy was acceptable to Critical Theory. This difference, however, did not touch the shared understanding of a necessary public engagement by a critical intellectual. Also,

---

<sup>41</sup> Cf. John Abromeit, 'Left Heideggerianism or Phenomenological Marxism? Revisiting Herbert Marcuse's Critical Theory of Technology', *Constellations* 17, 1 (2010), 87-106.

<sup>42</sup> Max Horkheimer was already in retirement. Adorno politely expressed his inability at the moment to join the summer school, when he was invited during a personal conversation with Gajo Petrović in Frankfurt 1967. The latter was at this time a Humboldt-Fellow in Frankfurt. 'In a talk I had with Adorno in the Institute for Social Research in December 1967 and that had a quite diplomatic character, because Adorno was trying to be very polite and gentle and I myself was trying to convince him to join our summer school, Adorno assured me, that he was reading the journal *praxis* with great interest and that he would really like to come to Korčula. But he immediately apologized, that he couldn't participate at the coming conference (in Summer 1968). He assured me, that we would come in 1969 to Korčula. I can't precisely remember, if he was invited in 1969 and how he answered. However he didn't participate in the summer school in 1969 (and he couldn't), because he died on 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1969, two weeks before the summer school should begin'. Gajo Petrović, 'Die Frankfurter Schule', 69.

<sup>43</sup> Gajo Petrović, 'Die Frankfurter Schule', 68.



in general, Gajo Petrović spoke in his conclusion of a ‘critical appropriation’ beyond ‘the named differences’.<sup>44</sup> Petrović presented this retrospect at a meeting in Germany, organized by Albrecht Wellmer and Axel Honneth. Despite all the differences concerning the theoretical approach, contacts continued far beyond the existence of the summer school. As Habermas looked back on the relationship to *Praxis*, there were indeed differences in the conception and understanding of theory; nevertheless, the understanding of public intellectual *Praxis* and the need for a critical examination of a theory of society were shared by both.<sup>45</sup>

### Instead of a Conclusion: Further Perspectives on Researching *Praxis*

These differences concerning the approach to and understanding of theory were characteristic predominantly for the first generation of *Praxis* philosophers in Yugoslavia. The younger generation was not that bound to the notion of *Praxis* and was also in closer touch with the concepts of critical theory, particular in the more articulated interest in sociology as mentioned above. It can be said that an intensive but ambivalent relationship, visible in the first generation, was put on a more stable basis by the younger generation, particularly by Žarko Puhovski and Gvozden Flego in Zagreb and Nebojša Popov, Miladin Životić and others in Belgrade. This intensive exchange evolved into a paradox: particularly after the end of the journal, east-west contacts were intensified by the younger generation,<sup>46</sup> but – at least in the German context – they actually did not lead to a better conceptual comprehension of the Yugoslav peculiarities.

On the other hand, since the prohibition of *Praxis* in 1974, a forum for the exchange of theoretical concepts was missing in which a critical reinterpretation of the experiences of the last decade could be undertaken. Therefore, other international journals and meetings offered possibilities for discussion. It seems, however, that they were used primarily by the elder generation of Yugoslav philosophers to reassure themselves of the validity of the categories that had been used up to that point. This at least seems to have been the case with Mihailo Marković: His concepts of an integral self-management in an egalitarian outlook did not change during the two de-

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>45</sup> Gajo.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Gvozden Flego, ed., *Herbert Marcuse – Eros und Emanzipation: Marcuse-Symposium 1988 in Dubrovnik* (Giessen: Germinal Verlag, 1989), and numerous other editions of the Dubrovnik Symposiums.



comes since its appearance until they were transformed more or less in a voluntary act into the ideological foundation of the re-named Serbian League of Communists in 1989. While Marković’s case is an exception, it does hint at a particular phenomenon: the changes in Yugoslavia – the strengthening of authoritarianism after 1974 in particular – did not lead to the same kind of reconsideration of theoretical concepts that the failure of reform socialism had initiated in Poland, for instance.<sup>47</sup> On the contrary, the *Praxis* philosophers primarily sought to secure their theoretical achievements and to reassure themselves of their validity.

This may also be one factor for a desideratum particularly criticized recently by the *Praxis* member Gajo Sekulić: the lack of an orientation towards democratic theory. It is indicative that in the 1970s and 1980s Jürgen Habermas was a reference person for questions regarding the organization of science, but he was less inspiring with regard to theory.<sup>48</sup> Sekulić sees this deficit as a crucial one for theory-building in Yugoslavia. The critique of growing bureaucratization and the possibilities of self-liberation stood in the foreground. In their critique of the shapes of domination, the Yugoslav theoreticians of society neglected to draw more precisely on the possibilities of the constitution of democratic procedures – beyond reiterating the importance of expanding the sphere of workers self-management.<sup>49</sup>

This gap in the reflections of the *Praxis* circle could be – as a suggestion – discussed in a transnational perspective: the new left in western Europe, too, was confronted with challenges. On the one hand left-wing terrorism in the 1970s and on the other ‘new social movements’ starting at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. A theoretical reflection on these new experiences began only gradually. While the former *Praxis* members had this problem in common with their western friends, the focus of analysis of the new generation, if they dealt explicitly with societal development, was on analysing power structures and conflicts in Yugoslavia. Nebojša Popov’s study of *Društveni sukobi* [Conflicts in Society]<sup>50</sup> could have been

---

<sup>47</sup> Agnes Arndt, ‘Der Bedeutungsverlust des Marxismus in transnationaler Perspektive: “Histoire Croisée” als Ansatz und Anspruch an eine Beziehungsgeschichte West- und Ostmitteleuropas’, in Agnes Arndt, Joachim Häberlen, Christiane Reinecke, eds., *Vergleichen, Verflechten, Verwirren? Europäische Geschichtsschreibung zwischen Theorie und Praxis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 89-114.

<sup>48</sup> Of course this began to change in the mid-1980s, when the translation of works of Habermas intensified.

<sup>49</sup> Gajo Sekulić, ‘Pogovor: Nelagoda u Filozofiji – Milan Kangrga i spekulativna prevladavanja filozofije kao metafizike’, in Milan Kangrga, *Spekulacija i filozofija: Od Fichtea do Marxa*, (Beograd: Službeni glasni, 2010), 422-450.

<sup>50</sup> Popov, *Društveni sukobi*.

a turning point in the direction of another kind of theory taking democracy theory more seriously into account – but unfortunately this profound study based on empirical research was banned and the copies of the book confiscated and destroyed. It is significant that the book was republished only in 1989.<sup>51</sup> Like this observation, this essay, too, should serve primarily as a preliminary consideration of possible fields or research, because of the fact, that up to now there has been almost no research (with a few exceptions) about this phenomenon.<sup>52</sup> Thus, this article merely sought to sketch the most promising possibilities of conceptualizing the history of the Yugoslav intellectual public as a history of the transfers of ideas and the entanglements of intellectual milieus in eastern and western Europe.

This is not at all the kind of ‘eccentric occupation’, which Gajo Petrović distrusted so much. On the contrary: an evaluation and a search for possible foundations of civil society in these parts of Europe, particularly a reconsideration of this intellectual tradition would be of particular value. Even a short glance at the surface can show that the greater part of the movement for peacefully resolving the Yugoslav crisis in the 1980s, and the following anti-war movement, as well as the protagonists of civil societies in our time mostly have either a biographical background or were intellectually socialized in the theoretical framework set up in the 1960s and 1970s around *Praxis* and numerous other journals. Also the protagonists of *Praxis* contributed to a great extent to the understanding of the destruction of Yugoslav society and the war of the 1990s that were not based on essentialist understandings of ethnic identity. These interpretations were important points of departure for the analysis of the war in western societies – anticipating a further field of research in which one could speak of a re-transfer.<sup>53</sup> Thus the general quest for traces of traditions of civil orientation in the Balkan societies becomes at the same time the necessary point of departure to reconsider the legacy of critical thought in the societies which were formed after the breakup of Yugoslavia.

---

<sup>51</sup> The book was finished in 1978. After difficulties in raising money for printing, it was sent only in 1983 to the printing house, where it was then confiscated, see: Nebojša Popov, *Contra Fatum: Slučaj grupe profesora Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu 1968-1988* (Beograd: Mladost, 1989), 377.

<sup>52</sup> Kanzleiter and Stojaković, “1968” in *Jugoslawien*; Kanzleiter, *Die “Rote Universität”*.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Nebojša Popov, ed., *Srpska strana rata: Trauma i katarza u istorijskom pamćenju* (Beograd: Republika, 1996); see also the translations: Drinka Gojković and Nebojša Popov, *The Road to War in Serbia: Trauma and Catharsis* (Budapest/ New York: Central University Press, 1998); Thomas Bremer, Nebojša Popov, Heinz-Günther Stobbe, eds., *Serbiens Weg in den Krieg: Kollektive Erinnerung, nationale Formierung und ideologische Aufrüstung* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag 1998).