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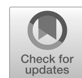

Encounters: East/West dialogs on existence

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Abstract
The article discusses the historical background and transnational context of the dialogue between East-European communist philosophy and Western existentialism. It does so by first outlining the exchanges between Lukács, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty between the late 1940s and the early 1960s. Subsequently three major forums of East–West philosophical dialogue are surveyed, that took place during the 1960s: the 'Morals and Society' colloquium, organized by Instituto Gramsci in Rome in May 1964; the Korčula summer school, organized by the Praxis group between 1964 and 1975; and the International Congress for Philosophy organized in Vienna in September 1968. This series of events and the dialogue and confrontations that they engendered prove that, contrary to the exclusively negative reception of existentialism in the socialist camp in the 1950s, but also contrary to the distorted representation, which can be found in dissidents' recollections and which became dominant after the fall of communism, which excluded any possibility of dialogue between the two sides during socialism, such a dialogue has taken place, and led to mutual appropriations on both sides.

Keywords Existentialism · Sartre · Fink · Praxis · Philosophy congresses

Introduction

Although existentialism was fiercely rejected in most State Socialist countries during the 1950s as a late remnant of bourgeois idealism, the 1960s saw a wide resurgence of interest in developing hybrid original forms of existential or phenomenological philosophy throughout the Eastern Bloc as a possible expansion of the official Marxist–Leninist framework. While the papers gathered in this special issue address the re-

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ception, critique, and appropriation of existentialist philosophies in various State Socialist countries from complementary thematic and methodological perspectives by focusing on specific case studies, the present article sketches out a more encompassing transnational view of this process. To this purpose, it focuses primarily on instances of mutual engagement between philosophers in the East and in the West at summer schools, conferences, and large-scale international congresses during the 1960s, which all bring about some sort of mutual intersection between State Socialist Marxism and existentialist philosophy. Without exhausting all available sources, but instead seeking for a just balance between the synoptic presentation of materials and their more indepth hermeneutic and philosophical analysis, the paper ultimately aims to contribute to a more thorough understanding of the specific transnational context of philosophizing in the Eastern Bloc, by focusing on aspects of circulation and coproduction of knowledge in philosophical discourse across the East–West divide during the Cold War.

To be sure, when speaking of "existentialism" and its reception here, some terminological clarifications are in order. *On the one hand*, we use the term in a broad acceptation, which goes against current more nuanced ways of discussing the works of authors as diverse as Sartre, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Fink, Patočka, and others, some of which no doubt reject the label or regard their work as incompatible with that of the others – see, for instance, Heidegger's firm rejection of Sartre's interpretation of existentialism as a "humanism" (see GA 9, pp. 321 f.). Despite such overt contrasts, several recent works have advocated for the need to use a more encompassing concept of existentialism. Existentialism is thus understood as a philosophical direction, which is primarily interested in advancing new categories for understanding human existence, while emphasizing the key values of individual freedom and personal authenticity (see especially Crowell 2012; Khawaja 2016 and Webber 2018). This is a helpful definition for orienting the reader with regard to what is at stake in the debates studied throughout the present article as well. *On the other hand*, in the present article, we mainly follow the specific use of the term "existentialism" in the State Socialist context we study, a use of the term that debuted with Lukács' reflections on existentialism in the late 1940s and prolonged through various stages at least until the late 1960s. While this acceptation may be even broader than the one currently employed by the above-mentioned contemporary interpreters, to the point of strongly conflicting with our current-day philologically correct terminologies, this use of the term is not entirely arbitrary either, but instead it rests on three main assumptions. First, it involves a very fluid relationship to phenomenological philosophy, which often tends to plainly identify the two, as Lukács himself explicitly does, for instance, when interpreting the phenomenological method outright as an achievement of existentialism.[1] However, secondly, the two terms are not used indiscriminately, such that one may find the works of Fink and Patočka, or even Husserl's own later philosophy of the life-world, termed as "existentialist", but one will never see the labels applied

[1]The German edition of *Existentialismus oder Marxismus* specifically reads: "Obwohl Husserl noch nicht Existentialist war, können wir die phänomenologische Methode ruhig als eine Errungenschaft des Existentialismus ansehen" (Lukács 1951, p. 34). The quote is rendered somewhat more inconspicuously in the French translation used in the rest of this paper.

to say Ingarden, or Husserl's earlier work. While the demarcation line may seem arbitrary, the philosophical positions labeled as existentialist visibly share one common element: they all pose a specific kind of difficulty to the official Marxist–Leninist framework by bringing into play the issue of finite, individual human experience. What is termed "existentialist" in this literature ultimately designates a specific type of challenge for Marxist–Leninism. Thirdly, it is also important to note that existentialist philosophy is, in the aforementioned body of works, not sharply distinguished from existentialist fictional literature.

In the following, we will try to outline the specific ways in which the ongoing dialog between the Existentialist and the Marxist–Leninist camps during the Cold War helped formulate a set of novel questions and theorems, which ultimately enriched both sides. We will start with a brief sketch of the main theoretical points of contention between existentialism and official Marxism during the 1950s. Subsequently, we will follow a number of significant public encounters between the two sides during the 1960s that point to a more complex negotiation between the existentialist and the Marxist–Leninist position, which included both attempts to assimilate the existential qualms of the individual into Marxism–Leninism and to tackle issues like labor and class relationships with the tools of existential analysis.

Lukács vs. Sartre and Merleau-Ponty before the 1960s

Although recurrently reprimanded and even denounced by the communist authorities and their philosophers,[2] the very presence and prolonged prolific activity of Lukács in communist Eastern Europe exerted an unofficial yet irreducible philosophical authority. An intellectual figure descending straight from the world of Lenin and Trotsky, Weber and Heidegger, Lukács' thoughts represented a direct link – perhaps the only one remaining after the great purges and Stalinization – to the great philosophical and political prewar traditions of both Eastern Communism and Western Marxism. As such, it set the tone and the conceptual framework for the ensuing reception of existentialism in the region. Thus, a brief look at the context and content of the dialog between Lukács and Western existentialists in the immediate postwar period would be most helpful.

The first systematic expression of Lukács' own perspective on existentialism and its philosophical, historical, and political meaning, is articulated in his book *Existentialism or Marxism*[3] (1947). Existentialism is approached here from a four-fold perspective: first, as an expression of the contemporary, yet prolonged crisis of bourgeois philosophy, which manifested during the last hundred years as a series of repeated attempts to articulate a third way between materialism and idealism. These attempts, Lukács claims, are destined to remain trapped in idealism, because the originality of being and consciousness from which they start denies any transsubjective autonomy of being. In this long philosophical tradition, existentialism's more nihilist blend

[2] By Rudas and Deborin, after the publication of *History and Class Consciousness*; in the late 1920s for the Blum theses; in the late 1940s in the 'Lukács affair'; in 1956 for his participation in Nagy's cabinet.

[3] Published in Hungarian in 1947, translated in French in 1948 and German in 1951.

corresponds to the specificity and world-view of today's bourgeoisie in the Western camp, in which "men who have no prospects themselves find consolation in the doctrine that life in general has no prospects to offer" (Lukács 1961, p. 92). Secondly, Lukács establishes the similarities and dissimilarities between Sartre's existentialism and Heidegger's phenomenology: like phenomenology, existentialism dissolves the objectivity of social relations into the inwardness of consciousness, while the two also share the same preference for intuition against concept and intellect. However, in fetishizing an abstract freedom, irreducible in any context and thus universally democratic, Sartre's existentialism differs significantly from Heidegger's more negative and aristocratic view. Their difference reflects, in fact, the different tonalities and different functions they had to assume in their contexts of origin: the "oppressed murky atmosphere before the fascist storm" of *Being and Time*, versus the last stages of the war, "when liberation from fascism was already in sight and when [...] the longing for freedom was the deepest feeling of the intellectuals of all Europe" (Lukács 1961, p. 97). Thirdly, Lukács criticized the moral philosophy of existentialism, which is at best "an eclectic insertion" that cannot solve the basic fact that it is founded on a wholly indeterminate concept of freedom, to which corresponds a no less infinite responsibility. Finally, Lukács addressed existentialism's underlying epistemology, in a defense of Lenin's theory of reflection and objectivity of knowledge, against the irrationalism of Sartre's principle of indeterminacy.

However, with all these critiques, Lukács acknowledged there is a legitimate factor in Sartre's existentialism, and that is "without question, the emphasis on the individual's decision, whose importance was undervalued alike by bourgeois determinism and by vulgar Marxism" (Lukács 1961, p. 107). In the 'Epilogue' to *Destruction of Reason*, written in January 1953, he went somewhat further in singling out Sartre among the pléiade of existentialists: Lukács came to appreciate Sartre's position in his polemic with Camus, in which he defended the cause of East-European communism; although, in his view, Sartre's progressive perspective was in fact contradicting his existentialist philosophical basis, which Lukács continued to situate in the tradition of contemporary irrationalism.

In the meantime, the leading existentialists' own perspective on Eastern Marxism and communism was also evolving, and quite in opposite directions. In October 1945, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Simone de Beauvoir were pledging their new journal *Les Temps Modernes* to the fight for personal freedom and socialist revolution. Among the founders, Merleau-Ponty was initially the one closest to the cause of communism.[4] In 1947, in *Humanism and Terror*, he went so far as to argue that the violent means employed by soviet communism were legitimate as long as they bring closer the realization of a humanist future.[5] However, after the war in Korea and the beginning of the 1950s, Merleau-Ponty's enthusiasm for existing communism started to fade. In 1953, he quit *Les Temps Modernes*, impatient with Sartre's "ultra-Bolshevism",

[4]In 1946, he wrote a long and warm letter to Lukács praising his *History and Class Consciousness* and his more recent essays on literature, and also inquiring as to the reasons of Lukács' repudiation of his famous early work – see Merleau-Ponty 2021; see also Tertulian 2016, p. 336 sqq.

[5]The striking resemblance of Merleau-Ponty's book and argument with Trotsky's classic *Terrorism and communism* seems to do some justice to Lukács' later unceremonious description of Merleau-Ponty as *anima naturaliter trotskyana* (Tertulian 2016, p. 336).

and two years later, *Adventures of the Dialectic* (1955) would finally settle the score by denouncing the Soviet socialist experiment, which not so much betrayed Marxism, but rather "found itself loaded down with other tasks that Marxism thought had been accomplished" (Merleau-Ponty 1973, p. 7). The book attracted Lukács' ire in a vehement letter sent to *Cahiers du communisme*, in which he condemned Merleau-Ponty's "disloyalty", "reactionary content", and "falsification of history" (Garaudy et al. 1956, pp. 158–159).

While, with the onset of the Cold War and the exclusion of PCF from government in 1947, Merleau-Ponty's disenchantment with actually existing socialism was rather the norm in the French cultural sphere (see Christofferson 2004), Sartre's position was evolving somehow in the opposite direction, approaching the stance held by the PCF intellectuals. In the early 1950s, after the revelations in the Rousset affair,[6] he continued to credit the Soviet experiment as a force for progress, a position in which he was still joined by Merleau-Ponty (see Merleau-Ponty and Sartre 1950). In 1956, when the uproar over the Soviet invasion of Budapest was raging in France, Sartre, while condemning the invasion and ensuing repression, was nonetheless pointing to the reactionary turn of the protests, that were aimed at the complete liquidation of the socialist bases of the regime, and thus somehow justified – in the name of socialism – the foreign intervention (Sartre 1956).[7]

The year 1960 represented the culmination of Sartre's engagement with Marxism and actually existing communism. His second major philosophical work, the first tome of *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, came out by famously acknowledging Marxism as the "unsurpassable horizon of our time", to which existentialism is only an enclave (Sartre 1963, p. xxxiv). The book marks Sartre's adhesion to Marxism, but it was also meant as an attempt to rejuvenate this tradition by opening it to "the unsurpassable singularity of the human adventure" (Sartre 1963, p. 176). Its effort to de-Stalinize Marxism by combining its historical materialist foundation with an existentialist conceptualization of subjective freedom politically translates in an anarchizant theory of the "group in fusion" as the supreme form of sociality, against all the inertia and alienation of institutions. The main philosophical point of contention with Marxism – in fact, with Engels, Garaudy, and Lukács – regards the dialectics of nature: such a thing, according to Sartre, cannot exist, since human practice is the source of all dialectics, while granting dialectics to nature would mean turning it into an abstract, universal, transhistorical principle.

Initially, Lukács felt it was his duty to give a proper reply to Sartre's book, not only because it represented Sartre's answer to his own book on existentialism from the late 1940s, but also as a comradely salute to Sartre's growing interest and engagement with Marxism and actually existing communism. However, he gave up on that idea after reading the first two hundred pages – "the book is honest, but very confused

[6]David Rousset, himself a survivor of Nazi concentration camps, founder, along with Sartre, of Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire, created in 1949 a commission to investigate the existence of labor camps in the USSR. He was subsequently attacked by the communist newspaper *Les Lettres Françaises*. Rousset sued the newspaper and won his case in court in 1951.

[7]See also Sartre's leading article in the issue of *Les Temps Modernes* dedicated to the Hungarian uprising – Sartre 1957.

and boring", he confessed in a letter to Benseler.[8] The only answer that he will give to Sartre's charge would be in the later *Ontology of Social Being*, and will address only one aspect: the issue of the dialectics of nature, which Lukács would restate, along with a defense of the theory of reflection and ontological materialism. However, by that time Sartre was no longer clamoring for a synthesis between personal freedom and socialist revolution, nor claiming Marxism as the unsurpassable horizon of existentialism.

All these exchanges between Lukács, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty are rather well documented (see Bouffard and Feron 2021, Tertulian 2016, pp. 297–352, 2019, pp. 263–280),[9] which is why we only indicate them briefly here as context and background to the main topic of interest of this article, namely the proper dialog between Eastern Marxism and Western existentialism that began in the 1960s and manifested primarily as, or at, a series of international conferences and colloquia. If they represented the historical base or origin of this subsequent and richer dialog, it was certainly a complex, context dependent, and evolving base. On the one hand, Lukács' critiques in the late 1940s and early 1950s represented the most articulate Marxist engagement with existentialism. On the other hand, as they were formulated during the high time of late Stalinism, and as they seemed to converge, in their ruthless critique, with the official denunciation of this decadent bourgeois philosophy,[10] they had to be somehow set aside or neutralized in order for a more fruitful dialog to begin – which will happen with de-Stalinization and the turn to Marxist humanism in the East. Finally, on yet another hand, this shift in fortunes would also be short lived: already from the late 1960s, after the Soviet invasion of Prague, the long Brezhnevite normalization and stagnation was cutting the wind from Marxist humanism's sails, just as in the West itself, existentialism was losing its center stage to the antihumanist philosophy of Althusser and deconstruction. This is why the long 1960s – the period explored in the rest of this paper – constituted a short window of historical and philosophical opportunity for the mutual engagement between existentialism and Eastern Marxism.

Morale e società

Between 22–25 May 1964, the Gramsci Institute in Rome organized a major international conference on 'Morals and Society' gathering participants from both political camps. To say that this represented a debate or confrontation between Marxism (orthodox or critical, actually existing or theoretical) and existentialism would be somewhat correct, yet imprecise. First, numerically speaking, it was a highly unequal confrontation. On one side of the lineup were numerous Marxist philosophers from both the socialist camp – either revisionists, such as Mihailo Markovic, Karel Kosik,

[8] Letter from 19 September 1964, quoted in Tertulian 2016, p. 308.

[9] For a more general take on the relation between Marxism and existentialism in postwar France, see Poster (1977) and Feron (2022).

[10] Beyond this overlapping surface, for the major differences and opposition between Lukács' thought and Stalinist Marxist–Leninism, see Tertulian 1993.

and Adam Schaff, or more orthodox, like C.I. Gulian, Tibor Huszar or A.F. Sciskin – and the Western world, from France (the PCF intellectuals Roger Garaudy, Gilbert Mury), Italy (both lone riders like Galvano della Volpe and PCI figures like Cesare Luporini, with other philosophers and intellectuals in between them), and the USA (Howard Parsons). Alone on the other side was Jean-Paul Sartre. Secondly, as regards their content, the lectures and ensuing debates were rather seemingly divided into the corresponding political camps and internally oriented: the PCF intellectuals debating with Sartre; the East-European Marxist revisionists taking a stance against official dogmatic Marxism and bureaucratism; while the other participants spoke more by themselves: Della Volpe taking aim, as was characteristic, against the Hegelian influence in Marxism; Howard Parsons opposing the values of humanism to the decadent American contemporary society and C.I. Gulian taking safe aim with Louis Lavelle's spiritualist psychology of values.

With all the significant differences between their philosophical perspectives, the guests from the East were all high-placed figures in the intellectual and institutional spheres of their home countries. Three of them (Markovic, Schaff, and Gulian) were directors of their respective Institutes of Philosophy, while the others were also well integrated in the academia back home. For most of them, their engagement with existentialism and participation at the conference were part of a bigger and longer project. Kosik, already connected to the Italian philosophical milieus (Fusi 2022, pp. 310–311), was coming to Rome fresh off the publication of *The Dialectics of the Concrete* the year before, a soon to become classic in which Marxism met existentialism and phenomenology. Adam Schaff had recently seen his collection of essays *A Philosophy of Man* translated and published by Monthly Press – a book whose purpose was, according to its author, to articulate "a single argument that would both oppose Existentialism and attempt a positive solution of the problems raised" (Schaff 1963, p. 5). Markovic was already one of the main animating spirits of the *Praxis* group in Yugoslavia, whose attempt at articulating a Marxist humanism presupposed a rich dialog with the contemporary Western schools of thought, and especially with the problematic of man developed by existentialism, phenomenology, and critical theory; and, finally, even for the more orthodox figures like Gulian, the conference in Rome will initiate a consequently larger attempt at articulating a "philosophical anthropology" back home.

In the organizers' view, the questions of individual freedom and moral responsibility constituted a fertile ground of debate, as they presented a challenge to both Marxism and existentialism, albeit from opposite directions: for Eastern Marxism, it represented a challenge to the one-sided social determinism of official Marxism–Leninism, which left no place for individual choice and potential for self-creation. For Sartre, instead, the question of morality and its relation to history and society represented a chance to soften the highly indeterminate nature of freedom and the infinite responsibility that his existentialism seemed to entail. In the presentations and debates at the congress, both sides accepted the legitimacy of the challenge raised by the other side – yet in the end rejected its solution, which, they claimed, can be instead found internally.

As for the rather French debate on existentialism, Roger Garaudy argued in his intervention that Marxism should accept the challenge raised by existentialism and

confront head-on the moral and philosophical aspects of subjective freedom, choice, and responsibility, which it neglected so far. However, it should not accept the solution proposed by existentialism, which is problematic in a number of aspects: its conception of freedom is metaphysical and ahistorical. At the same time, it leads only to moral formalism, as it does not provide any moral content, goals, or values. In his quest for a "critical philosophy that is not idealist, a theory of subjectivity which is not subjectivist, and a theory of transcendence which is not alienated" (Della Volpe et al. 1966, p. 10), Marxism should – according to Garaudy – return to Fichte, the last philosopher to have managed a synthesis between individual freedom and social morality, a synthesis that was subsequently lost, towards one pole or the other, with Hegel and Kierkegaard. In fact, Garaudy argues, existentialism is to dogmatic Marxism what Kierkegaard was to Hegel – thus, the solution for both theoretical platforms is to return to Fichte's synthesis, which should not be so difficult given that existentialism originates in his philosophy. In his intervention, Gilbert Mury very much agreed with Garaudy's stance: critical of existentialism, yet acknowledging the progress made from *Being and Nothingness* in addressing the issue of history and society (Morale e società 1964). In the same camp, screenwriter and director Brunello Rondi argued during the discussions that the moral question – which indubitably existentialism had the merit to have illuminated in all its intricacy – requires that both Marxism and existentialism should reform themselves; however, from the two of them, only Marxism seems to have the resources for internal rejuvenation (Morale e società 1964).

If Garaudy's or Mury's interventions, with all their polemical thrust, could be seen as at least an invitation to a common ground and an admission of the other's legitimate point of view, Sartre's lecture on "Determinazione e libertà" [11] looked rather like a stubborn and emphatic defense of his positions already known and already under critique from the Marxist camp. Against the positivist view on morality, in which each action is already determined by external circumstances, Sartre argued that the moral imperative does not take into consideration any of these circumstances and determinants, and claims from the subject an act of freedom in which, in the last instance, his action is only internally determined. This free act thus opens a 'pure future' that is not foreshadowed by any of the subject's pasts (Sartre 2015, p. 21). Moreover, in a further challenge to Marxist sensibilities, Sartre raised the political stakes by sketching a bifurcated future: the "local and infrastructural" future in which the system, through its structural constraints, allocates predetermined positions and trajectories to human beings, and the 'indefinite future' of genuine practice, in which "humanity is not a fact, but something to be accomplished, not by means of any system (be it the *socialist system*) but on the ruins of every system" (ibid., p. 34).[12] This rearticulation then allowed Sartre an elaborated critique of both forms of "industrial societies": the colonialist violence and class structure of Western states and their imperialist politics and the revolutionary terror and the bureaucratic pragmatism and inertia of the Stalinist world. It also allowed Sartre a rapprochement with the philosophy of praxis

[11] A short Italian version is included in Della Volpe et al. 1966; a longer French version has been published in Sartre 2015, and is the version used here.

[12] This is again emphatically reaffirmed towards the end of the lecture: "Communism is the suppression of all system. [. . .] But socialism is still a system" (ibid., 116).

developed by Kosik, Schaff and the others: the moral norm was identified with praxis, and the revolutionary morality with the goal of the "autonomy of praxis".

In spite of this opening from Sartre's side, the Eastern representatives of the philosophy of praxis engaged, in their lectures, in a rather parallel confrontation with state socialism and official Marxism–Leninism. In his intervention, Adam Schaff attempted to outline a Marxist theory of personality by means of a return to early Marx. This theory – lacking so far in contemporary Marxism, yet absolutely vital for any materialist understanding of morals and freedom, and crucial for rejecting the idealist theories on the subject – should acknowledge the complex determinations of human practice (biological, social), but also the potential of human self-creation and self-determination that is inherent in it. Karel Kosik went even further in challenging Marxist orthodoxy, arguing that the fact that Marxism has not so far developed a moral philosophy is not something accidental, nor could it be resolved by an external addition to its philosophical structure: this omission was somewhat grounded in Marxism's first principles. Hence, addressing today the question of freedom and responsibility entails an inquiry into the validity of those very principles. Against the dogmatic uses of Marxism, we should apply dialectics and historical analysis also to the socialist states, and acknowledge that, even if the capitalist contradiction is eliminated in such societies, a whole range of other contradictions remain: between word and deed, reason and reality, morality and action, etc. This moral space delineates the existence of the concrete man, which "takes place in the distance between the impossibility of being reduced to a system and the historical possibility of overcoming the system itself" (Kosik 1994, p. 68). In this conflicting space, the two moral pitfalls that should be avoided are the figures of the moralistic "beautiful soul" and the utilitarian "Commissar" – between these two dead-ends, we have to recover the original, revolutionary Marxist stance, and rejuvenate dialectics, which is, by its nature, a "destruction of the pseudo-concrete" and the "expression of the movement of human praxis" (ibid., p. 74). "The problem of morality", argues Kosik, "thus becomes the question of the relation between reified practice and humanizing practice, between fetishistic practice and revolutionary *praxis*" (ibid., p. 76). In the terms it uses – the "pseudo-concrete", the emphasis on *praxis* – and in the substance of its argument, Kosik's intervention is clearly indebted to his *Dialectics of the Concrete*, published one year earlier. However, while acknowledging the continuities, we should also point out that Kosik's lecture in Rome goes somewhat beyond the revisionist Marxist framework of his most famous work, approaching the more dissident and libertarian stance that he embraced in his writings on the Prague Spring of 1968.[13] To put it in other words: if *Dialectics of the Concrete* was challenging the orthodox centrality of the 'economic factor' and the unilateral relation between base and superstructure, which it replaced with the more dialectical relation engendered by the totality of the "economic structure",[14] the Rome lecture goes further and seems to replace the reworked basis of

[13]Most of these writings were published in English in Kosik 1994. For what interests us here, it is highly significant that, while in *Dialectics of the Concrete*, existentialism was one of the main targets of critique, in his Rome lecture existentialism is not mentioned at all.

[14]This attracted Paul Piccone's bitter remarks on this half-step on the path to complete liberation from Marxist determinism, see Piccone 1977, p. 51.

the economic structure with the individual and her moral praxis, a step that will be decidedly accomplished by Kosik a few years later.[15]

Finally, Mihailo Markovic took an even more direct aim at the realities in the socialist camp, arguing that, ultimately, "the degree of the moral integration of persons in the socialist society is proportional to its degree of de-bureaucratization" (Della Volpe et al. 1966, p. 130). The latter, however, is not to be accomplished simply by political means, since it is directly related to the underdeveloped nature of the societies in which communism took hold. This underdevelopment, and the prolonged sacrifice of needs that it necessarily imposes, led to a deepening contradiction, after the revolutionary phase, between the high social, unselfish principles of the regime and the individual's incapacity to meet his or her primary material needs, which constrains him/her to a selfish strategy of survival. Thus, only a society of genuine abundance and in which the political power is no longer separated from society could form the basis for the moral integration and integrity of the socialist man.

As parallel as these discussions seemed, they nevertheless met at several levels: in the ultimate emphasis shared by all interventions on the concept of praxis, seen as a dialectical encounter between the sociohistorical determinants and the subject's freedom and capacity of self-creation; in the shared ideal of socialist humanism that can and should be developed on these newly elaborated practical and conceptual foundations; and even in their shared conceptual metaphors. These metaphors are the repeatedly occurring opposition between system and individual; the heroic and exceptional nature of their case studies, such as Sartre's discussion of torture, which is seen as the test case of ultimate freedom; Garaudy's concept of love, viewed as the supreme example of Fichtean synthesis; or, finally, the repeatedly occuring identification of the genuine moral subject with the artist, and the equation of free praxis with *poiesis*. If the discussions in which Eastern Marxists and Sartre engaged here were rather parallel to one another, the vocabulary and the political thrust of their interventions were quite common.

The Korčula seminars

While subsequent efforts to bridge the philosophical divide between the East and the West have generally been given little attention in contemporary literature,[16] it

[15] For the evolution of Kosik's thought and especially the significance of his Rome lecture in this evolution, see Tava 2022, pp. 61–62.

[16] It is interesting to compare the divide between State Socialist philosophy and the contemporary philosophies of the Western world with the far better studied split between analytic and continental philosophy. In both cases, we are dealing with philosophical traditions that initially shared common intellectual sources, but that came to evolve for decades in complete separation from one another. Moreover, both divides also present the historian of philosophy with similar attempts to negotiate forms of mutual understanding and dialog between the two camps in order to bridge that divide. While the past decades have witnessed intense preoccupation for covering the gap between analytic and continental philosophy, with numerous contributions not only working towards furthering fertile communication between the two sides, but also researching and appropriating the history of past attempts at such dialog – see, for instance, the ample discussions about the famous 1958 Royaumont colloquium (cf. Overgaard 2010 and Vrahimis 2013) – little has been done to cover the history of the similar attempts made to bridge the philosophical East/West split during the Cold War.

is clear, on the one hand, that the reception of existentialism and its philosophical consequences for the Marxist–Leninist system played a central role in this process, as it is clear, on the other hand, that for this effort the summer school of the *Praxis* group, organized on the island of Korčula between 1964 and 1975, was one of the main catalysts.

To be sure, this was made possible from the onset by the specific context of non-aligned Yugoslavia, where the early political break with the Soviet Union also helped avoid a deeper embroilment with the rigidity and dogmatism of Stalinist philosophy. In fact, as Gajo Petrović recalls in one of his later accounts of the origins of the *Praxis* movement, the dominance of Stalinist philosophy was not that exclusive before the break either, as it still left room for both non-Marxist philosophers and non-Stalinist approaches to the interpretation of Marx (see Petrović 1969, p. 9). According to Petrović, this had methodological consequences, as it allowed for a more liberal relationship between philosophy and politics and a more nuanced relationship to the classical authorities of Marxist thought. However, it also had theoretical implications, since it opened up the sphere of philosophical discourse towards questions of anthropology and even immediate everyday experience, which were at the time still unconceivable in the rest of the Soviet Bloc. While some version of Stalinist philosophy – that is: not Stalinism *per se*, but a rigid and dogmatic conception of Marxism–Leninism, which stemmed directly from the Stalinist era – was nonetheless still the dominant force throughout the early 1950s in Yugoslavia, its main theorems (as in the canonical method of dialectical materialism, or the Leninist theory of reflection) were constantly challenged by young Marxist philosophers like Petrović, Kangrga, Grlić or Marković, who plead for a return to a more authentic understanding of Marx. According to Petrović, this led to heated philosophical debates during the late 1950s and early 1960s, which culminated with the 1959 colloquium of the Yugoslav Society of Philosophy on “Problems of Marxist Philosophy Today”, as well as the Bled debate from 1960, devoted to the question of reflection. Both events opposed the camp of “orthodox” Marxist–Leninist philosophers, who upheld the official Soviet understanding of Marxism. The younger generation of Yugoslav philosophers advocated, on the one hand, a more indepth confrontation with Stalinism and, on another hand, a renewed and more creative engagement with Marx. The outcome of these debates was a decisive victory of the progressive camp, which, as Petrović recalls, did not succeed in formally winning the argument, but effectively proved its intellectual superiority over the sterility of sanctioned Marxism–Leninism and soon became the leading force in Yugoslav philosophy. It is precisely the intellectual context shaped by these philosophers, who would become the main protagonists of the *Praxis* group, which allowed for some of the most intense episodes of mutual philosophical engagement across the East–West divide.

This engagement took various shapes. For one, the members of the *Praxis* group, who enjoyed the appreciation of their peers across the divide, took the opportunity to address Western audiences directly by publishing extensively at various publishing houses in the West. Thus, several publications emerged throughout the 1960s and 1970s in German or English translations presenting the positions of the Yugoslav philosophers, among which one could single out: “Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century” (ed. G. Petrović, 1967), “Revolutionäre Praxis. Jugoslawischer Marxismus der

Gegenwart" (ed. G. Petrović 1969), "Philosophie und Revolution. Modelle für eine Marx-Interpretation"(ed. G. Petrović, 1971) or "Praxis. Yugoslav Essays in the Philosophy and Methodology of the Social Sciences" (eds. G. Petrović and Marković 1979). Needless to say that this intense editorial activity in the West only heightened the suspicions of their orthodox critics in the East. Thus, for instance, a paper from the GDR's *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* from 1972, which aimed to deconstruct the Yugoslav philosophers' understanding of dialectical materialism, maliciously sees the fact that "between 1969 and 1971 no less than 7 books [were published] by Yugoslav authors in the GFR alone" (Kosing 1972, p. 206, n. 4) as proof of the fact that their revisionist version of Marx only served the purposes of "imperialist ideologies and institutions" (ibid., p. 206).[17] Aside from such editorial initiatives, however, the single most important contribution of the Yugoslav philosophers to furthering intellectual dialog across the East–West divide was no doubt their yearly summer school in Korčula, which brought together the most important figures of Eastern and Western philosophy at the time allowing them to find common ground. Their debates, which often found their way into the International version of the journal *Praxis*, published beginning in 1965, most frequently engaged major figures of Western Marxism, like Ernst Bloch, Herbert Marcuse, Henri Lefebvre or Lucien Goldmann, but, less conspicuously, the Existentialist tradition also played a crucial role.

This is visible beforehand if one considers the fact that the first two issues of the international edition of *Praxis* in 1965, which mainly served to outline the objectives and principles of the group, both devoted ample space for sketching thoughtful portraits of Sartre (in the first issue) and, respectively, Merleau-Ponty (in the second). In this context, both articles clearly take their distance from the dismissive criticism of existentialism one finds in the bulk of Stalinist philosophy, wherein existentialism was simply labeled as "decadent", "bourgeois", or "ideologically fraudulent". In contrast to such reductive interpretations, both the aforementioned articles, which develop a nuanced reconstruction of Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies, center their presentation on the two authors' late engagement with Marxism. Thus, in Danilo Pejović' view, Sartre's philosophy can be divided into two main phases: an early existentialist phase, and a later one, characterized by his move to a nondogmatic version of Marxism (Pejović 1965a, p. 72). However, the author is not merely interested in taking note of this shift, but instead he wants to show that, with it, Sartre actually helps overcome the rigid opposition between existentialism and Marxism, by proving their complementarity. In fact, according to Pejović, existentialism ultimately turns out to be a needed corrective for an understanding of Marx, which has become dogmatic and ailed with blindness towards the human individual. While, according to Pejović quoting Sartre, Marx's historical materialism no doubt offers "the only valid interpretation of history" (ibid., p. 72), existentialism remains the only concrete understanding of human reality. The point would be precisely to allow the two perspectives to crossfertilize. To be sure, Pejović doesn't seem entirely convinced that

[17] Furthermore, this Western editorial interest in the Praxis philosophy also materialized in collective book projects across the divide most frequently with proponents of the Frankfurt School. *Socialist Humanism*, the collective volume edited by Erich Fromm in 1965 with several contributions of the Praxis philosophers can probably count as one of the more notable examples thereof.

Sartre succeeds all the way in integrating Marxism and Existentialism. Instead, in his view, Sartre's value was primarily to be found in his ability to challenge contemporary Marxist thought, just as, in his article on Merleau-Ponty, Pejović regards the latter's questions as philosophically more fruitful and relevant than his actual responses (Pejović 1965b, p. 346). While Pejović ultimately raises some doubts with regard to both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's engagement with Marxism, in his view their main merit lies in the fact that they have forcefully posed questions concerning the situation of the human individual in a dehumanized and depersonalized world, which may not only apply for the decadent bourgeois world, but also perhaps for State Socialism (Pejović 1965a, p. 86). This obviously opens the path for a discussion of topics like alienation, oppression, abandonment or humiliation as experienced by the socialist subject.

Significantly, however, the *Praxis* group and their philosophical endeavors were not just relevant in that they created a breech in the monolithic bloc of Marxist–Leninist discourse by opening it up towards various recent trends in contemporary Western philosophy, including phenomenology and existentialism. Instead, they were also relevant in that they occasioned Western philosophers to more intimately engage with the philosophical preoccupations of State Socialism. In what concerns phenomenological existentialism, the most important case in point for this was no doubt Eugen Fink. Of course, other philosophers broadly associated with existentialism and its conjunction with the phenomenological movement have also attended the Korčula summer schools (Hans-Georg Gadamer, for example), or have later on engaged in collaboration with the Yugoslav philosophers of the *Praxis* group. This latter was most ostensibly the case with Ludwig Landgrebe or Bernhard Waldenfels.[18] However, if we choose to focus solely on Fink in particular in what follows, it is not only due to our lack of space in the present essay. What makes Fink's case unique and most relevant in this context are three things: the fact that he was a frequent visitor of the Korčula summer schools, where he presented on at least three occasions; the fact that he collaborated with Yugoslav philosophers, thus contributing to their effort to build bridges between the East and the West; and finally the fact that he also took these presentations during the 1960s as an opportunity for elevating the intention of bridging the East–West divide to the level of theoretical reflection in making it a subject of his own philosophical thought. It is this very intention that drove Fink to even contemplate coorganizing a small East–West conference in Freiburg with Heidegger himself in 1971 (see for this Fink and Patočka 1999, p. 103). While this project ultimately did not materialize, Fink's presentations in Korčula, which were subsequently published in the international version of the journal *Praxis*, certainly deserve closer scrutiny in the context of our present analysis.

Thematically, these essays belong to Fink's late systematic project of a social phenomenology, which is documented extensively by the recently published volume 16 of his *Gesamtausgabe*. The centerpiece and starting point of the volume is his lecture course from 1952/53, "Grundphänomene der menschlichen Gemeinschaft", which was later published as *Existenz und Coexistenz* and laid the groundwork for his theory of the "fundamental phenomena of human existence". This work is interesting primarily in that it attempts to sketch out an "existential analytics" in Heidegger's vein

[18] With regard to Waldenfels' work in this context see also Kline 1968, p. 70.

by taking its main cues from the phenomenon of intersubjectivity and thus arrives at the guiding concept of coexistentiality, which defines Fink's overarching perspective throughout these reflections. Making true on Heidegger's promise to understand the existence from the outset as defined by "being with one another", Fink thus seeks out and analyses those fundamental ways of "being in the world", which directly reveal its social import. While the initial lecture itself only deals extensively with two of these fundamental phenomena, namely love and death, its final pages already suggest a necessary continuation of the project by also taking into account two more such phenomena: labor and power. In further consequence, it is precisely the relationship between these two latter "co-existentials" that determines Fink to extensively engage with Marx in two of his later seminars of the 1950s: "Das philosophische Problem des Historischen Materialismus" (1956) and "Philosophische Probleme des Dialektischen Materialismus" (1959).

Both seminars drew a large audience attracted by the topicality of the subject matter. Although Fink began his explorations in both cases by stating that "all those who came here attracted by the actuality of the political topic will not get their money's worth" (EFGA 16, p. 535), he nonetheless made it clear that the current geopolitical debates about the understanding of labor were at the very core of his reflections. Thus, one of the concluding passages of *Existenz und Coexistenz* explicitly states: "Just as, in earlier times, people have fought over the meaning of man's relationship to God, our present age is defined by its struggle over man's just relationship to labor and power. This clash has reached the intensity of a religious war, which has now taken grasp of the entire world" (ibid., 283). While this geopolitical perspective still lingers in the background of his Yugoslav presentations, his actual interest in the seminars on Marx was not merely to offer some sort of essayistic political diagnosis, but to show the core philosophical dimensions of these debates, and this is precisely the leading interest in his *Praxis* papers as well. Thus, Fink's main intention in all three papers is arguably that of outlining the metaphysical presuppositions underpinning the contemporary understanding of labor. More precisely, in his view, the contemporary discussion of labor is, on the one hand, insufficient in that it still draws from early ontological conceptions of the distinction between natural objects and artifacts, as initially developed by Aristotle, thus offering only a very limited understanding of the process of labor itself. On the other hand, this traditional ontological framework proves even more incapable of accounting for the *contemporary* transformations of labor in the industrial technical world, which Fink explicitly designates with a term inspired by Marx: unfettered production (*entfesselte Produktion*). In his view, contemporary industrial production is, in contrast to the forms of production that grounded our standard ontology of artifacts, unfettered both in the sense that it is no longer bound by the prior representation of an artisan, which envisions the idea of the artifact and transposes it into matter, as the production process rather follows its own dynamics autonomously. It is unfettered also in the sense that it resists the traditional divide of work and power by ultimately demanding that "labor itself rules and the rulers work" (Fink 1966, p. 37).

Now, such claims obviously bring Fink into the immediate vicinity of Marx and there are numerous passages in his Yugoslav essays that echo communist stances, such as his outright claim that, under the current circumstances, the state is bound to

become a state of the proletariat. However, despite such overt remarks, it is clear that Fink nonetheless is still largely skeptical with regard to the Marxist project, which he criticizes throughout his writings of the 1960s and 1970s in various respects. Thus, in one of the essays published in the international edition of *Praxis*, for instance, he relativizes the Marxist treatment of consciousness as a mere byproduct of material relationships of production by pointing to the necessary role of intellectual phantasy and strategic intelligence for advancing revolutionary action (Fink 1969, p. 108). This point is certainly not marginal, as it basically touches upon the key question of the role of philosophy within Marxism, and Fink is very keen to point out Marx's inconsequentiality in this regard. However, his main critique primarily concerns what Fink terms as the unilaterality of Marx's conception of labor. To be more precise, Fink considers that, while Marx's analyses indeed forcefully posed the philosophical problems of contemporary labor, his fault was nonetheless in his forced monism, which sought to reduce the whole of existence to only one of its fundamental phenomena, which is labor, while ignoring other coexistentials like play, love or death.

In pointing out these issues, however, Fink is not simply interested in setting Marx straight or in proposing an alternative account of labor, but his intention is rather that of integrating Marxism in a broader existentialist perspective. Of course, interpreting labor as a coexistential or as a "fundamental phenomenon of existence" reshapes Marx's perspective entirely, but Fink's case also helps us make a further point relevant to our essay. The discussions outlined in the present section show that the stimulating influence between existentialism and (Eastern) Marxism did not go only one way, in the sense that existentialism helped Marxist–Leninism pose specific problems of individual existence that were largely ignored initially, but instead the contamination of perspectives also went the other way around. Thus, key topics of existentialist philosophy like the question of the relationship between man and technology indeed came, under the rising influence of Marxist thought, to be dealt with extensively in view of the underlying relationships of production. Despite the fact that Fink doesn't consider Marx' theory to be capable of fully providing for the necessities of present-day philosophical reflection, his own version of existential analytics is nonetheless highly indebted to his persistent dialog with Marx, which came to the fore more vividly during his interactions with Eastern-Bloc philosophers in Korčula.

The Vienna World Congress

While it is clear then that the Korčula summer school benefited from a set of circumstances, ranging all the way from political context to the eclectic philosophical interests of its conveners, which gave it an entirely singular standing during the Cold War, it was by no means the only occasion for extensive debates among Eastern-Bloc and Western philosophers with regard to the issue of existentialism during these decades. Several major intellectual events organized in State Socialist countries, like the International Congress for Philosophy in Varna in 1973 or the International Conference for Aesthetics held in Bucharest in 1972, also gave the opportunity for further exploring both the contradictions and the points of contact between contemporary bourgeois philosophers and their peers in the East in their mutual treatment of existential matters. Already in the 1960s, similar events were taking place in Western countries as

well. For example, consider the series of encounters organized in Zwettl in the first half of the decade, or the various attempts at philosophical dialog between Marxists and Christian theologians. While the present essay cannot engage in a full account of all these relevant instances of mutual dialog, which partly also touched upon topics associated with existentialism, it is worth taking a closer look at one of these encounters in particular: the International Congress for Philosophy organized in Vienna in September 1968.

Contemporary accounts vividly show why this event was particularly relevant in the context of the 1960s. Thus, a report for the German magazine *Spiegel*, written shortly before the opening of the congress, paints a highly dramatic and suspenseful picture:

> The Soviet Union had initially sent 170 philosophers to the largest Olympic Games of the mind in all times: the 14th International Congress for Philosophy, which is about to begin in Vienna next Monday. Last week, however, Moscow has raised the stakes with 50 more comrades, requesting that their accommodation be secured against protesters. For, in the arena of philosophers, the main building of the University, the Soviets are bound to expect a storm.[19]

This was, of course, due to the recent Soviet invasion of Prague, which had raised important protest from several keynote participants to the congress, including Jean-Paul Sartre and Bertrand Russell, as it had shortly before also prompted the philosophers gathered at Korčula to offer a common statement and prepare for an intense confrontation during the upcoming World Congress. Ultimately, this quarrel only played a minor part in the actual development of the congress, which was nonetheless important for our topic in at least two other regards. First, the congress was far better attended than the prior International Congress for Philosophy, organized in 1963 in Mexico City. Hosting several hundred delegates from the Eastern Bloc together with numerous peers from the West and from the rest of the world, the Vienna congress thus offered far more extensive opportunity for debate between the opposing camps. On the other hand, the organizers themselves made sure to place the congress in the sign of Marx, in celebration of his 150th birthday, consequently presenting the congress from the onset as an "encompassing dialogue between the East and the West".[20]

When sifting through the six volumes of the congress proceedings, one immediately notes that this dialog took various shapes throughout the sections of the congress: it became a rather intense stand-off in the section on "philosophy and ideology", it turned into an almost neutral dialog in the sections on aesthetics or philosophy of science, and it brought to light irreconcilable positions in the discussion on freedom. However, the main tenets of these debates were no doubt to be found in the large panel on "Marx and contemporary philosophy", in the context of which the question of existentialism played a key role. In fact, the very first intervention in the panel, a paper titled "Marxism and Free Will" by the American Thomist philosopher F.J.

[19] The article is available online in the archive of the magazine: https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/macht-zersetzen-a-de7da828-0002-0001-0000-000045950125?fbclid=IwAR3B7MwOzoLYJKak3_shNh-LGIeOhNmRi8adaNOIm5CZ3kWyWC1AEkMe_MA (accessed 29.09.2021).

[20] This is how the congress is described by its president, quoted in the above-mentioned report in *Spiegel*.

Adelmann, tackled the dispute between Marxism and Existentialism head-on as its main point of concern. In the author's view, both Marxism and Existentialism adopted extreme positions: "The Marxists tend – though not always – towards a determinism from the factors of experience that leaves no room for creativity and spontaneity. The Existentialists, on the other hand, leave no place – yet not always either – to the environmental and inherited influences in our background" (Adelmann 1968, p. 3). The author, who thus saw Marxism and Existentialism as providing opposite, but equally errant solutions to the problem at hand, ultimately concludes by suggesting a rather lofty resolution to the dilemma: he plainly recommends the return to a more moderate scholastic theory of free will. Nonetheless, the same key contrast reoccurred in several instances throughout the other presentations in the panel as well, most forcefully in the debates concerning "Marx's humanism", a topic that was touched upon more or less directly in at least six of the presentations in the section.

Apparently, this question represents a clear-cut point of contention between Marxism, on the one hand, and contemporary bourgeois philosophers, on the other, wherein the two sides are quite overtly and clearly delineated. Thus, orthodox philosophers from the Eastern Bloc, like the Romanian Constantin Gulian ("Humanisme et anthropologie philosophique chez Marx") or the Moscow philosopher Mark Borisowitsch Mitin ("Marxist philosophy of real humanism and its significance in our time"), plainly defend Marx's conception of the "concrete human being" as a superior form of philosophical anthropology. It is an anthropology, which, according to their account, doesn't fall prey to subjectivism and doesn't implicitly glorify the bourgeois individual, as has been the case with existentialism. Instead, it bases itself on "a scientific theory of the social emancipation of working people" (Mitin 1968, p. 82). On the other side, the American philosopher George L. Kline ("Was Marx an Ethical Humanist?"), for instance, outright rejects calling Marx a humanist in the strong ethical acceptation of the term in the first place, by stressing that the entire topic of Marxist humanism only serves Eastern-European philosophers "to buttress their anti-Stalinism by appeals to the authority of Marx himself" (Kline 1968, p. 69). Thus, the author shows, Marx may have professed a "humanism of ideals", but he explicitly rejected an ethical "humanism of principles", which alone could have precluded the terrors of Stalinism. As such, he claims, "Marx's future-oriented humanism of ideals led naturally to Leninism and Leninism in turn to Stalinism", while "only a present-oriented ethical humanism, a humanism of principles, can effectively preclude the recourse to anti-humanist means in the service of a humanist ideal" (ibid., p. 70). To be sure, this overt and direct clash of positions with regard to the specific question of whether Marx can or cannot be termed a humanist seems to leave little room for a fertile encounter between the philosophers of the two camps. Indeed, an analysis that would resume itself to this would hardly find anything worthwhile in these debates. Instead, if one focuses more specifically on the presentations of existentialism, which were brought up throughout as an implicit counter-reference in these discussions, one can easily outline far more nuanced attempts, made by some of the participants, to negotiate a sort of philosophical truce between the two clashing positions.

This comes to the fore most visibly in a paper by the Frankfurt-based philosopher Helmut Ogiermann, which tries to offer a synthetic overview of the ongoing debates concerning the mutual interrelation between Marxism and Existentialism. In

Ogiermann's view, who refers primarily to Sartre,[21] this debate is centered foremost on two issues: the question of whether or not a dialectics of nature is possible and the question of whether Marx's historical materialism needs to be grounded in an existentialist philosophy. With respect to both points, the author shows, contemporary Marxists share the opposite view from Sartre, as they hold onto a dialectics of nature, while they reject Sartre's claim of the need to ground anthropology on an understanding of individual freedom that excludes all social determination. Though Ogiermann presents the contrast in stark and uncompromising terms, he nonetheless concludes by conceding that authors like Th. Schwarz or A. Schaff, who do not deem it necessary to borrow from existentialism for their own materialist anthropological reflections, nonetheless have come to intersect with existentialism by turning to specific philosophical questions of the individual human being, like responsibility, the meaning of life, sufferance, death, and happiness. In doing so, Ogiermann stresses, an author like Schaff in particular – at that time the director of the Polish Institute for Philosophy – "hopes to integrate the questions posed by Existentialism and offer them a Marxist response" (Ogiermann 1968, p. 90).

This is indeed the crucial point for us here, which Schaff himself, who also took part in the congress with a talk in the panel on "Marx and contemporary philosophy", was perhaps able to express most vividly. His presentation, titled "Marx et l'humanisme contemporain", indeed offers one of the most elaborate accounts of the complex mutual attractions and contradictions between Existentialism and East-European official Marxism during the 1960s. Interestingly, Schaff begins his reflections by somewhat relativizing the hard-boiled claims of his orthodox socialist peers, which simply pose Marx's humanism and his corresponding anthropology as undisputedly superior to all other bourgeois versions of humanism, including existentialism. Schaff overtly admits that the question of Marx's humanism is in fact indicative of a novel turn in Marxist–Leninist philosophy and wonders about the motives that determined it. In his view, this was brought about, of course, by the objective circumstance of the late publication of several of Marx's hitherto unknown writings, which somewhat helped change contemporary philosophers' perspective on his work. However, it was at the same time also brought about by "our present-day aspirations towards a new humanism" (Schaff 1968, p. 105), which engendered a novel reading of Marx as a humanist. This aspirational return to the primary value of the human being is, according to Schaff, determined by many factors. Above all, however, it is triggered by the sentiment of total menace, which comes from the contemporary risk of thermonuclear war and thus with the perspective of the complete annihilation of mankind. In brief, it is precisely the psychological terror of the Cold War, which, in his view, determined

[21] Sartre is the self-understood antagonist to Marx in most of the contributions devoted to this topic. However, an interesting exception is a paper by the Bulgarian philosopher Pantscho Russev, "Der Existenzialismus und das menschliche Dasein", presented in the panel on "philosophical anthropology". This panel obviously also dwells intensely on Marx's philosophy of the concrete human being and thus communicates with the debates on humanism. In taking Heidegger as its main point of reference, the paper actually arrives at stipulating the contrast between Existentialism and Marxism in precisely the opposite way to what is usually the case, by presenting Existentialism not as the beacon of absolute individualism (Sartre), but as a doctrine that reduces the individual to the general whole (Heidegger with his theory of *das Man*), instead of also taking note of the dialectical tensions between them; see Russev 1968, p. 67.

Marxist–Leninist philosophers to cross paths with the existentialists in contemplating how contemporary civilization ultimately arrives at radically threatening the value of the human individual.

In doing so, however, Schaff is by no means willing to simply identify his own understanding of a Marxist humanism with the Existentialist point of view, which he still labels as idealism, and this is precisely why he sees it as the main challenge for contemporary Marxists to find a navigable path between "the Scyla of idealism" and "the Charybdis of losing hold of an important problem" (ibid., p. 105). In other words, if one really wants to tackle the urgent philosophical problems of the day, which are, as shown above, also problems of the individual human being, it is worth risking the proximity of existentialism. Schaff tries to purge himself of this risk by extensively highlighting the advantages of a specifically Marxist take on humanism over all other, catholic or existentialist versions thereof. Thus, in his view, Marxist humanism is superior in that it emphasizes human autonomy in contrast to the heteronomous catholic humanism, and in that it is scientifically grounded in contrast to the irrational tenet of existentialist humanism, while it is precisely these two complementary aspects that determine Schaff to oppose the fundamental optimism of Marxist humanism to the pessimism of a mere "philosophy of despair".

This is not the final word of the paper. While Marxism is, in Schaff's view, doubtlessly engaged in a struggle with the other versions of humanism – an ideological struggle, to be more precise – this struggle doesn't by any means rule out dialog. On the contrary, it even makes it necessary under the present circumstances of menace. Thus, in Schaff's opinion, Marxist humanism is under these circumstances bound to find allies against the true common enemy, which is the radical antihumanism that comes with the peril of the complete destruction of mankind. Somewhat surprisingly, this consideration leads Schaff to conclude his argument with an entirely new, ethical reassessment of the mutual relationship between Existentialism and Marxism, which is still at base a struggle, "but not a total struggle, a partial one, conducted on the basis of a certain community of intentions; a struggle which involves an element of tolerance, that consists in admitting that the point of view of the adversary may be at least in part just, and in giving up the arrogant conviction that one is the sole owner of the truth" (ibid., p. 114). Granted, this may not be much, but it certainly involves a renewed understanding of orthodox Marxism–Leninism, which is now supposed to become no less than "an open doctrine, prepared for dialogue and tolerant enough to reach that goal" (Schaff 1968, p. 115). Thus, the importance of the debates outlined in this section primarily lies in the fact that they help us see more clearly the limitations of the ongoing attempts during the 1960s to make the dialog between existentialism and Marxism more fruitful, for these dialogs never really come to outgrow the initial hostilities. At the same time, however, we come to acknowledge that, while the theoretical positions themselves may not seem to change much in the meanwhile (with few exceptions) the persistent reflections on both sides concerning their mutual relationship nonetheless rubbed off on the doctrines themselves and ultimately also helped soften the contrast.

Epilog

Of course, during the 1970s, Marxist–Leninism did not really become the "open doctrine" Adam Schaff had hoped for, but existentialism nonetheless came to prosper throughout the Eastern Bloc. Contrary to Schaff's views, however, this intensification of interest in existentialist themes and authors no longer came as a critical challenge to the official philosophy of State Socialism and it no longer actually involved any form of sophisticated dialog and negotiation between the two perspectives, but instead it occurred largely without any relevant reference to the official Marxist–Leninist framework at all. Existentialism, in brief, became a tolerated reserve within that official system, a neutral field of timeless reflection about the human condition and its essential limitations, which no longer clashed with the accepted truths of Marxist–Leninism. The process by which this occurred is indicative of a general transformation of the Marxist–Leninist doctrine throughout the Eastern Bloc during the 1960s and 1970s, allowing for the gradual emancipation of various fields of theoretical studies from the ideological custody of State Socialism. As is well known, up until the 1950s, dialectical materialism evolved throughout Stalinism as an attempt to turn Marx's social critique into a complete philosophical program replete with even its own conception of nature and reluctant to accept any form of autonomous scientific knowledge. Thus, even disciplines as remote from worldly matters as logics were subjected to strong ideological constrains. For instance, consider the lengthy debates which called for a dialectical understanding of logics to replace the dominant paradigm of formal logic. Similar trends could be observed in various fields of the empirical sciences as well. However, this strong dogmatic grip gradually loosened, allowing for the constitution of various forms of ideologically neutral intellectual discourse, tolerated outside the main system of Marxism–Leninism. This occurred relatively soon with logics, but it took far longer with a discipline like aesthetics, which, by the mid 1970s in Socialist Romania, was nonetheless largely liberated from its initial Marxist–Leninist tenets and now revolved primarily around politically neutral questions of axiology and cultural value. It is precisely around these lines that one can also interpret the gradual naturalization of existentialist philosophy in the philosophical discourse of the Eastern Bloc during the 1970s, after the initial attempts made by authors like Schaff or Kosik to integrate it within the accepted Marxist framework failed.

Why those attempts ultimately failed is a question that certainly deserves closer scrutiny. It was presumably, in part, because the aforementioned theoretical endeavors were not simply complementary to the main tenets of Marxist–Leninism, but instead implied major theoretical revisions in numerous points, which were deemed inacceptable. Moreover, they brought to the fore larger issues of social criticism, concerning alienation, reification and the living conditions in Socialist Societies, and, while these forms of discontent certainly served as an indirect motivation for sparking East-European interest in existentialist philosophy, they also led to aborting the initial attempt of bringing them into harmony with the dominant framework of Marxism–Leninism. What is certain in any case is that by the mid-1970s the interest in existentialist philosophy exploded throughout the Eastern Bloc and it was now indeed, in contrast to the 1960s, allowed free reign without any attempt to flesh out its con-

sistency or its tensions with the official philosophical paradigm.[22] This heightened interest manifested itself in numerous regards ranging all the way from semiofficial reading groups, devoted to Heidegger and Husserl,[23] to official dissertations[24] and journal issues devoted to Heidegger's philosophy;[25] from approved research stays abroad by Socialist researchers with the intention of a more thorough engagement with contemporary existentialist philosophy[26] to translations of important works and even conferences devoted to some of the main figures of existentialist thought.

This striking transformation is discussed extensively by Jan Patočka on several occasions in his works in ways that were to shape the main narrative about existentialist phenomenology during State Socialism: a narrative of a clandestine resistance, which aims to bridge the artificial ideological divide imposed by the regime in connecting philosophers working privately in the underground with the presocialist past and with a West from which they felt themselves unjustly severed. In one of his letters to Fink, Patočka thus writes: "One has to distinguish between what is official and what actually goes on. People try to continue their existence and work even under unofficial circumstances. And while one is not allowed to publish, which makes communication difficult, it is still surprising how popular it has become to read Heidegger" (Fink and Patočka 1999, p 117). Patočka develops this narrative more extensively in a short text written for the Heidegger *Festschrift* in 1970, titled "Heidegger from the other shore", taking the opportunity to retrospectively evaluate the reception of Heidegger during State Socialism. In his brief overview, he dismisses the stereotypical treatment of the issue in the Soviet Union, as well as the cases of Yugoslavia and Poland, which were more interested in French existentialism, in order to focus primarily on Lukács' critical reading of Heidegger and Kosik's revision of that critical perspective. For the most part, the article is simply a polemical deconstruction of Lukács' interpretation of Heidegger, which Patočka rejects on several accounts. First, in his view, Lukács fully adopts the simplistic schemata of Stalinist philosophy and as such doesn't properly follow a Marxist methodology by concretely deriving Heidegger's philosophy from a thorough analysis of the social and economic circumstances of his time. Secondly, he doesn't really do justice to Heidegger's philosophy in conveniently conflating it

[22] In this regard, an endeavor like the series of lectures "Phenomenology and Marxism" organized between 1975 and 1978 by Bernhard Waldenfels (with Jan Broekman and Ante Pažanin) at the Interuniversity Centrum in Dubrovnik does not really constitute an exception. As most contributors solely refer to contemporary Western Marxism, or to Marx's own classical works, in a rigorous and scholarly way, while hardly ever mentioning the official State Socialist philosophy, the lectures did not really present the opportunity for an East–West dialog of any sorts. See for this Waldenfels et al. 1977/1979.

[23] See for this Patočka's letter to Fink from 17.12.1974, Fink and Patočka 1999, p. 117.

[24] In Poland, Krzysztof Michalski was one of the first to earn his PhD with a thesis on Heidegger in 1974: *Heidegger and Contemporary Philosophy*. In socialist Romania, there were several doctoral projects during the early 1970s that walked a fine line between actual exegetical reception and alleged Marxist–Leninist critique.

[25] According to Patočka's account, the Polish journal *Zmak* requested his contribution to a special issue on Heidegger in 1974, also including some translations of shorter texts by Heidegger himself; see Fink and Patočka 1999, p. 117.

[26] In Socialist Romania, several researchers of the Institute for Philosophy like Nicolae Gogoneaţă or Gabriel Liiceanu took extended research stays in France and Germany with a strong focus on Existentialist philosophy.

with French Existentialism and only giving a very reductive reading to the Heideggerian accounts of death or everyday life, which are ultimately not so far from the points Lukács himself wants to make. Finally, Patočka accuses Lukács of misunderstanding both Heidegger's methodology and his ontological intentions, which aim to deconstruct traditional oppositions like that between subject and object, in order to schematically label Heidegger as an idealist and interpret his work as a mere illusory attempt to sketch an impossible "third way" between bourgeois idealism and proletarian materialism.

Instead, in Patočka's view, it is quite clear that this exclusive alternative is plainly false when used to describe the relationship between Existentialism and Marxism. This is easily made clear from the onset when contemplating Lukács' consistent early engagement with Kierkegaard in the prewar period, which also rubs off on his own later work, or similarly when considering the most recent developments in contemporary phenomenology:

> The strict opposition between Existentialism and Socialist Materialism can hardly be taken seriously any more after Sartre's critique of dialectical reason, after the development of Marxist schools in the bourgeois West and many other phenomena. Already at the time of Lukács essay on Existentialism, it was impossible to inscribe Merleau-Ponty, for instance, in that schema. Paradoxically, Lukács' own work has played a certain part in reshaping that rigid opposition. (Patočka 1970, p. 403, n. 2)

For Patočka, this latter becomes especially clear when considering the work of Karel Kosik, for, in Patočka's view, Kosik adopts Lukács' philosophical framework, but reinterprets it in concepts inspired by Husserl and Heidegger like "horizon" or "destruction". In doing so, he ultimately arrives at refuting Lukács' reading of Existentialism – in fact, Patočka explicitly calls Kosik's work a palinody of Lukács – all the more so as he manages to prove beyond any doubt the essential compatibility between the Existentialist and the Materialist Socialist perspective.

Of course, Patočka himself is not really interested in exploring and validating these hybrid attempts to combine Marxism and Existentialism in his turn. On the contrary, he explicitly criticizes Kosik for attempting an economic interpretation of Heideggerian concepts like *Besorgen*, an attempt he can only regard as the perpetuation of Marxist–Leninist schematics adopted from Lukács. Instead, Kosik's true merit for Patočka lies in having opened the appetite of his contemporaries in Czechoslovakia for Heidegger. Thus, these Eastern-Bloc readings of Heidegger only need to be purged of their materialist residues to become truly adequate to Heidegger's own radical ontological intentions. Put in this perspective, Lukács himself only appears for Patočka as the accidental vehicle for connecting a contemporary readership in the East with a philosophical tradition, from which it was unduly broken off at a time of complete severing of traditions. Moreover, it is a vehicle that should itself in the final account of things be bracketed out. Thus, the entire communist episode implicitly appears to Patočka as a mere gap in history, which existential phenomenologists

working in the East should privately and secretly work to bridge safely – a narrative one finds in other Eastern-Bloc countries as well.[27]

There may no doubt be some truth to this story, but the present essay as well as the present issue as a whole are especially concerned with what that story nonetheless leaves out, namely: the officially sanctioned contacts and mutual appropriations between State Socialist philosophy and Existentialism. The primary purpose of this paper was thus to flesh out how this process of mutual appropriation came to play out in several attempts to engender a consistent philosophical dialog between the East and the West during the 1960s, in ways that engendered interesting developments in both camps. On the side of Marxist–Leninism, it determined the gradual adoption within this framework of questions of "concrete existence", which were largely ignored during the 1950s, and that were now spearheaded especially under the label of "Marxist humanism" in constant risk of being branded as "revisionism". On the side of existentialism, it similarly led to novel forays into the existential analyses of phenomena like labor or production, which obviously expanded its initial philosophical scope. Both Existentialism and Marxist–Leninism were thus forced to venture into novel areas. While, ultimately, the dialog itself might be said to have ended in failure, as the two philosophical directions only came to cohabitate indifferently on both sides of the Iron Curtain, the sparks that sprang from their initial contacts are nonetheless unrealized potentialities worth a more attentive analysis.

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Declarations

Competing Interests The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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[27] See, for instance, Gabriel Liiceanu's account of the Romanian philosopher Alexandru Dragomir's Socratic private lectures during the 1970s and 1980s as a "long exile", which only ends with his contemporary postcommunist recuperation: "Embarking on a long exile, the spirit is obliged to find strange ways of functioning through which, to the extent to which it preserves its freedom, it also manages to protect itself from the vicissitudes of history. In fact, it buries itself, goes into the trenches, disappears from the public surface of culture where there is room only for the display of an ideology with which no negotiation is possible. [...] However this operation of folding inwards is not without risk: who can guarantee the person who has hidden so well in a cranny of history that his spirit will emerge one day into the light, that he will be recovered, and that others will be able to say of him what Hamlet says about the ghost of his father: 'Well said, old mole'? Who will guard him from the danger that he will disappear unknown, buried alive with the work he has generated in secret, of which no-one has ever managed to find out anything? Emergence from assumed clandestinity of culture is only possible through chance, or through the existence of a God who loves culture" (Liiceanu 2017, p. 13). See for this also Ferencz-Flatz 2017.

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