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RED HORIZON

AVANT-GARDE AND REVOLUTION
IN YUGOSLAVIA 1919-1932

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The Social Revolution in Yugoslavia is the only thing that can bring about the catharsis of our people and of all the immorality of our political liberation. Oh, sacred struggle between the left and the right, on This Day and on the Day of Judgment, I stand on the far left, the very far left. Because, only a terrible cry against Nonsense can accelerate the whisper of a new Sense.

It was with this paragraph that August Cesarec ended his manifesto 'Two Orientations', published in the second issue of the "bimonthly for all cultural problems" *Plamen* (Zagreb, 1919; 15 issues in total), which he co-edited with Miroslav Krleža. With a strong dose of revolutionary euphoria and expressionistic messianic pathos, the manifesto demonstrated the ideational and political platform of the magazine, founded by the two avant-garde writers from Zagreb, activists of the left wing of the Social Democratic Party of Croatia, after the October Revolution and the First World War.

It was the struggle between the two orientations, the world social revolution led by Bolshevik Russia on the one hand, and the world of bourgeois counter-revolution led by the Entente Forces on the other, that was for Cesarec pivotal in determining the future of Europe and mankind, and therefore also of the newly founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom of SCS), which had allied itself with the counter-revolutionary bloc. It had the character of a class war, which in Cesarec's interpretation carried the biblical dimensions of the conflict between good and evil, Moses and Pharaoh, the oppressed proletarian majority and the tyrannical bourgeois minority. In this struggle, the theoretical

programme of the Left was “communist Marxism”, and its method was “the most daring Bakuninism” – that is, “the resuscitation of the revolutionary orientation of the *Communist Manifesto*, the heroic evolutionary step through the muddy and treacherous marshlands of Europe, the magnificent passage through the depths torn open as a consequence of the satanic devastation of the world war”. Without this passage through the turbulent “Red Sea”, without changes in the social system, without a new morality, without a new politics and a new understanding of life, there would be no new culture or new art, warned Cesarec.

Conceptually, *Plamen* had been put to the service of the revolutionary movement from the very beginning, and had the characteristics of social revolutionary action, which was attributable to the fact that both writers shared the point of view that intellectual struggle is fruitless if it does not contribute to the organised struggle towards changing the state system. “Revolution is the criterion for evaluation”, observed Zorica Stipetić in her analysis of the magazine’s political mission, and “a call for revolution is a call for the discovery and fulfillment of humanity”, with the complete exclusion of everything that does not contain the elements necessary for the revolution (Stipetić, 1982: 83). The social revolution, as Cesarec pointed out in ‘Two Orientations’, is fundamentally different from the national revolution – as the bourgeois ideologists of Yugoslavism named the unification of the South Slavic nations – because it is class-conscious and brings about the liberation of every individual and the whole society. It promised an integral solution to the Yugoslav problem which, in its primary form, could only be socialistic. It was a total and ultimate revolution, which would resolve all issues, ethical, social, class, cultural, economic, national and interstate, and would establish the dictatorship of the proletariat as a

“true democracy”, in contrast to the bankrupted bourgeois parliamentarianism that carried within itself the “decay of sterile dictatorship”, and on its conscience “the millions of victims of state wars”.

The model of revolution that would bring about the “consolidation” of the whole world and Yugoslavia was the October Revolution, and for Bolshevism, as its driving ideology, Cesarec noted that it represented a heroic step on a path that was officially steered towards socialism. For Krleža, it was the “Moscow Thunder” that marked the beginning of a new era: “The minds that propelled Russia into motion represent today the only intelligent formula (or better, the only formula worthy of the European intellectual spirit) as to how life energy should be directed” (Očak, 1982: 36). The October Revolution, Lenin, Bolshevism, Russia and Liebknecht, were the signifiers of a suggestive effect in the literary and publicistic works of Krleža and Cesarec, which exuded revolutionary romanticism and prophetic tones. This enthusiasm was shared by many European intellectuals, who recognised in The Red October an event of epochal significance, “an explosion that blew up the historical continuum” (Walter Benjamin) of the bourgeois world, and freed the imaginative space for new forms of reflection on man, society and culture. Georg Lukács, Deputy to the People’s Commissar for Education of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, perhaps most accurately described the expectations of this generation:

There was a widespread belief that we were at the beginning of a huge revolutionary wave that would spill all over Europe in a few years. We acted driven by the illusion that in a short period of time we would be able to sweep away the last remnants of capitalism (Benson and Forgács, 2002: 24).



PLAMEN

POLUMESEČNIK ZA SVE KULTURNE PROBLEME

GOD. I.

BROJ 3.

SADRŽAJ

- Miroslav Krleža: **VELIKI PETAK 1919. (KARLU LIEBKNECHTU U SPOMEN)** -- MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI
August Cesarec: **POBEDA DUŠE** -- ZIDANJE NOVOGA DOMA --
Ilijo Gorenčević: **CRISTOVAL COLON**
LABUDJA PEŠMA KARLA LIEBKNECHTA

Without an enormous desire to become part of an epochal event, to be ‘intoxicated’ by and come as close as possible to it, there would be neither the revolutionary enthusiasm of Krleža and Cesarec, nor their dramatisation of the revolutionary moment of Europe and the world. This desire to appropriate the event of the Revolution, at least symbolically, was evident in the name of the magazine, taken from the name of the magazine *Пламя* (*Flame*), edited by Anatoly Lunacharsky in Petrograd (1918–1920), and inspired by the motto of Lenin’s magazine *Искра* (*Spark*): “From a spark a flame will flare up”. Not without reason, all these names evoke associations with fire, since, in the discourse of the epoch, revolution had been metaphorically linked to natural disasters and elemental catastrophes (storm, blizzard, flood, earthquake, fire, whirlwind, eruption) – to the apocalypse that terminates a historical epoch.

As soon as it made its appearance on the historical scene, Bolshevism overcame the limits of the specific circumstances in which it had triumphed and filled the world with the promise of a universal revolution. It created a myth about itself equal to the one the French Revolution had created by nourishing the dreams of the 19th-century progressive intelligentsia with its political and affective meanings. The irresistible spell of The Red October rested on the conviction that it was an event that necessarily spilled over the borders of Russia and gave a new direction to the whole of history, expanding the space of the politically possible and imaginable. Lenin’s ‘mantra’ that the goal of the Bolshevik Revolution was universal was later adopted by Krleža, when he wrote that “the significance of the Russian Revolution is not only of importance to the Russian revolutionary problem”, but also of the utmost importance to the “development of the *International Revolution*, the only revolution that can achieve Communism

in the international sense” (Očak, 1982: 40). Cesarec shared a similar view, and in the manifesto entitled ‘Internaciona-la Aeterna’ (‘The Eternal International’) (*Plamen*, nos. 5–6, 1919), greeted brothers from around the world, led by the Russians, “the sons of the Great Mother in whom we believe”, and called for world revolution in the name of the Yugoslav proletariat: “We strongly believe that the fire that has been smouldering for centuries in the hearts of the trampled and the sad will eventually flare up, the fire that has been burning from the beginning”. Their belief was based on Marx and Lenin’s premise that the communist revolution was the final act of the salvation of all the mankind from the clutches of capitalism and the last in history, since it led to the creation of a society in which there would be no more need for revolution.

The Russian Revolution shocked both the capitalist world, because it was the first anti-capitalist revolution under the banner of Marxism, and the socialist world, since it represented a direct negation of a Marxist revolutionary premise: it occurred in an unexpected place and with an unexpected outcome. It was made possible thanks to the intervention of a revolutionary group outside the existing social forces (the proletariat), which compensated for its initial shortcoming in not representing the latter by employing a strong revolutionary subjectivism and the ability to decisively ‘seize the moment’. The October Revolution did not arise from the class struggle, but it represented a kind of moral-political action based on Lenin’s party’s conviction about the appropriateness of such a decision, despite the fact that the country, according to Marx’s theorem of economic determinism, was not ready for a transition to socialism. As Immanuel Wallerstein observed, the Bolsheviks changed the social psychology of revolutionary movements, offering them a foundation for an



ЛЕЊИН

**DE MORTUIS
NIHIL NISI BENE**

RED.

The header to Leo Trotsky's text 'Lenin', *Zenit*, nos. 26–33, 1924

“optimism of the will”, which from that moment became the pillar of their political power (Wallerstein, 1990: 25).

The Bolshevik recipe for structuring the party and carrying out the revolution had become a universal recipe and was, therefore, accepted by all communist parties throughout the world, subject to the dictate of the Third International. The party would take on a leading role in the revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie, and bring revolutionary theory and political organisation to the exploited masses, since “without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement” (Lenin). According to Lenin, the working class cannot acquire class consciousness spontaneously, by way of an organic development – that consciousness must be developed by a party led by the intelligentsia, the avant-garde of the working class. Marx and Engels did not use the term ‘avant-garde’ for the Communist Party in the *Communist Manifesto*; however, they implied it by stating that of all the workers’ parties, the communists stood out as the most determined, theoretically qualified, internationally oriented

and ready to represent the interests of the entire movement. Lenin developed this thesis into a doctrine by setting up the model of the Party as a coherent and disciplined organisation of professional revolutionaries, which stood in an organic connection with labour, and which channelled the latter's revolt into a revolutionary political act. This doctrine of the hegemonic role of the party in the workers' movement, presented in the book *What Is to Be Done?* (1902), caused contradictory reactions within the Russian and the European social democracies, but it prevailed after the October Revolution, as it proved to be an effective recipe for carrying out a revolution.

The political collapse of the Second International, as a consequence of the decision of the vast majority of social democratic parties in Western Europe to vote for the war budgets of their governments, meant the defeat of those of its views that deviated from revolutionary Marxism. The difference between the politics of Bolshevism and those of social democracy could be explained by the difference between the "two incompatible logics" of revolution as expounded by Slavoj Žižek: the one which awaits the ripening of the teleological moment of the capitalist crisis when a revolution will explode according to its historical necessity, and the other, which maintains that revolution does not have "its time" and sees a "revolutionary chance" as something that appears on the detours of "normal" historical development (Žižek, 2002: 10). The Bolshevik Revolution, according to Žižek, discovered an exception to what Marx called "normal" revolution, since Lenin did not understand Marx literally, but "betrayed" him so that he could carry out the first Marxist revolution. Lenin criticised the leaders of the Second International for being revolutionaries in words and reformists in action, and his elaborations of Marxist theory – the problems of class struggle, revolution, party, state socialism, dictatorship of the pro-

letariat, democracy – were sharply opposed to the ‘pedantries’ which the reformists slipped in as Marxism. Starting from the conviction that Marxism is not a “recipe book for the inn of the future”, Lenin had, as Antonio Gramsci noted, carried out the general reform of classical Marxism through his political thought and practice by leading it into its “third phase”.

Before the war, the Bolsheviks constituted only a small faction in the Second International, and after their seizure of power and establishment of the Third International, they broke up with the entire left, above all with the “tame social democratic formula of socialism” (Krlježa), which triggered a pan-European avalanche of conflicts between social democrats and communists.¹ Following The Red October, Marxism-Leninism imposed itself as the most influential anti-bourgeois revolutionary ideology, directed towards a fundamental change of the existing situation according to uncompromisingly defined goals. The new momentum of Marxist theory, with Leninism playing a dominant part, led not only to opposition to the Marxism of the Second International, “both in its revisionist and its orthodox forms”, but also, at the very beginning of the Third International’s activity, to sharp internal polarisations among Marxist theoreticians (Vranicki, 1987/II: 13). A special stimulus to that phase arose from the emergence of the first socialist state, which began to be associated with all theoretical issues, and which influenced the development of theoretical thought in other communist parties as well.

The October virus, which began to expand in Europe immediately after the end of the Great War, when the Bolshevisation of the left wing of social democracy took place,

1 The change of name of the Russian Social Democratic Party to the Russian Communist Party (The Bolsheviks) in 1918, was aimed at emphasising detachment from official socialism by approaching the model taken from the *Communist Manifesto*.

also spread in Yugoslavia. In April 1919, four months after the launch of *Plamen*, the 'Congress of Unification' of socialist and social democratic movements and groups was held in Belgrade, at which the Socialist Labour Party of Yugoslavia (a party of Communists) was formed, emphasising as the key point of its programme the "uncompromising class struggle" against capitalism in line with the principles of the October Revolution, and declaring its adherence to the Third International. At the Second Congress, held in Vukovar in 1920, after it was renamed the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (the CPY), the party adopted a programme and a statute, setting as its immediate goal the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism in a swift class war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, which would result in "the breakdown of the state, the expropriation of private property and the establishment of the power of soviets modelled on the Russian proletariat" (Bilandžić, 1985: 28). The strategy of the proletariat's class offensive against the bourgeois state was founded on the Comintern's assessment that the historical moment for the replacement of capitalism with socialism had finally come, and that the Kingdom of SCS was "pregnant with revolution" as "the weakest link in the chain in a capitalist system broken by the October Revolution" (29).

The Party's assessment of the crisis of the social order in the newly created state was based on the objective state of affairs on the terrain, especially in those parts of the country that were under Austro-Hungarian rule, where dissatisfaction and social antagonisms were the most pronounced (workers' strikes, mass demonstrations, soldiers' riots, peasant unrest, green cadres). It seemed that all the conditions for what Lenin called a "revolutionary situation" had been met: the continually deteriorating living conditions of the oppressed classes, the considerable increase in mass activities for the above stated

reasons, and the growing ability of the revolutionary class to organise mass revolutionary actions. However, the situation did not explode into a revolution, because the state managed to prevent it by combining reformist and repressive measures, whilst, the CPY, torn by internal disputes, was neither prepared for such a demanding undertaking on the organisational level, nor in possession of sufficient support from the masses. Its subsequent successes in the parliamentary elections (as the third party in power) and municipal elections, alarmed the state's repressive apparatus into reacting to the growing 'red danger' with an intensified 'white terror'. With the passing of the Declaration of State Protection (1920), which banned communist activity throughout the country, and the subsequent Law on the Protection of Public Security and State Order (1921), the CPY was practically shattered (the CPY was classified as an anti-state party and a terrorist organisation, its leadership was arrested and the communists expelled from the National Assembly). The Independent Labour Party of Yugoslavia (the ILPY), through which the CPY continued to operate in public, did not win a single seat in the parliamentary elections of 1923, because voters turned to nationally affiliated parties. Focused exclusively on demands of a social nature in order to alleviate the difficult social and economic state of affairs in the postwar Kingdom of SCS, the CPY, as a supranational party, initially adopted a stance of indifference towards the national question, one of the burning political issues in the newly created state, and this eventually led to the electoral collapse of the ILPY (Prpa, 2018: 210–211).² Finally, the strategy of class *blitzkrieg*, with

2 At the time, the CPY supported Yugoslav national unity, denying the existence of separate nations and ignoring the demands of some bourgeois parties for a federalist state system. Sima Marković, the then leader of the CPY, was the first to point out the need to change the political orientation regarding the national

which the CPY began its political life, experienced a debacle, and the party was expelled from the public political scene and forced to work illegally until 1941, under the constant white terror of the state's repressive apparatus.

Krleža and Cesarec's magazine was launched in the chaotic social atmosphere that marked the formation of the Kingdom of SCS, and a revolutionary ferment, which, under the impact of The October Revolution and the subsequent revolutionary turmoil in Central Europe (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Italy), spread among the advanced intelligentsia and the dissatisfied masses. Through its literary and artistic issues, *Plamen* propagated the revolution and tried to supplement on the cultural level what the party newspaper *Istina* represented on the political level. It was the first literary magazine in Yugoslavia to establish a public platform for the communist intelligentsia, as far as censorship allowed, and the first to be banned, along with *Istina*, in August 1919, for "endangering the interests of the state and public order and peace". Krleža and Cesarec believed that the success of the revolution was possible if it was achieved in totality, if a cultural change – the negation of the bourgeois cultural system, accompanied a social change – the negation of the bourgeois social order. Therefore, they conceived the magazine as a literary-political tribune of the left intelligentsia, with the goal, as they

question, which led to the polarisation between the proponents of the federalist and autonomist state systems. The dispute ended in 1925, when the Executive Committee of the Comintern passed a 'Resolution on the Yugoslav Question', which forced Yugoslav Communists to accept as their long-term political orientation a "consistent struggle for self-determination until secession, and for a federation of workers' and peasants' republics in the Balkans" (Prpa, 2018: 213). That attitude was changed at the Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the CPY, held in Split in 1935, where it was stated that the right to self-determination did not mean unconditional secession and the creation of new states. It resulted in the conclusion that a solution to the national question was possible within the reformed Yugoslav state union (Morača, Bilandžić and Stojanović, 1977: 65).

emphasised in the fourth issue, of “a radical cleansing of our cultural and social circumstances”. According to Stipetić, *Plamen* did not rise above the level of *Istina* in its cognizance of fundamental social problems, but from the standpoint of the Left, it raised important questions for Yugoslav society, although it did not give appropriate answers to all of them (Stipetić, 1980: 101).

A few years after *Plamen*'s closure, Krleža wrote that it was “the first literary magazine in the Balkans that kept pace with great international cultural conceptions and endeavours” (*Književna republika*, no. 1, 1923). This assessment can still be taken as plausible when it comes to Yugoslavia, because at the time there was no other similar project among literary periodicals. Simultaneously, in the text ‘Lef in Yugoslavia’, published in the *Moscow Lef* (no. 2, 1923), Cesarec informed Russian readers that, from an artistic point of view, *Plamen* was “the first conscious appearance of the Left Front in Yugoslav culture and art”, where:

in spite of the most brutal campaign, sabotage and censorship, it dug up such a deep furrow in the unsown or very sparsely sown field of Yugoslav culture that its fruitful influence on the advanced working class and intelligentsia are still felt, 3 and a 1/2 years after its untimely death (Cesarec, 1986: 203–204).

We must agree with this statement too, because *Plamen* and its politically more mature and analytical successor, *Književna republika*, which Krleža edited from 1923 to 1927 with Cesarec as his main associate, acquired the status of pioneer magazines for the literary Left between the two wars. The former was also recognised as an avant-garde pioneer by the Zenitist Boško Tokin, who in his text ‘Young Reactionaries and the New Spirit’ (*Zenit*, no. 2, 1921) acknowledged it

as “the first review of the new spirit in our country”, whose revolutionary struggle “for man and art” would continue to be propagated in *Zenit*.

What are these “great international cultural conceptions and endeavours” that Krleža implied? Half a century later, with reference to Expressionism, he identified its “politically tendentious” wing as being the “most interesting”, the one founded on the ideas of socialism, anarchism and communism and responding to the political imperatives of his time (Krleža, 1972: 136). *Plamen* was ideologically close to activism, the politically tendentious wing of German Expressionism, initiated by Kurt Hiller, who was preoccupied with the idea of the ethical awakening of the intelligentsia and its activation in political life. It could be said that it represented the Croatian counterpart to the Berlin activist newspaper *Die Aktion*, whose founder and editor, Franz Pfemfert, had from the very beginning (1911) “linked expressionist literature and contemporary cultural politics with (historical) social-revolutionary texts to form a singular combination” (Raunig, 2006: 90). The magazine was associated with the left wing of the Social Democrats and, as Pfemfert pointed out in the editorial for the first issue, supported “the idea of the great German leftists” and “the organising of the intelligentsia”, i.e. the arousal of the revolutionary spirit in Germany. Before the young Croatian writers launched *Plamen*, having parted ways with the non-Marxist Hiller, Pfemfert had radicalised *Die Aktion* by implementing communist and anarcho-sindicalist ideas, joining the newly formed Communist Party of Germany, supporting the Spartacus League, publishing Marx, and translating Russian anarchists, Lenin and other revolutionary literature. It is certain that Krleža and Cesarec were acquainted with *Die Aktion*, as evidenced by the fact that in his text ‘Bolshevism and Culture’ (*Nova istina*, nos. 11,

13 and 14, 1919) Cesarec discussed Lunacharsky's text 'The Cultural Task of the Struggling Proletariat', referring to the translation he had read in the Berlin magazine.

However, we are not certain whether they were acquainted with Hungarian activism, Lajos Kassák and his journals *A Tett* (1915–1916) and *Ma* (1918–1925), especially the former, which, conceived according to Pfemfert's model, represented the artistic and political forum of the Hungarian avant-garde during the war. Similarly, we do not know about their knowledge of the Polish group Bunt from Poznań, which was associated with the circles around *Die Aktion* and *Der Sturm*, and whose activist ideology was rooted in the ideas of European anarchism. According to Eva Forgács, Expressionism in Central Europe during the war was welcomed not only as an aesthetic idiom, since a number of artists deviated from pre-war theoretical principles and declared themselves activists with "an articulated social consciousness and political goals" (Forgács, 2002: 144). Expressionism became a movement of anti-war engagement and international solidarity, channelling "the anger, energy, and hope" of a generation of artists "nourished by the futuristic visions, socialist utopias, and scanty news coming from post-revolutionary Soviet Russia" (143). Forgács emphasised that avant-garde artists in Central Europe, following the example of their German colleagues, organised themselves into activist groups in order to expand their mission more pragmatically than their romanticist predecessors: they embarked on the path of social activism. From hesitation between idealistic faith and nihilistic scepticism regarding humanity's spiritual rebirth, Expressionism evolved with its activist wing to become the leading catalyst for radical leftist ideas in the fields of art and literature.

The first avant-garde literary aspirations, Futuristic and Expressionist, which appeared in the Yugoslav countries in the second decade of the twentieth century, were marked by social and political implications concerning the role of literature in the struggle for the liberation and unification of Yugoslav nations, as well as of its ethical and social functions. As Predrag Palavestra noted, “national reasons and the combative idea of the liberative gathering of the Yugoslav nations” endowed the Serbian and Croatian avant-garde with features somewhat different from the features of the European avant-garde (Palavestra, 1979: 254). At the literary and artistic levels, there was intense turmoil through which the avant-garde critical model was profiled, intellectual nonconformism was expressed, and an antagonistic relationship was established towards the idealistic aesthetics of the forebears and the entire tradition. At the same time, socialist and anarchist ideas mingled with Yugoslav nationalism and messianic visions of a new, dealienated and liberated man, in which the basic ideological position was more associated “with Yugoslav thought than with the socialist and workers’ movement” (135). The “youth generation” in question here was characterised by an ideological syncretism drawn from various sources, with which they responded to the challenges of social modernisation, national aspirations, advanced artistic developments in Europe and forebodings of a war catastrophe.

As Radovan Vučković noted, the first Yugoslav avant-garde was not “extremely radical in the revolution of art forms”, but manifested its radicalism in its “overall activity, in which literary and ideological views, as well as literary and political practice, were deeply intertwined” (Vučković, 2011: 37). For Vučković, “general thoughts about the need to activate politics, spiritualise and revolutionise its means, reject the slow reformist methods of the forebears, and their moral passivity

and indolence,” were almost identical to those propagated by representatives of Activist Expressionism in Germany (48). Attempts at establishing the connection between the youth generation and its magazines (*Val*, Zagreb, 1911; *Vihor*; Zagreb, 1914; *Kokot*, Zagreb, 1916; *Vijavica*, Zagreb, 1917–1918; *Bosanska Vila*, Sarajevo, 1910–1914; *Juriš*, Zagreb, 1919) and Hiller’s activism and the pre-war *Die Aktion* can be accepted to a certain extent, in the sense that they did not speak from coherent ideological positions and from the perspective of clearly determined socio-political goals³. Having analysed the pre-war literary situation in Croatia, Stipetić concluded that, in spite of the fact that some intellectuals and writers (Tin Ujević, Vladimir Čerina, Ulderik Donadini, A. B. Šimić) questioned certain elements of society’s foundations, they essentially assumed them, not recognising the true meaning of social injustices and conflicts (Stipetić, 1980: 88). This means that Benjamin’s critique of Hiller’s activism, expressed in ‘The Author as Producer’, could also be applied to the Yugoslav proto-avant-garde: it was more revolutionary in mood than in production.

The politicisation of the avant-gardes in Central Europe was a consequence of the transformation of a pre-war cultural discomfort into a political discomfort – that is, of a cultural radicalism into a political radicalism. In this context, the American historian Geoff Eley speaks about the transition from “romantic anticapitalism and moral criticism to revolutionary politics”, thanks to the emancipation of the

3 A special case is the unique project of Croatian Futurism, the *Zvrk* magazine, which in 1914 in Zadar tried to publish a group of young writers led by Joso Matošić. The publication of the magazine was prevented by the outbreak of the First World War and the arrest of Matošić and the two members of the group on suspicion of their involvement in the organisation of the Sarajevo assassination. As *Zvrk* was discovered only decades later, this early example of radical avant-garde remained without an echo on the Croatian cultural scene (Šimičić, 2012: 45).

“self-conscious radical intelligentsia” which will “fight for its place in politics” in the coming years (Ili, 2007: 290–291). The first total war on European soil was perceived by both the defeated and the victorious as a catastrophe that led to disillusionment with European civilisational values and the progress of capitalist modernisation, which represented the framework within which the majority of pre-war avant-gardes circulated. What is more, the socialist movement gathered around the Second International had failed the test of anti-militarism and anti-nationalism, and this encouraged the seeking of other solutions offering a way out of the bourgeois political constellation. Thus, on his return to Berlin from the Italian battlefield, Walter Gropius found himself a witness to the November Revolution, which led him to conclude: “This is more than a lost war. The world has come to an end. We must seek a radical solution to our problems” (Gay, 1999: 19). Left-wing writers and artists took part in the revolutionary events in Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Budapest and Turin, became members and sympathisers of communist parties formed all across post-war Europe under the patronage of the Third International, and understood their artistic work as an integral part of the overall political struggle. In this sense, German activism, with Pfemfert as the leading figure, distanced itself from Expressionist *left-wing Nietzscheanism*, because, as Benjamin was to say, “living in a glass house of revolutionary virtue and moral exhibitionism” became irrelevant to taking a more politically productive position in society. While 19th-century proto-avant-gardes insisted, as a rule, on the total autonomy of art, even when artists personally engaged in politics, the avant-gardes of the early twentieth century were prepared to understand art/artistic politics as an heteronomous aspect of revolutionary politics (Raunig, 2006: 83).

Adherence to revolutionary politics was characteristic not only of Expressionism but also of other movements, primarily Dada, which, with Zürich as its birth place, was anti-militaristic, but at the same time apolitical in its anti-social nihilism (Tristan Tzara later stated that the October Revolution was hailed only as a means of ending the war), whereas Berlin Dada, born in explosive social circumstances, put itself at the service of revolutionary politics. That is why, on his return from Zürich, Richard Huelsenbeck wrote that he had nothing against Tzara's nihilism, but that he was disappointed by his apoliticism: "While Tzara was still writing Dada *ne signifie rien* – in Germany, Dada lost its art-for-art's-sake character, with the very first move" (Taylor, 1990: 187).⁴ In Berlin, Dadaism became communist-anarchist, presenting itself as "the international revolutionary union of all creative and intellectual men and women, on the basis of radical Communism" ("What is Dadaism and what does it want in Germany?", 1919). In spite of the political division into the communist wing (Gross, Heartfield, Herzfelde) and the anarcho-communist wing (Huelsenbeck, Hausmann), the Berlin Dadaists, driven by revolutionary enthusiasm, agreed that political action should take precedence over art. A Dadaist should be more of a political partisan than an artist, and his artwork should be a by-product of political action or a kind of manifesto for social behaviourism, said Huelsenbeck (Elderfield, 1970: 183).

Moving in the interspace between Marxism and the anarchism of Berlin Dada and Pfemfert's *Die Aktion* was not

4 At the same time, after Tzara's departure for Paris, a short-lived group of "Radical Dada" (Viking Eggeling, Marcel Janco, Hans Richter, Hans Arp) was formed in Zürich (1919), coming out with a socially awakened and constructive programme, according to which art should take part in the "ideological evolution of society" by serving "the formation of a new man" and belonging to all "without class differences." (Janco, 1957: 9)

uncommon for left-wing intellectuals at the time, and even later. Elaborating on Cesarec's youthful anarcho-communism, Stipetić stated that Marxism and anarchism originated from sources that advocated human freedom and “a social transformation that would include not only economic and political changes, but also changes in the ethical, moral and political spheres” (Stipetić, 1982: 85). The historical analysis of the genesis of Marxism and anarchism demonstrates that both directions, declaring themselves representatives of the exploited social class, offer solutions to the question of freedom, that is, the problem of the dealienation and total emancipation of man and society. Their relationship is dialectical in the true sense of the word, because, while they share the socialist concept of social transformation, in doctrine and methodology they diverge and come into conflict in attempting to prove the correctness of their own positions, and in politics they fight for supremacy in the international socialist movement. Despite the theoretical differences and political conflicts between the representatives of Marxism and anarchism, expressing admiration for Proudhon, Kropotkin and Marx at the same time was not unusual for members and sympathisers of the socialist movement during the Second International. The “popular socialist mind” of the time was characterised by ideological inconsistency or eclecticism, because the general principles and basic values of the workers' movement were more important than an “exclusive and esoteric understanding of any theory” (Ili, 2007: 76).

Anarchism had gathered a respectable number of followers in literary and artistic circles, leaving a mark on the avant-garde subculture at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Neo-Impressionists, Symbolists, Fauvists, Cubists, Expressionists and Futurists recognised, in the anarchist resistance to the apparatuses of state and social coercion,

its egalitarianism and the revolutionary-utopian tendency, something close to their own non-conformism and assaults on the conventions of bourgeois culture. However, after The Red October, anarchism, except in Italy and Spain, lost its political battle with communism, which grew into the dominant regulatory idea for revolutionary change in the social order. As Raymond Williams noted, the deep emphasis on the liberation of the creative individual took many artists towards the anarchist wing, but, after the 1917 Revolution, “the project of heroic revolution could be taken as a model for the collective liberation of all individuals” (Williams, 1994: 57). André Breton later testified about this in his ‘Black Mirror of Anarchism’ (1952), ascertaining that “an organic fusion between a truly anarchist and a surrealist element” did not occur. “The triumph of the Russian Revolution and the establishment of the ‘workers state’” altered the political perspective of the Surrealists, who believed that “a social revolution that would engulf all countries cannot miss the opportunity to promote a libertarian world (some call it a surrealist world, but that is the same).” (Breton, 2003: 4–5).

The essential reason why the Surrealists and other socially sensitive avant-gardists chose Marxism-Leninism as their political ideology was the “idea of efficacy” (Breton), since the avant-garde of the working class, strengthened by the success of the revolution in Russia, imposed itself as the most plausible ideological-political alternative to capitalism. There could be no other choice if an artist wanted to revolutionise life in its social totality, if he aspired to an aesthetic and not just an artistic revolution, if he wanted the ideological effects (moral, political, cognitive) of his creation to obtain immediacy and interest among an audience wider than the advanced intelligentsia and bohemia. Acting on the margins of the bourgeois cultural system, the avant-gardes were

aware of not being able to realise their programme without dismantling the entire social system, as Cesarec made clear in 'Two Orientations'. They believed that both revolutions, the social and the aesthetic, strove to achieve the same goals, and therefore the prevailing opinion was that they were not two revolutions but one, leading to a radical transformation of human practice and the emancipation of the individual and society as a whole. It was a question of faith in the dialectical intertwining of the two revolutions, a kind of mechanical connection, without which each of them would remain incomplete, or perhaps even unsuccessful. Richard Wagner, in his youth a socialist-anarchist and participant in the failed uprising in Dresden, was one of the first artists to bring the artistic and social revolutions into direct correlation, having written in 'Art and Revolution' (1849) that they had a common goal, and that "both of them can achieve it if they get to know it in cooperation" (Vagner, 2010: 166). Just as the idea of a social revolution rested on the belief that the bourgeois social system could not be reformed but only revolutionised, in order to abolish the injustices and restrictions on which it was built, so the idea of an aesthetic revolution rested on the conviction that the dominant artistic paradigm had no capacity to meet the demands of the modern age confronting the process of artistic creation. Consequently, the avant-gardes (and not only them) identified themselves with left-wing revolutionary projects in which they recognised a common goal – an intervention in the present that seeks to change its course and direct it towards a better future.

A similar understanding was shared by the initiator and ideologue of Zenitism, Ljubomir Micić, when he wrote that the former created the preconditions for the latter: "And spiritual revolutions are strongly connected with the social revolution. It is through that bond that their mutual reper-

cussions occur. Scientific and artistic reversals have an indirect but strong psychological effect on people, who then look more courageously at social reversal and transformation” (Расинюв, 1926: 15). Micić presents a typical example of avant-garde self-understanding, the roots of which we trace back to the Saint-Simonian ideal of the artist as a “beacon of society”, a prophet and messenger of the future, whose aesthetic imagination possesses the capacity to exert a “general stimulus by finding ways of progress” (Saint-Simon). The mytheme of the artist-prophet, originating in the romanticist messianic zeal, had endured until the 1930s, even when artists “did not use the term ‘avant-garde’ or accept the didactic-utilitarian philosophy of art” (Calinescu, 1988: 103). In other words, the stimuli that came from social utopians, socialists and anarchists, and then communists, the belief that “universal human emancipation” (Marx) in the form of a social revolution encompassing all strata of social life was achievable, shaped modern artistic consciousness politically, and especially minds prone to the resolute rejection of the values and achievements of bourgeois culture. According to Jan Patočka, the idea of revolution represents “a fundamental feature of modernity”, which means that it is inscribed into the new semantics of the times, where “the past no longer illuminates the future, but where the future illuminates the present” (Bensaïd, 2009: 203).

Ever since the French Revolution, the word ‘revolution’ had become a name for the introduction of absolute novelty into political, social and cultural life, changing all existing fundamental relations and offering a new understanding of man and his world. It has carried the promise of emancipation, progress, freedom and a new beginning, the total reconstruction of society, so that its narrative patterns are characterised by an exalted rhetoric and a secularised eschatological content,

reproducing the drama of the biblical apocalypse. This Manichaeic image also adorns Marx's conception of revolution as a total reversal: the "empire of freedom" as opposed to the "empire of necessity", the "classless community as opposed to earlier societies of class struggles, dealienation as opposed to alienation, objectification and a state of radical disharmony, and the period of true human history as opposed to the previous prehistory of humankind" (Raunić, 2018: 32). The reasons for such Manichaeic rhetoric are twofold: theoretically, they are rooted in the Hegelian belief in the power of a scientific cognition of the necessary course of history, and politically, in a strong distancing from those currents of the labour movement characterised by the "inability to comprehend the course of modern history" (Ibid.).

For Marx, socialist revolution is "the driving force of history", which liberates the potentials contained in society, builds a new system of values and "produces change in conditions and human relations, as well as the transformation of personality". As Milan Kangrga asserted while discussing Marx's theory of revolution, from the standpoint of what has not yet been – "from that of creation" – one can observe what is and what has been, and deduce a "practical-critical activity as a determined historical happening" (Kangrga, 1969: 29). The Croat philosopher alluded to the fact that Marx, in propagating social revolution, himself carried out a genuine theoretical revolution in the history of political, economic and social thought, which makes him the prototype of the avant-garde thinker. Instead of giving new answers to the predetermined problems of bourgeois science, he put forward a new set of questions or problems that bourgeois science did not or could not have in its field of vision. As Louis Althusser observed, Marxist theory not only had nothing in common with bourgeois theories, but spoke of something

that the world of bourgeois theory and ideology considered foreign to it (Altiser, 1988: 377). “To be radical is to go to the root of the matter”, read the Marx’s principle.

Although Marx did not discover the phenomenon of revolution in its central meaning for modern life, he had come to his own understanding of this phenomenon through his reception of Hegel’s philosophical understanding of the French Revolution and the perception of the reality that resulted from it. His conclusion was that revolution is a purposeful, planned, intentional, practical and critical activity that takes place in a specific space-time, within the specific opportunities, conditions, people and ideas representing the historically achieved foundation and horizon on the basis of which and within which the revolution can be initiated. Hence, the socialist revolution is born, as a well-known thesis from *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* reads, at that stage of historical development when the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, i.e. when the rationality of production collides with the irrationality of production relations. This is the moment in history when an order based on exploitation, inequality and poverty ceases to be considered natural and when socio-economic issues begin to be understood in the political terms of class conflict. The subject that recognises the moment for revolution is not some abstract totality (the people), but the working class as the only class that can be the subject of universal human emancipation: by liberating itself, it liberates the entire social order at the same time. The proletariat, as the subject of socialist revolution, transforms into a concrete-general movement whose historical goal is overcoming the horizon of class society on the principles of liberty, equality and solidarity. It was Althusser’s contribution to bring Marx’s transition to class theoretical positions

into association with his revolution in the subject, in political economy, which changes not only in general terms, but also in its identity and practical-revolutionary consequences.

Despite the belief that art could have a motivating effect on the cognition of social reality, Marx and Engels did not assign it a role in awakening the revolutionary consciousness, nor did they expect it to engage in propagating revolutionary ideas. The constitution of art as revolutionary per se, observed David Weir, was the result of the internal development of avant-garde culture from the end of the 19th century (Weir, 1997: 160). The idea that an alternative model of society presupposes an alternative model of art originated from the artistic avant-gardes, which considered aesthetic innovation to be an anticipation of society's revolutionary transformation. In keeping with such an idea, which reminds us of Nietzsche's conception of the artist as a "preliminary stage" (*Vorstufe*), art, as a transcendental draft of the possibility of the not-yet-existing, is not shaped by social reality as its reflection; instead, that very reality should imitate art, as an expression of its liberating, cathartic and messianic projections. "We intend to create a communist art alongside the communist economic system... We believe that our new art, and the worldview that goes with it, is equally useful and vital for building a new world as is any other profession", Lajos Kassák emphasised in the programme text 'Onward on Our Way', written during his appointment to the administration of the Hungarian Soviet Republic (Kassák, 2002: 172).

According to Kassák, whose belief was shared by other radical avant-gardists, new art is not just the creation of new works stylistically different from previous ones, a progress in art that gradually develops in correspondence with internal artistic laws; rather, it is like "the yeast that raises a revolution" (Karel Teige) – and it does it right away. In this

context, we can refer to Guy Debord's division between *weak* and *strong* avant-gardes: the first term describes progressive action in the broadest sense, whether it be medicine, industry or art, whereas the second denotes an avant-garde that "by open criticism and construction, constitutes an alternative to the ensemble of realities and problems that are inseparable from existing society" (Debord, 1963). Debord's perspective was similar to that of the American philosopher of science, Ernan McMullin, who made a division between *shallow* and *deep* revolutions. He illustrated the former with the discovery of X-rays: it "did not entail any fundamental change in theory", although it brought "certain changes in experimental procedure and our understanding of scientific instruments" (Žitko, 2018: 330). The Copernican revolution, on the other hand, was deep and profound, because it challenged the dominant scientific paradigm in its totality; by attacking the very procedures of its justification and bringing about a radical change in the image of the world, it challenged knowledge of the functioning of the world at the fundamental level. This means that every revolution that could be considered *deep*, be it scientific, social or artistic, leads us to points outside the existing world and aims at transcending any existing normative support.

Moreover, never before in the history of European culture had such a strong nihilistic urge manifested itself, starting from the Nietzschean belief that a culture can be *mortal*, and that it is possible to create a tabula rasa and start from the beginning, "as if art had not existed before that" (Sloterdijk, 1988: 44). The radical avant-garde's discourse was characterised by a synthesis of destructive and constructive operations: while new territories of expression were experimented with, cultural tradition was denied and derogated, to the extent that its entire meaning was renounced and its annulment

advocated. Such operations were often desemantifications/desacralisations of existing art, such as the Gioconda with moustaches drawn onto her by Marcel Duchamp, or Mayakovsky's line "I write nihil over everything that has been done". The dialectical principle of *creation by destruction* represented a commonplace of radical avant-gardism, as reflected in the nihilistic *anti* mood (anti-lyrics, anti-painting, anti-aesthetics, anti-art), yet also exalted as the revelation of a new poetic meaning from the ashes of the old. In this sense, Benjamin spoke of the "positive barbarism" of modernity, of the permanent violence of innovation: "The destructive character does not want anything that would last. But it is precisely because of this that it finds its paths everywhere [...] It will destroy whatever exists not because of the ruins themselves, but because of the path that goes through them" (Wimmer, 1990: 187). This was exactly how Micić reasoned when, in the manifesto "The Spirit of Zenitism", he declared that the zenitist revolt and creation were intrinsically connected: "[...] the demolition of the old, not as the final goal, but as an imperative of positive force, which is a new affirmation" (Micić, 1921: 3).

The principle of creation by destruction was analytically expounded by the constructivist poet Srećko Kosovel, who, in his unpublished manuscript 'Perspectives of Modern Art', underlined the difference between the two phases of modern art, destructive and constructive: the first "demolishes buildings of the past and only hints at new paths", whereas the second "from the ruins created by the demolition of old art creates new image of life" (Vrećko, 2015: 86). In Kosovel's view, revolution in art only makes sense if it "crosses the bridge of nihilism" and becomes constructive, passing from the reactive stage to the active and affirmative stage. Kosovel is just one example of the systematic development

of the “technique of destruction and overturn” (Adrian Marino), which, with its variations, characterised all the strong avant-gardes whose militancy was demonstrated both towards the past and towards the cultural present conditioned by the past. The Manichaeic exaltation of the avant-garde, through the rhetorically suggestive idea of a fateful turning point, which turns upside down a set of values and opens the way for a completely new art, can be seen as analogous to the Manichaeic rhetoric used by Marx and the anarchists when they spoke about radical social change.

Debord’s division into *weak* and *strong* avant-gardes corresponds to the division into *artistic* and *aesthetic* avant-gardes which Aleš Erjavec established, with reference to Schiller and Rancière: the former introduce new styles and techniques and give birth to new representations of the living world, which occasionally provoke artistic revolutions, while at the other end of the same spectrum, there are those avant-gardes that “tend to reach beyond art, into life, and their goal is to change the world” (Erjavec, 2016: 14). With regard to society, the former are autonomous and represent “pure art”, whilst the latter are heteronomous, since the aesthetic as an addition to the artistic expands from “specifically artistic experiences to a broad, holistic field of experienced and imagined experiences, including social, political, physical and technological dimensions” (ibid.). With a frontal, iconoclastic attack on the institution of art, strong or aesthetic avant-gardes produce an explosion of the aesthetic beyond traditional borders, outside the “museum of the aestheticians” (Kosovel), annulling the art-life dichotomy by some kind of dialectical process of art-desublimation and life-aestheticisation, which is a political act per se. Thus, they stand in an antagonistic relationship with the entire bourgeois ideological complex, and this antagonism is constitutive of their political subjectivation.

We should remember that the complex world of art, unlike the worlds of politics and science, “does not have such clear and indisputable values, according to which transformations and changes can be discerned as moments of progress or regression”, and, therefore, the “play between paradigms and revolution occurs, so to speak, freely and without any restrictions” (Vatimo, 1991: 93). Also, it does not mean that each innovation has a revolutionary character; some can be retrograde, returning to outdated forms of creation, while others can be avant-garde, shifting the boundaries of understanding art and artwork. Artistic revolutions are slow to take effect, and are not achieved, as Benjamin believed, through “explosions” in the form of a sudden aesthetic shock or scandal, but, on the contrary, almost always a posteriori, through the consequences they themselves have had on the development of art. In line with Hal Foster’s famous thesis, the effects of artistic revolutions are not recognised in the present but in the future, as a form of Freudian ‘deferred action’ (Nachträglichkeit): an event (avant-garde) becomes registered as such only through another that recodes it (neo-avant-garde). So it is, for example, that only with the appearance of the neo-readymade in the 1950’s does Duchamp become ‘Duchamp’ (Foster, 2012: 39). The activity of the avant-garde at its initial moments is never historically effective, “nor is it totally significant because it is traumatic – it is a void in the symbolic order of its time, which is not prepared for it, which cannot accept it, at least not immediately, or not without structural change” (40).

On the other hand, social/socialist revolutions are punctual and processual at the same time, which means that they represent a combination of a sudden one-time-only “explosion of political passion” (Gramsci) and slower processes that develop before and after the explosion, according to a (simplified)

scheme: preparation-break-freedom. According to Marxist understanding, a punctual moment or political revolution is the conquest of a nation state by a working-class party, and is the precondition for social revolution, which implies change in the social structure followed by *permanent revolution* in all areas of life such as economy, education, culture, etc. The practice of socialist revolutions in the past century has shown that this model has no value as a universally applicable recipe, but the fact remains that the principle of ‘two in one’ is at work, which is exactly what Marx called “a political revolution with a social soul”. Unlike artistic revolution, whose history is written in retrospect, socialist revolution is historically effective because it brings concrete structural changes and alters the course of the history of nation and state. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, revolution as concept and event is “self-referential, that is to say, it positions and closes itself so as to be apprehended in an immanent enthusiasm without any state of affairs or experiences being able to tone it down, not even the disappointment of reason” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1995: 128). This means that it is self-apprehended and politically legitimised by the moment of break and discontinuity it promises through the establishment of a new system of values and a symbolic order.

In this sense, the question of operational cooperation or the encounter of two revolutions in a concrete space-time arises. The answer to this question was offered by John Roberts, who wrote that “the functions and effects of art praxis and political praxis exist in different temporal dimensions, but at crucial points overlap and, as such, produce transformatively novel forms of praxis under varying sets of conditions” (Roberts, 2015: 35). The most far-ranging transformational forms of praxis, according to Roberts, are manifested in periods of actual revolutions or state-political crises, in which

the “partisan character of the avant-garde” usually submits its activity to the demands of an external political process. In a revolutionary situation, the avant-gardes (and not only the avant-gardes) perceive an opportunity to affirm their aesthetic model as compatible with the revolution, starting from the *responsibility of the aesthetic* as a sensory-experiential sphere, i.e. from the existential dimension that complements the political one.

It was to this topic that Gerald Raunig devoted his book *Art and Revolution*, in which he discussed examples of “temporary overlaps and micro-political attempts at the *transversal concatenation* of art machines and revolutionary machines”, spanning from the Paris Commune and Courbet, through the October Revolution and the Russian avant-garde, to the anti-globalisation protest in Genoa and the Publix-Theatre Caravan (Raunig, 2006: 13, 15). The tendency to overlap was not for the two machines – understood in Deleuze’s terms as complex assemblages that connect many structures and pass through both individuals and collectives – to merge with one another, but rather to enter into a concrete exchange relationship for a limited time. In what way and to what extent revolutionary machines and artistic machines “become integral parts and wheels to one another” was for Raunig a question that could not be generalised, but only discussed with reference to particular historical examples. In other words, in revolutionary situations, the artists were strongly attracted to the “reconfiguration of the universe of the possible” (Rancière), but the modalities of overlapping for the two machines varied according to “sets of conditions”, or whether we focus on the Paris Commune, post-October Russia, the Weimar Republic or the Kingdom of SCS. Raunig also spoke of the “infinite combinatorial possibilities of revolutionary machines”, highlighting several models of overlapping: “one-af-

ter-another” in Courbet, “one-on-top-of-another” in Soviet Productivism, and “one-next-to-another” in the relationship between Viennese Actionism and the students’ protest in the Vienna of May 1968. That is why he emphasised that this was a history of “currents and breaks”, which did not know of a “linear learning process”, since in “new situations there are always new attempts” as well as aberrations.

The history of relationships between artistic and political avant-gardes shows, wrote Matei Călinescu, that the key difference between them lies in the fact that the former would insist on art’s independent revolutionary potential, while the latter would base itself on the opposite opinion, that art must subordinate itself to the demands and needs of politics (Calinescu, 1988: 103). Generally speaking, this relationship would remain complex and oscillatory, and the difference that Călinescu wrote about would constantly weigh on him, as would the conflicts within art groups regarding their attitude towards organised communism. Thus, the revolutionary turmoil in Central Europe after the First World War became an accelerator of the overlapping of revolutionary machines, producing short-lived connections, which resulted, almost as a rule, in the artists’ disappointment with party politics, as evidenced by the split of Kassák’s activists from the leadership of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, as well as Pfemfert’s withdrawal from the Communist Party of Germany. Kassák, who worked in the Republic’s Writers Directorate, came into political conflict with Béla Kun, because of his refusal to place *Ma* under party control, which resulted in the magazine being banned.⁵ This was probably the first

5 The subsequent split within the Hungarian avant-garde group, initiated by the renegades led by Béla Uitz launching the rival magazine *Egyseg* (1922), which was under the direct control of the Hungarian Communist Party, referred to their positioning towards party politics, although both magazines promoted the same art – Constructivism and Suprematism (Botar, 1993: 36).

time that a communist government banned a pro-communist art magazine, which was indicative of everything that would happen in the relationship between organised communism and the avant-garde, starting with the revolutionary events in Russia and Central Europe, and culminating in the relentless war between Surrealism and Stalinism in the 1930s.

As Surrealism began approaching communism, Benjamin was motivated to ask, in the concluding section of his essay 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia' (1929), the crucial question, as it were, concerning all pro-communist avant-gardes: are they successful in welding a radical, anarchist experience of freedom with the other revolutionary experience, "the constructive, dictatorial side of revolution? In short, have they bound revolt to revolution?" (Benjamin, 1974: 270). It turned out that this was not possible, that "poetic politics" was incompatible with party politics, and that the employment of the "energies of intoxication" for revolution did not keep up with the "methodical and disciplinary preparation for the revolution".⁶ In spite of the fact that the conflict between the Surrealists and organised communism took place during the Stalinisation of the latter, the complete subordination of speculative artistic energies to the strategic and tactical demands of party political praxis could neither be carried out in its entirety nor without mutual misunderstanding, as Kassák and Pfemfert showed. Intellectual self-awareness and artistic ego could not

6 A great metaphor for this incompatibility was given by the Romanian writer Andrei Codrescu in his book *The Posthuman Dada Guide: Tzara and Lenin Play Chess*, in which he imagined a chess game being played by the "father of Dadaism" and the "father of Communism" in a Zürich cafe in 1916. On one side of the table, Tzara is playing for "chaos, libido, the creative, and the absurd", while Lenin is opposing him with "reason, order, an understandable social taxonomy, predictable structures" (Codrescu, 2009: 11–12).

harmonise with disciplinary party dictates, just as transgressive artistic expression did not meet the communist parties' expectations for the role of art in the revolutionary struggle. Eric Hobsbawm saw the essence of the misunderstanding in the fact that there was no necessary or logical connection between the two avant-gardes: the assumption that what is revolutionary in art must be revolutionary in politics (and vice-versa) "is based on a semantic muddle over different ways of understanding the term 'revolutionary' or similar terms" (Hobsbawm, 2012: 246).

For Marino, who followed Benjamin's line of thought, it was the question of the utopian dream of an intimate union of the literary and socio-political revolts, because the avant-garde opposition rises up essentially in the name of aesthetic rather than political values (Марино, 1997: 56). Hence the difference in goals and methods, the divergence between literary engagement and revolutionary praxis, and between authentic internal revolt and the action programmes of political parties. Some had accepted and joined these programmes, but given up on account of "not being able to accept the discipline of the struggle", while others had "cultivated and proclaimed the principle of pure revolution prior to any precise political engagement" (60). An example of the former were the Berlin Dadaists, who, in spite of their support for the German revolutionary movement, "always left the side door open for a quick getaway, if this should be necessary to preserve what Dada valued most – personal freedom and independence" (Lewis, 1990: 10). The latter, however, even when they identified with the idea of social change, believed that art contributed to that change autonomously, on a spiritual and cognitive level, moving along a track detached from practical politics. This was the case with the majority of German Expressionists, who wanted to be "revolutionaries in writ-

ing, and not revolutionaries in politics” (Julio Cortázar), and whose politics of representation critically reexamined the ideological foundations and values of Wilhelminian society, but lacked attachment to specific social goals and political ideologies. Some other members of the avant-garde, however, did not believe in revolution but in evolution, as in the case of De Stijl, whose aesthetic ideology was socially reformist and based on the idea of the development of a new consciousness in all spheres of life through a new plastic art which reconciled the individual and the collective. Then again, the Zürich Dadaists, for example, were apolitical, and, if they believed in revolution, understood it abstractly and dreamily, as an “imaginary explosion of freedom with sublime enthusiasm” (Žižek), after which some better future would produce itself. Finally, it is important to set apart a unique example of the avant-garde that eventually transformed its activity into practical politics: in 1918, the Italian Futurists founded the Futurist Political Party, which, on the basis of a programme that combined nationalism, militarism and socialist democracy, aimed at merging the political and artistic revolutions in order to achieve futuristic rule in Italy.⁷

Regardless of whether they engaged with political parties, or distanced themselves from them, the avant-gardes were characterised by a “para-partisan” or “para-party” (Lev Kreft) group organisation, and by the use of political propaganda methods for affirmation of their ideas, attitudes and works. As Alain Badiou has explained, “avant-garde” means group, even if this group only comprises a handful of members, and this organised sectarian dimension already forges an at least

7 The party failed in the elections, and Futurism began to lose its characteristic features, disintegrating into various factions, the most important of which, led by Marinetti, collaborated with the fascist apparatus of force, and underwent a transformation from a progressive to a reactionary artistic movement.

allegorical link between the avant-gardes and politics, primarily with the communist parties (Badiou, 2007: 133). On the one hand, this sectarian activity rested on the notions of ideational community, collective production and intersubjective exchange, on ‘cooperatives’ that challenged the classical ideologue of the individual author-subject and created an alternative model of social organisation, through which a new type of relationship between artist and society is established. On the other hand, there was the belief that the collectivity, that ‘We’ which was speaking from avant-garde manifestos and proclamations, was a powerful agent of constitutive power, similar to the proletarian revolutionary subject that Marx and Engels lauded in *The Communist Manifesto*. Regardless of their different ambitions and conceptions, modernist art collectives gave the impression of acting as either agents or symptoms of supra-individual forces, as apostles and prophets, most often in the name of the wide-ranging forces of social, political, and technological modernisation (Stimson and Sholette, 2007: 5).

Marino also drew our attention to the fact that the theory and practice of the two spheres can be convergent, sometimes even identical. According to Filiberto Menna, the rapprochement of the aesthetic and social revolutions should be viewed in the light of the fact that revolutionary thought postulates the disintegration of the political at the end of history and its “death” in the definitive transparency of the social, “in the same way as the avant-gardes presuppose the ‘death’ of art and its transformation into a diffuse aesthetics and a different life practice” (Mena, 1984: 13). The Italian art historian alluded to Marx’s conception of a self-governing state or people’s democracy, which breaks with the political state that serves the interests of the ruling class and financial capital through parliamentary democracy. Marx believed

that the process of the dissolution of the state into society closed “the gap between state and society, and between politics and everyday life”, and restored power to the people in their everyday life, which had been taken away from them by state (Eagleton, 2011: 190). The tendencies of the avant-gardes to bridge the gap between art and life by a radical reorganisation of the ways of art production and reception, as well as changing the identity of the artist, were analogous to Marx’s vision of socialist democracy. The dissolution of the political within the social, and of the artistic within the aesthetic, opened the possibility of a “total metamorphosis of everyday life” (Henri Lefebvre), when art and politics, as autonomous institutions, would eventually disappear. According to Marx, autonomy would also be lost progressively by other alienated forms of human practice and thought, through a movement towards the achievement of “democracy without professionals”.

With communism, said Marx, man’s creative potentials, realised but alienated in the bourgeois institution of art, would reestablish themselves in everyday life, giving it a new quality. According to Lefebvre, Marx imagined a society in which, by arriving at the spontaneity of everyday life and the original creative zeal, everyone would “perceive the world like the artist, enjoying it with the sensual eye of a painter, the ear of a musician, the language of a poet” (Lefebvre, 1988: 243). In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels predicted that in a communist society, the exclusive concentration of artistic talent in chosen individuals would disappear, because the division of labour and the class structure of culture would disappear. In a communist society, “there will no longer be painters, but only people who, among other activities, engage themselves in painting”, and anyone “in whom resides a potential Raphael will be able to develop without hindrances”.

The American literary critic Edmund Wilson, referring to Engels' preface to his *Dialectics of Nature*, found that the forebears of Marxism were "influenced by the ideals of the versatile Renaissance man, the 'complete man' who, like Leonardo, was a painter, mathematician, engineer... before the division of labour divided human nature and limited people to only one function" (Wilson, 1983: 283). That is why communism is possible only under conditions that enable a comprehensive development for everyone, where no one is limited to only a certain type of profession, but where everyone can participate in all forms of work. For Marx, art is a paradigm of free creative work and liberation from the constraints of material life, and, therefore, has a significant role in the self-realisation of every human being in a future classless society. Marx's considerations of the aesthetic were in line with his humanistic assumptions, in the same way as this very assumption was possible thanks to the understanding of art as an "authentic expression of humanity", and, on a more individual level, thanks to Marx's own artistic impulse.

Marx and Engels's utopian vision of the transformation of the social function of art and aesthetic experience in communism was limited to these scanty indications. Contrary to the profound revolution they had carried out in philosophy, political economy, and political theory, they had not devoted themselves to aesthetics thoroughly, nor had they systematically developed their theses on literature and art. They made a series of incidental and inconsistent observations, arguments and remarks (first published collectively in 1933 in Moscow, in Russian, edited by Lunacharsky, Mikhail Lifshitz and Franz P. Schiller), presented in texts that varied in content and fundamental intention. Therefore, there cannot be a question of some original Marxist aesthetics or science

of art, but only of a collection of fragments that considered issues of art and aesthetics as part of their critique of the capitalist mode of production and objectified social relations. And that is why we can agree with those Marxist aestheticians who have claimed that no reconstruction of Marx and Engels's observations on art would lead us to some complete and comprehensive system, and thus to some normative formulation of an artistic model that should be implemented in practice. The vagueness of the forebears of Marxism in their approach to art made their thought open to "independent research" (Lukács) and interpretations, which further led to the development of individual variations and directions in aesthetic thought within the corpus of theories that fall under Marxist aesthetics.

Interestingly, Marxist aestheticians have generally shunned elaborations on Marx and Engels's fragments on art and aesthetics in communism, especially as it has remained unclear whether they predicted the death of art or some form of its socialisation through the removal of the aura of exclusivity. On the other hand, communism had become an attractive political solution for the avant-garde because, crowned with the aura of the "true realm of freedom", it offered the promise of an entirely new ontology of the creation and social function of art. A pioneering example was the most creative Marxist thinker in the world of 19th-century art, William Morris, who, even before studying Marx, had come to the conclusion that the fate of art is inseparable from social revolution. According to Morris, art must die with capitalist society in order to be reborn with socialism: "The old superstitions and conventionalities of art have got to be swept away", and it will become a "spontaneous expression of the pleasure of life innate in the whole people" (Thompson, 1976: 665). Morris's vision of aesthetic socialism

did not foresee the abolition of art as a professional activity; instead, it assigned to the arts, and above all the crafts, a key role in encouraging creative satisfaction in work, individual education and the refinement of everyday life. Morris was a “romantic revolutionary” (E. P. Thompson) who preached a pastoral vision of a premodern social utopia (described in the utopian novel *News from Nowhere*) opposed to industrial civilisation; but his ideas anticipated the emergence of modernist projects for the construction of an aesthetic society, especially those which saw in design and architecture significant means of achieving the qualitative transformation of everyday life, such as the Werkbund and the Bauhaus.

A comparison of Marx’s notion of unmediated aesthetic experience with avant-garde programmes of integrating art into life practice could begin with Surrealism, which, inspired by Lautréamont’s aphorism “Poetry must be made by all, not by one”, advocated the termination of the distinction between artists and non-artists, professionals and amateurs. Driven by Breton’s maxim “We have no talent”, taken from the *First Surrealist Manifesto*, Belgrade Surrealists Aleksandar Vučo, Djordje Jovanović and Petar Popović pointed out that Surrealism did not strive to create any new aesthetics or poetry, because “it considers poetry a separate category of human existence and not an artistic form of expression” (Vučo, Jovanović and Popović, 1931: 327). Poetry, regarded by the Surrealists as a synonym for all the arts, was no longer an individual’s property but everyone’s practice, with everyone creating and receiving it, spontaneously inventing new forms and ways of expression. Indications of the path towards “a poetry that is made by all” were the surrealist procedures and techniques, which lead to the deskilling of artistic labour: automatic writing, dream recording, collage,

frottage, decalcomania, *cadavre exquis*, photogram, etc. In this context, Karel Teige predicted that, thanks to the abolition of the “class principle of education”, such experiments would eventually step out of the circle of elite audiences and become comprehensible to the masses, converting into “folk art” (Tajge, 1977: 66). For Teige, who elaborated on the Marx-Engels premise in *The German Ideology*, there was no doubt that the term “folk art” would one day become “archaeological”, because the laicisation of the work of art would lead to the gradual disappearance of art in its earlier forms.

Similarly, Sergei Tretyakov believed that the maximalist goal of the Russian Futurists – “Art for all, not as a product of consumption, but as a product of production” – would be achieved when the art of writing, thanks to the deprofessionalisation and deindividualisation of authors, became one of the fundamental human activities.⁸ Following Marx’s vision of overcoming an art perceived as the property of specialised “wizards” and “illusionists”, Tretyakov made a proposal – inspired by Alexander Bogdanov’s *tektology* (the universal science of organisation) – for redefining artistic creation in the direction of an organised process, in which the division into producers and consumers would be annulled. This “true art for all” would rest, therefore, on the collectivisation of production and consumption, which would lead to each segment of everyday life being coloured by art:

8 Tretyakov referred to the Proletcult practice of worker-correspondent, whose aim was to transform the passive consumer of information into an author and enable the inclusion of the working masses in the creation of press content. His slogans, such as ‘Our epics are the newspapers’ and ‘All the nameless masses, from the workers to the first striker, are the collective Tolstoy of our days’, reflect the idea of replacing traditional literary genres with new ones, such as the newspaper feuilleton, agit-verse (*аітїўка*), etc.

Art's centre of gravity will be situated in life itself, in the lines and forms of its objects, in everyday language, in the sounds of plants, factories, ports, streets, tractors and workers' assemblies. To each according to his needs: such is the precept of the revolution. The attention of the constructors of our life must be focused not on *perfect works of art*, but on the *perfect individual*, full of organisational skill and the will to overcome the obstacles that lie along the path to the total mastery of life (Tret'iakov, 2006: 18).

According to Tret'yakov, art was destined to experience a mutation and put itself at the service of everyday life in order to achieve its real and not its idealistic transformation, so that the work of art would become life itself, with all the means at its service. That is why the Futurists saw their artistic work after the October Revolution as work on changing the human psyche, in the sense of encouraging flexibility and creativity with the aim of forming a new communist man, whose aesthetic views were to reflect his modern industrial sensibility.

On the other side of the demand for the abolition of art as a specialised activity there were proposals for "its redemption and reintegrated existence" (Gianni Vattimo) through its transformation into a social form of work. This was the case with the Russian Productivists, who believed they had found a formula for the delineation of the work of art by overcoming the division between intellectual and manual work, that is, between non-utilitarian artistic work and utilitarian factory work. According to their conception, by entering into production, into the factory, the artist is transformed into an "engineer-constructor" or "engineer-organiser", and art is removed from the autarchy of "laboratory work" and becomes utilitarian through an organic union with industry. As Slobodan Mijušković observed, it was the kind of compro-

mise that did not overlook any artistic experience or method of artistic creation: “It (art) does not exist as an established form, recognisable on the basis of previous experience, but as a ‘creative substance’ (Tarabukin), which will continue to live in new, socially purposeful forms” (Mijušković, 1998: 276). With Lefebvre’s interpretative key to Marx, it can be said that the Productivists sought to abolish art as an autonomous technical category by resorbing it into industrialised everyday life, which would not be possible without the Soviet techno-machine paradigm attracting new cultural forms, and a radical transformation of everyday life suitable to the building of a socialist society. Moreover, the programmes of the avant-gardists regarding artistic creation, the organisation of work and use of modern technology, exceeded immediate political and social goals, and were ahead of what was conceivable in Russia in the 1920s. Marx’s vague vision of the function of art in communism was, so to speak, elaborated in theory and concretised in practice by the radical Russian avant-garde, which believed that the task of the artist in Soviet society was revolution in all aspects of everyday life.

One could find more proposals for the melting of art into life praxis – which could be called *artistic communism* – but all these proposals essentially start with the undermining of their own foundations, which Theodor Adorno called “the total revolt against organisation” – against the institution of art. It is well known what the final outcome of this revolt was, as embodied in the pungent mantra, *the death of the avant-garde*: instead of the total eradication of the autonomy of art, a recuperation ensued, as institutional art structures in the West resisted the attacks from the avant-gardes, confirming the autonomy of art in relation to life praxis, and allowing the simultaneous expansion of the field of artistic possibilities beyond all conceivable boundaries. At the same

time, the insistence on an explosion of aesthetic experience beyond the boundaries of art lost its revolutionary quality and dissipated, as Menna noted, “into a diffuse and unspecified area, in a field devoid of structures and clear outlines” (24).⁹ Analogous with what has been said above, Marx’s idea of closing the gap between state and society as a precondition for building socialism underwent a complete deviation, as was evident in the Soviet Union: socialism was established by the strengthening of the state and the complete concentration within it of the political.

According to the American philosopher Gabriel Rockhill, there is a historical synchronicity between the “failure” of the avant-garde and the disintegration of the great narratives of the communist tradition, collapse of aesthetic utopias and political utopias, and end of “aesthetic myths” and “political fantasies” (Rockhill, 2014: 92). Rockhill has critically examined subsequent theoretical interpretations of this synchronicity, stating that “the true utopia, as it appears at the ultimate end of history, is historiographical and epistemological, rather than aesthetic or political”: we supposedly know, unlike our “benighted” predecessors, that the course of history cannot be changed by radical art or revolutionary politics. This stereotypical theoretical utopia – which Rockhill analysed with reference to Peter Bürger’s diagnosis that failure is nothing but a reaffirmation of the utopian character of the avant-garde – serves to put a definitive end to all other utopian aspirations by purporting to have attained absolute

9 The arts’ stepping out of the traditional framework was connected with the acceptance of mass reproduction technologies, which enabled, if not determined one form of generalisation of the aesthetic. It was Benjamin who first drew attention to this in ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, where he observed that the death of art was not only the fruit of a revolutionary reintegration of existence but also a general aestheticisation of life and politics (fascism) through the mass media.

knowledge concerning what is historically possible (93). Later interpretations disqualified the revolutionary projects of Modernism by declaring them incomplete or unreal, and even “nonsense experiments” with no emancipatory results (Jürgen Habermas). In line with such views, revolutionary projects had erupted and blazed in their own radicalism, which had lost its historical reason and dispersed into particles that here and there gave off sparks of utopian hope.

The subsequent awareness that artistic and social revolutions were utopian, because the horizon of achievements did not meet the horizon of expectations, overlooked the fact that the horizon of expectations was constantly being corrected to make space for new areas of experience.¹⁰ In other words, the horizon of expectations did not disappear but was modified, losing the totalising, metaphysical and futuristic character that distinguished the *great utopias* of Modernism. Thus, the utopian contents of the avant-gardes continued “to circle the cultural environment” (Menna) and inspire new strategies of arriving at the experience of art as an anti-aesthetic and integral fact (Situationism, Fluxus, Happening). The neo-avant-gardes renewed with theoretical-critical rigour the avant-garde call for the deautonomisation of art, through various practices of the defetishisation, dematerialisation and democratisation of the work of art/act (“Everything is art and everyone can practice it”, read the credo of Fluxus’s *spiritus movens*, the communist George Maciunas), turning it into an everyday event, a “social sculpture” or some other form of social participation. In all these strategies, there was

10 This is evidenced by an anecdote passed on by the German historian Reinhart Koselleck. After a speech in which Nikita Khrushchev claimed that communism was almost visible on the horizon, one of the listeners asked him what he meant by “horizon”. The Soviet leader advised him to consult a dictionary, which he did, encountering the following definition: “Horizon, an apparent line that separates the earth from the sky and disappears as you approach it” (Doorman, 2003: 24).

an obvious effort to restructure and redefine the experience of the avant-garde on new political foundations and in new historical circumstances, without renouncing the desire for radical cultural change and the willingness to act on it vigorously.

The same could be said for the idea of communism. Contrary to the standard anticommunist argument that communism was judged by history and proclaimed to be without a future, Bruno Bosteels has insisted on the opposite, referring to Sartre's "supposedly outdated" definition of Marxism as the unsurpassable horizon of our time. The term *horizon* for him indicates a certain dimension of experience that we can never lose, which is *real*, "not only in terms of the impossible, but also in terms of the *actual* format, conditions and forms of our surroundings" (Bostels, 2014: 194). In order for communism not to remain mere speculation "devoid of contact with reality in the manner of the old idealism", it is necessary, Bosteels continued, for communism to rediscover "a way of inscribing itself in the concrete body, the collective flesh and thought of internationalist political subjectivity", without the necessity of having that act of subjectivisation go through the traditional form of the party (201). Marx's idea of communism has, on the reverse side of bureaucratised real socialism and its totalitarian deviations, continued to inspire the various micropolitics of collective emancipation with its universal transferability, although deprived of faith in its overall future feasibility. Or, as Žižek has put it in another way, communism has long ceased to be an ideal; it is a reaction to social antagonisms, and, therefore, the essential problems remain how to formulate the antagonisms that will generate a communist idea and where to look for a new modality of this idea.

Although the utopian ethos was woven into the mental tissue of the aesthetic avant-gardes, we are using, instead of the term *utopia*, the term *optimal projection* as being more appropriate for the essence of the avant-garde programmes, as was standardised in Yugoslav avant-garde studies thanks to the convincing argumentation of its creator, Aleksandar Flaker. By optimal projection, Flaker understood movement as the choice of an “optimal variant” (Yuri Lotman) in overcoming reality, as opposed to utopia, which signified a closed space with an ideal social structure as opposed to real social relations (Flaker, 1982: 68). Unlike mainstream Modernism, which placed an emphasis on the *work*, an artifact isolated from the flow of everyday life and intended for aesthetic contemplation, the avant-garde programmes strove for a future which was brought into the living reality, and placed an emphasis on the *act*, because the act can only think its performative effects in the present. The notion of optimal projection highlighted the constructive principle of avant-garde texts, their “orientation towards the future in the name of which it is possible to reevaluate the past and deny the present”, i.e. “to perform an aesthetic revaluation associated with the social functions of the moral, ethical and social revaluation of the whole system of life relations” (Flaker, 1982: 66). According to Flaker, the introduction of the future into the present was explicitly confirmed by the self-naming of certain avant-garde movements: Futurism, Constructivism, Zenitism, Ultraism. The avant-garde icon of the first socialist country, Vladimir Mayakovsky, went a step further by assessing the present from the perspective of the future, and even interpreted his literary attribute “futurist” as both pertaining to a certain literary direction and to a man of the future (Russian *будетлянин*) – a man *from* the future and a man *for* the future.

The notion of optimal projection can also be applied to Marx and Engels' definition of communism, embodied in the oft-quoted formulation from *The German Ideology*: "Communism for us is not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things". Apart from the general determinants (social property, liberated labour, classless society, abolition of the state), in Marx and Engels' writings there is neither a systematic description of a communist society, nor a clear vision of the "communist paradise", and thus the impression is given that they were more concerned with what communism was not than what it was. There was a reason for this: they predicted that the transition from capitalism to communism would be a long and arduous process which would take place in two stages: the *dictatorship of the proletariat* as the first phase of the revolutionary transformation of capitalism, and as the second phase, *pure communism*, whose form was to be given by communists themselves when the appropriate historical conditions were met. Referring to Engels' brief definition of communism as the "doctrine of the conditions of the liberation of the proletariat", Alberto Toscano has explained that this doctrine and these conditions are not fixed, that Marx and Engels had not succeeded in offering ready-made solutions or some predetermined structure, and that therefore "communism has never been freed of the need for formulation" (Toscano, 2012: 186). At the same time, it was important for Marx to emphasise that communists were not supposed to be social utopians who invented fantastic rescue systems for the misery of the oppressed classes, but were meant to become an expression and tool of social practice directed at abolishing unfreedom and alienation. Criticising social utopians, Marx pointed out in a letter that "the doctrinaire and

inevitably fantastic anticipation of the programme of action for the revolution of the future only diverts one from the struggle in the present” (Geoghegan, 2008: 51). Predicting the future can be not only meaningless, but also harmful, because it encourages the false belief that history inevitably moves forward, instead of first resolving the contradictions of the present that prevent a better future from happening. Marx’s critique of the utopian spirit in politics has been poetically summed up by Giorgio Agamben: “Our dreams cannot see us, this is the tragedy of utopia”.

The similarity between Marxist and avant-gardist optimal projection is also reflected in the presence of an element of fiction in projecting the future, which is in line with Bosteels’ thesis that all emancipatory politics relies on a certain dose of fiction, namely, “on a fictive gap between the given task and the ability to make it suitable for performance by a certain subject (or group)” (Bostels, 2014: 228). In order for a new social order to be projected, and for a new art and a new culture to be conceived, a certain fictive extension or “generic addition to the *status quo*, which is neither dogmatic nor utopian”, is needed (ibid.). Both art and politics possess the capacity to invent alternatives to the present, the former as the most potent form of fiction, and the latter when, driven by the impulse to create a new social order, it has to use imagination to transcend the mental boundaries set by the existing order. In this sense, we can refer to Rancière’s notion of fiction as a reconceptualisation of sensory coordinates and the semantic order that “belongs” to them – a fiction that destroys the established representations and creates unexpected relationships between the perceived, the sensory and the semantic (Rancière, 2010: 140).

Although Marx and Engels used the term *utopian socialism* to emphasise the “excess of fantasy” in their predecessors’

consideration of scientific socialism, they themselves could not avoid the use of fantasy in the critical analysis of capitalism and the projection of communist society. In this regard, Herbert Marcuse noted the potentially progressive role of fantasy in Marxism as a bridge between the “irrationality of capitalism”, of which the forebears of Marxism spoke in *The Communist Manifesto*, and the “rationality of communism” as its alternative. “The abyss between rational and present reality cannot be bridged by conceptual thought”, he said, “because in order to retain what is not yet present as a goal in the present, fantasy is required” (Geoghegan, 2008: 129). For Marx and Engels, this fantasy, to use Marcuse’s term, was “accountable fantasy”, since it found the parameters of its development in reality (the separation of what is possible from what is impossible), and its source of cognizance in literature and art. Likewise, Lenin gave fantasy a significant role (“We must dream!”), and not only in art but also in science, practical life and politics, because fantasy for a man is “running ahead” in relation to that “product to which his hands are only just beginning to lend shape” (Lenjin, 1957: 124). Before the October Revolution, he criticised his party comrades for their excessive sobriety and lack of fantasy.

It is known that Marx and Engels wrote poetry in their youth, and that the former was an exceptional connoisseur and passionate reader of world literature. Marx left behind an unfinished fantasy drama in verse, *Oulanem*, and the humorous novel *Scorpion and Felix*, and he intended to write a study of Balzac after the completion of *Capital*, as well as a drama about his favourite heroes – the Gracchi brothers, the tribunes of Ancient Rome. Although he gave up writing poetry in order to, as he stated in a letter, dedicate himself to work for the “benefit of humanity”, he perceived himself as a “poet-dialectician”, and considered his writings as an artistic

whole. As for art, Marx was primarily interested in how it achieves concreteness, sociality and historicity, and, simultaneously, universality and timelessness – in how it lives in time and out of time. He gave preference to the cognitive aspects of a literary work over the ideological, and that is why he did not mind Balzac's monarchism, since, in his novels, he found insightful descriptions of social and economic relations which he could apply in the analysis of bourgeois society. He admired Greek art, which he considered the norm and eternal model, despite the fact that it originated from a slave-owning social order and reflected a mythological view of the world. He greatly appreciated Greek tragedy, especially *Prometheus Bound*, the “patron saint of the proletariat”, considering Aeschylus the greatest playwright of all time, along with Shakespeare, whom he knew by heart and often quoted.

In literary works, Marx discovered characters, phrases, images and metaphors that helped him to express his own thoughts and present his arguments more powerfully. His works abound in quotations, paraphrases, allusions, and references to literature, and, according to the Polish literary theoretician Maria Janion, *Capital* is the most significant example: *Faust* and *The Apocalypse* meet in one paragraph, his shrewd interpretation of *Robinson Crusoe* becomes the basis for important economic analyses, without Shakespeare's “unaccommodated man” there would be no Marx's “economic man”, and ancient mythology serves as a symbolic repertoire of the most important life situations (Janjion, 1976: 195). There is the impression, Janion concluded, that “for Marx, the exposition of his theory of the capital would simply be impossible without that network of concepts and literary imagination”, which was a procedure closely associated with the Greek philosophers who “borrowed profusely from the works of poets and referred to the events described in them as facts of life” (196). This was

also noticed by Veselin Masleša, one of the leading Yugoslav Marxists between the two world wars, when he wrote that, alongside its revolutionary scientific significance, *Capital* is characterised by high literary cogency: “*Capital* is brilliant literarily. The dry and heavy matter processed in it becomes a living and interesting text in Marx’s sentences, full of sarcasm, irony and witty remarks” (Masleša, 1934: 124). Finally, David Harvey has assessed *Capital* as “an astonishingly rich literary construction”, a multidimensional text containing an opaque and dense network of references, a great diversity of literatures written at different places and times (Harvey, 2010: 2). Therefore, it can be concluded that Marx was not only a revolutionary scientist but also an exceptional modernist writer, and that *Capital* is a complex intertextual work stepping out of the genre brackets of 19th-century scientific discourse, and “announcing” the citational and multigenre revolution of the 20th-century avant-garde.

Marx’s literary imagination is not only displayed in his analysis of the “poetics of capitalism”, but also in the reflections on social revolution, above all in the oft-quoted passage from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past. Earlier revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to drug themselves concerning their own content. In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead. There the phrase went beyond the content; here the content goes beyond the phrase (Marks, 2017: 18).

According to Terry Eagleton's interpretation, this passage calls into question the concept of representative aesthetics: previous revolutions have been formalistic, engrafting factitious "phrase" or form onto their content, while the content of socialist revolution is excessive of all form, out in advance of its own rhetoric, and signifying only at its "absolute moment of becoming", and thus a kind of sublimity (Eagleton, 2004: 214). This means that the anti-capitalist revolution, instead of remaining in awe of the past, must invite the future more decisively, and come up with phrases, genres and forms that derive their "poetry" from the future, in which Martin Puchner has recognised the resonance of the original meaning of the Greek term *poiesis* as an act of 'bringing into being' (Puchner, 2006: 1). Thus, for Puchner, *The Communist Manifesto* was more than an announcement of the arrival of social revolution, it was the act of its self-establishment and self-creation, a new literary genre that the 20th-century avant-gardes adopted as a key rhetorical device, starting with Marinetti's ur-manifesto of 1909. The epic, heroic and prophetic poetry of communism, at the same time loud, antagonistic and militant, as coined in the *Manifesto*, found its transposition in the artistic manifesto as "ardent action writing" (Stephen Marcus) and the generic denotation of the avant-garde. The announcement of a revolution that would bring about a total change of the existing situation, implied in the cases of both communism and the avant-garde, a strong faith in their own mission, which, starting from the here and now, looked beyond the horizon of the future. As Badiou has noted, the avant-gardes had activated formal interruptions in the present and at the same time produced, in the form of manifestos and declarations, the rhetorical envelope for that activation "in the fictive future", calling this double production "new artistic experience" (Badiou, 2007: 139).

The collaboration between the Bolsheviks and the avant-garde in Russia gave an extraordinary impetus to avant-garde aspirations throughout Europe for a tangible conjunction of the aesthetic and social revolutions – for a completely new artistic experience. In the eyes of its European colleagues, the Soviet-Russian avant-garde was perceived as an accomplished avant-garde operating under the patronage of the state, which itself was on the experimental path of building socialism as a “lower phase of communist society” (Lenin). That is why Hans Richter, recalling the enthusiastic reception of the Soviet-Russian avant-garde in Western Europe in the early 1920s, enthusiastically stated that it was “a rare moment in history in which the government and people, patron and art, wanted one and the same thing” (Forgač, 2013: 126). With an incredible concentration of avant-garde experiments in all artistic disciplines, Russia was identified not only as the unofficial capital of the avant-garde, but also as an experimental laboratory for testing the functionality of avant-garde programmes in the new organisation of society.

European avant-gardists were particularly fascinated by the bold radicalism of their Russian colleagues, their resolute denial of traditional art forms and modes of aesthetic judgment. “The merciless destruction of the past” was the consequence, as Boris Groys has observed, of two interrelated facts: revolutionary ideology had no genuine Russian roots but was imported from the West; while the Russian tradition was “associated with backwardness and humiliation” in relation to more developed countries, therefore “evoking disgust rather than compassion among the majority of the intelligentsia and, as became clear in the course of the revolution, among the people as well” (Groys, 2009: 9). No revolution in the West could be successful because the Western revolutionary ide-

ology was aware of its dependence on tradition and always ended in a counter-revolution which led to the establishment of an order that was in continuity with the old order, even though it included elements of the new. What Groys intends to say is that the October Revolution, unlike the revolution in 1848 or the Paris Commune, brought what Marx called “the cleansing of the Augean stables” as a precondition for a fresh start in all areas of social production. It is in that sense we should interpret Malevich’s proposal that all paintings in museums be burned and their ashes exhibited (because there would be no other art than Suprematism), as well as Mayakovsky’s demand that Pushkin, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy be “thrown from the steamship of our time” and that we start over. According to the historian Sheila Fitzpatrick, after the revolution “an iconoclastic attitude to the past was *de rigueur* among young radical intellectuals” and if they had had their way, “traditional bourgeois art would have been liquidated even more quickly than the bourgeois political parties” (Fitzpatrick, 2001: 85).¹¹

If we apply the geopolitical criterion for reviewing the field of the *avant-gardes* after the October Revolution, then we can speak of *two avant-gardes*, the one operating under socialism in Russia and the other operating under capitalism in the rest of Europe. The former was subsidised by the state and freed from the yokes of the market, occupied sinecures in state bodies and art institutions, and thereby provided with the opportunity to reform them, put itself at the service of state propaganda, and even dominate the arts sector, while the latter acted on the margins of the bourgeois cul-

11 Aware of these destructive impulses, the Bolshevik government established two years after the revolution the official Committee for the Protection of Museums, Works of Art and Historical Monuments, headed by Maxim Gorky, who stood out during the revolution for his efforts to preserve cultural goods.

tural system as its opposition. The new social contract and the entire social atmosphere in post-October Russia had the characteristics of a *maturation period*, similar to all revolutionary epochs, and it was in that atmosphere that the Russian avant-garde found a motivation that was different from that of the avant-gardes in the West. For the most part, the Russian avant-garde identified with the revolution and thus set itself the practical task of participating in the grandiose project of creating a new society.

This is what Stephen Bann has pointed out, when emphasising the difference between Russian and European Constructivism: the former was guided by political and social imperatives and could identify with the struggle of the proletariat through “intellectual-material production”, while the latter was guided by aesthetic imperatives and was forced to concentrate on the problem of communication from across the barriers of nationality and profession (Bann, 1979: xxxv–xxxvi). This statement, however, must be taken with a grain of salt, because although European Constructivists were usually not wholehearted Marxists or members of left-wing parties, they were not apolitical either, since most of them expressed their commitment to social progress.¹² As Timothy Benson observed, the utilitarian ideology of Moscow Constructivism gave way to a “broader utopian ethos” in Berlin, the hub of international constructivism, while constructivist visual language was transformed and adapted to a new purpose by the artists who worked in this cosmopolis, especially those coming from The Netherlands and Hungary

12 This is evidenced by the fact that the attempt to establish the Constructivist International (1922) had failed because some artists, including Theo van Doesburg and Kurt Schwitters, spoke out against adhering to the leadership of the Communist Party, as demanded by Hungarian and Russian Constructivists (Van den Berg and Fenders, 2013: 166).

(Benson and Forgács, 2002: 20). Hungarian, Polish and Czech Constructivists established direct communication with their Russian colleagues, although each group developed its own version of the constructivist idiom in accordance with its own capacities, cultural situations and material conditions. Constructivism was not the only modernist style that had, by dispersion, been subject to local adaptations; but the specificity of Russian Constructivism lay in the fact that it was more rigorously anti-artistic, and programmatically guided by practical goals set by the ideology in power.

The nucleus of the Russian avant-garde was formed in pre-revolutionary times, in Tsarist Russia, but the Revolution gave a political focus to radical artistic movements, resulting in “a specific conjunction, a union even, of the formal and the political: the avant-garde was practically transformed by a wider social revolution” (Wood, 1992: 9). The sovietisation of the Russian avant-garde led to a change in its cultural status, with its shifting from the margins of artistic events to the centre, which represented a change in artistic mentality, from bohemian to class-conscious (or close to that), and thus a change in the code of artistic culture. Artists stepped free from the preserve of self-purposefulness because the revolution “infused reality to their profession and a long-sought direction to their energy” (Camilla Gray), i.e. the possibility of implementing their ideas on a broader social level, which was associated with the invention of new production techniques, forms of distribution and ways of receiving art. This implied the annulment of the autonomy of art as a bourgeois legacy, as Mayakovsky’s speech, given at a discussion for the “broad labour masses” held in the Winter Palace in 1918, demonstrates:

Now, as has been proclaimed, is not the time for leisure paintwork – a square canvas is, after all, a weak and insignificant means of communication (with loathsome associations with the bourgeois system) when you can paint the streets, and when squares and bridges become an obvious field of activity. We do not need a dead mausoleum of art where dead works are worshipped, but a living factory of the human spirit – in the streets, trams, factories, workshops and workers' houses (Grej, 1987: 219–220).

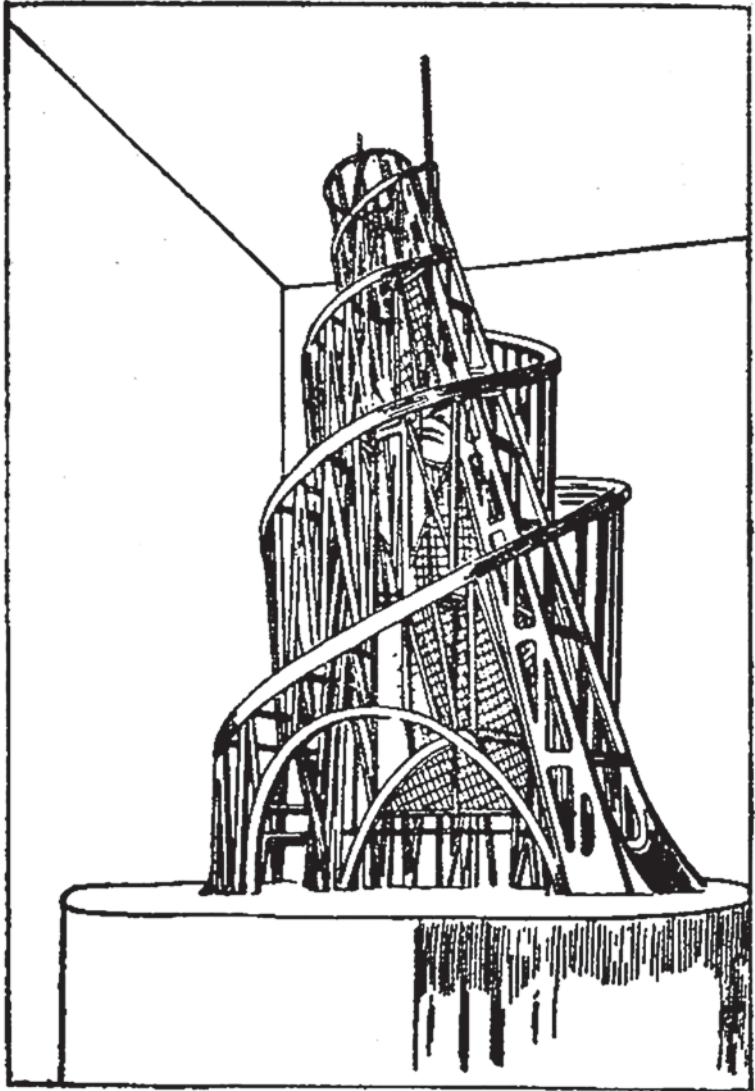
The avant-garde placed formal experiment at the service of stimulating a “new experience of the world”, “the construction of a new life” and “the aestheticisation of work”, believing that it deserved a full mandate, if not the exclusive right, to transpose revolutionary tasks into the domain of art. Marx's dichotomy of base and superstructure was practically turned upside-down because radical artists believed that art represented part of the base, not an upgrade of social production. Thus the Futurists strove to demonstrate the correspondence of their aesthetic revolution with the social revolution, connecting the proletariat with Futurism – as Nikolay Punin put it, “We should not live our life but build it, as does the working class. In this sense, we, the Futurists, were anticipated and called to work together by K. Marx himself: do not explain the world but change it – and you will be in the future” (Sola, 1987: 55). The Constructivists accepted the “fusion of ideological and practical imperatives” (Alexei Gan) dictated by the party as their own task, endeavouring to contribute to the industrialisation of the country and the reorganisation of production along new scientific and technical lines. The “Programme of the Working Group of Constructivists” (1921) defined their ideological position as “scientific communism, built on the theory of historical materialism”, and revealed

their intention to achieve “the communist expression of material structures” by organising the material according to the principles of *tektonika* (the socially and politically appropriate use of industrial material), *construction* (the organisation of this material for a given purpose) and *faktura* (the conscious handling and manipulation of the material) (Lodder, 1992: 267). A similar meaning resonated from Dziga Vertov’s statement that the systematic use of experimental film procedures (“anomalies”, as he used to call them) – editing, fast motion, slow motion, reverse motion, and double exposure – should be put at the service of “a communist decipherment of the world”, which was inseparable from raising class consciousness (Michelson, 2003: 303). These examples of the intertwinement of the formal and the political testify not only in favour of the fact that the experimental search for socially transformative visual language was the artists’ primary goal, but also that the ideational-political explanation of that goal was equally important to them.

There is no doubt that internal dynamics played its part in the transformation of avant-garde trends (as Tatlin remarked, what happened in the social field in 1917 had already happened in the artistic field in 1914, when “material, volume and construction” became its foundation), but it was the post-October circumstances that led to every segment of life, every social activity and every profession acquiring a political dimension and, therefore, to the necessity to adapt one’s position accordingly. Citizens were required to behave not as passive observers of the process of building a new society, but to actively participate in it, either through personal initiatives or mass mobilisations which were supposed to demonstrate identification with the Bolshevik project. Regardless of their political affinities, artists actively participated in what the historian Stephen Kotkin dubbed “Bolshevik

self-fashioning”, when describing the “state-sponsored game of social identities” in which, at the beginning, setting “true believers” apart from those who only accepted the rules of the game was not possible (Kachurin, 2013: xviii). Adopting the rhetoric of Bolshevism to describe their own projects, as well as the programmes of the institutions with which they were affiliated, artists not only secured financial and political support from the state, but also demonstrated their commitment to “active participation in the evolving discourse of Soviet life”. (ibid.)

The Bolshevik leadership was familiar with the political affinities and tactics of artistic groups and individuals, ranging from left to right, from true believers, through fellow travellers to the apolitical, but in those years the predominant belief was that art should develop according to its own laws and without direct interference from the state, even if it showed signs of anti-authoritarianism, such as insisting on autonomy from the state or professing anarchistic ideas. There were no binding decrees or formal restrictions, and therefore it could be said, on the basis of Lenin’s article of 1905, ‘On Party Organisation and Party Literature’, that it was necessary to provide “unconditional freedom of personal initiative, individual inclinations, freedom of thinking and fantasy, form and content”, but on condition that this freedom be “different from the hypocritically masked freedom of a bourgeois writer bribed by literary careerism and individualism, ‘white-collar anarchism’ and production of goods for the market” (Lenin, 1957: 8). At work was more or less liberal model of cultural policy (minimum censorship and maximum creative freedom), which respected freedom of expression and the right to artistic initiative, whilst those artists who did not adapt to the post-revolutionary situation were permitted to emigrate (Kandinsky, Chagall, Gabo).



Vladimir Tatlin, 'Draft for the Monument to the Third International', *Zenit*, no. 11, 1922

The oft-quoted statement of the People's Commissar of Education and Culture, Anatoly Lunacharsky, read that the revolution gave a good deal to the arts, from living conditions, through economic position, to a new ideological content, but that the state also needed art as a "powerful weapon of agitation" and instrument for the cultural legitimisation of the Bolshevik state-political project. According to Susan Buck-Morss, the Bolsheviks "appropriated the utopian impulses of the avant-gardes by affirming them and channeling their energy into the political project" (Bak-Mors, 2005: 63), primarily thanks to Lunacharsky, who played the role of a mediator between the party and artistic groups. The pluralism of artistic styles – ranging from academic realism to radical avant-garde – flourished among rival groups, but Lunacharsky, in his attempt to put political loyalty before artistic style, "encouraged all these groups to compete with each other by proving they were authentic, that is, politically revolutionary, culturally proletarian and historically progressive" (Bak-Mors: 80). Later, however, as rivalry became more intense and when the party began to be expected to arbitrate in artistic matters, it informed those concerned, in its resolution 'On the Policy of the Party in the Sphere of Artistic Literature' (1925), that it objected to any kind of "communist arrogance as a most destructive phenomenon" and that it did not support any faction "in the field of literary forms" (Flaker, 1967: 450). It was emphasised that the party supported free competition between the various groups and currents and did not want to hand over the monopoly to any one group by issuing official-bureaucratic decisions, "even the most proletarian in its ideological content: that would mean, above all, the destruction of proletarian literature itself".

It was on the artistic left front where a heated debate took place about what a new art for a new society should be

like, be it called 'revolutionary', 'proletarian', 'socialist' or 'communist'. This confusion in terms, which served the political self-identification of groups, indicated a disagreement as regards what the critic James T. Farrell called literature's *transferable value*, in presenting the question of how it should express the ideas, feelings, needs, and goals of Soviet society. In spite of the spirit of tolerance, the state-party leadership was not indifferent to artistic appropriations of the goals of the revolution, not only because of aesthetic radicalism, but also because those appropriations clashed with its vision of overall social progress. Hence Lunacharsky's pedagogical warning that "communist art is only in its infancy", because as society was at a historical turning point, "complete human art is possible in the relatively near future, after the decisive victories of work over capital are achieved" (Lunačarski, 1983: 115). A similar opinion was expressed by Trotsky, who, referring to Proletcult in *Art and Revolution* (1924), noted that artistic creation must be an organic part of social life, the conditions for which had not yet been met: "Art in slave-owning and bourgeois societies was created over centuries, so the same holds true for proletarian art; a new culture comes after a long and difficult transition" (Trocki, 1971: 136). Elsewhere in the book, Trotsky criticised the "utopian sectarianism" and "anarchism" of the Futurists, whose demands he felt exhibited a "childishness" that lagged behind the workers' revolution, and concluding that theirs was by no means proletarian or communist art. He also objected to Mayakovsky that his ideas about revolution were not the ideas of a proletarian, but of a bohemian who understood nothing about communism.

These were corrections of the avant-garde's impatience to disrupt the continuum of history, which the party had defined and controlled, acting like the locomotive of historical

progress. The concept of socialism, or even more broadly, the theory of social development advocated by the Bolsheviks, was positivist-organicist in its respect for the “socio-economic formation as a relatively complete whole” (Lunacharsky) which had its own culture and art and was marked by the dominant class. In other words, art could not progress faster than society, not only because years of “a long and difficult transition” towards a complete socio-economic whole were lying ahead of it, but also because, according to Trotsky, communism did not yet have an artistic culture, but only a political one. He repeated Lenin’s well-known thesis that the primary tasks of the Bolsheviks were the conquest and stabilisation of political power, followed by cultural revolution, which would help the class struggle in all aspects and set the seal on the political hegemony of the proletariat. In Lenin’s view, cultural change, whether in terms of values, attitudes or skills, was of crucial importance for the building of socialism, because cultural backwardness (“the semi-Asiatic ignorance”) was an obstacle to it. He considered it not right for some in Moscow to be enjoying theatrical performances, while at the same time millions of people were illiterate and incapable of enjoying the art that in the new society should belong to everyone. Therefore, cultural work in the period of transition to socialism should not be focused on creating proletarian culture, but on raising the general educational and cultural levels of all strata of the population. “On that soil, a really new, great communist art must grow, and its form should correspond to its content”, concluded Vladimir Ilyich (Lenin, 1957: 216). As the cultural historian Christopher Read has pointed out, for Lenin and his comrades, Bolshevism was primarily a *cultural project* aimed at changing human nature, just as the key mechanism for achieving that aim, i.e. raising class consciousness, was primarily cultural (Read 2014: 2).

The question of what constitutes communist art was postponed to an indefinite future, and the proposals of the avant-gardes were initially ignored, and later criticised, until the political clash which started with Proletcult, representing the most organised, massive and influential leftist opposition to the Bolshevik cultural policy. The Proletcult ideologue Alexander Bogdanov – who had begun to elaborate on the concept of proletarian culture in the pre-October Bolshevik period – insisted on the planned creation of a completely new proletarian culture and class art, which, in the spirit of a working collectivism, would be an authentic expression of the working class and an organic factor in the transition to socialism. Lenin opposed Bogdanov’s view that the old culture must not be passively accepted but critically interpreted, announcing that proletarian culture could arise only on the foundations of bourgeois culture, through “development of the best patterns, traditions and results of existing culture” (Lenjin, 1957: 146). This means that socialist culture cannot be built iconoclastically *ex nihilo*, relying on the proletariat as the only creative subject; instead, it is necessary to adopt and “revise” the tradition, which is of universal importance for humanity.¹³ In this, Lenin was consistent with Marx, who warned that the socialist revolution simply was not meant to *abolish* anything but to *prevail dialectically*, in the same way as the bourgeois revolution prevailed over the feudal world while retaining all the true values and achievements

13 For Lenin, this tradition consisted primarily of the Russian classics, Pushkin, Chekhov and Tolstoy, particularly the last, about whom he wrote panegyrics, believing that he portrayed extraordinarily the epoch of preparation for the Russian peasants’ uprising (1905) and the mood of the broad masses. Nadezhda Krupskaya explained that “Russian literature was a tool for him to get to know life. And the more complete, versatile, profound these works were in depicting life, the more simple they were, the more Ilyich appreciated them” (Lenjin, 1957: 199). He disclosed that he did not appreciate or understand modern art, and that he felt incompetent and “barbaric” concerning that subject.

of previous epochs. Therefore, the dispute between Lenin and Bogdanov, as Lev Kreft has observed, was not a dispute for and against cultural tradition, but a “disagreement between the avant-gardist view that the past should be conquered, and Lenin’s belief that the past should be appropriated as it is” (Kreft, 1986: 125).

The assault on Proletcult marked the beginning of direct interference by the party leadership in artistic issues and its opposition to “destructive tendencies” in art. For the first time since the revolution, it became clear to both avant-gardes, the political and the artistic, that the Bolshevik revolution and the artistic revolution were not in harmony, as they had initially seemed to be. It turned out that the avant-garde’s demand for erasing the border between art and politics stood on unstable terrain and soon turned against those who made it. The German theatrologist Siegfried Melchinger described this split as follows:

At the moment the revolution seized political power, art, however aware still of the “no” it shared with it against everything in power up to that moment, collided with it. But this new, which had in the meantime been developing and had revealed itself, was already so far removed from the common source that it came or was bound to enter into contradiction with that new whose realisation had now to be fulfilled by politics. Art, if it was still revolutionary, was in a state of contradiction which now placed it in opposition also to the new one in power (Melchinger, 1989: 437).

What Osip Brick called “the annulment of revolutionary tone”, with a view to a return to artistic tradition through the strengthening of the groups of the realist school (the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia, 1922; the Society of Easel Painters, 1924), and the support they received from

the cultural administration, led to a gradual eradication of avant-garde principles and narrowing of avant-garde groups' space for action. Describing the cultural atmosphere in Russia in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Hans Günther stated that the canonisation of the new norms meant a transition from "egalitarian to hierarchical culture, from the moving to the static, from the collective to the individual, from mechanical to organic construction – a 'new humanism', from purposefulness to artistic value" (Günther, 1990: 202). The postulate of the cultural heritage and the classical ideal of man, as well as a general inclination towards everything "great" and "opulent" in all areas of culture was being advanced, concluded Günther, whilst the procedures of abstraction, construction, deformation, estrangement and montage inherent in the art of the left were rejected.

According to Groys, Lenin's launching of the market-oriented New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1922, which reduced state subsidies for the arts and gradually handed them over to the market, initiated the twilight of the avant-garde movement, which had lost all its influence by the late 1920s, although continuing to exist at a very modest level (Groys, 2009: 37). When Stalin came to power, all areas of life, including the most trivial, were placed under the total control of the state, and it was with regard to this that the party passed a resolution 'On the Restructuring of Literary and Artistic Organisations' (1932), in which it was decided that all "creative workers" who supported the platform of the Soviet government should unite in the appropriate unions compliant with the type of their activities. Although this meant the disbanding of all independent groups, the resolution was accepted enthusiastically, because artists believed that the wider umbrella of unions would afford them greater freedom from the monopoly position which some organisations, such as the Russian Associa-

tion of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), had started to occupy in the late 1920s (Degot, 2011: 72). This assessment proved to be mistaken, because what the restructuring in fact implied was a shift to state commissions (Stalin had abolished the NEP in the meantime), and the exercise of complete state control over the exhibition, distribution and reproduction of works (73). From the resolution to the proclamation of the doctrine of Socialist Realism at the First Congress of the Soviet Writers' Union (1934), the road was not long, and it definitely put an end to the Russian-Soviet avant-garde era.¹⁴

Among the numerous European writers and intellectuals who visited Soviet Russia in the 1920s were Cesarec (1922) and Krleža (1925), both on party assignments. This gave them the opportunity not only to become acquainted with the situation in the first socialist country, but also with the "Russian artistic experiment"; their conclusions, however, were not positive, which is not surprising, bearing in mind their previously expressed views about the avant-garde.¹⁵ Their critique of the avant-garde, especially abstraction, was de-

14 Many years later, André Malraux stated that, as a participant at the First Congress, he had the opportunity to meet Stalin, who told him that Lenin was "extremely liberal" in terms of art, and that he himself only loved Pushkin (Popović-Zadrović, 1978: 262–263).

15 Krleža made his first critical assessment of the avant-garde in a diary from 1917, where he asked: "What do these artists of today want with their perpetual ecstasy? Where do they want to potentiate the chaos, in themselves, in us, around us, in the world? Is everything really collapsing as drunkenly as Delaunay's tower? Is everything really as melancholic as Munch? Is everything really iconoclastically spiritualised into pure musical abstraction like Kandinsky?" (Krleža, 1977: 234). Cesarec's first critique appeared in the text 'Decadence and Revolution' (1920), where, in the spirit of Spengler, he described the "decadence" of capitalist culture and the "twilight" of its art: "With all its convulsive drowning into Futurism, Cubism, Expressionism and Dadaism, today, although sometimes being a beautiful ephemerality, it titillates our nerves, it leaves us with the impression of helplessness, the impression of despair (megalomaniacs and graphomaniacs can, complacently, of course, be very optimistic!) – and with all this, it means nothing but the fatal, incurable, almost sadistic disease of European culture, the paralysis of all its former creative energies and values" (Cesarec, 1986: 139).

structive and sometimes subject to derision (Krlježa called it “Icarus’ flight into emptiness”), denying it any aesthetic value or claim as a new artistic paradigm, and only acknowledging its merit for breaking with the petrified aesthetic canon. If there was something Krlježa really valued, according to Viktor Žmegač, then it was an individual result, a singular work of art, which interested or even delighted him with the power of its artistic quality, and not as an example of some ism (Žmegač, 2001: 26).

In his article ‘Contemporary Russian Painters’ (*Književna republika*, No. 9, 1924), in which he analysed Kandinsky, Malevich and Tatlin, Cesarec concluded that, despite its aspiring to serve the revolution, modern Russian art was an excess that ignored the social vocation of art, such that, instead of serving collective goals, it resulted in “aesthetic solipsism”, “philosophical scepticism” and “pseudo-scientific utilitarianism”. On the other hand, he was delighted with the Lefians’ aspirations to the aestheticisation of life and democratisation of art, but the problem of how to bring this essentially elite art closer to workers and peasants remained. The measure of the gap between the social and artistic revolutions was the Russian worker, who was to be the primary recipient of the new art; but he was never present at avant-garde exhibitions, because he preferred frequenting the Tretyakov Gallery to admire Repin. Cesarec wrote about this experience in his article ‘Art and the Russian Worker’ (*Književna republika*, No. 8, 1924), where he found himself in agreement with the question that occupied Lunacharsky, whose texts he carefully studied and whom he met in Moscow. It was Flaker who drew attention to this particular concurrence, quoting Lunacharsky’s statement that there was a “distinctive chord” attuning the revolutionary nature of Russian painters with the revolutionary nature of the Soviet government, but that expressing the

revolutionary spirit in abstract forms bordering on nonsense did not meet the acceptance of people who appreciated more the painters of Repin's type. (Flaker, 1982: 110). Since the October Revolution presented its "original demands", Cesarec raised the question of how art was to fulfill them: a return to old patterns was not possible, and new quests that "led art to suicide" were in contradiction to those demands. From his articles on Russian art the question arises as to what kind of art was appropriate for Soviet society and the cultural needs of the broad masses. His hope was aroused by the "Ahasver of the Russian theatre", Meyerhold, whose "non-theatre", with biomechanics and constructivism as its methods, was considered by him to be a laboratory through which a way could be found to a "new communist theatrical art".

In 'A Crisis in Painting', a chapter of his travelogue *Journey to Russia* (1926), Krleža repeated his previously expressed disqualification of abstract painting by stating that all of its Russian exponents together were not worth as much as "one ancient Chinese bronze", while condemning the Western European painting he saw on his travels through Berlin as "prostituted" slavery to the market, "like toothpicks and chocolate". On the other hand, observing the prosperity of a Russian theatre receiving support and encouragement from the Party, his attitude towards the new theatre in the chapter 'The Theatrical Moscow' was very affirmative, especially towards Meyerhold, whom he presented as one of the greatest contemporary theatre experimentalists. While considering Stanislavsky "academic and painfully stiff", he recognized in Meyerhold's theatre (which impressed him with its removal of the barrier between stage and audience, and its simultaneism, biomechanical acting technique, and grotesque "circusisation") "élan and momentum", and evidently found a "spiritual kinsman who experiences theatre in a similar

way”, because he himself was, it should not be forgotten, a pioneer of avant-garde and socially engaged theatre in Yugoslavia (Visković, 2000: 201).

The relentless dialectical denial of traditional literary formulae and the avant-garde was the result of Krleža’s and Cesarec’s insistence on “original creation”, which rejected compliance with any “defined literary or artistic model” (Flaker, 1982: 183). The orientation towards originality or “artism” (Krleža) implied the non-acceptance of “imports” or fashionable imitations of modern artistic trends, in which they recognised a provincial complex that uncritically welcomes everything that comes from European metropolises. In *The Return of Philip Latinović* (1932), Krleža saw the question of arriving at an authentic expression, i.e. finding one’s own place in the great cultural changes of the modern age, as a question of overcoming the dichotomy between “Pannonian mud” and urban Europe. Interpreting the geopoetic imagination which Krleža demonstrated in his *Künstlerroman*, Alfred Gall has spoken of the “internal conflict” of the artist on the periphery for whom the lack of “a common ground in the cultural as well as socio-political sense makes it impossible to find those images by which one is able to determine his identity” (Gall, 2016: 69). The crucial aesthetic question to which Krleža would persistently return in his literary and essayistic texts was the quest for timeless “Beauty” and a “sincere reflection of one’s own truthfulness”, and even when writing about other authors, he primarily thematised the aesthetic and ideological problems of his own literary works. At the same time, the rejection of imports did not mean that Krleža and Cesarec did not attempt to fit into the “supranational ideational and aesthetic process and gain knowledge about its basic coordinates”; so the texts published in and around *Plamen* corresponded to the texts of the European

avant-garde, while the texts from the period of *Književna republika* “manifest the evident renewal of mimetic forms” (Flaker, 1984: 183).

In his book *The Krležian Avant-Garde*, Predrag Brebanović presented the provocative thesis that Krleža holds the position of leading Yugoslav avant-gardist in the history of literature and culture. His argument is convincing, and we can to some extent agree with it: Krleža, “*malgré lui*”, was a solo-avant-gardist who did not support some “unambiguous aesthetic or anti-aesthetic programme”, but thanks to the “demystifying power of his writing, as well as the leadership potential of his own personality, represented the strongest Yugoslav incarnation of the avant-garde-as-function” (Brebanović, 2016: 44). Tomislav Brlek has shared a similar view and, analysing Krleža’s communism in reference to Stipetić, stated that the role of Krleža’s texts in the history of the Yugoslav communist movement was irreplaceable because “almost all alone, he managed to arouse a distrust of all traditional values and ways of thinking in the light of the ideas of the October Revolution”; just as in ‘The Dialectical Antibarbarous’ (*Pečat*, nos. 8–9, 1939) he “dissected the Stalinist mentality with a precision such as had to provoke uproar” (Brlek, 2016: 36). Krleža’s writing, in which we find an organic assimilation of avant-garde formative procedures (montage, disruption of logical syntax, mixture of genres), is not radical in its formal aspect – it is dominated by mimetic formative procedures and “respect for a normative syntax” (Brebanović); but the function of that writing and Krleža’s overall intellectual engagement in the Yugoslav cultural context can be called avant-garde. Krleža’s penetrating deconstructive apparatus was aimed at literary taboos, national myths, intellectual delusions, social anomalies, political sanctities, and at what he generally called “the stupid dregs in people’s heads”, which

made him the most astute polemicist in the region. His “solo-avant-gardism” rested on the principle of non-identification and “a particular *negative capability*: on the ability to doubt, to belong nowhere, to avoid any doctrinaire tendency” (Brebanović, 2016: 119). Krleža’s literary work, which Stanko Lasić described as a “hyperbolic antithetical carousel”, is also filled with constant re-examinations, antinomies, ambivalences, contradictions, affirmations and negations.

Krleža’s seemingly paradoxical avant-gardism–anti-avant-gardism should be understood in the sense of his complex intellectual universe, and therefore we should not be surprised that he knew how to reject and, at the same time, reluctantly accept the classification of his early phase as Expressionism, to which, judging from the characteristics of the writing of that time, he objectively belonged. According to Šime Vučetić, Krleža’s Expressionism was not an escape from reality and “passive expression of a disturbed and deranged state”, but an attempt at overcoming that state “precisely through expressionist imagery”, and finding a way towards a critical, that is to say, “realistic securing of that reality” (Vučetić, 1983: 232).

When analysing the attitude of the avant-gardes towards the communist movement in Yugoslavia, we come to the conclusion that *Plamen* is the only avant-garde that corresponds to Renato Poggioli’s metaphor of the “joint march in the same line” of the artistic and political avant-gardes. In this particular case, we are talking about personalities who were at the same time writers and communist activists, whose subjectivation, both artistic and political, was marked by the strong revolutionary will that distinguished the first generation of Yugoslav communist intellectuals. *Plamen* was the first Yugoslav literary journal of the “self-conscious radical intelligentsia” which was in an organic relationship with

the ideas of The October and which put art at the service of the revolution, although preserving the independence of its vision of the relationship between art and revolution. The difficult choice between art or revolution, which in those years put many artists to the test, did not apply to Krleža, because he unwaveringly adhered to the principle he had proclaimed in his essay on George Grosz: “the artist must serve himself: art”, and, simultaneously, “he must serve the revolution: the left front” (Lasić, 1970: 107). Krleža was rightly considered the only intellectual who, in polemics with political cadres, “knew how to profile himself so successfully as a free and independent observer of the passage of time, and at the same time become a synonym for the intellectual who is politically on the side of the social revolution” (Tomić and Stojaković, 2013: 11).

This was not the case with other avant-gardes – Micić’s Zenitism, Aleksić’s Dadaism, Podbevšek’s ‘Red Pilotists’, Drainac’s Hipnism, Slovenian Constructivism (Avgust Černigoj, Ferdo Delak, Srečko Kosovel) and Belgrade Surrealism – which operated without a political-organisational connection with the communist movement and the party as its base. They were autonomous from the movement, and especially its party core, but heteronomous in their aspiration to merge the aesthetic revolution with the social revolution, to be the latter’s cultural formation, if not its precursor. Commitment to communist ideology and the revolutionary struggle of the working class varied from one avant-garde to another in their degrees of intensity and significance (some, we shall see, were prone to anarchism), but each of them was convinced that it had created a new art expressing the “music of revolution” (Alexander Blok). All strong avant-gardes shared anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-nationalist, anti-clerical and cosmopolitan beliefs, welcomed the October

Revolution and believed that “the fiery door of the Revolution” (Risto Ratković) would open in Yugoslavia too. Therefore, regardless of the fact that they were not part of the network of revolutionary organisations and their literary formations, they can and must be classified as belonging to the left cultural front in Yugoslavia. If the avant-gardes represented, according to Ješa Denegri’s well-known thesis, the *other line* of Yugoslav modern art (which the author extends to the neo-avant-garde and the new artistic practice of the 1970s), they also represented the *other line* of the Yugoslav cultural left, in the sense of having a different vision of the role of art and the artist in the revolutionary struggle, opposed to that originating from the core of the communist movement.

The third decade of the 20th century represents the most difficult period, the so-called ‘bloody decade’ in the history of the Yugoslav communist movement between the two world wars. “The messianic exaltation of the first generation of communists” (Stipetić), which characterised Krleža and Cesarec, did not last long, but subsided along with the ebb of the revolutionary mood in the country and the world. Suppressed in political life by bans and persecutions in 1921, and burdened with internal organisational, ideational and political weaknesses, the CPY lost its previously attained influence on the working class and other working strata (Morača et al., 1977: 37). The initial period of the party’s operation in conditions of deep illegality imposed a reorganisation that took place slowly and uncertainly, owing to the factional struggles of its leadership, which presented the most serious obstacle to its internal consolidation and the restoration of its influence on the broad masses. Although it operated under the repressive regime of the Kingdom of SCS, objective circumstances actually turned to the CPY’s advantage, since national, so-

UPRAVA POLICIJE U ZAGREBU

PREDSIEDNIČKI URED.

Pov.-Broj: 3621/1934.

Zagreb, dne 14. februara 1934.

Predmet: Podaci za M. Krležu, novinara.-

KR. RANSKOJ UPRAVI SAVSKE BANOVINE
Odeljak državne zaštite

Z A G R E B .

U rešenju naloga od 10. februara t.g. str. pov. broj 61. čast mi je izvestiti:

KRLEŽA MIROSLAV, rođen 7. VII. 1893 u Zagrebu, ovdje i nadležan sin Miroslava i Ivanke rođj. Drožar, rkt. oženjen sa Leposavom rođj. Kangrga, književnik u Zagrebu, stan Kraljice Marije ul 39. -

Krleža, inače ugledni i istaknuti književnik, po svom radu i delovanju odaje izrazitog komunistu, što on nimalo ne taji.

Izvadak iz političke evidencije:

KRLEŽA MIROSLAV evidentiran je god. 1920 da je bio tada vodja komunista, te da je na komunist. zboru dne 28. III. 1920 držao govor i napadao državno uredjenje sa primjedbama, da se ovo mora kod nas promjeniti po primjeru ruske sovjetske republike. God. 1920 je Krleža napisao dramu pod naslovom "Galicija" u sasma komunist. duhu. Nakon toga je Krleža Miroslav opetovano puta bio govornik na komunist. skupštinama.

Dne 17. VI. 1929 bio je ovdje uhićen zbog sumnje širenja komunizma, ali je 18. VI. 1929 usljed pomanjkanja dokaza bio pušten na slobodu.

Uprava policije u Ljubljani 29. VII. 1930 Pov.broj 553/23 izvestila je ovu upravu policije, da je u medju dospjeloj inozemnoj pošti nadjer l primjerak komunist. lista "Radnik" koji izlazi u Americi, a upućen na adresu Miroslava Krleže u Zagrebu, Kraljice Marije ulica 39. Ovome listu je raspačavanje u našoj državi zabranjeno.

God. 1931 ponovno je uprava policije u Ljubljani u par navrata izvestila ovu upravu policije, da komunist. list "Radnik" često puta dolazi medju inozemnom poštom za Miroslava Krležu, pa buduć da je tome listu raspačavanje u našoj državi zabranjeno, to su pošiljke bile zaustavljene.

Police data on the communist Miroslav Krleža, 1934

cial and economic problems, exasperations and antagonisms multiplied and deepened. However, the party was too preoccupied with itself and did not have the strength to take that chance, “despite its best activists’ efforts to find answers to the gaping problems and contradictions of Yugoslav society” (ibid.). Simply put, during the 1920s the CPY was in a state of permanent crisis, which, following the assassination of three Croatian deputies at the National Assembly by the Serbian MP Puniša Račić in 1928, culminated in the introduction of King Aleksandar Karadjordjević’s 6 January Dictatorship in 1929, thereby inflicting on the party the mightiest blow since its foundation. The monarcho-dictatorship resulted in a ban on the work of political parties and trade unions, the suspension of parliamentarism, democracy and freedom of speech, as well as the imposition of the ideology of integral Yugoslavism symbolised by the change of the state’s name to Yugoslavia. On account of a wrong assessment of its own organisational capabilities and the mood of the masses, the CPY committed a fatal mistake by calling on the workers and peasants to take up arms in order to overthrow the “bourgeois dictatorship and establish the rule of workers and peasants”. The regime responded to this call with the white terror on the part of the state apparatus, which resulted in the virtual disintegration of the party: membership was decimated by killings and arrests (including of Krleža “on suspicion of spreading communism”, as was stated in the police record), the organisational infrastructure was broken, and part of the leadership ended up in exile. Thus, as the historian of the Yugoslav communist movement Dušan Bilandžić commented, it once again became clear that the revolution could be carried out by the broad masses, and not by a restricted sectarian organisation (however revolutionary, monolithic and determined), “which further meant that the CPY had not

yet developed a strategy and tactics for the revolution appropriate to the Yugoslav reality” (Bilandžić, 1985: 34).

As part of its consolidation plan, in the early 1920s the Party began work on expanding Marxist political culture, which was then at an unenviable level, alongside the intellectuals who had founded the Party and led it for a long time in the absence of workers’ cadres. Therefore, Krleža admitted that his and Cesarec’s historical materialism at the time of *Plamen* was “primitive”, scanty, “more of a sensitive, romantic, ‘Sturm und Drang’ nature” than a “programmatically synthesised effort” (‘Editorial note’, *Književna republika*, no. 1, 1923).¹⁶ Shortly before the Vukovar Congress, the Party’s publishing activity intensified: a new edition of the *Communist Manifesto* (Zagreb, 1919; Belgrade and Ljubljana, 1920), Lenin’s *State and Revolution and Imperialism* (1919), Engels’ *Development of Socialism* (1919), as well as a number of other brochures were printed.¹⁷ At the same time, Yugoslav Marxist theory also began to flourish: Veljko Ribar published his

16 Although he started reading Marx during the First World War, he became a convinced Marxist as an adept of Lenin, whom he praised for “teaching his generation to think about the things and phenomena that surround us in Marx’s way, and helping to shed light on complex Yugoslav and Croatian political issues with precise, scientific clarity” (Očak, 1982: 39).

17 The first excerpts from *Capital* translated into Serbo-Croatian were published in the newspaper *Radenik* (1872), launched by Svetozar Marković, while other excerpts appeared in periodicals of the following years. In 1924, Moša Pijade first published a translation of *Capital’s* abbreviated edition in Berlin, and then translated the first volume in the cell in Sremska Mitrovica, together with Rodoljub Čolaković (the editor was Cesarec), and the second and third volumes at the penitentiary in Lepoglava on his own. The first and second volumes were legally published in Belgrade in 1933 and 1934, respectively, while the third was published only in 1948. The first translation of *The Communist Manifesto*, published in *Pančevac* in 1871, was produced by Vlada Ljotić, a supporter of Svetozar Marković. The second edition appeared in Budapest in 1902, translated by Milorad Popović, and was later reprinted several times. Engels’ *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* appeared in Zagreb in 1924, followed by Marx’s *Poverty of Philosophy* (1933) and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1934), Engels’ *Anti-Dühring* (1934), Marx’s *Grundrisse* (1935), and so on.

Principles of Materialist Dialectics (1922), in which he tried to articulate a dialectical-materialist view of the world; Sima Marković, in his book *Behind Science and Philosophy* (1924), made the first attempt at developing a Marxist theory of science in Yugoslavia; and Filip Filipović published *The Development of Society in the Mirror of Historical Materialism* (1924). However, as Boško Jakšić has observed, interwar Yugoslav Marxism was often less manifested as a theory, and more as an opinion, precisely because it became the foundation of an ideology and a means for propaganda and agitation (Jakšić, 1984: 33). Since the Party had organised itself according to the Bolshevik prototype, Lenin's principle that theoretical questions had no independent meaning, but were exclusively the means for class struggle, was adopted ("The only correct revolutionary theory assumes its final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement"). Only certain theoretical treatises that, according to Jakšić, "consider issues of history, economy or the political life of Yugoslav society, or try to bring some European intellectual currents closer to the Yugoslav cultural public, surpassed the propaganda-popularising character of that Marxism" (34).

The repressive measures that the state continuously implemented in the suppression of communism (the term 'Bolshevism' was most often used) were aimed at preventing communist political activity and the dissemination of communist ideas. Periodicals were of strategic importance in spreading these ideas, so the Communist Party during its illegal operational phase developed an intensive publishing activity, as evidenced by the impressive fact that in the interwar period about 170 illegal magazines were printed in the country and abroad. The CPY attached first-class importance to the party press (*Nova iskra*, *Komunist*, *Borba*, *Klasna borba*, *Slobodna*

reč, Radnički sindikat, Delo, Proleter) in communicating with the masses, especially with the disenfranchised and exploited part of the population that needed to be mobilised to fight against the ruling class. Newspapers and magazines served as a forum for the contest of opinions and attitudes, playing “an important role in the development of Marxist thought and clarification of revolutionary practice, and thus in building the leading party cadre, and strengthening and maturing the Party and the revolutionary workers’ movement” (Iveković, 1970: 137). What is more, in certain periods the illegal Party press was the only means of communication between party members, a link between the leadership and the base of the workers’ movement, intended for the transmission of instructions and directives.

The suppression of freedom of speech, conducted by the repressive state apparatus through censorship of the press, was intensified after the introduction of the 6 January Dictatorship, when the Council of Ministers founded the Central Press Bureau (one of the first intelligence and propaganda services of its kind in Europe), whose task was to uproot the publication of any anti-regime views and promote the work of the government. According to Ivanka Dobrivojević, “an attempt at establishing total state control over people’s opinions, political attitudes and emotions” implied the building of an extensive system of supervision over newspapers and magazines, but also books, films, radio shows and theatre performances (Dobrivojević, 2005: 66). The law on the press banned all party and independent newspapers, while the Central Press Bureau regulated the political content of legal newspapers and other information media, subjecting them to the strictest control and censorship. Bearing in mind the regime’s excessively agitated fear of communism, censorship was particularly sensitive to “communist propaganda”,

which led to absurd situations, such as when uneducated censors, without a clear picture of communist teachings, proclaimed Ludwig Renn, Erich Remarque and Egon Kisch “the most striking persons in communist literature”, and suspected Hegel and Goethe of communism (Dobrivojević, 2005: 67). In the realm of scientific Marxist works, the situation was to some extent different, because censorship was more permissive, in the belief that such literature, limited to a constricted circle of readers, did not directly jeopardise the existence of the regime.

The only possible way to express social criticism legally and create a tribune of revolutionary intelligence under conditions of strict censorship was through literary and cultural magazines (*Kritika*, *Literatura*, *Književnost*, *Novi pokret*, *Nova literatura*). Persecuted and disabled in their political activities, many left-wing intellectuals turned to literature as a means of propagating their ideas, so that the escalation of social literature or, conversely, the “literarisation of the movement” (Rodoljub Čolaković), was caused by specific social circumstances. Writers and publicists exerted political influence on a generation of readers at the time through self-initiated magazines, and among these writers was also Krleža, who would later triumphantly state: “It meant that the youth absorbed communism on the basis of our texts” (Čengiđ, 1985: 202). Krleža referred to *Književna republika*, which, using the “historical-materialist analytical method”, continued *Plamen*’s literary and political mission, playing a key role on the left literary scene of the 1920s in spreading Marxist thought through authorial texts and translations, promotion of the October Revolution and critical analysis of the Yugoslav social-political situation. The literary periodical represented a particular area of revolutionary activity and, in line with Lenin’s understanding of its function (“It must

become a component of organised, planned, and integrated party work”), it was subject, like any other tactical aspect, to the same imperatives of struggle against the bourgeoisie as was the proletariat. Magazines were launched quickly, but also reduced by censorship or banned after a short period of publication, then relaunched under a new name with the same or similar orientation – until the assassination of King Aleksandar in Marseille in 1934, after which the regime of the 6 January Dictatorship became partially liberalized.

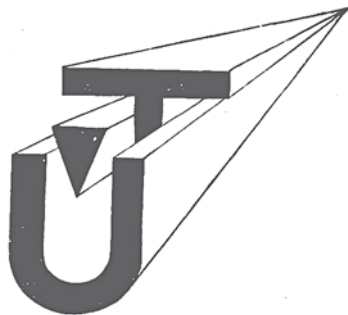
In studies of the Yugoslav avant-garde the third decade is known as the *decade of the avant-garde*, because it was marked by an explosion of the avant-garde model of literature/art, imposed by the proliferation of -isms (Expressionism, Sumatrainism, Cosmism, Svetokretism, Zenitism, Dadaism, Hipnism, Constructivism, Surrealism), with periodicals at the core of the gathering, production and dissemination of avant-garde poetry and thought (*Plamen*, Zagreb, 1919; *Svetokret*, Ljubljana, 1921; *Trije labodje*, Novo Mesto, 1921; *Zenit*, Zagreb and Belgrade, 1921–1926; *Dada tank*, *Dada jazz* and *Dada jok*, Zagreb, 1922; *Út*, Novi Sad, 1922–1925; *Hipnos*, Belgrade, 1922–1923; *Misao* at the time of Ranko Mladenović as editor, Belgrade, 1922–1923; *Rdeči pilot*, Ljubljana, 1922; *Putevi*, Belgrade, 1922–1924; *Crno na belo*, Belgrade, 1924; *Svedočanstva*, Belgrade, 1924–1925; *Novi oder*, Ljubljana, 1925; *Bela revija*, Belgrade, 1925; *Večnost*, Belgrade, 1926; *Tank*, Ljubljana, 1927; *50 u Evropi*, Belgrade, 1928–1929, *Tragovi*, Belgrade, 1929, *Немојѷће/L'impossible*, Belgrade, 1930, *Nadrealizam danas i ovde*, Belgrade, 1931–1932). The first to comment analytically on the dynamics of events on the Serbian literary scene – the same could be said for the whole of Yugoslavia – was Boško Tokin in the text ‘Seven Post-War Years of Our Literature’ (1928), where he wrote that the magazines revealed the need that movements and groups be created, that new ideas be af-

firmed, and that individuals impose themselves as leaders; and that therefore

quite naturally, there is a certain commotion, struggle, assaults are followed by counterassaults, discussions are held, and, in the beginning, it always seems that a new group with a new magazine will have more success, but then – very often for material reasons – the magazine shuts down, the movement wanes. And then the initiators themselves become ideationally uninterested... And, ultimately, all the movements have remained more or less in the form of idea, without further consequences, isolated, and only a small group of people have tried to understand and accept them. The exception is *Zenit*, and to some extent the group of Surrealists, who have not even sought a wider circle of understanding (Токин, 1928: 375).

Token drew attention to the fact that these magazines and movements did not give an exclusive tone to this epoch, but were a “very characteristic phenomenon”, since groups and coteries of the like-minded gathered around their programme guidelines.¹⁸ The magazine was not only an optimal avant-garde genre, but, according to Biljana Andonovska, also performed several functions in the articulation and dissemination of avant-garde programmes: as an independent *cultural formation* and a “public collective mani-

18 It is characteristic that the protagonists of the organised avant-garde in Yugoslavia were predominantly writers and critics (and men), that visual artists were rarely actively involved (Jo Klek and Mihailo Petrov in Zenitism, Radojica Živanović-Noe in Surrealism), with the exception of the Trieste group of visual Constructivists led by Avgust Černigoj. But, in light of the fact that most avant-gardes are defined by interdisciplinarity based on crossing the boundaries between disciplines, media and professions, this piece of evidence is not important, because the visual experiment played a valuable role in profiling avant-garde poetics, especially in Zenitism, Constructivism and Surrealism.



Mih. S. Petrov, Beograd:

HIDAK ÉS ÚTAK (Linoleum)

I. év AKTIVISTA FOLYÓIRAT **II. szám**

1922. NOVISAD V. HÓ

Mihailo Petrov, 'Hidak és utak' (Bridges and Roads), *Út*, no. 2, 1922

festation" (Williams) leading directly to a *microsociology* of small art communities; as a *free zone* for the affirmation of new literary and artistic practices; as a polemical tribune and means for the international networking of avant-garde groups; and as an instrument for "breaking" with traditions and reinventing alternative lines for the reception and transmission of knowledge throughout the diachronic depths of European (and other) literature and culture (Andonovska, 2014: n.p.).

When browsing through avant-garde periodicals and samizdats (books, brochures, leaflets) today, we can notice an incredibly rich archive of modern, innovative and revolutionary ideas which we rarely find in other discursive formations of the period. The ideas and ideologies that had begun to penetrate the Yugoslav literary-artistic space in the second decade of the past century gained in intensity and radicalism after the war apocalypse, when the generation following believed, as Bertolt Brecht wrote in *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, “that everything can be permitted”, that axioms, views, ways of thinking, morals and faith can be changed radically, that total human freedom, real autonomy and true social justice can be achieved. The opinion that the denial of aesthetic norms and cultural conventions was not only an act of achieving absolute creative freedom, but also a political act of disagreement, confrontation and subversion, was profiled. The “total conflictuality of the avant-gardist image of the world” (J. J. van Baak) is evidenced in a retrospective assessment by the leading ideologue of Belgrade Surrealism, Marko Ristić, who, with his meticulous precision, had listed the factors of the bourgeois ideological complex which Surrealism called into question:

[...] social rules, civic virtues, philosophical theories and moral norms, religion, nation and family, flags and symbols, titles and honours, academies and barracks, churches and banks, ethical principles and aesthetic dogmas, social and artistic conventions, customs and habits, laws and rules of civility, literature and language (Ristić, 1987: 341).

Ristić suggested that Surrealism, aiming with all its might at the unmasking of the ideological mystifications of the bourgeois order, established itself as its antithesis. The same could be said of other strong avant-gardes, which, through relent-

less criticism, provocation and inflammatory rhetoric, confronted hypocrisy and demystified the “false mantles” (Micić) of the bourgeois nomenclature, denying it the monopoly of truth/knowledge and the steering of the nation’s destiny. In other words, they declared a total war on Yugoslav society in the domain of truth, justice, morality and values, to which they claimed the rights one after the other. Devoid of any resentment, avant-garde criticism was radically emancipatory; it produced new concepts and invented new problems, i.e., dramatised the inherited concepts in a creative way by introducing a “dimension of potentiality into pure actuality” (Žižek). It confronted the doxa from an exclusionary position, breaking through the boundaries of social consensus and, being ultimate in its demands like the political avant-garde, rejected the possibility of ‘democratic debate’. That is why radical avant-gardes can and must be interpreted as autochthonous sources of unfettered leftist criticism, and in many ways more radical than the political left, because they were not guided by specific tactical and strategic party political goals, but by poetic imagination and ideas of aesthetic revaluation. Apart from the Surrealists, who were theoretically well-grounded, their knowledge of Marxist literature was modest, as evidenced by the simplified use of Marxist axioms, just in Krleža’s ‘Sturm und Drang’ sense, while for many, Leninism was the primary source of Marxist thought.

It can be said that the avant-gardes contributed to the modernisation of Yugoslav culture by producing and transmitting ideational and intellectual contents which were projected from the sphere of art into the entire social space. With reference to the cognitive contribution of the historical avant-gardes, the sociologist Pavle Milenković has pointed out that “the formation of their own discourse and its dissemination in the space of symbolic power allocated the avant-gardes the

function of knowledge producers”, in response to “the historical and political challenges of societies and their value matrices” (Milenković, 2012: 20, 23).¹⁹ On the other hand, while discussing the modernisation concepts of the peripheral Central European avant-gardes, Kreft has come to the conclusion that their exponents

had a solution for the modernisation of their societies that was not only different from the previous models but also directly destructive of them, even if they were also models for nation-building. They had a sense for humanity as a whole that was beyond national frontiers, they fought for a new human being, and they planned to end the story of salvation here and now. (Kreft, 2004: 20).

The modernisation impulse of the Central European avant-gardes varied from country to country, in line with the transformations and conditions of local cultures, i.e. it had a much stronger impact in culturally more developed and liberal states, such as Germany and Czechoslovakia. In Yugoslavia, the avant-garde model of cultural development, situated on

19 The challenges Milenković discusses were multiple, because they referred to an economically, socially and culturally heterogeneous state of peripheral capitalism which remained at the stern of European modernisation trends, and in which no comprehensive reform was implemented. As a unitary parliamentary democracy, which at one time grew into a monarcho-dictatorship, the state (the court and political elite) was the main obstacle to development, not only because it did not have the political will/interest to solve numerous problems inherited from the past or created by the unification, but, with its authoritarian way of governing, narrowed the space for democratic debate and critical thought. The numerically small intellectual elite was dependent on the state and could not significantly influence the development policy, although the breakthroughs of modernisation in culture and art prevailed in comparison to other sectors of social production. Summarising the overall situation in the country, the historian Marie-Janine Čalić has concluded that the “innovative potential did not suffice to break the shackles of premodern economic and social organisation”, owing to which “Yugoslavia had not become a modern, developed and bourgeois state even up to the Second World War” (Stojanović, 2010: 50).

the margins of the cultural system, met with resistance from the extremely strong patterns of the residual national cultures of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia, while at the same time, opposing the bourgeois model of modernisation that conveyed the values of Western European liberalism and shaped the culture of mainstream modernism. In the case of the strong avant-gardes, this model was inseparable from social radicalism, and thus the avant-gardist optimal projection for its political platform, which complemented the aesthetic one, adopted an ideology that possessed both concrete solutions for changing the social system and a utopian pathos.

We can take as an example Risto Ratković, a “poet-communist” as he called himself, who, together with Moni de Buli, launched a small pro-surrealist magazine *Večnost* (1926), in all four issues of which he published texts and verses calling for or alluding to a revolution based on the Bolshevik prototype. For Ratković, poetry is a total act which must not be terminated conformistically and reduced to formal innovations such as free verse, but requires the poet’s personal engagement in revolutionary “socialist aspirations” through a merging of the individual and collective rebellions, and even a “revolutionary suicide”, because it is thus that the two highest manifestations of the spirit are proved: Revolution and Poetry” (‘One Two Three’, no. 3, 1926). This is the categorical imperative of absolute revolt that Ratković pathetically and confusedly called for in the proclamation ‘To the Left!’ (no. 1, 1926), in which he saw the link between art and politics as immanent to the total act of poetry: “Politics is the equation of personality and community, art is the equation of personality and everything else”. Finally, in the manifesto with the striking title ‘Towards a Red Metaphysics’ (*Večnost*, no. 4), he rejected the possibility of “an intellectual solution to a cosmic riddle”, believing that it must be solved “socially”,

and that therefore any revolution whose ideas cannot be concretised is “absurd and, moreover, false”. Ratković’s belief that a revolutionary literary phenomenon could not be accomplished socially outside a revolutionary social event and without the adoption of a Marxist materialist worldview was typical of the pro-communist avant-gardes of the 1920s.

The encounter of freethinking artists with revolutionary theory and practice resulted, according to the Surrealist Dušan Matić, in their “ending up marked by some other signs and categories, different from those they started with” (Matić, 1969: 251). The path to a revolutionary political standpoint guided them from an aesthetic-ethical to a political rebellion against the bourgeois worldview, that found its ideological definition in Marxism. Or, in line with Ristić’s analytical formulation of this question, “spontaneous and irreducible revindications make it clear to the poet that their realisation is possible only if the material conditions standing in their way change”, and that this “liberating action can be carried out only by that part of the social community which is today oppressed” (Ristić, 1934a: 84). This meant that the transition to a revolutionary perspective implied the rejection of the “frantic freedom” (Immanuel Kant) of individual revolt in favour of accepting the organised struggle for a ‘real freedom’, which would be possible only as a collective struggle led by the proletariat as the empirical subject of revolution. The radicalisation of the avant-garde represented its climax, that final point when politicisation becomes necessary, as Janez Vrečko has pointed out in reference to Flaker, in order “to achieve its own functionalisation, which now moves from an aesthetic to a moral, ethical and social reevaluation – the last in the sense of political revolutionism” (Vrečko, 1984: 14).

MESEČNIK PREVRATNE MLADINE ZA DUHOVNO REVOLUCIJO

STEFANJIA RAVNIKAR:

NA KONCERTU.

Dvorana je bila razsvetljena tako šarko, kot ki je a slatost poučil. Od svetilnikov, visokih od stropa in stov, so se luči široki pramenji šarko in se odličaji na vse strani. Le en kot je bil temen, isto ob steni pri vhodu. V tem kotu so se zadržali ob tisti človek, ki je moral biti zahtevno odločen zato, da stoji v edinem temnem kotu. Ustne soli so strmile in bledega obraza skominkov po beli, zlato obarvani steni so se plazili njevog pogled do vhodu, Z meškalci očmi je opazoval bledeči nepravilni tak ljudi, ki je izgajali v sedini dvorane pod množicami lesteni v neravnih amon.

Človek v temnem kotu dvorane je pritel vanjo ko pred množico, ku so brleto je majhne rdeče svetilke na visokih stebrih. Vstavil se je pri dveh in se ostil po vsaj dvorani. Mladena tema je njaja po njej in vendar je videl tisti kot, v katerem je stonil sedel. Ko je ušel od člove vrate slobodnih tedev, je videl tudi to vse tiste, ki sede sedaj na njih — in sede prvji njim. Gato je bil močje v tisti kot, ki ga luč svetilnikov ni dosegla niti sedaj.

Polosona so se sapilo njegove trdnico meškalje osti, in duri vhodu so zdrknile skupaj, da je videl belo, sloto obkroženo steno je naprej. Isto do napovedne kote, ki pa je bil avstal kakor via ostala dvorana. Nihčeav več ni videl, ostil je le čim instrumentov na visokem kote, a bočni akordi, izšli iz njihovih strun, niso dosegli temnega kote.

Ne šarki hti, na pogledi množice in ne glasovi godbe niso mogli prodreti tamo, v kateri je bil on.

—Bepo, v-ber se me zadržal: tistega za je glas, ki bi moral biti igran na prvem mestu. Ze so se brusno dvigale vrste za odhodi, kot valj od je zakomala veda in vobilo je zopet vse, ko je stopil tista zaginjala človek a izstru-menost v raki, le nihče ni igral na tak instrument in le noben godec ni bil njemu podoban. Nagrnla se je množica proti odno, v napetih priklonovajo so obrali obrati.

Ko je prvi zvok razvenil po dvorani, so je vdrnil človek v temnem kotu. Z rokami in najel nepočasno laze, prebrljal na ristično roko in v skladoti mu je stjal obrat.

Ze je bila pesen končana, množica pa je le vedno pri-kavala začetek. Videl jo je človek a ostra, osramenjen je hotel oditi, ker se mu je ponesrečila nalobna pesen, ki je igrana na posebnem instrumentu. Ker se ga je dotaknila blede roka in radostno je silal besede: vV temnem kotu sem stal, nihče me ni videl, besede in pesni so bile same same in osti luč tisti svetilnikov me ni obistila. Poudri, kako avstal je sedaj kot, v katerem sem stal, pojdi a menoj in igraj vsem tistem besedilniku, ki jih ne dosegla ne pesem, ne luč. Mogoč voč jih je kot tih rukaj, ki imajo obojega to-liko, da me niso videli niti njega v temnem kotu. In dalj-mega kote je segla roka k njemu in godec je bil za njo. Kjerkoli je strel, je bila tema in to je kotal, je njema jansa lad.

Dolga vrsta ljudi so se zmetla okoli širke duri in vsam se je sedlo silno prav, da ta tudi godec ni igral na prvem mestu.

TONE SELJKAR:

LJUDOŽRCI.

*Hošna po poti preklestava danajste dobe
in splošno zaznamovanje
visoke kulture
omamnjete beraje,
brezvrstne invalide,
gladne srce,
obelena trupla,
trane pijanov,*

ŠTEVILKA 2.

LETO I.

Rdeči pilot, no. 2, 1922

Vrečko has discussed the first Slovenian avant-garde poet Anton Podbevšek as an example of the radicalisation of the avant-garde artist whose poetic trousers had become too tight for him to put his ideas at the service of a general social transformation. Together with the literary critic Josip Vidmar and the composer Marij Kogoj, Podbevšek launched *Trije labodje* (1921) in Novo Mesto, which was the first avant-garde (expressionist) magazine in Slovenia, but soon parted ways with them before the second issue was published, insisting on taking a more politically revolutionary course. In Vidmar's recollection of the events, after the publication of the

first issue of *Trije labodje*, Podbevšek gave a memorable lecture in Novo Mesto City Hall, “where he announced his re-orientation towards socialism and, correspondingly, towards a more socially tendentious literature” (ibid.). In the second issue of his “monthly of subversive youth for spiritual revolution” *Rdeči pilot* (1922), which he launched in Ljubljana after parting ways with the ‘Labodjeans’, he offered, in the manifesto ‘Political Art’, a vision of the art of the future that would be a mixture of Marx’s aesthetic communism and Morris’s aesthetic socialism, with elements of Kropotkin’s anarchism. He advocated the rejection of capitalist culture and total integration of art into life, with the utopian prediction that the art of the future would be collectivist, deprofessionalised, associated with industry, ennobling people’s living spaces (here referring to Ruskin and Morris), and becoming an affectionate and friendly offering instead of an object for sale (here alluding to Kropotkin). In the text ‘The Relationship of Artists in the State’, he was more politically explicit, revealing that the mission of *Rdeči pilot* was to prepare people for a socialist future, “in which we will know no borders, where we will sing funeral songs to the capitalist regime, and where the salvific proletarian international will rule universally”.

However, the ‘Pilotists’ (Podbevšek as the leader of a group of young followers), who promoted their programme at literary evenings in Slovenia, not only did not have any communication with the proletarian international, but did not even look for it. The revolution they called for was essentially spiritual (as evidenced by the magazine’s subtitle) and declaratively social, with art as its sophisticated weapon, and literature first of all as its strongest ethical instance. In the ideological context of the time, Podbevšek’s literary-cultural engagement was, as Matevž Kos has put it, exceptional to

such an extent that neither the left nor the right knew what to do with it (Kos, 2009: 8).²⁰ The same could be said of all the other Yugoslav avant-gardes whose social radicalism remained without an echo on the communist left and its literary formations until the late 1920s (the right, of course, was the natural enemy of any left-oriented cultural discourse).

Like other communist parties throughout the world, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia did not have a profiled cultural policy in the 1920s, and thus decisions were mostly left to the writers and cultural workers, a small number of members and a larger number of sympathisers (Matvejević, 1977: 48). “The risk they took with their convictions in the given social circumstances was, at the beginning, a sufficient guarantee of correctness”; while the Party reserved the right to “judge the cultural phenomena it could not influence, and to internally qualify them as more or less useful for the movement” (ibid.). Culture was not on the agenda of the communist parties at the time, the function of art in the ideational-political struggle was not clearly profiled, directives from Moscow did not arrive, and artists on the left across Europe represented a variegated and loose mixture of intellectual, political and aesthetic sensibilities. During the 1920s, there was no significant conflict on the literary left in Yugoslavia, and the first politically explosive tightening occurred after the Second Conference of the International Association of Revolutionary Writers in Kharkov in 1930, whose resolutions proclaimed

20 Kos has drawn attention to Podbevšek’s dynamic changes in cultural-political standpoints and ideological beliefs in the period from 1920 to 1927 when he worked as an avant-garde artist. After *Rdeči pilot* had been shut down, he became the editor of the Slovenian social democracy newspaper *Naprej*, at a time of internal party crisis, and then settled down on the editorial board of *Jutro*, the newspaper of Slovenian liberals. As a response to public criticism, in *Jutro* he published ‘The Statement’ (1927), in which he distanced himself from both the left and the right literary camps and promised to continue his struggle for art alone.

the supremacy of the political will over aesthetics. It was with the assault of the social literati on the Belgrade Surrealists that *the conflict on the literary left* commenced, marking the literary life of the 1930s until the occupation of Yugoslavia by the Axis powers in April 1941.

To the poetic diversity on the literary left 'Lef in Yugoslavia' offered testimony, when Cesarec placed on that part of the front which stood "in a close relationship with the communist movement" only Dragiša Vasić, a collaborator of *Književna republika*, "thanks to his powerful descriptions of Yugoslav Siberia" (Cesarec, 1986: 204).²¹ He went on to list those "sympathisers" who looked at the struggle "from afar", dealing with "more sublime" matters "such as Expressionism": the Belgrade literary group 'Alpha', led by Stanislav Vinaver and Boško Tokin, and then, outside it, Antun Branko Šimić and Jovan Kulundžić, as well as Zenitism, the domestic "variation of Dadaism". He concluded his text with a call to create a left front all over the world, crescendoing in the last sentence with the words: "The future of world culture is on the left wing".

Cesarec's construct of the left cultural front in Yugoslavia was indicative, because it opened up a series of questions concerning political and aesthetic differentiation on that front in the early 1920s. The differentiation between communist writers and sympathiser writers was a pan-European phenomenon: the latter were associated with the communist movement at different levels of sympathy and alliance, but not by real political-organisational connections (they could

21 Cesarec was alluding to the book *Two Months in Yugoslav Siberia* (1921), in which Vasić described his experience as a soldier forcibly sent to quell a rebellion in Albania. Vasić belonged to the bourgeois left intelligentsia and at times acted as a communist party sympathiser, but after the introduction of the '6 January Dictatorship', he abandoned literary work and the circles of social literati to become the apostle of Serbian nationalism and cultural conservatism.

also be social democrats or left liberals). Their motives were also different, although they all shared the same belief that it was necessary to change the social situation, which did not, however, mean changing the society fundamentally, as the communists demanded. Fellow-travellers, said Trotsky, neither grasped the revolution as a whole nor shared its communist goal, and their creativity was deprived of political perspectives (Trocki, 1971: 40). They were not “artists of the proletarian revolution, but its artistic fellow-travellers” who, each in his own way, embraced the revolution, “from whichever of its angles caught them”. The same could be said for Cesarec’s sympathisers, who also were not taken by “strict Marxism” (“Marxism proclaims *urbi et orbi*”, Vinaver later wrote) or loyalty to the revolutionary goal; with the exception of Micić’s Zenitism, which on this ‘front’, as we will see, was specific in many ways.²²

The above-mentioned writers (Vinaver, Tokin, Šimić) were typical sympathisers from the ranks of the bourgeois left intelligentsia, while being, at the same time, as Cesarec sarcastically suggested, exponents of a depoliticised cosmic Expressionism which kept literary and political issues at a distance. Although they were not devoid of social consciousness and had knowledge of artistic trends in the first socialist country, they advocated the principle of an autochthonous artistic and spiritual revolution “above any precise political engagement”, refusing to express their political sympathies in literary practice. The then future Zenitist, Boško Tokin, spoke about this explicitly in his programme text ‘Expressionist Philosophy and Art’, where he considered the expres-

22 Cesarec’s classification of Zenitism as Dadaism is unfounded, bearing in mind Micić’s pronounced anti-Dadaism and breakup with Dragan Aleksić; which only indicates that Cesarec did not undertake a profound study of Zenitism and its genesis.

sionist writer's joining the political avant-garde unproductive, because his political mission was above practical politics – it was “a spiritual action and an introduction of the religiosity of spirituality into everyday life” (Токин, 1920: 2). Interpreting Vinaver's texts on Russia, Vučković noted that, whilst not being interested in the significance of the revolution as a political and historical event, he viewed it from the perspective of “Bergsonian idealism”, as “something new that drives the world off balance”, which on the spiritual level corresponded to the avant-garde rebellion against artistic conventions (Vučković, 2011: 191–192). Such an understanding, continued Vučković, was “identical to the ideas of the liberal bourgeois literature of the expressionist movement”, according to which the revolution meant “the materialisation of their idealistic utopia of the spiritual kingdom on earth” (Ibid.). Krleža also considered cosmic Expressionism “idealistically reactionary”, objecting to its chaotic picture of the world and life and “a naive and mystical illusion” that, by means of verse and palette, political and social reality could be overcome. The case of A. B. Šimić, the leading Croatian expressionist poet, essayist and critic was different; and it was Krleža who, many years later, would credit himself for Šimić's turn from lyrical Expressionism to social poetry: “He had no idea of the nation, politics, socialism, communism, about the left movements in general, and so I was his spiritus movens” (Čengić, 1985: 337).

In the following year, Cesarec would revise his previous position by presenting Vinaver's *Russian Processions* (1924), “the first Yugoslav post-revolutionary travelogue from Russia” (Brebanović) in *Književna republika*. For Cesarec, Vinaver's view of the Russian revolution had been typically “intellectual”, if not “counter-revolutionary”, because instead of its face it depicted its obverse, “despite previously shown sympathies

for the Bolsheviks' cultural work" (Cesarec, 1963: 143). He admitted that he was wrong, and that he only knew Vinaver superficially and believed in the prestige that circulated about him as a witness to the revolution, all out of a desire to present to readers in Russia the widest possible list of Yugoslav writers consentaneous with the aspirations of the revolution (139–140). With regard to this, Velimir Visković has noted that Krleža's *Journey to Russia* is the particular counter-book to *Russian Processions*, because it contains "the implicitly subsumed dimension of the political controversy within the generation of writers who were poetically close immediately after the war, but gradually parted ways in the mid-1920s, both poetically and politically" (Visković, 2000: 180).

During his stay in Moscow, Cesarec moved in the circles of Lef and Inkhuk adherents, and thence came the invitation to publish an article about the left cultural front in Yugoslavia. Launched in the same year (1923) by the Futurists (Mayakovsky, Brick, Tretyakov), *Lef* aimed to unite avant-garde groups (the Futurists, the Constructivists, the Proletcult) and become the centre of the gathering of leftist forces in Soviet art, with international perspectives. However, unlike *Lef*, which was the magazine of an informal group of artists, critics and writers, and which enjoyed the party's support and promoted the diversity of experimentation in literature, art, film and theatre from the beginning, Cesarec's left front was a subjective and exclusively literary construct, brought together realists, modernists, avant-gardists, communists and sympathisers, did not know of common goals or publications, and implied different views of the politics of literature. It could be said that he was encouraged by the statement of the Lefians that their intention was to convert what had until then figured as a "mythical left front" into an "enterprising group" that would reflect "the panorama of art in the RSFSR"

(Aseev et al., 1971: 34). However, the front *Cesarec* was mapping, in completely different socio-political circumstances, was everything but a “panorama” or proposition for a joint operation, but rather an indication of a definite poetic and political split on the literary left and of the conflict that was to take place in the triangle of modernists, avant-gardists and social literati.

Cesarec’s portrayal and classification of communists and sympathisers on the same front could be explained by the non-sectarian policy of *Plamen* and *Književna republika*: both magazines brought together Croatian writers who did not belong to the left, but were close to avant-garde poetics or represented it, i.e. shared similar aesthetic values with their editors. According to Cesarec, who declared himself an “artist communist”, no references to Marxism, “much as they may create an illusion of the objectification of artistic phenomena, can be a guarantee of objective knowledge, let alone an evaluation of art” (Flaker, 1982: 120). Krleža was also reserved about ideological dogmatism that neglected aesthetic criteria (“Art can never be a means but only an end!”), and therefore he would later adhere to the principle of openness to cooperation when editing *Danas* and *Pečat*, which was the reason why he came into conflict with party politics in literature. Although he performed responsible tasks for the party in the 1920s, he preferred to call himself a “party companion” in order to emphasise his intellectual independence and maintain a critical attitude towards aspects of the party policy he disagreed with; however, he never explicitly stated whether he was formally a member of the CPY.

Facing a more profiled situation in terms of poetic and political differentiation, another prominent party intellectual, Otokar Keršovani, returned to the issue of the left front

seven years after Cesarec, in his article 'Notes on the Youth' (published under the pseudonym V. Dragin in *Nova literatura*, no. 1, 1930). The formal revolutionism which characterised the "Vinaver–Rastko Petrović–Drainac–Krakov–Miličić" generation turned into a "conservatism", becoming radical in the opposite direction, "to the right, towards mysticism, cosmic poetry, anti-rationalism, anti-concreteness – in short, towards 'nebulism'" (Keršovani, 1960: 95). In the natural struggle of the "young" against the "old", the socially sensitive generation of Expressionists played its part in destroying the "established values", but "did not leave behind any lasting values with a distinctly expressionist character". Therefore, the young on the left front were to stop "fighting with the old slogans" and turn towards new forms, new slogans and new sources of inspiration, such as "the factory and in the field, prison and correctional facility, boat and machine, orphanage and beggar-house, hospital and street".

Elements of the *tendentiousness* in the model of social literature, which emerged as a literary platform of the left in Yugoslavia in the late 1920s, were clearly indicated in Keršovani: writers on the left were to be expected to adapt to pragmatic demands for generally accessible and directly functional social-critical literature. Thus, literature became instrumentalised in the service of practical politics, and was denied the freedom to decide independently on the literary means by which the writer would express his political position. It should be emphasised that this was not the official position of the Party, because it had not by then formulated any directive in the sphere of culture. However, that was the predominant position amongst the communist literati indoctrinated with the concept of proletarian-revolutionary literature that spread from Moscow to Europe, beginning with the Second Congress of the Third International (1920),

which established the Provisional International Bureau of the Proletcult with the mission of promoting the principles of proletarian culture. The proclamation issued by the Congress spoke in general of the need for the cultural education of the masses and the formation of a class-based culture of the proletariat, declaring art to be “a powerful agitational tool” because of its power to “organise feeling in the same way as ideological propaganda organises thought” (Flaker, 1967: 35). Although the proclamation – which repeated the basic theses from Alexander Bogdanov’s resolution ‘The Proletariat and Art’, presented at the First All-Russian Conference of Proletarian Cultural and Educational Organisations in Moscow (1918) – did not contain specific recommendations for artistic creation, it was clear that it had to be fully aligned functionally with the revolutionary struggle, and reflect the “combative communist spirit” that characterised the proletarian culture movement. Thanks to the Provisional Bureau, the Soviet ideologeme of proletarian culture was institutionalised at the level of international communism, although autonomous concepts of proletarian art manifested themselves spontaneously in artistic practice before and after the Congress, especially in Germany (Erwin Piscator) and Czechoslovakia (Devětsil). In Yugoslavia, this ideologeme was affirmed through left-wing literary magazines, starting with Ljubljana’s *Mladina* under Kosovel’s editorship, and the term “social literature” began to be used as a cryptonym for “proletarian” and “revolutionary” literature under the conditions of a strict state censorship which was sensitive to every word that might be associated with class struggle, communism, revolution and the like.²³

23 It is important to underline the difference in the meaning of the terms “proletarian” and “revolutionary” literature, which are used in this context. The term “proletarian literature” means literature created by proletarians (workers, peasants) for proletarians, and which, assuming that all literature has a class character, reflects

It is interesting that five years earlier, in his article 'New Generations and their Movements' (1925), Keršovani, having noted the generational "chaos of search", oriented himself positively towards a number of modern writers (Krlježa, Donadini, Šimić), painters (Petar Dobrović, Milivoj Uzelac, the Kralj brothers) and composers (Dobronić, Kogoj, Manojlović), including *Zenit*, which, he believed, "brings the breath of international life and the spirit of new Europeanism into our narrow relations" (Flaker, 1988: 228). Recognising "the great disproportion between the illiterate peasant Yugoslavia and the chaos of isms that played roles in it", he predicted that only a few authors, who "had found connections between their individual aspirations and the social organism from which they had emerged", would remain "on the surface", with Krlježa as their leader. In spite of his sympathy for the exploration of new poetic territories and resistance to the canon of bourgeois literature, Keršovani thought that Modernism in the particular Yugoslav circumstances did not possess the capacity to address the wider masses, unlike social literature. That is why, in his 'Notes on the Youth', he came to the conclusion that there could be no compromise and that the new generation of writers must join the front of the "advanced forces of the modern world", primarily the Yugoslav labour movement.

a specifically proletarian worldview. The term "revolutionary literature" has a broader meaning, because it includes writers from different social classes who, as Lukács pointed out in a discussion on this topic, "share a Marxist worldview, which does not necessarily include class experience" (Gallas, 1977: 83). Starting from Marx's position that the proletariat is the most advanced class, Lukács, in his *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), attributed superiority to the "position of the proletariat" in understanding the totality of social processes and called on the left intelligentsia to accept that position as its own. The most frequently used term "proletarian-revolutionary literature", according to Johannes R. Becher, one of the founders of the German Association of Proletarian-Revolutionary Writers, means "literature that sees the world and shapes it from the point of view of the revolutionary proletariat" (Gallas, 1977: 88).

The model of social literature was considered by its protagonists to be the only legitimate literary expression of the working class movement. A social writer must be class-conscious and clearly oriented ideologically, because, as Stevan Glogaža, one of the movement's most ardent propagators, stated, "if a writer is not a fighter for those who work, he is not a writer". Consequently, from the end of the 1920s, the left front began to be understood as a social literature movement, "adequate to the social movement of the masses"; which meant, according to Veselin Masleša, that it was neither a group nor "a revolution of spirit, but an expression and an *avant-gardism* (underlined by D. S.) at the same time, of the social factors of social dynamics" (Masleša, 1932: 54). The time of the "ideationally barren" formal experiments of leftist Modernism had inevitably passed, and the "revolt of spirit", which Masleša attributed to Surrealism, reflected the "confusion of bourgeois intellectuals" confronted with the challenges of reality and an attempt to seek solutions on an individual level.

Another agile social writer and critic, Jovan Popović, having broken with the expressionist past, concluded in his summary of the 1920s that "formal revolutionary aspirations have merged into an ethical and precisely defined art of reality" all over the world, meaning that "the representatives of the *avant-garde* (underlined by D. S.) of the new spirit" had to "take a clear stance socially: either – or" (Popović, 1931: 2). Even Paris Surrealism, Popović continued, "had to draw the consequences and, in order to justify its cause, declare itself for Marxism, although its programme advocated a cosmic revolution that had nothing to do with concrete reality". What he wanted to point out was that the so-called "formalist" art of bourgeois Modernism had realised that, on account of its being deaf to social commotions, it had come to a dead end,

and that social art was the only possible revolutionary art – the only avant-garde.

In the discourse of social literati, the term ‘avant-garde’ was politically re-appropriated in the Leninist sense, and thus social literature in the artistic sphere was given the same role as that of the party in the political sphere. It was in this that Masleša and Popović ‘anticipated’ Lukács, who later, during the 1930s, in the famous polemic with Ernst Bloch on Expressionism and Realism, determined that the literary avant-garde was not characterised by technical innovations, however dazzling they were, but by the “social and human content of the avant-garde, the breadth, the profundity and the truth of the ideas that have been ‘prophetically’ anticipated” (Livingstone, Anderson and Mulhern, 1980: 48). This “authentic ideological avant-garde” – about which, Lukács admitted, history would be making the final judgment – consisted of the leading realists, like Thomas Mann, who had made the underground currents of social inequality and injustice visible. “To discern and give shape to such underground trends is the great historical mission of the true literary avant-garde”, concluded Lukács (*ibid.*). In that sense, in one of his later summaries, Popović recognised the prophetic mission of the social literature movement: it was not only literary, but performed a social and political function through literary work as “the only expression of bloodily suppressed progressive forces”.

At the beginning of the 1930s, leftist writers were expected to adjust their individual creative potentials to the collective goals of the labour movement and the literary model that adequately represented those goals. The permissiveness evidenced by ‘Lef in Yugoslavia’ began to give way to a one-sidedness that reflected a growing trend in the international leftist movement and its literary formations. In the second

half of the 1920s, there were organised attempts at uniting European left-wing literary groups, modelled on proletarian literature in Russia. It was with this goal in mind that the First International Conference of Revolutionary Writers was assembled in Moscow in 1927, after which national organisations of revolutionary writers, modelled on the RAPP, were instituted in some countries. The second conference, in Kharkov, passed several direct resolutions that were binding for national and regional writers' organisations, thus putting an end to arbitrary interpretations of the concept of revolutionary literature. As Aleksandar Flaker explained, the imposed RAPP model

was characterised by a pronounced instrumentalisation of literature in the class struggle, a demand for a distinct social-critical function of literature in capitalist countries, a refutation of the literary tradition of certain national literatures and avant-garde pluralism, particularly the critical attitude of its representatives towards the aestheticism and psychologism of modern literature, and a preference for forms with a lower level of belletrist fictionalisation of the real (Flaker, 1982: 185–186).

The instructive character of the main resolution ('The Resolution on Political and Creative Issues of International Proletarian and Revolutionary Literature') corresponded to the instructional character of the political resolutions of the Comintern, which were addressed to parties in capitalist countries. Just as the Soviet political-economic model imposed itself as the exemplar for the organisation of society after the collapse of capitalism, so did the Soviet model of proletarian literature impose itself as the exemplar for the aesthetic orientation of the international proletarian literary movement. The resolution was ultimate in its character, be-

cause it left no possibility for the establishment of a model of proletarian literature that would not be in line with the Soviet model, although it evinced respect for some socially-critical writers in the West, such as Henri Barbusse, Upton Sinclair and Dos Passos.

The congress in Kharkov was not in itself a turning point in the development of Yugoslav social literature, because its conclusions would manifest at a later stage, but, as Matvejević noted, it would “stimulate interest in theoretical discussions on the left: a common platform was finally proposed and some general guidelines were issued” (Matvejević, 1977: 67). The space for freelancers, who interpreted autochthonously the revolutionary engagement of literature and defended the spontaneity of fantasy, began to narrow, as the Kharkovian line, programatically most powerfully represented by the magazines *Stožer* (1930–1933), *Literatura* (1931–1933) and *Kultura* (1933), became dominant throughout the Yugoslav-wide “cartel” of social literature, which consisted of numerous writers, critics, publicists and artists from all social strata and pursuing every kind of left-wing political option. The almanac of proletarian poetry, *The Book of Comrades*, printed in 1928 on the day of the introduction of the dictatorship, and immediately confiscated “owing to the dissemination of communist propaganda”, contained poetry by authors from all over Yugoslavia, and is considered to be a constitutive moment of the social literature movement.

The Kharkov resolution called on communist parties to take over the leadership of the proletarian literary movement and make it, as was stated, the “party’s ideological weapon” in the class struggle. The CPY did not respond to this call straightaway, for several reasons: the party was in an internal crisis and far from defining its guidelines in culture and art, there were no Yugoslav delegates at the conference, and,

because of the ban on importing literature from the Soviet Union, the Kharkov decisions were not immediately available to Yugoslav communists. One of the first signs of a definition of the guidelines for cultural policy was the letter sent by the Central Committee of the CPY to the Local Zagreb Committee in 1933, in which, among other things, it was stated that “the entire left-wing movement among intellectuals should be organised on the broadest political foundation of proletarian literature and art, which would be capable of organising and exerting influence over the broadest strata from the ranks of intellectual writers and artists” (Očak, 1982: 203). The Committee was further asked to make sure that “the work of these intellectual groups be as closely connected with workers and peasants as possible and transmitted to the masses as soon as possible”. In the following decision of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPY, ‘Tasks of the Party on the Theoretical Front’ (1934), the communists were required to nurture a Marxist-Leninist position on literature, art, culture and criticism, and resolutely fight to suppress “various theories that have spread in Yugoslavia lately: individual psychology, neo-Kantianism, the mechanistic conceptions of dialectics, Surrealism” (Kalezić, 1975: 247). In the same year, at the Fourth National Conference in Ljubljana, the CC CPY adopted a Resolution on the Press and Literature, which emphasised the advantage of “comprehensible language” and of raising people’s awareness to the level of being able to understand the political line (Ђетковић, 1991: 40). All this suggested that the Party began to interfere directly in literary politics by initiating a series of actions in the magazines and cultural institutions that were under its control, with the aim of preventing the spreading of views that were in disagreement with its political strategy and tactics at the time. For the Party, it was not, as Vladimir Bakarić, a

member of the Agitprop of the CC CP of Croatia, recalled a few decades later, “a theoretical literary question, but rather a question of practical policy, that is, whether we would succeed in orienting our organisation towards revolutionary practice or not. And therefore, we decided, we had made up our minds” (Bakarić, 1971: 237). Bakarić admitted that this decision produced “misunderstandings and conflicts in the field of literature”, leading to the departure of “talents”, while “politicians” remained, i.e. writers who experienced literature as an expanded space for political activity.

The concept of social literature in its dogmatic Kharkovian variant meant the rejection of any critique of the bourgeois worldviews of writers of different aesthetic orientations, such as the Belgrade Surrealists, or leftist writers who opposed the imposition of vulgarising literary schemes such as Krleža. Political like-mindedness was not enough to ensure the acceptance of artistic dissenters as fellow combatants on the left-wing cultural front, because the differences in aesthetic views and understanding of the relationship between art and revolution were insurmountable for both. However, the Kharkov Resolution called on proletarian writers to “reeducate and transform their allies” in order to correct their literary orientation and rid them of “all prejudices related to the petty-bourgeois worldview” (Flaker, 1967: 112). This was initially implemented in the attitude of the social literati towards the Surrealists, whereby, for example, the former first tried to influence the latter pedagogically and critically; but when the reaction became polemical, a brutal confrontation which crossed the boundaries of literary polemic and assumed the form of ideational-political discreditation ensued.

By the end of the 1920s, before Keršovani had published his ‘Notes on the Youth’, the avant-garde scene had lulled, the cumulative revolutionary élan from the beginning of

the decade had faded away, new magazines and gatherings had become less and less common, and the euphoric poetic radicalism had either mutated into more conventional forms of expression or simply pulverized. Already by the middle of the decade, as Gojko Tešić has noticed, the ebb of programmatic associations was noticeable in favour of individual actions with “certain reflections of the first creative modernist phase”; but “it was no longer an avant-garde programme, nor an extension of that project as a definite creative engagement which had its goal and meaning” (Tešić, 1991: 170). It was a process that Marino called the avant-garde’s “inner cycle”:

After moments of *disruption* and *anticipation*, in spite of all actions and applied methods (propaganda, messianism, theorisation, etc.), the avant-garde, driven by the instinct for self-preservation, strives for stability and consolidation in a single formula. But its entire “revolutionary position” actually rejects this immobilisation, which is equivalent to stagnation and the repetition of a type of negation (Марино, 1997: 83).

This means that by entering a phase of stagnation the avant-garde “annuls itself” (Marino), that its own intolerance towards the environment becomes alleviated and vice-versa: it becomes artistically and socially acceptable, established, institutionalised and mainstream, which is why Teige complained in 1928 that Poetism had grown into a new ism. The avant-garde cannot overcome its immanent temporality, because the novelty it brings and around which it builds its identity is itself temporary, expendable and jeopardised by the novelties introduced by subsequent avant-gardes. After achieving “victory” and “affirmation”, the avant-garde is inevitably doomed to failure, to “ageing”, which results in the protagonists becoming “ideationally uninterested”, groups

and coteries diverging, and individuals continuing on their own way (ibid.).

Tešić talks about the cluster of avant-gardes that appeared in the years following the First World War, and for which Expressionism – the *lingua franca* of Central European Modernism in the first two decades of the 20th century – was the poetic orientation or origin (with the exception of Dadaism). Combining “revolution in the domain of form with revolution in the domain of spirit and sentiments, the experience of *reine Sichtbarkeit* with the experiences of *Einfühlung*, the national and the universal, the concrete social with the abstract-metaphysical” (Protić, 1967: 27), Expressionism gave expression to “anxiety and emotion” (Milan Dedinac) for the generation that stepped onto the scene shortly before and after the war. As an avant-garde whose exponents aspired to be “revolutionaries in writing but not revolutionaries in politics”, Yugoslav Expressionism was for the most part characterised by a general ethical socialism that manoeuvred above the concrete social reality. Activist or socially sensitive Expressionism, which in the post-war period turned into Marxism and merged into one of the nuances of social literature, did not find an echo in this generation, with the exception of Krleža and Cesarec (along with Tone Seliškar and Mile Klopčič in Slovenia, who from being pioneers of Expressionism became pioneers of social poetry); nor was this generation’s leftism consequential and decisive for further literary work.

According to Vučković, as of 1919, Expressionism underwent several stages in its development, the third of which – from the end of 1922 to the 1930s, could be described as the “restructuring of expressionist ideas in the direction of a mystical national philosophy, placed at the service of the ideology of the bourgeoisie” (Vučković, 2011: 150). During this third phase, Expressionism not only began to lose the fea-

tures of a “coherent programme” and disperse into several stylistic and “territorial variants”, but also became politically modified and instrumentalised into a “sometimes reactionary political doctrine, as was the case with the similar tendency in German Expressionism” (ibid.). Expressionism in its third phase, which we can call Post-Expressionism, lost its utopian pathos and began to deviate from its original forms, while retaining certain poetic and technical means, transformed into mainstream Modernism, gratifying to the taste of the bourgeoisie and its understanding of the modern in art. Here, we can no longer speak about Expressionism as an artistic movement with recognisable (avant-garde) features, but about a series of individual poetics that developed from Expressionism and which “already differ significantly from the original in their programme, content, and philosophical and political foundation” (Саболчи, 1997: 33).

Established as the dominant formula of Modernism in the Yugoslav literary-artistic space of the 1920s, Expressionism became the subject of critical questioning by the coming avant-gardes – Micić’s Zenitism, Černigoj’s Constructivism and Belgrade Surrealism – which renewed the fading experimental enthusiasm and established the idea of the synthesis of the aesthetic and social revolutions on newly laid foundations. As an unwritten rule, new avant-gardes bring about the negation of the previous avant-gardes, declaring them to be ossified, failed or compromised, changing the angles and directions of aesthetic reevaluation, and emphasising their own programme as the decisive turning point and only living force of the artistic era. Ideally, they acknowledge the merits of the older avant-gardes for breaking through the traditional boundaries of aesthetics and art, for promoting modern values and anti-bourgeois revolt, but they consider

their programme as superior and more revolutionary in their ideational and artistic solutions.

An example of the total negation of Expressionism was the work of August Černigoj, a pioneer of Slovenian visual Constructivism, who considered “Expressionism-Noucentrism” to be a “local metaphysics of stupidly defined phrases of the intimate self”, and a setback to the penetration of the new collectivist art of Constructivism (‘1/2’, *Tank*, no. 3, 1927). By stating that “our aspirations must be revolutionary and not evolutionary”, he made it clear that Constructivism marked the point of an absolute break with the artistic heritage, and especially with the “localisms” that ruled the art scene of “small philistine Ljubljana”. Černigoj alluded to Slovenian expressionist painting (the Kralj brothers, Veno Pilon), which, “by focusing on the humanistic or religious-utopian and ethical renewal of life and art”, was rather a “continuation of old art in new forms than the radical turning point in the understanding of art performed by Constructivism” (Denegri, 2012: 120). According to Černigoj, the local Expressionism (which at that time had melted into a variation of the New Objectivity) was not only provincial but also traditional, because it adhered to the representation of reality by subjectifying it (“false painting full of idiotic, exotic and poster effects”), while his new art constructed and objectified that reality as pledge to the creation of a new, universal and international culture.

An example of a motivated ideological-political critique of Modernism can be found in Ristić who, in several pamphlets in the late 1920s and early 1930s, accused Serbian modernist writers – with whom he shared a common poetic background and collaborated in *Putevi* and *Svedočanstva* – of being subject to templates, “the mechanisation of inspiration” and “academisation of Modernism”. He was sharpest in his criticism in

the pamphlet 'Against Modernist Literature' (*Nadrealizam danas i ovde*, no. 2, 1932), where he claimed that they had betrayed the ideals for which they had been labelled as cultural Bolsheviks, accepted opportunistically the norms and rules of conduct of those they had previously rebelled against, and become political reactionaries by turning to the right, like Miloš Crnjanski (of whose *Lyrics of Ithaca* he had written an enthusiastic review ten years earlier)²⁴. The modernists who were part of the avant-garde of the early 1920s had allowed themselves to be carried away by a wave of conservatism, which showed that their rebellion was superficial and not anchored in any ideology. According to Ristić, behind the Modernism that falsely presented itself as revolutionary, there was a spirit more reactionary than the traditionalist.

Such a critique was a follow-up to the view of Risto Ratković, who, having exposed the "lie of Modernism", located the problem in the "class psychology" which prevented "intellectual workers" from understanding that a change in the psychological structure of society was not possible unless its economic structure changed ('The Way of Intellectuals – Georges Sharman', *Večnost*, no. 5, 1926). He saw the cause of their "class indeterminacy" in a "deceptive economic position", expressing his belief that they would perceive this and unite with "manual workers" in the revolutionary struggle. Ristić, however, did not share such an idealistic expectation; for him, there was no doubt that the former fellow combatants had definitely crossed over to the other side and joined the ranks of the opponents of progressive forces, and he inter-

24 From anarchist rebel, pacifist, radical poet, and initiator of Sumatraism, which proclaimed a break with tradition and orientation towards the future ("There is nothing behind us we could continue"), and which put social consciousness "above historical consciousness of fame and greatness", Crnjanski transformed himself into an advocate of the national idea and cultural tradition, and the founder and editor of the pro-fascist magazine *Ideje* (1934–1935).

preted Surrealism as a response to the disorientation of the bourgeois intellectual and of the “decaying culture” he represented. Elsewhere, Ristić and Koča Popović admitted that with their bourgeois origins they were part of an “historically obsolete apparatus”; but since they were acting subversively in the direction of its abolition, they saw themselves “as a living example of an ending. And thus we ourselves become an accusation” (Popović and Ristić, 1931: 20).

As a member of a fresh avant-garde and a “traitor to the class of his origin” (Benjamin), Ristić operated from an anti-system and anti-regime position – the same position the Expressionists took at the beginning, before they started building their careers (with state support, sinecures, honours) under the dictatorship of King Aleksandar, which Ristić particularly criticised them for. In this sense, the group of Surrealists, in a letter to the leading Belgrade daily *Politika*, in which they announced the programme guidelines for their association and the launch of the almanac *Немогуће/L'impossible*, announced to the public:

[...] we will never write poems that will enter the anthologies of modern Serbian lyrics, because our poems will not be *all beautiful*; we will not write award-winning novels; we will not tell stories with a social tendency [...] we will not become members of the Pen Club; we will not organise receptions; we will not paint pictures for museums; we will be neither sculptors, nor musicians, nor designers of monumental buildings. But we will contribute to the architecture of freedom and the spirit (Матић and Ристић, 1930: 132).

The moral-political imperative was postulated in the letter as one of the pillars of the surrealist refusal not only to play by the aesthetic rules, but also to serve the apparatus of bourgeois

Надреалистичка издања - Београд

СВАКИ КО СЕ
ПОЛЕ
ИНТЕРЕСУЈЕ

ЗА
ЛИСАО
ЧУДО
ЕРОТИКУ
РУКОВОЂЕЊЕ ЖИВОТОМ
КАТАСТРОФЕ
ФИЛМ
СМРТ
ПОЕЗИЈУ
РЕКЛАМУ
НАДРЕАЛИЗАМ
УСПЕХ
САН
СЛОВОДУ
МЕТАФИЗИКУ
МОРАЛ
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ХУМОР
ОЧАЈАЊЕ
КРВОТОК
ПОДСВЕСТ
ЧУДО
СИСТЕМЕ
МАШТУ
АУТОМАТСКО ПИСАЊЕ
ЉУБАВ

МОРА ДА НАБАВИ

АЛМАНАХ КОЈИ

КОНКРЕТИЗУЈЕ
ХАЛУЦИНИРА
РАСВЕТЉАВА
ИЗМЕНАЂУЈЕ
РАСПРАВЉА
ПОМРАЧУЈЕ
ОПЧИЊУЈЕ
ОСЛОБАЂА
ОДГОВАРА
ОГОВАРА
ЗВИЈДИ
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ПЛАШИ
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НЕ МОГУЋЕ

ТУ

НАЈЧУДНИЈУ
НАЈОШТРИЈУ
НАЈМОРАЛНИЈУ
НАЈМОДЕРНИЈУ
НАЈГЕНИЈАЛНИЈУ
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НАЈПЕСИМИСТИЧКИЈУ
НАЈХУМОРИСТИЧНИЈУ
НАЈСЕНЗАЦИОНАЛНИЈУ

ПУБЛИКАЦИЈУ
КОЈА ЈЕ

ИКАД
КОД НАС ИЗАСЛА.

Ислази почетком маја 1930.

Surrealist leaflet announcing the release of the almanac *Немогуће/L'impossible*, 1930

culture. As Ristić pointed out in another place, “not conceding to the taste of the public and the effective non-participation of this group in so-called literary life” (Bor and Ristić, 1932: 30) proved the Surrealists’ moral superiority. This means that incorruptibility, which goes hand in hand with intellectual independence, was manifested by the absence of *ideological interest*, by which the Polish Marxist Isaac Deutscher meant the creative subject’s focus on the material aspect of his production, on his own objectification as an author.

Interpreting Ristić’s anti-modernist pamphlets, Tešić has noted that his negation of the recent literary past was not poetic but political in nature, since it was essentially a confrontation between the dialectical ideological perspective of Surrealism and the idealistic perspective of Modernism, which keeps revolt within the limits of art and “assumes an

opportunistic neutrality in the more critical areas of life” (Tešić, 1991: 184–185). Poetically, Belgrade’s Surrealism was closer to Expressionism than to social literature, but the latter was, at the same time, ideologically closer to it with regard to Marxist social radicalism. Regardless of their diametrically opposed aesthetic positions and mutual disputes, this was the perspective from which their critiques of Modernism were to find a common denominator, as testified by the congruence between Ristić’s and Keršovani’s views. Bourgeois Modernism was the target of attacks by these two new currents on the literary left, which in the early 1930s strongly repoliticised the role of art in social processes, and manifested a more politically mature radicalism than that which followed the war: for them, revolution was only a strategy and not an event that was to take place according to the Bolshevik recipe.

If we go back to the beginning of the 1920s, we will see that the first resolute poetico-political differentiation in the mainstream of expressionist currents, in their peak year in the Yugoslav cultural space, occurred with Micić’s Zenitism. This differentiation was hinted at in the pamphlet ‘Traveling Expressionism and the Anti-Cultural Bridge’ (*Zenit*, no. 3, 1921), where, in accusing Yugoslav Expressionists of being the epigones of a phenomenon they did not know and essentially did not understand, he paid tribute to Expressionism as “the art of our time and epoch in the whole of Europe”. However, he continued by proclaiming Expressionism to be an art that is not “definitive”, superimposing Zenitism on it as the art that is “beyond Expressionism” and “the art that means TOTALITY”. The French-German poet Yvan Goll, a valuable international collaborator of *Zenit* for a short period of time, in his text ‘Der Expressionismus stirbt’ (Expressionism is Dying), was more explicit, calling Expressionism a “failed war usurer” and placing it on the periphery of the

European avant-gardes (*Zenit*, no. 8, 1921). Goll's anti-Expressionism was in line with Micić's intention to make Zenitism completely independent of expressionist roots and to profile it into a self-sufficient Balkanocentric artistic movement which was to reverse the centre-periphery relationship in the sphere of culture. Although at the beginning Micić announced *Zenit* as an expressionist magazine gathering a pleiad of expressionist writers (Tokin, Goll, Vinaver, Crnjanski, Rastko Petrović) and painters (Vilko Gecan, Vinko Foretić, Jovan Bijelić) as his collaborators, he later drove away not only the Expressionists but also his subsequent collaborators by imposing his zenithosophy as the ideology of the movement ("our faith: ZENITISM"), by demonstrating his stubbornness and his authoritarian character; so that in the last phase of its existence the zenitist project practically became a personalised, *one-man* avant-garde.

Micić's critique of Modernism was not of the same kind as Černigoj's and Ristić's; his zenithosophy, driven by a strong dadaist impulse, was conflictual and fed by an "open and conscious provocation directed at the local community and its understanding of modernity/modernism" (Šimičić, 2012: 46). Of all the Yugoslav avant-gardes, the term *aesthetic provocation* could first be applied to Zenitism, by which Flacker implied an "enhanced intentionality of gestures or actions", i.e. a "deliberate challenge", and "artificial arousal of the process" of aesthetic reevaluation that brings the author into conflict with the recipient (Flaker, 1989: 71). This was evident from the beginning in Micić's emphatic manifestos and texts, in which he scandalised the Yugoslav cultural public across the board from left to right, not only with aesthetic provocation but also with "épatage" (*épater le bourgeois*). In 'The Categorical Imperative of the Zenitist School of Poetry' (*Zenit*, no. 13, 1922), he purposefully announced this inten-

tion: “Every word of ours should act as a poisonous injection (99% potassium cyanide). It should provoke: *reaction, protest, alarm*”. Micić declared a crusade against all actors on the literary scene, without distinction, including Krleža (“imagined himself to be a revolutionary and communist writer”), his former associate Dragan Aleksić (“Dadaism = masturbation”), and the Surrealists (“mystifiers”, “plagiarists”, “blasé salon pseudo-revolutionaries”). However, Micić differed from other avant-garde artists in that he did not limit his Nietzschean will to power to the domain of art, but extended it to the entire culture, imagining a Balkan cultural tsunami that would submerge the “withered” European culture and revitalise it with its primitive power. He only showed respect for Černigoj and the Slovenian Constructivists who, enchanted by *Zenit*, adopted the Balkanocentric ideology as a platform for their critique of Western European culture and collaborated with him.

The emergence of Zenitism, the longest-surviving and most international avant-garde movement on the Yugoslav literary-artistic scene, represented without doubt a turning point in the history of Yugoslav avant-gardes. Boško Tokin’s statement that “*an epoch begins with demolition, with the shattering of equilibrium and outdated ideas*” must primarily refer to Zenitism, the first strong avant-garde in Yugoslavia, and the first (it would prove to be the only) avant-garde of broad international orientation. The multilingual magazine *Zenit*, in its two regional phases (Zagreb, 1921–1923; Belgrade, 1924–1926; a total of 43 issues in 34 volumes), published articles by European avant-gardists and initially functioned as a tribune of the Yugoslav avant-garde. Thanks to Micić’s self-promotion skills and tireless personal communication with European avant-garde groups and individuals, *Zenit* had become part of a “large network of magazines” (Henryk

Berlewi) and a notable participant in the “Avant-Garde International”, playing an invaluable role in introducing the local cultural public to the avant-garde movements in Europe.²⁵

Zenitism, the “Balkan totaliser of new life and new art”, passed ideational and artistic evolutions from “abstract meta-cosmic Expressionism” (Micić) to Constructivism, manifesting in its maturity a peculiar eclecticism, which Miško Šuvaković has described as follows:

Micić’s Zenitism has paradoxical, eclectic and excessive ideological characteristics; in the most general sense, it can be defined as an anarchist approach that uses various strategies of provocation within the great ideologies of Pan-Slavism, nationalism, the Nietzschean Superman, Bolshevik revolutionary rhetoric (Leninism), Trotskyism and the nomadic anarchist strategy of permanently changing points of view, forms of expression, values and ideologies (Šuvaković, 1996: 114).

Questioning Zenitism’s position towards Marxism, Zoran Markuš, the first dedicated researcher of Zenitism, concluded that Micić “strongly expressed ultra-left radicalism”, taking as an example his most political text, ‘Zenitism through the Prism of Marxism’, published in the forty-third issue of *Zenit*,

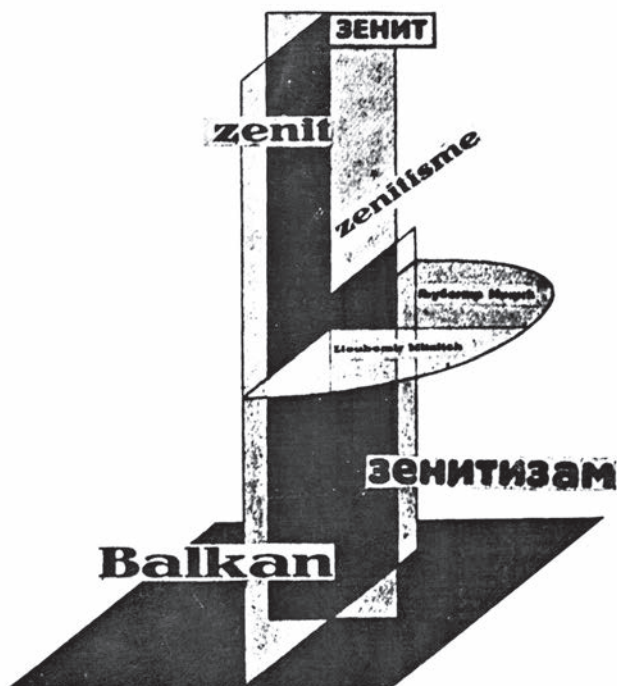
25 The list of collaborators whose texts and poetry were published in *Zenit* is impressive: Marinetti, Hausmann, Gross, Walden, Mayakovsky, Khlebnikov, Blok, Seifert, Malevich, Kandinsky, Behrens, Van Doesburg, Kassák, Gropius... Micić also formed a collection of avant-garde art, the only one in Yugoslavia at that time (exhibited at the *Zenit* editorial office in Zagreb and once shown in Belgrade at a zenitist exhibition in 1924), which consisted of works by Archipenko, Kandinsky, El Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, Glez, Chagall, Delaunay, Černigoj, Petrov, Klek and others. If we add to all the above-mentioned that *Zenit* was the first avant-garde magazine-artwork in Yugoslavia to make a radical step forward in editing and designing magazines, then Zenitism can be said to be the most comprehensive strong avant-garde which set the tone for the avant-garde’s explosive breakthroughs in the 1920s.

tions Marxism preaches as a science – as a sociology – are the same, literally the same knowledge and aspirations Zenitism preaches and revives in its sphere of art”, declared Micić. Later, he reduced his zenithosophy to a common ideological denominator with Marxism, so that the barbarians are “the entire world proletariat”, the Barbarogenius is “a fighter-proletarian”, “East against West” is “Moscow against Paris”, the zenitist revolution in art is “a stimulus and a premonition of the future Balkan revolution”, while zenitist internationalism is the opposite of “stupid” nationalist aspirations. He did not forget to recall the role of *Zenit* in the affirmation of Lenin and the Russian Revolution, in the anti-imperialist protest across “the whole of Europe” against military interventions in Morocco and other colonies, as well as in its “proletarian solidarity” in the cases of the assassination of the Bulgarian poet Geo Milev and the general strike in England. He also boasted about receiving “comradely greetings and good understanding” from the “proletarian camp” abroad (he mentioned *Rude pravo*, the newspaper of the CP of Czechoslovakia) and that Zenitism was represented at the ‘Revolutionary Art of the West’ exhibition in Moscow the same year.

All of Micić’s “paradoxical, eclectic and excessive ideological characteristics”, which are difficult to find in the programme of any other avant-garde, were highlighted and summarised in this text, leading to the dilemma arising from Micić’s urge to publish a statement that directly challenged the censors, with whom he had already had trouble (their ban on his anti-European poem *An Airplane Without an Engine*, because of the line “I am managing the Bolshevik revolution of the metacosmos”). The solution to this problem can be found in the text that had preceded the one mentioned above, in the same issue of *Zenit*, his pamphlet ‘The Legend of the “Dead Movement” or Between Zenitism and

Anti-Zenitism', in which, with his usual outbursts of insults, disqualifications and denunciations, he settled accounts with critics and adversaries from both the bourgeois and left-wing cultural intelligentsia. In a few sentences, he lashed out at "Marxists and other leftists", accusing them of "a reactionism nothing short of stupefying": instead of supporting the progressive movement which was "known far and wide" and represented "an inexhaustible source of spiritual wealth and new artistic expression", they had sided with the bourgeoisie (Мицић, 1926: 3, 8). They professed the "cultural and artistic ideology of their bourgeoisie", because they had not attempted to "nurture their new being", and because "politics was the most important thing for them", which could be justified in Moscow, but in Belgrade was seen as "miserable and sad". One gets the impression that these lines served as a kind of prologue to "Rasinov", who would loftily prove that they were wrong, that the ideological foundations of Zenitism were Marxist, and that his allegiance to the proletarian revolution was unconditional, as was better understood by the foreign "proletarian camp", and evidenced by his participation at the Moscow exhibition as the only Yugoslav representative.²⁶ Micić appeared there as a misunderstood Marxist-Leninist freelancer, opposing both the ideological blindness and intellectual stuntedness of party members, and the "reactionaries and false modernists" on the literary scene with whom he had been in constant conflict since the

26 The aim of the exhibition was to gather together revolutionary directions, groups and individuals, in order to establish the impact that the October Revolution had on European art. "The organisers wanted to unite all radical forces in such a way that the central role would be entrusted to Moscow" (Golubović and Subotić, 2008: 231–232). Golubović and Subotić implied that János Mázsa, a member of the Hungarian group *Ma*, should be credited with the participation of the Zenitists at the exhibition, because he wrote about *Zenit*, lived in Moscow at the time, and was one of the consultants in the expert team for the exhibition.



Jo Klek, 'Zenit, Zenitism', emblem for *Zenit* editions, 1923

launch of *Zenit*. Therefore, we can conclude that *Zenit* no. 43, whose pages were almost completely filled with these two texts, was Micić's final agonistic confrontation with the Yugoslav cultural milieu where he had been unappreciated, contested and attacked from the beginning.

Micić's zenitist "spiritual vertical" was made up of elements of different origins: expressionist cosmism and left-wing Nietzscheanism, the civilianism of the Italian Futurists and the Eurasian primitivism of the Russian Futurists, dadaist nihilism and finally constructivist simultanism. All this was permeated with the messianic conviction that Zenitism was a

creative synthesis of all these movements –“everything that was the best and positively created with great effort in the past 20 years” – and their ideological totalisation, i.e. the ultimate avant-garde that “Balkanised” all other avant-gardes. Developing his zenithosophy, as Arthur Lovejoy said in his *Essays in the History of Ideas*, Micić manipulated “idea-units” or “elementary components”, but not systems of thought, doctrines or isms. These components have their own life and history independent of the system or the person to whom they originally belonged, they enter into an interplay, into conflicts and alliances with other ideas, they become prey to other patterns of thought where they can lose their essential meaning and forget their origin. Thinking along these lines, Radomir Konstantinović noted that Micić’s “basic method” rested on the creation of a “plusexistence” of avant-garde directions, which implied “a confusing ideological ‘reversal’ of the ideas of others” (Konstantinović, 1983b: 360 fn 88).

We must also agree with Konstantinović’s claim that Micić’s Balkanisation of Europe was “the most fantastic ideological construction of modern Serbian culture, and that the Barbarogenius, as its symbolic expression, is without any doubt incomparable: he is the genius of the artist and poet as barbarian at war with civilisation” (337–338). Micić’s prophetic barbarism, which provided reinforcement to the zenitist vertical, at the top of which shone the “Zenit Sun” as the “highest throne of the SPIRIT”, was at the same time anti-European and anti-capitalist, Slavophile and Balkano-centric, revolutionary and counter-revolutionary, anti-modern and avant-garde, essentialistic and cosmopolitan. At the ideological level, he produces a confusion over the East-West dichotomy: Spengler’s ideologeme of “the Decline of the West” met with Lenin’s critique of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism, racial nationalism met with proletarian social-

ism, conservative millenarian pan-Slavism met with Bolshevik internationalism, the mystic spiritualism of the East met with the technical civilisation of the West. etc.²⁷ Micić's point of view was ideologically confusing and often contradictory as it constantly zigzagged and changed places, moving the signifiers from left to right and back, and thus causing the contradictions in his Marxism-Leninism to accumulate.

Theoretically unqualified, Micić moved across surface of Marxism, automatically incorporating Marxist idea-units and slogans into the ideology of Zenitism, in the same way as he incorporated elements of the previous avant-gardes into the poetics of Zenitism. He employed Marxist slogans mechanically, noisily, and often childishly, as for example in a passage from the manifesto 'Man and Art' which opened the first issue of *Zenit*: "Our struggle will be the struggle against crime – for the sake of Man. Proletarians of all countries, unite – against killing!" On the other hand, starting from Lenin's critique of imperialism, in the proclamation 'Morocco – once more, for the salvation of civilization!' (*Zenit*, no. 37, 1925,) Micić used an aggressive vocabulary while

27 When considering the anti-European discourse in the Serbian culture of the interwar period, Branka Prpa emphasises that anti-Europeanism and faith in Balkan man can be regarded as a link that connected Serbian avant-gardists and Serbian traditionalists. Although they differed in form, "certain representatives of the both currents are very similar in their critique of European civilisation, and even in the spiritual sources in which they seek inspiration for the establishment of a new identity" (Prpa, 2018: 341). By way of comparison, the anti-European discourse linked two ideologically disputed camps in Russia: the Slavophiles and the radical left intelligentsia, including the Futurists and some Constructivists. The former believed in the superiority of Russian folk culture over degenerate European, "Romano-Germanic" civilisation, including socialism as a new form of colonialism, while the latter rejected the "bourgeois-capitalist-imperialist" episode of Europe, but not its constitutive civilisational and cultural values. According to Jane Burbank, both camps referred to Spengler's *Decline of the West* (in the Russian translation, *The Decline of Europe*), but drew opposite conclusions regarding assessment of the future of Russia and Europe (Burbank, 1989: 213–220).

engaging in his most extensive critique of the “two-headed monster” of capitalism and imperialism (“The expansion of capital is insatiable. The instinct of imperialism is cruel and unscrupulous”), which he saw as a threat to the whole world, and calling for the defence of the Balkans (analogous to the call for the defence of Morocco) from “vulgar Europeanisation”. Micić was not the only avant-gardist who preached his own rudimentary, even (in his case) “barbarised” Marxism. However, no one else had done it so loudly and ostentatiously, nor claimed that the left front in art was his only project and nothing else.

Micić’s Marxism, especially in its Zagreb phase, often mingled with a frenzied and inflammatory anarchistic type of radicalism. In ‘Man and Art’, he put the mystical demigod Anarch, the one who “wanted to be the ruler in chaos – the ‘vsevold’ – and longed to create a work out of chaos”, at the head of the zenitist cultural revolution. He mentioned the same Anarch who creates a work out of chaos in ‘The Zenitist Manifesto’, and then later, in ‘The Spirit of Zenitism’, identified Zenitism with anarchy:

In aspiring to man’s liberation and individualisation, Zenitism is at the same time anarchy, whose religion is: the creation of new forms and relations as the spiritual foundations of a future Balkan-human art, and the destruction of all the inhuman and unspiritual past with its positive work (Micić, 1921: 4).

Micić’s anarchism was cosmic and metaphysical, passing through the filter of expressionist left-wing Nietzscheanism, and its basic guideline was the spiritual and creative liberation of the individual. His insistence on individualism manifested in an indirect polemic with Lunacharsky, whose text ‘Proletcult’ Micić had previously published in the first

two issues of *Zenit*, as the first sign of his sympathy for the Bolshevik revolution and the new Russian art. In the second sequel, where Lunacharsky, who insisted on the social factor, questioned personality as the “source of creation”, there was an editorial remark to the effect that he did not agree with the sections on individualism. Finally, in the short story *De gidi bekjar budala*²⁸ (*Zenit*, no. 40, 1926), the main protagonist and Micić’s alter ego, Anarh Glad, was a phantom, a poet, a proletarian and an apostate to whom nothing was sacred, and a revolutionary who unsuccessfully attempted to change people’s mind in the Balkans, ending his mission with the dilemma “growing beneath the skin like an ulcer: BOMB OR SUICIDE”. The evolution from cosmic to haiduk-style anarcho-individualism was analogous to Micić’s evolution from advocating a “pure revolution” which flirted with communism from a distance to openly placing Zenitism under the banner of Marxism.

According to Esther Levinger’s observation, Micić did not call for class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat, and did not even refer to communism as an ideal social order; nor did he mention the working class until the final phase of the zenitist project (Levinger, 2002: 260), and nor, we should also add, did he ever even mention Marx. However, the Surrealist Jovanović, acknowledging in retrospect his consistent anti-bourgeois attitude and a “certain autochthonousness”, also criticised Micić (and the entire ensemble of Serbian Expressionists) for “an obvious inaccuracy with class terms, which was at times only absurd, but often openly reactionary” (Jovanović, 1932: 52). All this demonstrates that Micić did not understand his barbarogenic utopia as a concrete form of social organisation, but “as a function whose

28 Translator’s note: the title consists of untranslatable neologistic units.

motivating power lies in poetry and art” (Levinger), which means that his revolution was carried out in the domain of culture and represented the particular type of poetic policy of which Benjamin wrote.²⁹

The same applies to Micić’s brother and faithful zenitist comrade Branko Ve Poljanski, who in the ‘Manifesto’ published in *Svetokret*, the personal pre-zenitist “magazine for the expedition to the North Pole of the human spirit”, exclaimatorily celebrated the October Revolution (“Long Live the October Revolution of the Spirit!”, “Long live Lenin!”, “Long live the International!”, “Long live the Soviets!”, etc.), preaching a new historical beginning of humanity under the banner of spiritual revolution. However, that revolution, inspired by the October, was anti-Bolshevik in its expression, because it was based on “self-determination of the spirit” and the internal autonomy of art, “far from banal political-national-social and Bolshevik terrors”. Although he professed Micić’s Balkan-Slavophile ideology, for Poljanski, according to Aleksandar Petrov, “Moscow did not possess such a magnetic attraction as it did for Micić”; so he did not associate his vision of revolution with the Russian Revolution so much as see himself as “the messenger of World Revolution” (Петров, 1988: LXVIII).

29 After returning to Belgrade from being an emigrant in Paris (1937), where he had tried unsuccessfully to restore Zenitism, Micić demonstrated a complete political metamorphosis by declaring himself a Serbian nationalist, anti-Yugoslav and anti-communist. This was evidenced by the novel *Barbarogénie le Décivilisateur (Barbarogenius the Deciviliser)*, published in Paris (1938), and the only issue of the magazine *Srbijanstvo* (1940), which was almost completely dedicated to his ‘Manifesto of Serbianism’. However, if we look at the later issues of *Zenit*, in which Balkan nationalism acquired the clear outlines of Serbian nationalism (let us not forget the anti-Croatianism he had manifested since moving to Belgrade), then this metamorphosis was not surprising. Until his death in 1971, Micić lived in an internal emigration where he continued to profess his irrational chauvinist ideology, being despised, passed over or arrested in socialist Yugoslavia. Serious scholarly research and reevaluation of Zenitism came posthumously, culminating in the comprehensive exhibition ‘Zenitism and the Avant-Garde of the 1920s’ at the National Museum in Belgrade (1983).

He refrained from repeating his critique of Bolshevism, but expressed his “ultra-left radicalism” in a line from his poem *A Journey to Brasilia* (1922), in which he mentioned Alija Alijagić (“Alijagić thinks that worms are smart beasts”), the assassin of the Yugoslav Interior Minister Milorad Drašković (1921) and a member of the terrorist organisation Red Justice, founded by the Communist Youth members disgusted by the passive attitude of the CP of Yugoslavia after the adoption of the ‘Proclamation’, whose author was Drašković. Finally, the main protagonist of his short novel *77 Suicides* (1923), Niki-for Morton, was a grotesque anarchistic type who planned to blow up the world with demonic machines (he had 77 bodies in 77 cities), in protest against bourgeois morality and aesthetics.

Dragan Aleksić’s Dadaism, however, was a different case, showing the typical characteristics of dadaist “apolitical nihilism” (Erjavec), although it occasionally declared its own variant of Bolshevism, with slogans such as “DADA is a revolutionary communist” and “Russia is ultra DADA”. Presented in the magazines *Dada tank* and *Dada jazz*, Aleksić’s Dadaism soared high with the latest wave of Dadaism’s international diffusion, at the time when the metropolitan Dadaisms of Paris and Berlin were in decline, and when fresh avant-garde projects such as Constructivism and Surrealism, which many Dadaists would later join, started to emerge. With regard to the absence of a revolutionary political imagination, Aleksić’s dadalogy followed Tzara’s, which was deprived of any potential for aesthetic revolution and optimal projection by a cultural nihilism based on the cynical operations implied in “opposing art as a technique for giving meaning” (Sloterdijk); as was also, for comparison, the case with Zenitism. Referring to this, Erjavec noted that its radical nature made it impossible for Dadaism to “fully embrace any particular

the point of view of the aesthetic avant-gardes, lacked in reality a “positive designation”. The same holds true for Aleksić’s Dadaism, which was not announced by a programme in the form of a manifesto, although at the same time delivering, according to Predrag Todorović, poetic attitudes presented in short prose passages inserted between poems in *Dada tank* (Тодоровић, 2016: 176). In the case of Aleksić, there was no explicit commitment to the dadaist new man, new life and new art, nor were there clear indications as to what Dadaism wanted, except ludically to destroy the culture as “ennui, boredom, bourgeois madness, beautifully embodied and wrapped in saffian” (‘Dadaism’, *Zenit*, no. 3, 1922).

In his retrospective article ‘A Sergeant in the Dadaist Troop’ (1931), Aleksić determined that, unlike other movements, Dadaism completely left aside the question of style because, as many failed to understand, it was a philosophical rather than an artistic movement, which used art as “the most popular means of expression”. Dadaism was essentially sceptical and ironic, “without the ridiculous intrusions of the Futurists into the domain of art”, and as such, a movement which “took art as a means, not an end” (Алексић, 1978: 112). In other words, he intended to say that Dadaism was a grand provocation and did not even attempt to create a new art, but “to inject the thought of an almost purposeless or all-purposeful revolt as such” and shake up the stagnant artistic milieu. Dadaism, explained Aleksić, “left an example that no one will achieve for a long time: rowdiness, elasticity and nonchalance. Ultimately, who will attain the courage of a Dadaist...?” (115). Although twenty percent of dadaist principles guided the post-war generations of writers (Vinaver, De Buli, Drainac, the Zenitists, the Surrealists), they did not have enough audacity and courage to use those potentials, but, as Aleksić noted, stopped halfway through, diluting the

revolt and surrendering to the “worship of transformation” and the search for new literary idols.

The dadaist rejection of a work of art as an object of aesthetic contemplation in favour of “vehement distraction” was for Benjamin a manifestation of a social attitude in itself, in which he recognised a revolutionary effect of Dada in which it had exceeded its immediate goal (Benjamin, 1974: 143). The dadaist giving a slap to aesthetic habits with a poem as a “salad of words” could perhaps be seen as “rebellion for rebellion’s sake” (Hans Richter), deprived of optimal projection; but with its draconian violation of linguistic, genre, medium and aesthetic conventions, it manifested itself as a rebellion against the ideological social structure that formed the field of art. In this sense, Peter Sloterdijk has argued that montage procedures, destruction of the dogma of mimesis, emancipation of dissonance, the principle of alienation, the abstraction of the real, new techno-morphemes, and the aesthetic use of calculation and chance, constituted a revolutionary, exclusivist rebellion against the “self-evident”, the obvious, the implied and the “natural” (Sloterdijk, 1988: 36). According to the “anti-ontological affect”, the avant-gardes were “spiritually akin to the secular-eschatological projections of the end and goal of the history of mankind” which were spread by “liberal progressivism, Marxist production messianism and aesthetic-social anarchism” (18).

Sloterdijk moves along the line of Adorno’s aesthetics, which interpreted modern art as the production of “negative knowledge of the actual world”, an autonomous aesthetic critique that became a social critique by functioning as a means for the radical change of sensory experience, and thus of the way we experience the world. As he stated in *Aesthetic Theory*, “in the liberation of form one counts primarily on the liberation of society, because with form, the aesthet-

Sivo

**Sivo od ulic,
sivo od kamna
je moje srce.**

**MRTVI KORAKI JETNIKOV
BIJEJO VANJ.
ŽELIŠ BITI SREČEN?
NE ŽELI SI SREČE.**

**DINAMIZEM
AKTIVNOST
BALKAN B**



**AA' — depresija
BB' — akcija
= realno delo**

' ekspresionizem življenja
" brezrečni prostor, depresija
gospodarstva, politike itd.
''' Temelji bodočnosti

Fernando, strah Asturije

Srečko Kosovel, 'Gray', from the collection *Integrals*, 1967

ic coherence of each particular element represents a social relationship in the work of art”, and therefore “the liberated form is in direct opposition to the existent” (Adorno, 1979: 414–415). Adorno placed the critical function of art on the level of “expression” or “configuration”, which he illustrated with Picasso’s *Guernica*: its revolutionism stemmed from the “unhuman construction of the form”, and not from the anti-fascism, even if it expressed itself directly. He interpreted

Modernism as a definite break from the classical law of form and its “colourful facades”, in favour of the disharmony and ugliness by which art resists the dominance of the fetish of the Beautiful as a signifier of the hegemony of social, moral and aesthetic ideologies. For Adorno, the revolutionism of a modern work of art lay in its autonomy from politics, because only in this way, *sui generis*, did it develop its socio-political potential, that is, the “political participation of the non-political”. Adorno and his colleagues from the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research considered modern art to be the bearer of a longing for that other society besides the current one – “the guardian of messianic hope”.

The belief that revolution produces social and material consequences in the register of language was convincingly defended by Julia Kristeva in her influential study *Revolution in Poetic Language*. According to Kristeva, an analogy can be drawn between the political and the poetic revolutions: what the former generates in society, the latter performs in the subject. The breaking of poetic conventions reveals that changes in language cause changes in the *status of the subject* – its relationship to the body, others, objects – showing that “normalised language is only one way of articulating the process of signification which involves the body, the material referent and the language itself” (Kristeva, 1984: 15–16). For Kristeva, this heterogeneous process of “productive violence” is at the same time a structuring and destructuring practice, a passage to the external borders of the subject and the society – a revolution. Philippe Sollers, a colleague of Kristeva’s from the *Tel Quel* group, has explained the revolution of poetic language more simply: “To challenge a rhetorical system or narrative forms is to question bourgeois ideology, the bourgeois conception of the world (as an accumulative hierarchy, which can be narrated, ‘full of meaning’)” (Janjion, 1976: 116).

This means that the opening of a crevice in the coordinate system of discourse simultaneously opens a crevice in its ideological argumentation, and therefore in the construction of reality as a product of that argumentation.

“The Doomed Poetry of the Avant-Garde” (Teige) – the Dadaists’ *nigger lingua*, Marinetti’s *parole in libertà*, the Russian Futurists’s *зáумь*, Micić’s *reči u prostoru*, Kosovel’s *integrali* and *konsi*, the Surrealists’ *écriture automatique* – turned poetry into an “immanent critique of language” (Roland Barthes), and made the poet an engineer of language who liberates the suppressed being of language and discovers its unsuspected generative capacities. As Barthes explained in *Writing Degree Zero*, the ideological unity of the bourgeoisie had produced a unique writing whose form could not be broken until consciousness had matured enough to allow that language does not necessarily have to be “transparent to feel like language” (Bart, 1971: 34–35). Classical writing began to disintegrate in the 19th century, and with the radical poet Mallarmé, there emerged a tendency “to destroy language, whereby Literature was understood only as a kind of corpse” (36). Form was supposed to stop binding the writer to his society, and to develop a new power “independent of its economy and euphemism” and of the class character of writing, in order to separate writing from the “literary myth” and let it embark on an “adventure of form”. In other words, the writer was supposed to stop perceiving himself as a follower of a literary tradition and its ideology, and to “discard all those writing tools, the list of figures and fables, without which nothing can be done” (Macherey, 1979: 171–172), in order to kill “so-called literature” (Ristić). The avant-garde’s primary target was the novel, as a literary genre which embodied a systematic view of the world, determined by social and psychological laws and motivations.

The status of the avant-garde was primarily defined by its negative attitude towards the national tradition inscribed in the structure of the literary field, and by what Jean-Paul Sartre called “writing against readers”, to describe the refusal to indulge the taste of the audience and the demands of the market. In a small peripheral culture as was the case in Yugoslavia, the break with the operative literary norms carried a specific weight, because the dominant value matrix was premodernist and slowed down the processes of modernisation in all areas of creativity. According to the Surrealist Oskar Davičo’s recollection, “the circumstances around 1920 made it almost impossible to aspire to revolutionise literature on account of it – and not only it – being fifty years behind the world” (Davičo, 1969a: 45). However, it was then that a decisive step was taken by “skipping stages”, and the first to diagnose the temporal detachment of Yugoslav literature, “calling its nationalist bourgeois misery a literary lie”, was Krleža (ibid.).³⁰ Although the thesis of the fifty-year lag is fragile, Davičo’s assessment indicated the breakdown of the imposed frameworks of literary expression, through to the acceptance of contemporary European literary trends as signposts to one’s own poetic subjectivation and liberation from the burden of tradition.

Authentic testimony to the mood of the new generation of poets at the time was provided by the young militant Crnjanski, in the sumatrist manifesto “The Explanation of ‘Sumatra’” (1920): “Like a sect, after quite a long time during which art has meant entertainment, we now bring unrest and upheaval in words, sentiments and thoughts” [...] We

30 Davičo referred to Krleža’s pamphlet ‘The Croatian Literary Lie’ (*Plamen*, no. 1, 1919), in which in his youthful anarchism he uttered “the most terrible words ever written about his own national tradition” (Darko Gašparović), calling expressionistically, pathetically and hyperbolically for the destruction of the entire Croatian literary and intellectual heritage.

have broken with tradition, because we are throwing ourselves headlong into the future” (Crnjanski, 1983: VIII). The avant-garde’s iconoclastic appearance met with a combination of strong internal resistance (the literary field) and external resistance (the social field), so that during the 1920s, polemical exchanges with the cultural and political right wing were a common occurrence. According to Crnjanski, most of the attacks on his generation, which was politically on the left, “came from the miserable stupidity of small communities” that wanted to hang onto the pre-war artistic atmosphere and its “comfortable sensations”, without realising that after the slaughterhouse of the war the whole of life “was shaken”, and “new fervours, new thoughts, new laws and new moralities had arrived” (ibid.).

Conservative pamphletistics had often anathematised the breaking of classical poetic form as “anarchy in poetry” or “anarchist nonsense from which no work of art can emerge”, as the poet and anti-modernist critic Sima Pandurović described the lyrics of Miroslav Krleža. According to Pandurović, modern poetry was born from “chaos”, and chaos is “anarchy that has no goal, no form, it is a negation of ethical and any other meaning, while an aesthetic and ethical meaning, goal and form are the qualities without which a work of art cannot be imagined” (Пандуровић, 1920: 389). In conservative discourses, the label “anarchy in poetry” served to expose negatively the structure of modernist poetry, in the same way as “Bolshevism in poetry” served to disqualify that poetry politically, by linking it to an ideology that was considered destructive and barbaric. Pandurović, whom we take as an example of right-wing literary criticism in Yugoslavia in the 1920s, accused the apolitical Expressionist Rastko Petrović of following the “degenerate wave of the Russian revolution”, alluding to the fact that “the Russian avant-garde developed

on the basis of the revolutionary transformation of society”, although “the echo of that tradition in our area was not big” (Tešić, 1991: 99). Everything mentioned above shows that right-wing criticism “recognised” the analogy between the poetic and social revolutions, and realised that each in its own domain ruthlessly broke up the old “orthodox” system of values and created a new one leading to civilisational and cultural regression. In other words, in the avant-garde’s struggle for a new poetic language and new cultural patterns, right-wing criticism recognised the struggle for power, and in the nervous tissue of the avant-garde text, political subversion. The “recipe” for solving this problem was offered by M. Stanković, the editor of the conservative newspaper *Narodna prosveta*, in the pamphlet ‘Literary Counter-Revolution’ (1921): just as the “communism in social life” that preached “total freedom” was eliminated by “state armed forces”, so in the “realm of literature”, literary criticism that “served the Beautiful” should deal with dilettantes who, in the name of poetic freedom, “desecrated literature” by following the examples of the West (Stanković, 1983: 245–246). As Tešić has argued, the manner in which the avant-garde was denounced was taken from the political discourse with which the bourgeois and regime press fought against the “Bolshevism”, “socialism” and “communism” of the Leninist direction in Soviet Russia (ibid.). As elsewhere in Europe, right-wing literary criticism in Yugoslavia was motivated by nationalist and conservative nostalgia, and manifested a cultural and aesthetic traditionalism rooted in political traditionalism.

“Many people are frightened of the very sound of the word ‘anarchy’. Many people think that today’s art will not survive just because of that anarchy in art today. I do not belong to the type of people called ‘many people’, I am not frightened of the anarchy present in modern art”, wrote A.

B. Šimić in the manifesto 'Anarchy in Art' (1918), where he glorified anarchy, which was his term for free verse, as a new and liberating creative principle (Šimić, 2008: 171). Šimić was one of the first writers in the Yugoslav literary space who directly or indirectly accepted the idea of anarchism, either in terms of articulating one's own political point of view or advocating some kind of intellectual non-conformism and unrestrained artistic expression. The word 'anarchy' was indeed a resonant, explosive and provocative word in the discourses of the avant-gardes as well as of their conservative opponents, and a powerful signifier of aesthetic radicalism and affiliation with the solution of political anarchism, with diametrically opposed value accentuations.

Before Šimić, the idea of anarchism was marked by the poetic and intellectual habitus of the "apocalyptic poet" Janko Polić Kamov, who added the adjectival Kam to his name after the biblical Ham, the accursed son of Noah. His passionate search for the path to absolute freedom was manifested by exceeding the poetic canon (through free verse, profanity, absurdity, the grotesque), subversion of moral norms (sex, madness), intellectual intransigence and bohemia, as well as the founding in his youth of the anarchist literary-political organisation *Cefas* (1900), which aimed to start a revolution and blow up the whole of Croatia with dynamite and bombs. Polić's credo can be extracted from the following sentences of the novella *Freedom* (1914): "My temper is – opposition; my logic – indiscipline; my philosophy – overturn". With regard to his adventurous and bohemian habitus, Kamov was akin to the first Serbian Futurist, Dimitrije Mitrinović, in whose texts, primarily in the manifesto 'Aesthetic Contemplations' (*Bosanska vila*, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11–12, 13–14, 15–16, 17–18, 20, 1913), Palavestra recognised "anarchistic moods" close to those found in Bakunin's anarchism: he propagated chaos,

experienced it as catharsis, and identified it with revolution, “although he did not seek to abolish all values, which, at the social level, Bakunin’s anarchists did not wish to abolish either” (Palavestra, 1979: 232–233).

Krleža and Cesarec were anarchist sympathisers in their youth, and this was reflected in the first issues of *Plamen*, which at that stage could have been qualified as a communist-anarchist magazine. Starting from Marxist teaching, Cesarec referred to Bakunin and Kropotkin, and speaking of the “mission of anarchism”, he highlighted Kropotkin’s concept of the anarchist commune, considering it to be “the most harmonious, most audacious and most honourable form of society” (‘Mystification of an Ethics’, *Plamen*, no. 1, 1919). He later explained that he was an anarchist until he perceived in Bolshevism the “concisely and realistically conceived assumption of anarchism”, and in the dictatorship of the proletariat the way to create a “new civilisation”, which he regarded as a precondition for the total liberation of personality (Stipetić, 1982: 86). In his youth, Krleža, along with Lenin, was imbued with Russian anarchism, about which he collected an extensive literature, and with which he justified his “complete disorganisation” and “tendency to individualism” (Očak, 1982: 37). This was evidenced by his drama-legend *Christopher Columbus* (1917) – written at the time of the October Revolution – which he by analogy dedicated to Lenin, imagining him as “a Stirnerian, a solipsist”, as an “anarchistic type who is in the end has separated from the masses, who despises the masses”. Realising that he had misinterpreted the Bolshevik leader, and that Lenin was “a mason-constructor, a creator who works according to plan”, he withdrew the dedication in the printed edition of the play the following year.

The Yugoslav modernists operated in political milieus where anarchism met with only a modest response, and after the Great War it practically disappeared from the political stage. Just as socialism arrived in Yugoslavia relatively late in comparison to other European countries, so anarchism began to be accepted more significantly only in the last decade of the 19th century, at first in the territories of the Habsburg Monarchy – Croatia and Slovenia – where it arrived from Italy and Austria. As Luka Pejić has noted in his study on Croatian anarchism, “although it is inappropriate to speak about an anarchist ‘movement’ in this region, actions by individuals and collectives who have represented the views of European anarchist thought are evident, sometimes more loud, but mostly fairly quiet, often even unnoticed” (Pejić, 2016: 182). The inability of anarchism, which by the late 19th century had begun to distance it from the working masses, to find an historically adequate and active organisational form, led to the formulation of two alternatives for overcoming the crisis: the first was “the propaganda of the deed”, based on the belief that a silent revolutionary potential could be activated by the employment of heroic acts of individual terror (assassinations of politicians and crowned heads), while the other implied attaching itself to some of the mass workers’ organisations, primarily the trade union movement (Subotić, 1988: 48). This was also reflected in Yugoslav anarchism – dominated by the ideas of Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta – which found its supporters among radical socialists (for example, Živojin Žujović, Svetozar Marković’s mentor, was Proudhon’s follower and the first Serbian anarchist), and partly among the working class, whilst keeping illegal groups, workers’ associations and trade unions as their strongholds. The enforced repression of the labour movement under both the Habsburg Monarchy and the Kingdom of Serbia, as the

state response to the increasingly loud and better organised actions of workers in the fight for their rights, as well as the non-combative attitude of the socialists, undoubtedly contributed to the popularisation of anarchist ideas and methods of struggle.³¹

A separate niche in the history of Yugoslav anarchism was occupied by illegal revolutionary organisations from the period before the First World War, which combined nationalist and socialist demands in their struggle for the independence of their nations and were inspired by anarchist ideas (Young Bosnia, the Slovenian 'Revival', the Macedonian VMRO). Yugoslav anarchism experienced its most politically explosive version with Young Bosnia, whose ideological platform was based on a combination of Russian populism, anarchism, socialism and Nietzscheanism.³² After the failed assassinations of the Emperor Franz Joseph and the Austro-Hungarian Viceroy in Bosnia, General Varešanin, the Young Bosnians implemented their tactics of direct individual action by assassinating Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife in

31 Anarcho-syndicalism had dominated in Serbia since the beginning of the 20th century, thanks to the journalist Krsto Cicvarić, leader of the first anarchist group, founder of the magazines *Hleb i sloboda* (1905) and *Radnička borba* (1907), and author of the theoretical works *Anarchism and Anarchists* and *From the Anarchist Programme* (1909). In Croatia, the most prominent preacher of anarchism was the anarcho-syndicalist activist Miloš Krpan, who in 1909 tried to establish an anarcho-communist colony in Dubovik near Slavonski Brod, following the example of the "Tolstoy colonies" in the USA and Europe. The propaganda of the deed was partly advocated by the dissident faction of the Social Democratic Party of Serbia, known as the 'Direktaši' (1906–1912), which gave priority to direct action by labour (strikes) over parliamentary political struggle.

32 In his article 'Readings of Sarajevo Assassins' (1935), Dr. Jovan Kršić gave a detailed review of the literature favoured by Young Bosnia's members, from which we learn that they read Bakunin, Kropotkin and Herzen, as well as Chernyshevsky, Marx, William Morris and Maxim Gorky. The night before the Sarajevo Assassination, Gavrilo Princip was reading Kropotkin's *Well-Being for All*, and was thinking about the possibility of a social revolution, and later, in prison, admitted to Dr. Pappenheim that reading anarchist writers prompted him to the assassination (Kršić, 1960: 304).

Sarajevo in 1914, which led to the outbreak of the First World War. Under the intellectual influence of Dimitrije Mitrović, they tried their hand as writers, critics and translators, believing that the work of creating a modern national culture was inseparable from the struggle for the decolonisation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the formation of a nation state. “If a Serbian revolutionary wants to win, he must be an artist and a conspirator, have a talent for struggle and suffering, be a martyr and a plotter, a man of Western manners and a haiduk, who will cry out and lead the fight for the unfortunate and the oppressed”, was how Young Bosnia’s Vladimir Gaćinović summed it up (Čalić, 2013: 78). The union of “literary symbolism and revolutionary work” advocated by Mitrović made Young Bosnia into a distinct amalgam of revolutionary organisation and modernist literary movement.

Although political anarchism had been wiped off the political stage after the war, the libertarian spirit of anarchism continued to manifest itself in the poetics of the second-generation avant-gardists. This primarily applies to Rade Drainac, who in the first issue of his *Zenit*-inspired “review for intuitive art”, *Hipnos*, when describing Hipnism’s nihilistic programme, tendentiously used a blasphemous metaphor: “What do you care if we, the *New Anarchists*, burn the glorified false God of our ancestors” (“The Programme of Hipnism”, 1922). A self-proclaimed “poet, apache and prophet”, and an “individual anarchist”, Drainac played the card of the bourgeois negative stereotype which associated anarchism with chaos, violence and terrorism, just as Micić created his Barbarogenius as a threatening anarchist figure disguised as a new primitive. According to Konstantinović, Drainac was “a poet who fights by using scandal against bourgeois consciousness and bourgeois culture, who opposes the anarchy of disorder to every possible order”, and whose bohemianism

ХИПНОС

УМЕТНОСТ
ДЕКОНЦЕНТРАЦИЈЕ
ХИПНИЗАМ



МЕСЕЧНА РЕВИЈА
ЗА ИНТУИТИВНУ УМЕТНОСТ
БЕОГРАД

БРОЈ 2
ЈАНУАР 1923.

ДИРЕКТОР
Раде Драчина

Hipnos, no. 2, 1923

becomes “a conscious, even *programmatic apostasy from the existing world*” (Konstantinović, 1983a: 242–243).

In the only issue of *Novo čovečanstvo* (1922), the “international review for cultural and literary problems” launched between the two issues of *Hipnos* with the aim of letting “lit-

erature enter politics”, Drainac advocated anarchism more explicitly, writing that the magazine’s primary task was to contribute to the total liberation of human personality from “everything social and to do with the state”, by supporting the “modern aspirations” brought into politics and art by “the new people who are moving towards attaining the New Humanity”. In the poem “I Rade Drainac the creator of the New Universe”, he openly declared himself an anarchist: “[...] and I was born in Toplica, pale and sentimental/I became an anarchist child overnight/I Rade Drainac because of the greatest love and justice/I will die grey-haired in prison”. In the same magazine, in the article ‘Tolstoy and His Teachings’ signed by Ivan Mitković, anarchist action was recommended as a means of achieving man’s liberation, as the “apostles of anarchism” Bakunin and Kropotkin had advocated (Ješić, 2013: 81).³³ In spite of its anarchist intonation, six years later Boško Tokin described *Novo čovečanstvo* as a magazine with a “communist-literary character”, probably having in mind a most systematically written article, ‘A Contribution to the Critique of Social Reaction’, by the Croatian poet Tin Ujević, in which he pointed to the inevitability of the revolutionary class struggle that was to result in a new communist humanity. The magazine, which propagated both anarchism and communism, represented an attempt to “reconcile radical avant-gardism with a radically progressive political programme”, following the trail already blazed by Krleža and Cesarec with *Plamen*

33 In the monograph on Drainac, Nedeljko Ješić stated that Mitković, named as an editor (who was in fact Drainac, named as a publisher), was registered in a police document as a member of the communist movement, while at the same time in an authorial text he declared himself an anarchist. These facts led Ješić to the intriguing but unargued conclusion that the money for the printing of the magazine, transferred via Mitković, “came from some secret political organisation whose activities were aimed at overthrowing the existing regime” (Ješić, 2013: 80).



Vinko Foretić Vis, 'Portrait of a Slovene', (Anton Podbevšek), *Zenit*, no. 5, 1921

(Tešić, 1987: 355), but with the difference that in *Novo čovečanstvo* there were hardly any literary contributions, and the political articles were at a low theoretical level.

Unlike in the case of Drainac's self-mystificatory, bohemian and messy anarcho-individualism, Anton Podbevšek was known for his distinct anarchoid habitus, unique among Yugoslav avant-gardists. This poet of "demonic energy" gained

the status of an urban legend in Ljubljana, thanks to his para-textual strategies, ideas and way of dressing, and the extravagant public performances with which he scandalised the public and provoked the audience at literary soirées (Dović, 2009: 42). Marijan Dović has recognised in Podbevšek an artist whose subjectivity was not “derived” exclusively from his work, but also from what conditioned the work: social existence and ways of production, performance, programming, manifestation, socialisation and attitude towards the audience (39–40). His avant-gardism was not only literary but also behavioural, and he was a pioneer of what became known as *artistic behaviour* in the context of the new artistic practice of the 1970s, which is a concept broader than performance (Podbevšek was familiar with the performances of the Italian and Russian Futurists), because it indicates the removal of the border between the performing subjectivity in the context of art and the performing subjectivity in everyday life. Podbevšek’s “life in action” gained its poetic metaphor in his collection of poems *The Man with Bombs* (1925), in which his hero and alter ego presented himself as a “terrible anarchist” and “Man-God”, guided by a “boundless hatred for everything that exists” and an “infinite creative rage”. However, this hero, as Kos has noted, had nothing in common with the anarchists’ terror-bombing actions, but was the leader of a spiritual revolution, a cosmic anarchist whose path was “paved with good intentions” (Kos, 2009:7).

The first to draw attention to the anarchist affinities of the avant-gardes was Poggioli in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, who stated that “the anarchist ideal was innate to avant-garde psychology”, but that for him this ideal was “non-ideological”, and more the product of an “unconscious anarchist mentality” than a conscious choice for some of the options of political anarchism (Pođoli, 1975: 69, 129). Poggioli recognised a

general *esprit anarchisant*, as it was known in France, which nurtured avant-garde cultural negation and nihilism, and established a connection between the anarchistic and artistic habitus, without exploring the transposition of anarchist ideas into the aesthetic sphere. On the other hand, in recent scholarly researches that have preserved from oblivion the affinities of modernists with political anarchism, the questionable hypothesis emerges that the modernist *anti-ontological revolution* was driven by underground anarchist impulses, i.e., that what was called *anarchist aesthetics* was immanent in modern art, especially the historical avant-gardes.

In his book *Anarchy & Culture* (1997), Weir has demonstrated with various literary examples that political anarchism had taken on an aesthetic form with the advent of Modernism, because “ideas specific to anarchism were adapted by poets and novelists in such a way that the result of these ideas was aesthetic rather than political” (Weir, 1997: 161). Anarchism’s libertarian call was fully accepted by artists, as they were convinced that the only way for anarchism to succeed was through culture and not politics, “and even then, only through an aesthetic individualism so radical that it could hardly be recognised as specific to anarchism” (162). Weir sees the origins of modernist anarchism in Stirner’s extreme individualism, which subscribed to the following principles: a critique of all hierarchies and all forms of psychological and ideological control, the furtherance of a fragmented social order, a constant interplay between the ideas of the Enlightenment and the Romantic vision, a politics of style and internal contradictoriness. According to Weir, the only “proof” of the transformation of anarchism into a modernist aesthetics, both radical and idealistic at the same time, was the autonomist, heterogeneous and fragmentary nature

of modernist culture, which manifested anarchist ideology in an artistic form.

Following a similar line of thought, referring to Weir and Kristeva, Jesse S. Cohn considers that the primary link between Anarchism and Modernism is to be found in the “translation of an anarchist revolution against every form of domination into the Revolution of the Word”, that is “ the translation of an anarchist refusal of *political* representation into a generalised resistance to representation”, and especially symbolic representations (thoughts, abstractions, ideas, signs, binary oppositions), which are to be deprived of “metaphysical authority” (Cohn, 2006: 120–121). Modern art “stretches language to its limits” and exposes its ideological structure and deficiency as a system of representation, challenging its capacity to define and stratify the parameters of cognition (127). The first in the Yugoslav literary milieu to speak about this and the resistance to codified systems of representation through “the Revolution of the Word” was Šimić, in his ‘Anarchy in Art’: by destroying the artificial, lifeless and uniform order of art, known as “measure”, “style” and “school”, anarchy, “which is all movement, and which is all life “, “intrinsically reveals an order; a higher order; an eternal order” (Šimić, 2008: 171–172). In reality, it was the typical avant-gardist proposition of *creation by destruction*, which could here be brought (conditionally) into connection with Bakunin’s sentence, “the passion for destruction is a creative passion”, which, torn out of context (it was a metaphor that had nothing to do with the propaganda of violence), became the unofficial motto of an international anarchism meeting the needs of avant-gardist nihilism.

A different example of the revision of Modernism through the lens of anarchism can be found in the study *The Liberation of Painting: Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Guerre Paris*

(2013) by Patricia Leighton, who focuses her research on the early Modernist painting – ranging from political caricature to pure abstraction – of those artists who, as she emphasises, were in a “documented” relationship with political anarchism. Unlike Weir, she avoids generalisations, but falls into an aporia when she brings the artists’ political orientation into direct connection with stylistic transgression, as evidenced by Fauvism and Cubism, to which the largest portion of her book is dedicated. The resolute anarchists discussed in the book, Derain, Vlaminck and Van Dongen, had come to the same pictorial solutions as the apolitical Matisse, whom she mentions very briefly, and the same applies to Picasso who had been intellectually formed in the anarchist milieu of Barcelona, while the apolitical Braque is also barely mentioned. However, at one point in the book, Leighton admits that “we cannot assume a political position from an extreme radicalism of form” (Leighton, 2013: 143); which means that the relationship and interconnection between the politics of form, aesthetics and political beliefs of artists should be considered in a more nuanced way, and on a case-by-case basis.

The question of the anarchist substratum of artistic Modernism has been summarised by Erjavec in his discussion of the influence of Sorel’s anarcho-syndicalism on early Italian Futurism, when he states that “at the turn of the century and in the following twenty years, anarchism with all its variants was one of the key ideologies and movements, with an incredible influence in Russia and Italy, as well as in France, and it was an ‘everyday’ and omnipresent idea” (Erjavec, 1991: 130). The ideas of anarchism “fit into a broad cultural atmosphere” where, as we shall elaborate, they were to meet a developed cult of artistic individualism, the bohemia which had sympathy for the lumpenproletariat, the revolt against the “dead state” (Šimić) of bourgeois culture, the determination

to connect art with life, and the like. Alienation from society and the social radicalism of artists go hand in hand, because history testifies that alienation leads to rebellion and a desire for change in social conditions, although this desire does not necessarily grow into concrete political engagement, but can manifest itself as a lifestyle within bohemian enclaves. It is in this sense that Hobsbawm pointed to the importance of the “existential link” between the cultural and political avant-gardes: both consisted of social outsiders who were dissidents from the morality and values of bourgeois society, were also young and relatively poor, and whose lifestyle was alternative and close to the lifestyle of other alternative groups such as theosophists, spiritualists, vegetarians and feminists (Hobsbawm, 2016: 246). All of the above shows that *artistic anarchism* was inconsistent and passed through the filter of artistic idiosyncrasy, and more a demonstration of ecstatic sovereignty and expression of “programmatically apostasy from the existing world”, than a consequential political attitude.

For the Marxist aesthete, Christopher Caudwell, the rebellious modern poet was a representative of bourgeois individualism, and not the solution but part of the problem. The same held true for the anarchist, who was “a revolutionary since he represents a destructive element and a negation of the entire bourgeois society, but cannot bypass bourgeois society because he remains trapped in its fetters” (Caudwell, 1977: 127–128). This was the typical Marxist view of the political revolt of the individual subject as expressed by Lenin, who insisted on the difference between “freedom” as symptomatic of “bourgeois-anarchist individualism” and “*real freedom*”, which could be actualised by “breaking out of bourgeois slavery and merging with the movement of the really advanced and thoroughly revolutionary class” (Jones, 2006: 9). In the Marxist system, real freedom can only be achieved by a col-

lective unity – the proletariat, or the revolutionary party as its “organ of consciousness” – because the individual subject is entangled in a social totality in which, by himself, he cannot become conscious of his ideological conditioning. Marx believed that the bourgeois system kept the proletariat in the fetters of individualistic morality, which prevented the liberation of the spirit of unity alongside the understanding that the creator of values was not the individual but society (“It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness”). That is why, according to Caudwell, the modern poet was “the last bourgeois revolutionary”, the one who professed the bourgeois faith in an essential way – “complete individual freedom, complete destruction of social relations”. Of course, the identification of anarchism in its entirety with anarcho-individualism of Stirner’s type was a manipulative formula for discrediting political rivals by Marxists, since anarcho-individualism was a marginal current in comparison to the predominant social anarchism.

When discussing the relationship between Modernism and Anarchism, it is necessary to draw attention to the discrepancy between the enthusiastic reception of anarchist ideas in the world of modern art and the aesthetic views of the apostles of anarchism. Proudhon, Kropotkin, and Leo Tolstoy “linked anarchism to the realist understanding of literature and art, at least when it came to the anarchist critique of society and the ideals of anarchy being mediated by literary and visual means” (Van den Berg and Fenders, 2013: 37). Inspired by the painting work of Gustave Courbet, the first social realist in the modern sense of the term, Proudhon in his *Principles of Art and Its Social Function* (1865), the most influential aesthetic treatise of classical anarchism, expressed the view that the artist should be an educator of-

fering moral and intellectual guidance to his contemporaries, helping them to understand the gloomy existence of the lower social classes and arousing their desire for social change. In his apologetics, he proclaimed Courbet the leader of *l'école critique* (which was his term for the realist school) and called on artists to model themselves on him by representing people in their “true nature” and avoiding “artificial poses”. Other forebears of anarchism also embraced an idealistic belief in the social mission of art, and in its power to articulate the social imagination by judging the existing situation critically and pointing out the potentials hidden in the actual reality. This was what Kropotkin had in mind when he advocated “an aesthetics based on realistic description in the service of an idealistic goal”, namely, an aesthetic based on a dialectical interplay between the material and the ideal, and essentially characterised by “every genuine realism in art or politics” (Cohn, 2006: 168). Bearing in mind Proudhon’s, but above all Kropotkin’s views, Cohn speaks of the *critical idealism* of classical anarchist aesthetics, which rejected both romanticist mystical idealism for turning its back on the uglier side of reality, and the photographic vision of the naturalists, which reified reality by favouring the actual over the potential. It should also be emphasised that the puritan Kropotkin who, like Morris, believed in an organic, dealienated and collectivist art of the future socialist society modelled on medieval guilds, despised the avant-garde, believing it to be bourgeois, individualistic, complacent and irresponsible. Instead of ‘art for art’s sake’, anarchists propagated “art for man” (Proudhon), that is, art with a clearly articulated social destination that transcended “artistic egoism”, stimulated revolt and drew both the artist and the recipient into the whirlpool of historical change. Some anarchists had gone a step further in believing that art could be a powerful propaganda tool –

for instance, Gustave Landauer, the writer and revolutionary, who considered poetry a means of agitating with words and a form of direct anarchist action: “The people, the thinkers, the poets are a powder keg, loaded with spirit and the power of creative destruction” (Landauer, 2010: 170).

Realism also represented Marx and Engels’ perspective on art. Like with other questions about art, their views on realism were expressed sporadically in various writings, the most significant of which were Engels’ letters to Margaret Harkness and Minna Kautsky, which became key references for developing the theory of typicality and tendency. In the first letter, he defined realism as the accurate description of details and faithful depiction of typical characters in typical circumstances. Taking the examples of Aeschylus, Dante, Cervantes, Schiller and contemporary Russian and Norwegian writers, Engels pointed out in another letter that “the tendency must spring from the situation and the action itself, without being explicitly alluded to, and the writer is not compelled to give the reader the complete future historical solution to the conflict he describes” (Маркс and Енгелс, 1976: 171). To this he added the fact that a novel with a social tendency addresses the bourgeois reader, and so it is important that, by “faithfully portraying” social relations, it breaks conventional illusions about the nature of those relations, and undermines the optimism of the bourgeois world, “even if the writer does not offer an immediate solution, or demonstrate his political position explicitly” (172). Not only is the writer’s political conviction not of crucial importance, but it is also better for the work of art that it remains concealed, despite the author’s views, as was the case with Balzac, whose sharp satire of French society was contrary to his class sympathies. Keeping in mind everything mentioned above, it can be concluded that Engels understood typicality and tenden-

cy transhistorically, and therefore considered realism not as a separate genre but as a coded language for “the faithful portrayal of social relations”, which achieved psychological depth of character, as opposed to the “frigid objectivity” of bourgeois naturalism, which ended in superficial descriptions of social life.

Unlike the anarchists, Marx and Engels were not convinced that artistic fiction could produce “real effects in the real world”, i.e., that a work of art could induce a change in the recipient’s political consciousness. Their reflections on art did not contain the normative pretensions of aesthetic doctrine, however much subsequent interpretations have led to the profiling of the dogmatic Marxist view which measures art in accordance with presumed political effects, similar to the anarchists’ idealistic prescriptions.³⁴ In his (unjustly) forgotten essay ‘Marxism and the Literary Critic’, the American literary critic and writer George Steiner explained the reason for the deviation from the original Marxist line of aesthetic thought by Lenin’s “deviation” from Engels’s theses. Lenin’s insistence on literature’s partisanship and tendency, presented in a polemic with ‘art for art’s sake’ theory at the beginning of the 20th century (‘On Party Organisation and Party Literature’), was taken out of context and misinterpreted, which concluded with the proclamation of the canon of socialist realism (Jay, 1974: 279). The second direction, which Steiner freely called “Engels’ aesthetics”, valued art not according to the political intention and class interest of the author but according to its inherent social significance, and among its

34 Unlike Marxism, anarchism was a conglomerate of individual teachings without a common authoritarian origin, a “polytheistic” political ideology professed by different organisations and groups, and therefore there was no predisposition towards the founding of an umbrella anarchist aesthetic. It was historians of anarchism and artistic modernism who only much later began to call attention to the congruence of aesthetic views among the forebears of anarchism.

representatives he included “para-Marxists” acting outside the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union and communist parties – the Frankfurt School thinkers, Jean-Paul Sartre, Lucien Goldmann, Edmund Wilson and Sidney Finkelstein.

As rigid as Steiner’s division may seem, because the foundations of Marxist aesthetics had been laid before Lenin (Georgy Plekhanov, Franz Mehring, Karl Kautsky), it cannot be disputed that the “Leninist current” became predominant after the October Revolution and set the guidelines which official Marxist aesthetics were to follow, all the way to the final correction made by Stalin and Zhdanov, who insisted on the partisanship of art. On the other hand, the liberal “Engelsian current” belongs to the tradition of Western Marxism (Perry Anderson), whose representatives were characterised by an unorthodox, creative and selective approach to Marxism, as well as the shifting of the focus of research from politics, economics and class struggle to philosophy, aesthetics, culture and art. Their contribution to Marxist aesthetics, Anderson notes, was “far richer and subtler than anything else within the classical heritage of historical materialism” and, ultimately, perhaps “the most permanent collective gain of this tradition” (Bennett, 2005: 111). As Anderson has perceived it, Western Marxism after 1925 was characterised by the separation of theory from practice, because the belief in a revolution modelled on the Russian Revolution was extinguished. Thus, the Frankfurt School thinkers – Adorno, Marcuse, Horkheimer, Bloch and Benjamin – approached the issues of art, culture and aesthetics relieved of specific political demands and from a purely theoretical point of view, acting within the bourgeois academic and publicist system, independent of the communist movement in Germany and without any influence on it (Adorno called it “non-participation”). According to Buck-Morss, critical theory viewed

Marxism as a method and not as a cosmology, considering dialectics as a tool for the critical analysis of society, and not for building a metaphysical system (Buck-Morss, 1977: IX).

Another important fact that needs to be emphasised when analysing Marx and Engels' writings on art is that, in passing aesthetic judgments they, like the forebears of anarchism, focused their attention on content, leaving the formal aspects of the work of art in the background. This question was first raised by the pioneer of Marxist art history, Max Raphael, while interpreting one of Engels' letters to Mehring. In the letter, Engels admitted that Marx and he attached the greatest importance to "deriving political, legal and other ideological insights, as well as actions conditioned by such insights – from economic bases" and, therefore, when it comes to art, "they neglected form for the sake of content" (Raphael, 1982: 1–2). As regards the domain of art – regardless of the fact that none of the founders "had an authentic attitude towards the world of forms and that there was, for them, no actual political need for a more thorough elaboration in this area" – this one-sidedness was additionally strengthened given that "there was no exact subsidiary science available for the empirical treatment of that task" (2). According to Raphael, it had to be the materialist dialectic which, adequately applied, would make it possible to overcome both the limitations of a bourgeois metaphysical aesthetics and the "anxious neurosis of an uncertain and thus dogmatic Marxism". Consequently, starting from the conditions of material production, Marxist aesthetics was meant to demonstrate how these conditions in a dialectical procedure acquire their artistic form and thus become determined as artistic content.

Focused on the cognitive function and content of the work of art (which they owed to Hegel's aesthetics), and committed to realism as a "reflection of the essence of reality"

(Lukács), the first and second generation of Marxist aestheticians did not pay attention to literary expression (which Adorno obsessively insisted on), nor did they believe, as Weir has observed, that “technique might also be revolutionary, or that experimentation could signify political unrest” (Weir, 1997: 150). They did not recognise in modern art the uprising against the “false illusion” and the liberation from the social conditioning of art by “subverting the experience of the aesthetic” (Marcuse). For Marcuse, whose aesthetic views basically coincided with Adorno’s, literature does not become revolutionary because it is written for the working class or the revolution, but by its artistic features – “*through the form*, and into which content enters only as transformed, estranged, mediated: transformation of action, language, appearance, value” (Markuze, 1983: 100). Revolution, Marcuse concluded, should not be thematic, because in authentic works of radical literature the necessity of revolution is *assumed*, carrying within itself a break with the past and the power of liberation from the monopoly over reality.

As the left liberal Max Weber noted with a tone of sarcasm, there was an “affinity of choice” between the values to which the socialist movement was politically loyal and the artistic perspective which supported those values in the political struggle. Weber’s thesis was confirmed by Svetozar Marković, the first ideologue of both the socialist movement and literary realism in Serbia, who, rising up against the idealistic aesthetics of the romanticists, advocated the utilitarianisation of literature (“Literature is required to bring only what is really useful to society”), and of all the elements that constituted a literary work acknowledged only the “content of the subject” (Marković, 1967: 152). Proclaimed to be the father of social literature in Yugoslavia, Marković had founded an ideologically dogmatic understanding of literature which manifested itself

in an explicit demand for tendency, for turning literature into a means of social criticism and a “weapon” for propagating new ideas among the masses. As Palavestra observed, such an understanding not only failed to constitute the theoretical foundation for an aesthetics, but presented the use of literature as propagandisation of an ideology that Marković, under the influence of Nikolai Chernyshevsky and Dmitry Pisarev, “gave priority to above the creative properties and aesthetic values of a literary work” (Palavestra, 1979: 15). Given that the ideology of Russian populism presented the theoretical framework within which his ideas crystallised, Marković’s aesthetics cannot be considered Marxist (although he read Marx and met him personally during the First International), but can serve as an illustration of the continuity between early socialist and Marxist aesthetic orientations.

Marković’s aesthetic viewpoint was an indicator of the paradox of the socialist movement: the most progressive political movement of the modern age was characterised by aesthetic conservatism, which showed a preference for classical humanism and realism over Modernism. And, as the mimetic canon of art retreated in the face of tendencies towards abstraction, fragmentation, dissociation and objectification, the separation between the political and artistic avant-gardes had become more and more evident. It was up until the 1930s and the advance of the aesthetic theory of the Frankfurt School that Marxist reflection on modern art remained predominantly distinguished by a vulgar sociology typical of the dogmatic variant of Marxist thought, and blind to the historical breakthrough of modern art and the cultural-political perspective it had opened up. Although it had the appropriate theoretical and methodological instruments at its disposal, Marxist aesthetics/critique failed to use them and thereby take into account the way in which innovations in the

means of material production and communication modified the forms of perception of both the artist and the recipient, thus contributing to the understanding of the changes in the then stage of capitalist social development.

For Plekhanov, the first Marxist aesthetician and one of the leading thinkers of the Second International, modernist movements such as Impressionism (“false realism”) and Cubism (“the daubing of cubes and other geometrical figures”) were decadent, pseudo-revolutionary and devoid of socially advanced ideas (Moravski, 1980: 127–128). The same matrix of aesthetic judgment was adopted by the next-generation Marxist aestheticians, such as Clara Zetkin who, in her exposé at the Fifth Congress of the Third International (1924) argued that, unlike the art of realism, avant-garde art, with the exception of “some artists” trying to get in touch with the masses by way of a new orientation close to everyday practice (alluding here to the Proletcult), created only “dead or deformed symbols”, and “in a refined formalistic game avoided the conflict of social ideas” (Moravski, 1980: 173). Lunacharsky, the patron of the Russian avant-garde and an excellent literary critic, also closely shared such views, believing that what he had called “the deformation, fragmentation and disfigurement of reality” did not meet with the understanding of the broad masses, nor did it contribute to their aesthetic education. Evaluated from this cultural-political perspective typical of the Marxists of the Second and Third Internationals, modern art was the fruit of *l’art-pour-l’artistique* self-sufficiency, distortion of reality and esoteric pessimism, and therefore aesthetically worthless and socially irrelevant, deprived of the potential to communicate with the masses and contribute to the political struggle against the bourgeoisie on the cultural level. Even when it sympathised with the struggle of the working class and declared itself Marxist, it could not be a mediator

of progressive ideas, and thus not even a comrade-in-arms of the political avant-garde on its revolutionary path. That was not the end, however, because in the name of Marx, Engels and Lenin, a number of orthodox Marxists – especially those from the socialist bloc countries which represented so-called “scientific Marxist aesthetics” – continued to anathematise modern art, either as a puerile formalist exhibition or “dangerous” ideological diversion.

At the time when Marx wrote in his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that social revolution should draw its poetry from the future, he could not anticipate what that future “poetry” would be like, just as his followers did not recognise in it the aesthetic analogon to the social revolution. The Marxist theoretical breakthrough in philosophy, political and economic science failed to find its counterpart in aesthetics, which did not lead to the opening up of a new set of problems, but only to an attempt to give new answers to old problems inherited from bourgeois idealist aesthetics. Marxist critique shared an aversion to Modernism with right-wing critique, without perhaps being aware of this, but with the difference that conservatives advocated the preservation of the residual model of art, while Marxists demanded the upgrading of that model with a clear teleological perspective that reduced art to an instrument of revolutionary action. Poggioli explained precisely this difference within similarity between the right-wing and left-wing critiques of the avant-garde, by referring to their different time perspectives: the former viewed the avant-garde through a “reactionary and retrospective nostalgia” in the name of the past, and the latter through an “anticipatory and utopian dream” in the name of the future (Pođoli, 1975: 192).

The conservatism of the left-wing critique frustrated avant-garde artists, and shook their faith in the symbiosis of the aesthetic and social revolutions and consequently in

the correctness of the communist parties' political course. In his reaction to accusations by the German communist critique, which equated Dadaism with "cultural vandalism", Wieland Herzfelde complained in his pamphlet 'Society, Artist, Communism' (1921) that an artist who takes the side of the proletariat is often subject to the "shameful ignorance of revolutionary Marxist comrades with regard to contemporary art" (Gaughan, 2013: 284). Similarly, reacting to the changed policy of the Soviet cultural administration, the Le-fians warned that the renewal of 19th-century realism was non-Marxist, because it represented faith in art as a timeless aesthetic experience, beyond the dialectics of historical development. Commenting on this "misunderstanding", Hobsbawm concluded that while Marxists recognised in the avant-garde one of the symptoms of the crisis of bourgeois culture, the avant-garde perceived Marxism as yet another proof that the past did not understand the future.

At the same time, in the 1920s one could find rare examples of an understanding of the avant-garde experiment by non-dogmatic Western Marxists, unburdened by philosophical aesthetics and contentism, such as the writer and art theoretician Lu Märten, who based her opposition to the narrow-minded Marxist critique of modern art in 1920s Germany – the same critique Herzfeld opposed – on her "historical-materialist researches" (subtitle of her study *The Substance and Transformation of Art*, 1924). By Marxists ignoring the formal and material-technical conditioning of art in favour of focusing on the content and tendency of the proletarian worldview, experimental breakthroughs could not be understood adequately, and therefore "did not meet the expectations of a new or proletarian art" (Marten, 1983: 126). A revolutionary art could not be brought into existence by perpetuating the given artistic resources, the "old fetish

of art”, but by finding new resources that would follow the currents of life and things, and be utilisable for “changing the technical and social life of the times”.

In this context, it is important to mention one of the most original thinkers of Marxist thought in general, Gramsci, who, in his article ‘Marinetti the Revolutionary?’ (1921), proclaimed early Futurism to be a revolutionary movement, because it possessed a “Marxist” awareness that “our epoch – the epoch of great industry, the great workers’ city, of profuse and noisy life – has had to acquire new forms of art, philosophy, customs, speech...” (Gramsci, 1984: 166). Gramsci recognised in Futurism the herald of a radical cultural modernisation that was to pave the way for a new proletarian culture, cultivating new principles for experiencing and perceiving reality within the everyday life of the industrial world. Denying the separation of culture from economic and industrial realities, destroying “spiritual hierarchies, prejudices, idols, ossified traditions”, and not caring “whether the new achievements, the products of their activities, were more successful works than those they had destroyed”, the Futurists, according to Gramsci, expressed themselves in a more revolutionary way than the socialists, who were not inclined towards making a resolute break with bourgeois legacies in the fields of economics and politics. What is more, Futurism provided the working class with a creative impetus to conceive of a proletarian culture, as evidenced by the fact that before the First World War it had enjoyed popularity among Italian labour, who made up the majority of *Lacerba* readers, attended futurist events and defended them from attacks by “the professional clique of ‘writers’ and ‘artists’” (165).

Märten and Gramsci offered the lone examples of a departure from the dominant “Leninist” current of Marxist literary theoretical thought in the 1920s, insofar as they ar-

gued that art, autonomously and with the power of individual vision, participated in the struggle to create a new culture and new social order. They were the rare voices that identified the dogmatic involutions in Marxist aesthetics, each in his own way believing that Marxism as a critique of the old society and a project of the new must not hamper artistic research and expression, but respect aesthetic pluralism and richness of artistic thought, even when developed outside its boundaries. Protesting against the transformation of art into political propaganda, Gramsci warned that “the fact that a man of politics puts pressure on the art of his time, in his desire that it express a certain world of culture, is a political activity, not an art-critical activity” (Gramši, 1973: 164). If the world of culture was at the same time a political battlefield, then the artist from his perspective, which differed from that of the politician, was to find a way to “capture and criticise the true reality”, which was beyond the sectarianism inherent in politics.

In the period between the two world wars, there were no authentic Marxist aestheticians in Yugoslavia, with the exception of the early deceased Lav Grün (pseudonym of Iljko Gorenčević), “the third man of the Croatian and Yugoslav left” (Flaker), art historian, critic and collaborator of *Plamen*, to whom Cesarec paid tribute in an obituary published in *Književna republika* as “a unique cultural worker and true supporter of the struggle of the proletariat”. During his art history studies in Vienna in the early 1920s, Gorenčević moved in the circles of communist dissidents and became familiar with Marxist thought, especially that of Lenin and Lunacharsky. Although in his late and most important theoretical treatises, ‘Art and Revolution’ (1920) and ‘On the Materialist Observation of Art’ (1924), he did not touch on avant-garde art, Gorenčević presented views close to the ide-

as of the avant-garde, especially those of the inter-relationship between the aesthetic and social revolutions. According to Vlastimir Kusik, he was guided by the belief that “social transformation and revolution are a paradigm of art, which has itself changed”, i.e., the transformation of culture and art changes the world in which that art comes into being (Kusik, 1988/1989: 385). On the other side of the dogmatic Marxist argument that a new society is a precondition for the new art that has yet to accompany these changes, he believed that art was at the forefront of changing worldviews: “Artistic life and art are a paradigm of social overturn and socialist culture”. Gorenčević had formed his historical-materialist point of view from the perspective of the revolutionary changes in which he believed as a communist, having in mind the social and artistic events in Russia.

At the same time, one could find examples of communist intellectuals “in the field”, close to artistic circles, who expressed openness to artistic experiment when they recognised it was ideologically close to them. This was evidenced in the communist activist and journalist France Klopčič’s memory of Avgust Černigoj’s first solo exhibition, which he had organised after returning from his studies at the Bauhaus in the gym of the Technical School in Ljubljana in 1924. This, the one and only constructivist exhibition in Yugoslavia, presented paintings, objects, machine parts, a motorcycle and an American worker’s pair of trousers, along with productivist slogans written untidily (some of them upside down) on the wall: “Capital is theft”, “An artist must become an engineer, an engineer must become an artist”, “The education of workers and peasants is necessary”, “The main direction of our aspiration is organisation”, etc. Under the influence of Russian Productivism, Černigoj conceived the exhibition as a promotion of the new art of construction functionally

connected with industrial production, machine aesthetics and communist ideology. According to Krečič, the exhibition represented an “artistic-political provocation and a challenge to the rather literary, although radical Expressionism” which encompassed most of the young Slovenian art and enjoyed the affection of professional critics (Krečič, 1978)³⁵. Many years later, recalling the reception of the exhibition, Černigoj stated that in Ljubljana he was nicknamed “*Deus ex machina*”.

The first to disseminate the virus of Constructivism in Yugoslavia was Micić, the most agile Yugoslav promoter of the Russian avant-garde, with his publication of the text ‘Tatlin Hp/s + Man’ by Dragan Aleksić who, like the Berlin Dadaists, described Tatlinism as materialist and machine art (*Zenit*, no. 9, 1921). For his next step in the promotion of Constructivism, Micić placed a reproduction of Tatlin’s draft for the Monument to the Third International on the front cover of the magazine, and translated a part of Ehrenburg’s poem *And yet it Moves!*, which was inspired by this work (no. 11, 1922). Finally, he dedicated the complete double issue of *Zenit* (nos. 17/18, 1922) to the “new Russian Art”, placing it under the editorial supervision of Ehrenburg and Lissitzky who reprinted the texts of Russian avant-garde artists from their magazine *Veshch/Gegenstand/Objet*. His meeting with these two Russian expats in Berlin was crucial to Micić’s re-

35 The following year, this time in an art gallery (The Jakopič Pavilion) in Ljubljana, Černigoj organised a second solo exhibition, in which he presented works of a didactic character that interpreted the development of modern art from Impressionism onwards, with Constructivism as its culmination. Owing to the poor reception of the exhibition and a communist newspaper found in his mailbox, he was forced to flee to Trieste, where he founded the Group of Constructivists, which included Eduard Stepančič, Giuseppe Vlah, Giorgio Karmelich and Tea Černigoj. In the same year, in Trieste, as part of the exhibition of the Art Union and the Art Circle, the Group collectively created a constructivist ambience modelled on Černigoj’s concept of “elastic space”. Driven by the slogan concept of the first Ljubljana exhibition, Černigoj intended to exhibit a sculpture of Lenin, but his friends and organisers persuaded him to give up at the last minute.

orientation towards Constructivism, as was evident in his seventeen-act prose-poetic “zenitist radio film” *Shimmy at the Latin Quarter Cemetery* (no. 12, 1922), the earliest Yugoslav example of Constructivism in poetic expression. However, as Levinger has observed commenting on the reorientation of *Zenit*, unlike with Russian and international Constructivism, Micić “did not propose the rationalism of the Enlightenment, but its inverse”, incorporating Constructivism into his anti-European barbarogenic ideology (Levinger, 2002: 260).

During the same year, Constructivism experienced an international expansion, imposing itself as the dominant idiom of the European avant-garde, as evidenced by the Congress of the Constructivists and Dadaists in Weimar and the Congress of International Progressive Artists in Düsseldorf (where an attempt to establish a Constructivist International was made), as well as the “First Russian Art Exhibition” in Berlin funded by the Soviet government. Although the exhibition showcased a broad spectrum of post-revolutionary tendencies in Russia, it was Constructivism that met with the most enthusiastic reception, especially in Eastern Europe, where several magazines and groups were either launched or converted to Constructivism (*Blok* and *Zwrotnica* in Warsaw, *Revue Devetsilu*, *Zivot* and *Pasmo* in Prague, *Contimporanul* in Bucharest, *Zenit* in Zagreb), recognising in it the new model of artistic culture they had attempted to find in their passage through Cubism, Futurism and Expressionism. Yet, Christina Lodder draws attention to an important fact: the Constructivism promoted by *Veshch* and the “First Russian Art Exhibition” was the depoliticised, artistic version, divorced from the original social and ideological context, and devoid of the “theoretical and practical lessons” that were to effect a transition into productivist utilitarianism (Lodder, 1983: 229–230).

Two years later, Černigoj went one step further than Micić, presenting Constructivism plastically as a utilitarian materialist-mechanistic artistic practice of revolutionary society – an authentic communist art. In his texts and manifestos, he propagated the view that the “constructive, synthetic, dynamic and collective” art of Constructivism – which brought a new penetration into the structure of plastic-spatial thinking and addressed “a new generation that is waking up” – created a “new front” for a “new society”, following the example of Russian Productivism. The old art in galleries and palaces no longer “has any other function but to moulder and perish over time”, and the new revolutionary art “must live, be useful and serve” (‘1½’, *Tank*, no. 3, 1927). At the same time, Černigoj could not resist the seductive call of Micić’s barbarogenic ideologeme of “East against West”, and he explained Constructivism as an authentic Slavic, barbaric art, superior to the decadent salon art of European metropolises (‘East and West in Art’, *Učiteljski list*, 1926). As Miklavž Komelj notes, this was essentially to do with the identification of the “East” with the socialist revolution, which simultaneously carried an overtone of pan-Slavic (trans)nationalism, whereby “it is not entirely clear where Slavism is and where Communism is” (Komelj, 2012). Komelj has concluded that “such a conception had, as a final consequence at that time in Slovenia, a certain politically progressive role”, since “the avant-garde essentially and for the most part functioned as propaganda for communism”.

Klopčič, who had visited the exhibition in the company of his party comrades, recalled that it surpassed all his visions of art exhibitions, although he failed to understand it (“Why is there a motorbike, where does the ordinary wooden bicycle come from?”), except that it demonstrated a “protest against the culture and the aesthetics of the bourgeois



August Černigoj, 'International Revolution tank', linocut, 1927 (reprint)

class, because it had destroyed what until now could not be disputed” (Klopčič, 1985: 293). Klopčič also stated that at that time the party newspaper *Zapiski delavsko-kmetske matice* had opened its pages to the avant-gardists, and wrote with approval about Černigoj’s Constructivism and the experimental theatre of Ferdo Delak, – who had published an issue of the magazine *Novi oder* (1925) and founded a theatre company of the same name inspired by the new Russian theatre, with Černigoj as their scenographer, – and in which the anti-bourgeois aspirations of young Slovenian artists were recognised. The writer and critic Stane Melihar assessed Černigoj’s exhibition in *Zapiski delavsko-kmetske matice* as an “exhibition in the service of revolution” which “radically demolishes the bourgeois conception of an artistic product as the subject of eternal aesthetic values”, but criticised its abstractness and non-communicativity for the ordinary observer, as well as the lack of originality when compared with Russian Constructivism (294). Unlike their aversion to Podbevšek, the Slovenian communists’ sympathy with Constructivism was quite understandable: although they were not familiar with the abstract language of Constructivism, they accepted it on the basis not of aesthetic evaluation but ideological affiliation, as an expression of the author’s political position.

The concluding chapter of the Slovenian avant-garde opened with the launch in Ljubljana of Delak’s eclectic multilingual magazine *Tank* in 1927 (two issues were published, the third was banned), with Černigoj as the main collaborator. With its subtitle in French, “la revue internationale de l’art vivant”, *Tank* was the only avant-garde magazine in Yugoslavia that year and the only one which, inspired by the closed *Zenit*, highlighted international aspirations, and carried literary and artistic contributions from Yugoslav (Micić

and Poljanski) and foreign authors (Herwarth Walden, Lunacharsky, Tzara, Schwitters and Barbusse). Delak did not hide his ambition to carry on *Zenit's* mission of gathering together active local and foreign avant-garde artists (he also planned to invite French Surrealists for their cooperation, but gave up owing to Micić's animosity towards Surrealism), and at the same time affirming the Slovenian avant-garde internationally. He succeeded in this thanks to his collaboration with Walden, which resulted in Delak's departure to Berlin, where he organised an exhibition of Slovenian art and, together with Heinz Lüdecke, edited the Slovenian issue of the magazine *Der Sturm* (1928). However, as the time of Constructivism's climactic point had elapsed, and *Der Sturm*, as the hub of the international Constructivism towards which it had reoriented itself after the Russian exhibition in Berlin, was soon to close, Delak's idea of the European promotion of the Slovenian avant-garde remained fruitless.

In the following year, Delak published the article 'Slovenian Artistic Avant-Garde' in the Belgrade magazine *Nova literatura* (no. 7/8, 1929), in a thematic section dedicated to new Slovenian art edited by Bratko Kreft, associate of *Tank*, director, playwright and founder of the theatre 'Proletarian Scene' in Ljubljana, where Delak also worked as a director. The magazine's editorial board added a comment in a footnote that Delak's point of view did not coincide with the point of view of *Nova literatura*, expressing the hope that he would come to "align with its views, as was the case with the most talented and combative German Expressionists a few years before". It was clear that, from the perspective of the changes on the Weimar Republic's left-wing cultural scene, which influenced the editorial board, there was an allusion here to a paradigm shift from Expressionism to New Objectivity, i.e., to Delak's promotion of avant-garde isms (Expressionism,

Constructivism) which the German communist left rejected as pathetic and utopian, devoid of a sense of social reality.

The interdisciplinary modernist cultural magazine *Nova literatura* (1928–1929; twelve issues, the thirteenth banned), launched on the eve of the 6 January Dictatorship by the brothers Pavle Bihali and Oto Bihalji (pseudonym Oto Biha), critics and publicists, was a pioneering journal of the social literature movement in its formative phase, and gathered a pleiad of local and foreign authors on its editorial board and among its associates, thus making it the only internationally oriented left-wing cultural magazine of the 1920s in Yugoslavia³⁶, apart from *Zenit* and *Tank*. Guided by “proletarian leanings and historical materialism”, the founders of the magazine aspired to create a forum for leftist tendencies in art with the aim, as stated in the proclamation ‘To European Intellectuals and Yugoslav Readers’ which opened the first issue of the magazine, of “bringing closer together the truly advanced minds of our time, in spite of all the national limits – to convey the ideas and deeds of the spirit to the masses”. It was an authentic Yugoslav project of international networking on the left cultural front, which, according to Bihalji, in a retrospective review, was supposed to “combine the critical voice of our own leftist art with advanced voices from other areas of culture” (Bihalji-Merin, 1978: 43).³⁷ At the same

36 The editorial board and its associates consisted of a diverse group, with such left-wing writers and artists as Barbusse, Gorky, Eisenstein, Alexandra Kollontai, Grosz, Dix, Piscator, Becher, Kollwitz, Erwin Kisch, Cesarec, Galogaža, Popović, Keršovani, Ristić, Krsto Hegedušić and others.

37 At that time, Oto Bihalji studied painting in Berlin, where he joined the CP of Germany, wrote literary criticism for the party newspaper *Die Rote Fahne* and edited the newspaper of the German Association of Revolutionary-Proletarian Authors, *Die Linkskurve* (1929–1931). As a member of the German delegation, he participated in the Kharkov Conference with a paper entitled ‘Proletarian and Revolutionary Literature in Germany’. His Berlin contacts constituted a crucial guarantee of *Nova literatura*’s international content.

time, the brothers founded the publishing house Nolit, which brought out books by domestic and foreign authors of social orientation, often assessed by the censors as provocatively leftist and banned. Just as *Nova literatura* was modelled on the Berlin literary magazine *Die Neue Bücherschau* (from which its name was partially adopted), so the model for Nolit was the Malik-Verlag publishing house (founded by Heartfield and Herzfelde), to which the partial overlap between the catalogues of both publishers bore witness.

We can interpret *Nova literatura* as the historical crossroads of leftist art in Yugoslavia, demonstrating the transition from the avant-garde to the social model of literature/art, without the rigid border between the two models that would be insisted upon later. Although the editorial policy was characterised by the principle of plurality, the editorial board's aesthetic preference was the tendency that, thanks to Lukács' exhaustive theoretical elaboration, later came to be known as *critical realism*. At that time, the dominant term was 'Neue Sachlichkeit' (New Objectivity), coined by Gustav Hartlaub, the curator of the inaugural exhibition 'New Objectivity – German Art after Expressionism' (Mannheim, 1925), with which he indicated the turn towards the socially critical and satirical model of painting to be found in such artists as Max Beckmann, Otto Dix and George Grosz. Hartlaub linked this turn to "a general contemporary sense of resignation and cynicism in Germany following the period of great hopes (which found its refuge in Expressionism)", as well as to "an enthusiasm for immediate reality as a result of striving to take things entirely objectively on a material basis, without immediately comparing them with ideal implications" (Gay, 1999: 154). The fervent belief in revolution – aesthetic, spiritual and social – subsided and gave way to a critical reflection on the Weimar reality, and the departure

from academic realism and Impressionism (that connected the opposing camps of German Expressionists and Dadaists) led to the development of a modern realism based on the elements of expressionist pictorial style, metaphysical painting and dadaist montage.

Hartlaub's New Objectivity, which was also evident in the photography, film and literature of the time, resonated in other countries, including Yugoslavia (where it was translated as 'New Reality'), in the socially oriented painting of the Zagreb Association of Artists 'Zemlja' (Soil) (1929–1935), and among the already mentioned Slovenian Expressionists, although without a critical stance. According to contemporary interpretations, Krleža's text 'On the German Painter George Grosz' (*Jutarnji list*, 29 August, 1926) "introduced or at least strengthened the affinities with the social-critical understanding and language of art represented by the said artist" in the Zagreb cultural environment, influencing certain members of the 'Zemlja' group, Krsto Hegedušić in particular (Denegri, 2012: 126). In his text, Krleža stated that the artist had to reflect the state of affairs in society by taking a side in the class struggle, and Grosz was the best expression of that revolutionary tendency, both in the painterly and social senses.³⁸ According to Lovorka Magaš and Petar Prelog, Krleža wrote a kind of "programme before the programme"

38 Translations of Grosz's texts into Croatian-Serbian had previously been published in *Radnička borba* (1921) and *Književna republika* (1924), the latter ('Instead of Biography') being particularly interesting, containing as it did a series of provocative questions addressed to fellow artists, some of which are worth quoting in this context: "Are you perhaps working for the proletariat, the future bearer of the culture to come? Are you trying to understand and experience the ideal world of the proletariat, to resist its exploiters and oppressors? [...] You pretend to create for Man – and where is that Man? What else are your creative negligence and abstract nonsense about timelessness than ridiculous and useless speculation about eternity? Your brushes and your pens, which should be weapons, are just empty straws!" (Magaš and Prelog, 2009: 236 f.n.10).

for 'Zemlja' three years in advance of its founding, in which manifesto it was later stated that "contemporary life is imbued with social ideas" and that "the issues of the collective are dominant", such that "the artist cannot resist the will of the new society and stand outside the collective" (Magaš and Prelog, 2009: 229). *Nova literatura* also eulogised a member of its editorial board, Grosz, as the "critic of the times *par excellence*" and "the most clairvoyant artist of the present" (Biha), just as it presented 'Zemlja' as the first artistic group programmatically committed to social art, with reproductions and reviews of its first Zagreb exhibition.

The brothers Pavle and Oto, the first ideologues of critical realism in Yugoslavia, diagnosed a crisis in leftist Modernism, believing it had ended its historical mission and that modernist formative procedures were operative only if they served to abandon "artistic complexity" and turn towards "a figuratively calibrated theme", in order for the work of art to become a clear and rational creation with social significance (Bihali, 1928: 27). This does not mean that they advocated an anti-modernist and anti-avant-gardist approach similar to that of Lukács – as was visually confirmed by Pavle's extraordinary photomontages in the style of Heartfield, printed on the covers of the latest issues of the magazine as well as Nolit's books – but that, following Grosz's line of reasoning, they were opposed to an art "which, in a time of social ferours, walks on abstract and cosmic paths or vibrates around personal ideas and individual conflicts" (Biha, 1928: 67). Although Pavle would later realign himself with the Kharkovian position, at that time they still showed openness to different views on art, as evidenced by the printing of texts that did not suit the programmatic position of *Nova literatura*, such as Delak's review of the Slovenian avant-garde and Ristić's article 'Through Recent Serbian Literature' (nos. 7–8, 1929),



Nova literatura, nos. 7–8, 1929

with their objections to the latter for his lack of a “consistent materialist development of thought” that would bring him into line with social literature.

Following the course of post-avant-garde realignments on the leftist cultural scene in Germany and the rest of Europe, *Nova literatura* was both a seismograph and an engine of analogous realignments on the leftist cultural scene in

Yugoslavia. The awareness that, under the conditions of dictatorship, white terror, strict censorship and cruel class struggle, their artistic endeavour had remained far removed from “what is socio-historically significant in a specific socio-historical situation” (Lukács), led many Yugoslav writers and artists towards social realism. “It was the time”, as Matic recalled, referring to a thought by Maurice Blanchot, “when many other values, such as action, people’s deeds and accomplishments, were placed above literature” (Matić, 1969: 248). The artist became “engaged” in such a way that, having recognised the discrepancy between the demands placed on him by politics and by the art he created, he decided to subordinate his work to the demands of politics. And this categorical imperative of the revolution also invited the writer to suppress his inner creative impulse, to reject those “artistic truths coming from the hindbrain, from murky passions and bodily secrets” (Krlježa), for the sake of another, impersonal artistic truth imposed on him from the outside, which he, despite himself, needed to adopt rationally.

This was exactly how Jovan Popović went about it, explaining his adamant transformation from an Expressionist into a social writer oriented towards a simplified, naked method of ideologising the poetic word, with a “moral choice” between a “somniaesthetist night” and “dread of the day”, comparable with the transformations of Grosz, Johannes Becher and Louis Aragon. At the moment of making this decision, fateful for him as a poet, Popović, according to his own testimony, burned his first two books of poetry, which could be interpreted as a kind of ritual of self-purification, symbolising the break with one and the beginning of another poetic life. Interpreting Popović’s pathetic confession of his inner “moral-mental struggle”, Konstantinović spoke of the “typically dogmatic mythology of the victim”: the aesthetic call

was subordinated to the ethical call, in the belief that revolution was an absolute idea that required the renunciation of unbridled poetic dreams, the adaptation of the individual to the general, and the building and strengthening of the consciousness of affiliation (Konstantinović, 1983c: 522).

However, this was not the case with Drainac, who proclaimed his conversion from anarcho-avant-gardist to social writer more thunderously than he had implemented it in his poetry, insisting on adding to his “rhapsodic singing about himself and his own cosmos” occasional verses in which he expressed social protest and solidarity with the disenfranchised masses (Јешућ, 2013: 349). It was Keršovani who noted this in his pamphlet ‘A “Marxist” Paper on Art’ (*Nova literatura*, no. 2 1929), in which, criticising the lecture Drainac had held in front of Belgrade students entitled ‘On Art Observed from the Perspective of Historical Materialism’ (1928), he claimed that Drainac’s poetry was non-proletarian by inspiration, and that it was perhaps revolutionary in form but not in content; it was a “poetry consisting of an element incapable of struggle, and much less of new social constructions”. Since he failed to understand historical materialism, Keršovani concluded, Drainac could not “shed light on the problem of class-based art”, and therefore analysed socially conditioned art “in its dialectical changes”. The pamphlet launched attacks on Drainac by the social literati, to which, in a surge of vanity, he responded with counter-pamphlets in which he settled accounts with his critics, including the manifesto of the self-proclaimed leftist literary front ‘Manifesto I’ (*Pravda*, 1931), and two issues of the small “social-literary newspaper” *Front* (1931), which he filled up with his own contributions. Drainac was similar to Popović in the way they both artificially converted from avant-garde into social authors, but with the difference that the former’s conversion

was prompted by a desire to reconcile the poetic self and the political self, i.e., an attempt to remain faithful to one's own artistic truth and at the same time respond to the "demand of the epoch" on the eve of the 6 January Dictatorship.

Some decided to address the labour readership directly in the genre of autocritique, like Moni de Buli and Risto Ratković, who after the closure of *Večnost*, collaborated in the workers-artistic almanac *Novi Istok* (1927). De Buli published a confessionally intonated text, 'Comments on a Note', in which he admitted that he wrote poems following his own vision, regardless of tradition and rules ("as it has pleased me"), and that the proletariat did not belong to his readership. "The proletariat does not have time for and should not even be concerned about poetry that is not propagandistic, supportive and encouraging of the ruling class of tomorrow", was his answer to the question he had asked himself (De Buli, 1927: 16). Having declared himself to be a "declassified modernist", he admitted that social literature was the appropriate literature for the proletariat at the given historical moment, and in conclusion expressed hope that in the future classless society, obstacles to wider acceptance of new poetry would be removed through a new system of education. In his contribution to *Novi Istok*, 'The Spirit of Social Materialism', Ratković sharpened the view he had already expressed in *Večnost* – that is, by criticising Futurism, Zenitism, Dadaism, and even Surrealism, he asserted that "no objective action, even if non-political, can exist any longer outside the field of the class struggle" (Flaker, 1988: 195).

These autocritiques had different continuations in the further writings of the two poets. De Buli remained true to his personal Surrealism (he had moved to Paris, where he mingled with apolitical surrealist dissidents gathered around the magazines *Discontinuité* and *Le Grand Jeu*), and

in his short memoir 'A Week of Seven Weeks', written before his death, revealed that at the time he was "inept and unprepared" to become a "politically active communist", because it implied "obedience and loyalty to one tactic and technique where the sacrifice and the life-and-death struggle are total" (Де Були, 1968: 138). "It seemed to me quite normal", he said, commenting on the French Surrealists' joining the Communist Party, "for a poet to express his affiliation with Marxism or the Communist Party", but absurd to subordinate the whole movement to "a political obedience" that called into question its poetic sovereignty. Ratković, however, followed the path of Popović and Drainac, and turned into a social literatus writing "insignificant verse reports" (Konstantinović) about the position of the disenfranchised strata of society, which, we assume, he understood as the "unification with manual workers" to which he had called the intelligentsia in *Večnost*.

On the other hand, the self-effacing constructivist poet Srečko Kosovel, prematurely deceased and posthumously canonised, was a particular example of the political transformation of the avant-garde poet who announced a change in his literary orientation.³⁹ At the beginning, similarly to Podbevšek, the Belgrade Expressionists and Micić in his early phase, Kosovel advocated the "principle of pure revolution that is above any precise political engagement", believing in the power of art to autochthonously change human consciousness: "Creation, that is our ethics, art is our religion: the religion of the greatest human beauty seen from the perspective of the

39 Kosovel was an example of invisible "textual avant-gardism" devoid of "the external, social signs of avant-gardism", since he kept his poetic experiments to himself, rarely showed them to others and did not publish them (Dovič, 1997: 44). With the posthumous publication of his collection of poems *Integrals* (1967), he became recognised as the most important avant-garde poet in the Slovenian language.

soul; and our political goal is socialism” (Šuvaković, 1989: 13). He experienced the October Revolution as an epochal event that had changed the course of history, but gave prominence to the “white”, spiritual and ethical revolution that created a new man for a new society. An unpublished internal dialogue, quoted by Komelj, bears witness to Kosovel’s ambivalent attitude towards communism: “Are you a comm[unist]? / No, but I stand behind them./And what is your opinion about them?/ They are a punishment and restitution. They should become a salvation./I advocate justice./To be religious, and not confessional” (Komelj, 2017: 192). He expressed this unconventional attitude at the time when he was the editor of the magazine of the young Slovenian cultural left *Mladina* (1925–1926) and closely cooperated with the communists, revising his own political position. Komelj was of the opinion that Kosovel’s transition to the communist position was “at the same time an intensification of the distance from them; his new active political stance was a consequence of his knowledge of the relativity of politics as such” (199).

Kosovel’s political evolution was manifested by his turning from experimental towards more simple poetic forms and his advocacy of proletarian culture, including the idea of founding an International Federation of Proletarian Writers with a base in Slovenia. In the lecture ‘Art and the Proletarian’ (1926), which he read to workers in Zagorje and Ljubljana three months before his death, he promoted a proletcult model of literature, calling on writers to join the proletarian movement, which had set them a “new task: to portray life from *reality*, give that reality an artistic form, and shape that reality in art” (Kosovel, 1960: 74–75). Kosovel was not the first Yugoslav avant-gardist to affirm the proletcult model – it was Cesarec who had discussed Lunacharsky’s theses on the Proletcult in his ‘Bolshevism and Culture’ (1919) – but he

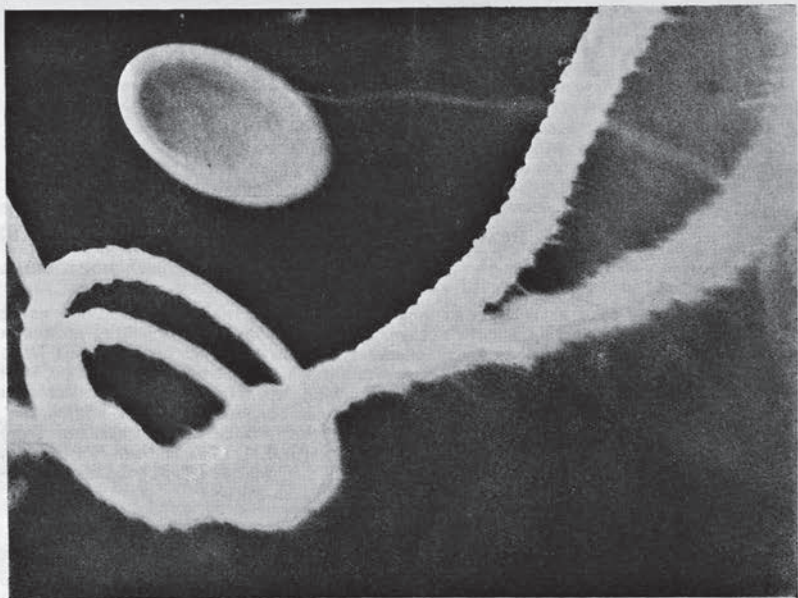
was the first to anticipate the model of social literature and all the key issues that were yet to actualise on the literary left. In his other writings, while keeping a critical distance from his own turn to the left, he reflected on the poet's complicated attitude towards the revolution and on the position of the intelligentsia in post-revolutionary times. As Vrečko has noted, his "service to the revolution" was connected with what was known as the "conflict on the left" in the early 1930s, insofar as "Kosovel had opened the question of normative poetics and personal poetic freedom as early as the mid-1920s, in a similar way to the actions of the Czech Poetists" (Vrečko, 1988: 13).

This question was directly confronted by the Belgrade Surrealists who, during the period of their group engagement (1930–1932), had a powerful rival on the left cultural scene in the growing movement of social literature. Like the French Surrealists, they happened to be the only strong avant-garde on the left cultural front which was fighting for its place and recognition, trying to find a balance between the "irrational-associative" method of surrealist poetics and the "rational-logical" (Ristić) method of social analysis. Though starting from Breton's principle that "the question of Surrealism is the question of freedom itself", in art as in all other areas of life, the Belgrade Surrealists could not have expected that insisting on that principle would become the crucial cause of their misunderstanding with the social literati and the Party.

This was evidenced by Ristić's recollection of his first meeting with Breton in Paris in 1926, when the latter announced his intention to pour Surrealism into the "great river of communism" (which happened the following year when Breton's inner circle joined the French Communist Party), though himself posing the question whether a marriage between Surrealism and organised Communism could be consummated, and at what cost. Ristić admitted that at

the time he was unaware of the weight of the decision the leader of the French Surrealists was facing, because it was about “including a libertarian, almost anarchistic movement into an organisation that inevitably requires subjugation to a discipline without the romantic margins of sovereignty of desire, wildness of spirit, love, dreams, fantasies and experimentation” (Ristić, 1967: 259). In the end, he came to the same conclusion as Benjamin, since the experience of the Belgrade Surrealists showed that their authentic solution for the dialectical unity of the social and aesthetic dimensions of art not only had not met with the understanding of the communist left, but, in an equivalence to the experience of their French colleagues, had broken against the wall of dogmatism.

The Belgrade Surrealist Group began its collective activity by publishing the bilingual almanac *Немогуће/L'impossible*, which consisted of written and visual contributions from the Belgrade Surrealists (Aleksandar Vučo, Oskar Davičo, Milan Dedinac, Mladen Dimitrijević, Vane Živadinović-Bor, Radojica Živanović-Noe, Djordje Jovanović, Djordje Kostić, Dušan Matić, Branko Milovanović, Koča Popović, Petar Popović, Marko Ristić) and their French counterparts (Breton, Aragon, René Char, André Thirion). Surrealism's revolutionary tendency was promulgated in the almanac at the poetic, cognitive and moral levels, while the social (material) level was reduced to allusions such as can be seen in Matić and Ristić: “We have remained determined to carry our thoughts even further left than our hearts” (Матић and Ристић, 1930: 113). In fact, the following year saw a turnaround in the group's activities which, with the declaration ‘The Position of Surrealism’, expressed the need for a more precise social orientation by harmonising the surrealist revolution of the spirit with its social determinants and consequences:



Пошто су констатовали да међу свима њима у начелу постоји, мимо свих индивидуалних разлика, извесна духовна сагласност, и да их једна стална издвојеност дели од свега што се око њих намеће као духовни живот, потписани су сматрали да су им наметнути, у датим околностима, једно прецизније истицање онога што им је заједничко и један дисциплинованији колективни активитет, ради кога сваки од њих пристаје да жртвује психолошку страну свога „ја“. Они су решени да, и у непредвидљивим диалектичким моментима овог активитета, учине и одрже константним и несводљивим, кретање свог непрестаног идеолошког и моралног дефинисања. Ова прва заједничка публикација представља само један видљив моменат у обележавању тог неопходног дефинисања.

АЛЕКСАНДАР ВУЧО, ОСКАР ДАВИЧО, МИЛАН ДЕДИНАЦ, МЛАДЕН
ДИМИТРИЈЕВИЋ, ВАНЕ ЖИВАДИНОВИЋ - БОР, ЖИВАНОВИЋ - НОЕ,
БОРЉЕ ЈОВАНОВИЋ, БОРЉЕ КОСТИЋ, ДУШАН МАТИЋ, БРАНКО МИ-
ЛОВАНОВИЋ, КОЧА ПОПОВИЋ, ПЕТАР ПОПОВИЋ, МАРКО РИСТИЋ.

One entire world against another. The world of infinite dialectic and dynamic concretisation against the world of mortuary metaphysics and static and slurred abstraction. The world of mankind's liberation and the irreducibility of the spirit against the world of constraint, reduction, moral and other castration. The world of irresistible disinterest against the world of possession, comfort and conformism, pitiful personal happiness, mediocre egoism, and every kind of compromise. (Вучо, Давичо, Дединац at al 1931: np).

The signatories of the declaration stated that, on its path to the absolute “concretisation of man”, the surrealist revolt must be coordinated at the level of materialist dialectics with a broader and more efficient negation that sought to change real living conditions, and quoted Marx's *Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach* (without mentioning the author): “And we believe that, ‘philosophers have until now only *interpreted* the world; the point, however, is to *change* it’”. The conclusion of the declaration expressed the determination to go to extremes in this uncompromising, “fateful” struggle, because it was not a matter of personal choice but of collective necessity.

As Lasić pointed out, “to declare on December 23, 1930 in Yugoslavia, that the communist revolution was the only solution for humanity was an act of supreme courage” (Lasić, 1970: 87), although the word “communism” was not mentioned in the declaration; but from the context it was possible to figure out the allusion to a change of social order, as was also deduced by the censors.⁴⁰ Let us not forget, it was the time

40 In the decision to ban ‘The Position of Surrealism’, which included quotations from the incriminating parts of the text, it was stated that the authors, protesting “against today's social morality and the conventions of the social order”, had clearly opted for “calling on citizens to change the laws of the world by force, and, consequently, this booklet must be PROHIBITED, – art. 19, pt. 3. Law on the Press” (Ristić, 2003: 254).

of the 6 January Dictatorship, of white terror and dungeons filled with communists, a time when expressing such views was an act of unequalled audacity which could only have been exhibited by a group of young radicals whose longing for freedom prevailed over common sense. A few years earlier, in a letter addressed to Ristić in Paris, Milan Dedinac had called attention to the difference in the positions of the Paris and Belgrade Surrealists as regards their local political situation: "Our position is immeasurably stupider and more brutal than theirs in France... Just imagine what meaning freedom has in our country... and what it means in theirs. And then, our Law on the Press..." (Тодић, 2002: 68 f.n. 23).

At that time, as Djordje Kostić testified in his memoirs *At the Core of Surrealism*, the Surrealists still had no contacts with the CPY: "For us, the Communist Party was a mystery. It existed in our minds as an idea, but not as an organised party. We considered ourselves communists who were organising work within the framework of Marx's conceptions of social organisation" (Kostić, 1991: 165). They studied Marxism as researchers and not as activists, with the intention of harmonising the surrealist programme, already impregnated with psychoanalysis, with the concepts accepted by the left for its own programme, and convinced that Surrealism could find its place within these concepts and with an authentic solution for taking on the role of creator in society. Kostić emphasised that the Surrealist Group was not only a group of poets engaged in literature, art and criticism, but also a group that was, as they believed, affirmed as a political entity on the left wing. It should also be added that group work was the *modus operandi* of the Belgrade Surrealists, who functioned as a closed intellectual community, and that the collective authorship of their texts and visual artworks was the result of the primacy of the collective over the individual, something

unprecedented among Yugoslav avant-gardists. The meaning of surrealist sectarian activity was explained by Jovanović and Bor: “Membership of a group means concentrating on actions in one direction, acting in the name of one idea, acting under one name. A group means a closed movement. The goal of a group is to exercise a certain moral discipline over its members” (Jovanović and Bor, 1932: 6).

After ‘The Position of Surrealism’, the magazine *Nadrealizam danas i ovde* emerged (1931–1932, three issues), whose title suggested the transition from the abstract revolt of the spirit which released the subversive power of the “impossible”, to the revolt that was rationalised and concretised in relation to actual social reality.⁴¹ This implied an autocritical reexamination of the previous work, and primarily of an “endemic idealism, metaphysics, pessimism and anarchist individualism” as a consequence of “the excessive belief in the potential of surrealist means” (Jovanović and Bor, 1931: 8). By analysing the results of their research and experiments (poetry, automatic writing, recorded dreams, simulation, painting, collage), the Surrealists wanted to draw certain conclusions, which were meant to be interpreted, critically elaborated and applied in further work. As was stated in the unsigned editorial of the second issue of *NDIO* (1931), it was a question of “the ideological development of Surrealism” in

41 The transition from the format of the almanac (*Hemoiýhe/L'impossible*) to that of the magazine (*Nadrealizam danas i ovde*) was a consequence of the change in the editorial concept caused by the political maturation of the group, and was analogous to the renaming of *La Révolution surréaliste* (1924–1929) as *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* (1930–1933); with the difference that Breton wanted to make a political concession to the French Communist Party and the Third International. It should be emphasised here that Belgrade Surrealism, although adopting the programmatic and poetic guidelines of its “older brother” (as from 1926, when the first surrealist poetic and visual works were created), expressed itself as an independent *local version of Surrealism* which, as Kostić explained, developed from its own sources, in its own way and in parallel with the French.

the direction of its “firmer positioning on the basis of dialectical materialism”, the only effective method for resolving the contradictions of the time. In this sense, Surrealism was called upon to “participate in solving the problems posed by history”, taking on the role of “the destroyer of a senile culture and the creator of a new one”, whilst the rigour of its own auto-critical re-examination gave it the moral right to point out the novelty of its specific contribution to “the fateful solution of some of the most urgent and presumptuous riddles of mankind”.

According to Miroslav Egerić’s critical judgment, the rising “social temperature of surrealist action falls beyond recognition”, because surrealist texts were for the most part hermetic, “deprived of logical approaches to a rational understanding of what was being said” (Egerić, 1990: 148). The presence of social elements – “ferments”, as they were called, – was “not observed, and therefore could not have greater mobilising, social-subversive effects, least of all the momentum required by abruptly formulated and goal-oriented social action” (ibid.). As regards the Surrealists’ idealistically conceived goal, Egerić was right: concrete social effects could not emerge from theoretical-critical discourse and experimental poetic production. Hence the “socialisation of Surrealism” was halted at the level of ideas, which were limited to the recipients of surrealist publications – a small number of admirers and a large number of critics, from both left and right. With regard to this, Breton believed work should begin simultaneously on the education of the working class in order to rescue it from “intellectual paralysis”, and he therefore offered himself to the French Communist Party to organise literary seminars at workers’ universities and write a Marxist manual of general literature, but his offer was rejected. He was aware of the fact that surrealist literature was hermetic and

elitist, and that its readers did not sit in factory halls but in bourgeois salons; but without the party's support there was simply no way to integrate it into the frontline of revolutionary-proletarian literature and bring it closer to the labour readership.

The implementation of auto-criticism was a consequence of the internal conflicts and polemics which had accompanied the group since its formation, and led to the correction of its initial position as regards the social goal of surrealist activities. However, auto-criticism also resulted in socialisation at the discursive level, which was a consequence of their interpretation of Lenin's position that the theoretical work of the intelligentsia was an integral part of the labour's class struggle. Referring to Engels' thesis about the working class as the bearer of "a biased materialist science", which "through the recognition of necessity, systematically accelerates the process towards freedom", they claimed that Surrealism was a formation for scientific research allied to that "biased, liberating and inevitable materialistic science" (Dedinac, Popović and Ristić, 1932: 14). If Surrealism had arrived at the same knowledge as the working class, the former by following its poetic path and dialectical development and the latter through its material and social positions, then they were lined up alongside each other in the "process of the historical elaboration and transformation of society". This meant that in the struggle of the working class they preferred – again, in a similar way to their French colleagues – to participate as Surrealists rather than Communists, assigning themselves the role of Brecht's "brain-workers" (*Kopfarbeiter*), while leaving the Communists the task of implementing social change.

Although it was not devoid of sloganry, patheticism and "burning bridges" (Breton), surrealist discourse was more

sophisticated and learned than the discourses of the previous avant-gardes, theoretically more qualified and analytical, and had as its aim the drawing of scientific and philosophical conclusions. The adaptation of psychoanalysis and Marxism to the surrealist poetic universe was of key importance for shaping the theoretical programme of the Belgrade Surrealists during their socialisation period. The nature of this adaptation was most precisely explained by Popović and Ristić in *Outline for a Phenomenology of the Irrational* (1931), which represented the theoretical peak of Belgrade Surrealism, and authentic surrealist philosophical writing that combined dialectics, psychoanalysis, Dali's paranoiac-critical method, Einstein's theory of relativity, the moral significance of poetry and the surrealist view of the world. Rejecting Freudianism as a personal worldview, they nevertheless insisted that "psychoanalysis is called, and perhaps is the only method today, to explain the mechanism by which the individual is determined by the social, just as historical materialism is the only method called to explain the mechanism by which the social is determined by the economic" (Popović and Ristić, 1931: 29). There is no doubt that the Surrealists, French and Serbian alike, were among the pioneers of Freudo-Marxism (Wilhelm Reich published his *Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis* in 1929), in their attempt to show that the use of these theories within the context of surrealist activities could help uncover fundamental life truths and contradictions as the precondition for the self-realisation of subject and society.

As has already been mentioned, the group shared the belief that surrealist experimentation contributed to "the progress of dialectical materialism in the comprehension of the world", which was why "revolutionaries should welcome it as they welcome scientific work in general" (Bor and Ris-

tić, 1932: 49). Responding to the criticism of one of its fiercest critics, Pavle Bihali, that Surrealism attempted to “correct Marxism”, Vane Bor explained that the opposite aim was at stake, i.e., that Surrealism aimed to enrich Marxism by “deepening dialectical materialism through the application of the dialectical materialist method also in areas which had not been explored sufficiently, and therefore deepening the method itself” (Bor, 1932: 311). This meant that Surrealism extended the method to examining areas which had not been studied dialectically, “either for their refutation (religion, prejudice, psychic deformations of all kinds, bourgeois literature), or for their elaboration or dialecticisation (dreams, poetry, relations between reality and thoughts, as well as between thoughts and expressions)”. The dialectical method was used to perform a critique of ideological materials or “closed systems of unfreedom” (Kostić), and to affirm radical models of poetic and critical thinking, thus disrupting these systems by going beyond their illusory frameworks.

The critique of Surrealism by the social literati punctured several neuralgic points of surrealist activity: the hermetic literary idiom that “the masses do not understand perfectly” (Janko Djonović), the “desperate” worldview, the deviation from historical materialism, the absence of class designation, the use of psychoanalysis, and the like. From the perspective of social literature, Surrealism appeared like an experimental laboratory project (“art in a test tube”, as Aleksić noted sarcastically), isolated from social reality and the class struggle, but without realising or wanting to admit it. Surrealism took its stance on the class struggle at the level of theory, but even there, with its “metaphysical structure of thinking” (Bihali), it exhibited violence in its interpretation of dialectical materialism, pairing it with the “reactionary and idealistic ideology of Freudianism”, formally anathema-

tised by the Kharkov Declaration. Disappointed with its rejection of criticism from “ideationally close circles”, Stevan Galogaža published an article ‘For the Liquidation of Surrealism’ in *Literatura*, where he declared Surrealism “a bankrupt company”, which, “under the false assumption that historical materialism neglects the spiritual liberation of man”, has retreated to “a superstructure”, that is, to theorisation and “spiritual” work, leaving others to act on the economic and social transformation (Galogaža, 1932: 68). In short, the Surrealists were understood by the social literati as progressive bourgeois intellectuals who found themselves falling into a chasm between individualistic revolt and indecision as to whether to join the struggle of the proletariat, which made their revolutionary commitment merely declarative and abstract.

At the beginning, the Surrealists responded to such criticism in a conciliatory tone, trying to prove that the gap between Surrealism and social literature was not insurmountable, because they were both based on the premises of historical materialism and in the service of the revolutionary struggle. However, after the polemic had finally assumed serious proportions, in their text ‘Misunderstanding Dialectics. Reply to Critiques by Merin and Galogaža’, Dedinac, Popović and Ristić presented a judgment (identical to Breton’s in *The Second Manifesto*) on social literature as a non-dialectical return to realism: “It is not a matter of moving from a shallow, static realism, which is entirely at the service of the interests and prejudices of bourgeois culture [...] into another shallow realism, equally static”, supposedly towards the “construction of a new culture” (Dedinac, Popović and Ristić, 1932: 3). Further on, they reproached the social literati for not being able to understand

materialistic exploitability, i.e., the *revolutionism of Surrealism*, which they view idealistically. That they have not studied Surrealism is no coincidence: they are afraid of free dialectical thought, they consider Marxism to be a precisely defined sequence of norms and formulas, a mechanism that only needs to be wound up so that thought can function within the precisely defined limits of a series of common places. It is understandable that they renounce Surrealism (ibid.).

They especially insisted that they had not arrived at Marxism independently of Surrealism but “thanks to its dialecticism”, evidently bearing in mind Breton’s definition of Surrealism as the resolution of “the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality into an absolute reality or *surreality*” (Breton, 1979: 23–24). After all, had not Benjamin, in his fascination with Surrealism, ingeniously called the principle of montage a “dialectic at rest”, which breaks through the apparent continuity of things by allowing something potentially new to shine through the confrontation of mutually disparate objects?

It was aptly observed that throughout these polemics the Surrealists were aware of the “real distribution of power” and therefore wanted to prove to the party that they were allies in the fight for the same goal, reducing the disagreement to the level of personal account settling, in order to locate the cause of the misunderstanding in the wrong interpretation of surrealist Marxism by those individuals who attacked them (Karan, 1989: 158). Despite the intellectual superiority of the Surrealists, it resembled the fight of David and Goliath, and brought the group closer to the turning point in its position towards the communist left, as Koča Popović was the first to realise, with the following formulation: “We shall either have

UMESTO »SOCIALNE UMETNOSTI«



MARKOV-DAN U BEOGRADU



PRIVATNA SVOJINA



LONDONSKI LORD-MAYOR



»IDANO« I »NEW MEXICO« (U. S. A.)



SANGAJ



U OCEKIVANJU HLEBA (BEOGRAD)



SANGAJ



PHILADELPHIA (U. S. A.)



MARCONI VRSI OPITE PRED PAPOM



OSVEĆENJE KAMERA TEMELJCA



»MIRACULUM« I RAZLAZ

to change their views about us, that is, those parts which corresponds with our areas of action, or we shall have to change ourselves” (Popović, 1932: 10).

This was the turning point that brought about the polarisation concerning the future of Surrealism, and it was initiated by Davičo, Kostić and Matić, who neither participated in the polemic with the social literati, nor in the last issue of *NDIO*, because they had already left the group and embarked on illegal party work.⁴² They had developed the belief that “the bourgeois form of Surrealism should be abandoned after it had performed and fulfilled its role”, and that the group’s activity should be directed “towards a higher phase of action”, to acting *within* the labour movement “which is the only one that exists collectively on the basis of historical materialism” (Davičo, Kostić and Matić, 1932: 122). They felt a strong urge to combine poetic work with political activism, which they demonstrated by publishing *The Position of Surrealism in the Social Process* (1932), a counter-book to *Outline for a Phenomenology of the Irrational*, in which, purging it of psychoanalysis and “Bretonism”, they unconvincingly tried to redefine Surrealism in terms of the class struggle and to set up a theoretical platform for turning surrealist poetry towards social tendency. Relying on the commonplaces of the Marxist understanding of history, socio-economic formation and class struggle, *The Position of Surrealism in the Social Process* had no epistemological character, nor did it give Surrealism any specific artistic status.

42 After joining the party, they began to translate and distribute Marxist literature. However, Davičo was arrested in Bihać and sentenced to five years in prison for organising a Marxist circle. After that, Jovanović was sentenced to three years in prison, and Popović, Kostić, Matić, Dedinac and Vučo were also arrested. The news of the arrest of the Belgrade Surrealists by the “pro-fascist Yugoslav government” was conveyed by René Crevel in an emotionally toned article, ‘Yugoslav Surrealists are in Prison’ (*Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*, no. 6, 1933).

It was explained as a social and revolutionary phenomenon whose place in the social process was marked not only by a critique of the existing situation but also by concrete social action.

Their goal was similar to that of Breton from 1927 onwards: to join the “collective” but to preserve the uniqueness of surrealist poetic-critical practice, harmonising its work with the goals and tasks of the party. Contrary to their expectations, however, the subsequent collision with the party’s realpolitik showed that the latter did not understand *The Position of Surrealism* as an attempt to harmonise surrealist Marxism with the Marxism of the Party, but as a heresy. Unaware of the state of affairs within the party, they believed that their tract would confirm the familiar assumption generally to be found in the Marxist literature of the time – that “everyone arrives at Marxism in the way which is characteristic of them” (Kostić, 1991: 150). Faced with an ultimatum to stop publishing *Nadrealizam danas i ovde* and terminate their surrealist activities, they conformed to their political beings, with support from Popović and Jovanović – that is, they renounced Surrealism, and put themselves at the disposal of the Party. Davičo later explained that his joining the Party was decisive for his break with “surrealist orthodoxy” and for all “his poetic tellings from then onwards” (Давичо, 1969: 293), while Jovanović wrote to Ristić from prison that he had cut the umbilical cord with the “petit bourgeoisie” (Surrealism): “I have learned here to look at things more clearly and incisively” (Ristić, 1953: 125).

Breton’s Surrealism had undergone two intense internal crises, occasioned by its position towards the Communist Party and its cultural policy (the “Navelle” and “Aragon” affairs), but thanks to the authoritative leader at its helm, this great movement had overcome them and survived to continue on

its independent path. According to Breton's testimony, after the Surrealists joined them, the French Communist Party had been pressuring them to renounce their autonomy and submit to party discipline ("If you are Marxists, you do not need to be Surrealists", the Party insisted) – this led to a loss of initial illusions and an open conflict which ended with the expulsion of Breton and his comrades in 1933. It was precisely the "Aragon Affair" (1932) that provoked the final confrontation with the "disciplinary fanaticism" of the French communists, which, as Breton stated in a letter to Ristić, was inevitable, and even favourable, as a way out of the predicament Surrealism had found itself in. The alliance between the surrealist poetic revolution and the communist social revolution had not proved successful, because the Surrealists did not want to relinquish their poetics and their means of expression, since for them, as Breton repeated, it would represent a betrayal of the poetic act. Ristić's "Bretonian" faction (Bor, Vučo, Dedinac) resonated in a similar way, proposing at a crucial moment that the group grow into a surrealist movement, independent of the party. "Surrealism has its own specific character and must have its own specific critique", wrote Jovanović and Bor, and therefore "in this regard, no concessions can be made to superficial spectators, even when it comes to spectators we care about" (Jovanović and Bor, 1932: 8). They thus expressed an attitude with which at that moment there could be no more agreement; but that attitude proved to be correct as regards the betrayed expectation of the pro-party "Aragonian" faction, because their "concession" did not meet with understanding.

The essence of the dialogue between Surrealism and Marxism was admirably explained by Matić in his book on Breton:

[...] sometimes it seems to me that this dialogue is almost at the core of Surrealism; it is the *Knot* where *Spirit* and *Revolution* meet, touch, break, judge each other, merge (*inevitably*) with a delay, from one side or the other, it does not matter which. Life is not Logic. Revolution is not Logic. It does not always erupt where it has been best planned. It erupts where the Gordian knot of some unbearable social or human situation must be cut, where the terrible question of the life and death of the common existence is *lived*" (Matić, 1978: 75).

Matić's metaphor of the "tough" Knot of Spirit and Revolution could be extended to other socially radical avant-gardes, starting with *Plamen*, but none of them found itself even close to the temptation Surrealism had to confront: *It was the only avant-garde group in the capitalist world that abolished itself under pressure from the Communist Party*. Although it is difficult to distinguish which social literati, in their attacks on Surrealism, spoke on their own behalf and which on behalf of the Party, it can be concluded that it was the Kharkov line that set the guidelines for the cultural policy to be defined by the CPY in the coming years, at a time when the *protocanon* of revolutionary-proletarian literature gave way to the *canon* of socialist realism.

It is important to emphasise that, in the Kharkov documents, Surrealism was not condemned, but the hope was instead expressed that this group of "young petit bourgeois" who had turned towards communism would continue to evolve in the direction of dialectical materialism, "correct the flagrant errors contained in their 'Second Manifesto of Super-Realism', and finally find their way to the real proletarian ideology" (Lewis, 1990: 103). But this barely earned credit of the "only communist avant-garde" would soon be exhausted by the in-

tensifying conflict between the Surrealists and the French Communist Party in the “Aragon Affair”. This was evidenced by the anti-surrealist articles in the party newspaper *L’Humanité* from the beginning of 1932, with the insinuation that Surrealism had become arrested at an “extreme individualism which is interested only in pure experimentation and art for art’s sake” (110). Such disqualifications undoubtedly had an impact on the reception of Surrealism in the international proletarian movement, which meant that the fate of Belgrade Surrealism was inevitably linked to the turbulent separation of the French Surrealists from the Communists.

The disintegration of the Belgrade group meant at the same time the end of the *epoch of manifestos* in Yugoslavia and the closure of the first chapter of conflicts on the literary left. The second chapter followed right away with the attacks on Krleža, despite his authority as the most eminent Yugoslav social writer and a “kind of left-wing institution” (Visković) close to the CPY leadership. Defending himself against these attacks on his writing (he was accused of turning right on account of his “solipsism” and “pessimism”), Krleža had grown into the leader of the independent-minded writers and critics resisting the norms of literary expression imposed by the communist left. In the new phase of his literary and theoretical-critical work, stripped of the avant-garde radicalism and with attitudes closer to those of Krleža, Ristić, as Krleža’s intimate and collaborator at *Danas* (1934) and *Pečat* (1939), became one of the main protagonists of the second phase of conflict on the literary left, even though poetically still a Surrealist. Other members of the group also gravitated towards the orbit of social literature and *new realism* (a cryptonym for socialist realism introduced after 1934) and its magazines, regardless of whether they had retained the elements of surrealist poetics (Vučo, Davičo, Matić, Dedinac) or completely

turned to literary (Jovanović) and artistic (Živanović-Noe) social realism. The former anarchist individualist Jovanović, however, was a special case, not only transforming himself into an ideologue of the new realism, but also a critic of Surrealism, who, “with a ferocity containing something of a bad conscience” (Konstantinovic), accused it of “*bel-esprit* artism”, “psychoanalytic mysticism”, “pseudocriticism” and the like (‘Aragon’, *Naša stvarnost*, nos. 17–18, 1939).

If the European avant-gardes before and after the First World War had been inspired by the revolutionary fermentation and drawn their strength from that atmosphere, the regeneration of capitalism and the rise of Fascism and Stalinism produced a more prudent approach towards social reality and modes of artistic participation in social change. Analysing European artistic movements, Miklós Szabolcsi concluded that around about 1930, the momentum of the avant-garde slowed down and in some cases adopted “incidental manifestations that are far away from its essence”, and that after 1935, only insignificant groups calling themselves avant-garde remain, whilst the “means of expression and art forms gradually traditionalise, namely, become part of the new modern realism” (Саболчи, 1997: 63). The reasons that led to this twilight of the avant-gardes could be external and internal, political and literary, and mutually intertwined, and in those countries, including Yugoslavia, where “the influence of avant-garde movements was reduced to a relatively small circle and became only a preoccupation of narrower intellectual groups, a much faster and more natural return to more traditional models occurred” (65). Only one movement, Surrealism, continued to flow uninterruptedly, spreading across Europe and Latin America and reaching Egypt and Japan; but this Surrealism, whatever effects it had in local milieus, was no longer a penetrating and subversive but stabilised

avant-garde, bearing the characteristics of an international style in art and literature. In France, the Surrealists integrated into a bourgeois art system whose ideological foundations they still challenged, and what seemed to be a florescence of the movement, with the luxurious new magazine *Minotaure* (1933–1939), art patrons, major exhibitions and commercial success, was in fact, for Maurice Nadeau, the historian of Surrealism, “the explosion of fireworks that fizzle out on their own, since there is no more gunpowder” (Nado, 1980: 239).

That “gunpowder” also ceased to exist in Yugoslavia after 1932, because all the *avant-garde resources*, so to speak, had been exhausted, owing to the split within the Belgrade Surrealists, who had only represented a functional avant-garde when they were a group, with optimal projection, aesthetic reevaluation, fiery revolt against art institutions, desire to abolish the autonomy of art, etc. Groupings gathered around Krleža’s magazines in the conflict on the literary left did not act under a common programme, but from the position of anti-dogmatic Marxist intellectuals who were leading a principled struggle to defend the autonomy of the revolutionary artistic subject on behalf of a “social tendency in which the literary criterion will prevail over the political” (Krleža). However, according to Ristić, social tendency “cannot be the result of various previous orders, rational resolutions and well-intentioned decisions, but only the fruit of the artist’s maturity and moral authenticity, as well as of the necessity of a specific content and the expressive value of artistic creation itself” (Ristić, 1934b: 243). The fact that it was a Surrealist who was still speaking from within him was evidenced by his position that real poetry must be revolutionary if it is saturated with the subversive potential of desire and, as such, “represents a breakthrough and the victory of the pure and spontaneous aspiration to liberation and revolt” (Ristić, 1934a: 80).

It should not be forgotten that the 1930s were a period of flourishing of social literature and art, with a significant growth in the CPY's reputation and influence among intellectuals and artists who had taken a position of dynamic social engagement by propagating communist ideas ever more boldly in magazines and books, forums and exhibitions, art organisations and cultural institutions. Ideationally, social art fell more and more under the influence of the Party, adapting to its tactics and goals, especially prior to the fascist invasion, as was justified by the need to educate and revolutionise the masses, as well as to establish the politico-ideational unity of the movement (Ćosić, 1969: 26). In that sense, the ideologue of the new realism shifted the emphasis from the class tendency of social literature to partisanship, which meant that the "*meta-literary* factor" (Lasić) became decisive for defining the literary-theoretical concept that was intended to become the binding concept for the literary left. If the social literature movement appeared "more as a *convergence of a series of writers towards a common denominator* than a 'single left front'", an exclusive concept that was "rigorously clean and tidy" and did not allow debate on fundamental categories was later insisted upon (Lasić, 1970: 150). To challenge these fundamental categories with arguments such as that social literature was a "regression of consciousness" (Ristić) which destroyed literary value by advocating undisguised tendency and vulgar sociology, was to defy the party's cultural policy and question its authority.

Expressing his view – which we can agree with – of the essence of the conflict on the literary left, Matvejević stated that it was a question of the difference between *political* and *aesthetic* viewpoints on the relationship between art and revolution: for the former, art practice was part of revolutionary action and fulfilled its immediate tasks, while for the

PEČAT

8-9

MIROSLAV KRLEŽA: DIJALEKTICKI ANTIBARBARUS

Na mrtvoj straži pameti ljudske / Recepti, propisi i dogme Ognjena Price / Prva seminarska varijacija / Intermezzo o prostoru i vremenu / Druga seminarska varijacija / Prvi intermezzo na motiv „La Quatrième“ / O lirici i o sferskom doživljavanju / Bijeg Pečata u metafiziku. Na granici dijalektike / Paralela između Ognjena Price i Bogomira Hermannova A. B. C. B. H. M-a / Kako se kod nas piše u ime dijalektike. O svrsi pisanja, o umjetnosti i o života upote / Nekoliko primjera na Priceovu lezu o Receptima sa komentarom o inspiraciji / Alcalá Zamora na čelu povorke u Escorial 1931. god. / Strašilo straži glib europskajski / Gumbeljum roža fino diši / Galtenjačka / Mizerere Tebi Jeruzalem / Nenadajano bogčije zveličanje / Plać Majke Jevrope / O pisanju a namjerom. O značenju ljepote i o našoj dijalektičkoj Ateni / Izobličeno dijalektike kod nas / Markelizam nije diletantizam, a socijalna književnost nije opereta / O zvijezdama sub specie dialecticae / O prošlogodišnjem štimingu oko Münchena / O materijalističko-dijalektičkoj metodi kao podlozi umjetničkog stvaranja / Neoposobnost na djelu ili kako dolazi do trockizma / O Pečatu i besjedi o njegovoj avrsi / Genes irritable vatum — razdražljivi taj soj plakarata / Geneza pečatovskog trockizma / Don Kihot na bombarderu i Crna Sraznola B. Zogovića / Jedanaest zvonkih rima Radovana Zogovića / Slučaj gospođe Cins Jota i Branka Teodovića / Barbuse-ova smrt u jednoj noveli B. Zogovića / Negacija negacije / Socijalistički san Jovana Popovića / Zbrka oko Pečata / Intermezzo o logici i nadrealizmu / P. T. T. pozdravlja Ognjena Price / Finale

DECEMBAR
ZAGREB
1939

Pečat, nos. 8–9, 1939

latter, “revolution and art are convergent, but in such a way that one is not exhausted in the other or not fully identified with it” (Matvejević, 1977: 124). “What is sought, on the one hand, is the *art of revolution*, and on the other, *revolution in art*; and this relationship is expressed in more or less inevitable divergences and occasional convergences” (125). Today we know that the circle gathered around Krleža at the time of *Pečat* sought for what was practically impossible at that

given historical moment for both Yugoslav and international communism, because Stalinist policy was ruthless towards “deviations” and “factionalism” in all areas of revolutionary theory and practice. If in the 1920s it was believed that some kind of synthesis was possible in the form of a transversal connection between the artistic and revolutionary machines, in the years of Stalin’s Thermidor, which contaminated the world of organised communism, it was a pure political illusion, as Krleža later admitted. Unlike Breton, who co-wrote the manifesto ‘Towards a Free Revolutionary Art’ (1938) with Trotsky and founded the anti-Stalinist and anti-fascist International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Art (FIARI), Krleža’s small circle, advocating essentially the same values, acted locally, was not familiar with Trotskyism, and was not ready to turn itself into dissidents, because they believed until the very end that they could gain victory with the strength of their arguments. The conflict quietened down on the eve of the Second World War, and eventually there were neither winners nor losers, because each side remained true to its argument.⁴³

43 The party’s leadership treated the conflict as a “tension between writers” (Tito), until it reached the boiling point with the publication of Krleža’s ‘Dialectical Antibarbarous’, which was perceived as an attack on the integrity of the Party and its leading intellectuals. The personal intervention of the Secretary-General J. B. Tito – who, after taking office in 1937, had successfully consolidated the Party – was motivated by the unfavourable position in which the CPY found itself in relation to the Comintern. As Tito later explained, there was a danger that the CPY Central Committee would be suspected of Trotskyism and be disbanded if it did not react to the “Trotskyism” around Krleža. In his articles in the party newspaper *Proleter* (1939), exercising a cruel Stalinist rhetoric, he accused the “Pečatists” Ristić, Zvonimir Richtman and Vaso Bogdanov of Trotskyist revisionism, in order to send a message to Krleža (whom he knew personally and respected) to stop publishing the magazine and terminate the polemics. The latter did as requested, realising that the conflict had lost its literary meaning and that there was no point in going against the CPY, since it was “the only force capable of resisting a political crisis that showed signs of a disintegration in all directions” (Visković, 2001: 78). The collateral victim of the conflict, however, was Oskar Davičo, who was accused of Trotskyism and expelled from the party because of poems of his published in *Pečat*.

In an interview broadcast on a German radio station in 1962, which covered the theme of nostalgia for the Golden Twenties, Adorno explained that it was essentially a nostalgia for a utopia, a period in which the possibility of establishing a politically liberated society opened up, when strong intellectual movements operated which were “avant-garde and not yet completely wrapped in the cellophane of modernity” (Adorno, 2016: 4). However, things had taken another direction: the hope that the world could change for the better was annulled by the ruling forces, which later became fully revealed with the advent of Fascism, and this catastrophe was triggered by the social conflicts of the 1920s, “even in the sphere usually called culture”. The 1930s also brought about the erosion of the collective energies which “had produced the greatest innovations in European art”, and “the unbridled spontaneity and independence of the artistic subject was restrained by the need for order”. (5) Although Adorno was speaking of Germany (where nostalgia was, understandably, most pronounced in the post-fascist period), his concise diagnosis of the 1920s could be applied to the entire continent, including Yugoslavia.

The third decade of the 20th century in a small culture such as the Yugoslav was not distinguished by such cultural and intellectual diversity, dynamism and innovation as appeared in Germany, but what it gave birth to in the domain of radical art and radical ideas gives us the right to talk about the Golden Twenties. The period from *Plamen* to *Nadrealizam danas i ovde* was, without a doubt, the period of the greatest innovations in Yugoslav art in the first half of the last century, and was complemented by the artists’ faith in the possibility of establishing a politically liberated society. In other words, it was a decade in which revolution for a new art and a new culture, for a new man and a new so-

ciety, was versed, thought about and acted upon with such passion and conviction as was never witnessed before or after in Yugoslav art. Referring to Clement Greenberg, we can say that the true and most important role the avant-garde performed was not to experiment in the field of art, but to “find a path along which it would be possible to keep culture moving in the midst of ideological confusion and violence” (Greenberg, 1995: 531). This trajectory was marked by an optimal projection that postulated a combative effort, a decisive action aimed at achieving the ultimate goal (optimal model), and an unwavering belief that this goal would be achieved precisely thanks to that effort. *The red horizon* that provided the ideological-political coordinates to that endeavour seemed close and inevitable, and it was seen as part of the epoch and not some indefinite future, the outcome that would follow after a series of rebellions, ventures, struggles and hopes. As the consequence of the historical events, and the drama that could not even be anticipated at that time, that horizon was exceeded, and not according to the script of either Marx, Bakunin or Lenin, but through the national liberation struggle in the Second World War, which was at the same time a socialist revolution, led by the CPY with J. B. Tito as its Commander-in-Chief. The revolution achieved victory, but the avant-garde was not there anymore, except for a few former Surrealists, who were Partisan fighters.⁴⁴

44 A veteran of the Spanish International Brigades, Koča Popović was the commander of the First Proletarian Division, in whose ranks Davičo also fought. Djordje Jovanović died as the political commissar of the Kosmaj Partisan Unit (1943), and Živanović-Noe was killed in the fighting for the liberation of Belgrade (1944). It should be added here that the former avant-gardist Cesarec – who had become an intellectual soldier of the party, transformed himself into an insignificant social writer and broke up with Krleža following the disagreement over *Pečat* – was executed in Zagreb by the Ustasha regime in 1941. “Long live Soviet Croatia!” were Cesarec’s last words, written on the wall of his prison cell.

However, if we turn the time perspective in the opposite direction, then we can draw a different conclusion: the avant-garde had carried out a genuine revolution in its own epoch, with its historical momentum, its own ways of world-making, its visionary thought and enlightening ideas. Misunderstood and unrecognised by both society and the revolutionary movement, it carried out its mission of turning culture in a revolutionary direction, and then disappeared. It is to this *red horizon*, which disappeared but inevitably returns to us today when we discuss the emancipatory potentials of art, that this book is dedicated.

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