The Dissolution of Marxist Humanism

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Given that it is now a half-century since the iconic year 1968, a reflection on the philosophical situation of that time, and our distance from it, seems in order. Though 1968 is no longer simply a year but a name for what is known as "the Sixties," a time whose myth still survives in our cultural history. Philosophy in that time was part and parcel of the international phenomenon of the Sixties in which decolonization, the New Left, youth politics, the fight against institutional racism, women's liberation, anti-war activism, cultural radicalism, and many more strands were woven together. Nevertheless, one experiences and investigates from a certain point of view and I might as well begin by admitting that my perspective is primarily Anglophone and Canadian—even though it is a perspective on a world phenomenon.

The philosophy of the Sixties which I want to define is not the thought of one situated person, nor a group, even less a party. It is what one might call a *discursive space* within which philosophies oriented to their time operate. By a discursive space I mean a realm in which arguments and explications can be made, which is structured in a certain form, but which remains as a background to explicit philosophical articulations and debates between them. The interplay between more-or-less structured background assumptions and explicit articulations means that, while there are certainly characteristic philosophies of the time, those which are less characteristic are subliminally required to address those which are dominant. While I will explain the discursive space of philosophical discourse in the Sixties with reference to influential figures, the discursive space itself is a more encompassing phenomenon whose full explication would require a much more detailed investigation. One's own struggle for truth operates within such a discursive space and in this way we not only are born into a time but struggle to become true children of our time and thus perhaps adults who may define their time and play a role in shaping it.

1. The Philosophy of the Sixties

Without further preamble, I want to assert that the dominant philosophy of the Sixties was Marxist humanism or existential Marxism. I mean no distinction between these two terms that were both very much in evidence at the time. The interplay between three key terms defines its discursive space: a certain understanding of Marx,

existentialism (primarily of the French variety), and humanism—a term with a long history that took on a quite specific meaning.

The humanist reading of Marx can be dated from Erich Fromm's *Marx's Concept of Man* which appeared in 1961 and went through sixteen printings by 1971. Fromm convinced T.B. Bottomore to translate Marx's 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* into English for his volume.[1] The manuscripts had been available in German since 1932 but had not made inroad into English-language discussions. Even in Europe, the Second World War had interrupted the continuity of Marxist theory, so that the 1960s reading occurred largely independently of former discussions. Bottomore also published Marx's *Early Writings*, which included the *Manuscripts*, in a separate 1963 edition. The foreword by Fromm emphasized that "Marx was a humanist, for whom man's freedom, dignity, and activity were the basic premises of the 'good society'."[2] Similarly, his introductory interpretation in *Marx's Concept of Man* emphasized that "Marx's central criticism of capitalism is not the injustice in the distribution of wealth; it is the perversion of labor into forced, alienated, meaningless labour, hence the transformation of man into a 'crippled monstrosity'."[3] The appropriation of Marx in Marxist humanism was the conception of the whole human being alienated by capitalism from the human essence and capable of recovering that essence through the activity of creative labour. This conception allowed a critique of the defining features of the historical era: consumerism as alienating in the West and the subjection of the individual by the state in the Soviet bloc.[4] In 1965, Fromm edited a volume of essays by 35 contributors from both East and West that showed that socialist humanism had become not only a philosophical tendency but a rallying cry. As he put it in the introduction, "socialist Humanism is no longer the concern of a few dispersed intellectuals, but a movement to be found throughout the world."[5] The hierarchical control of the labour process, and the subjection of the individual worker to the factory, appeared no different on either side. Marxist humanism aimed to avoid the confrontation of East and West through a return to the creative individual in search of non-alienated work and social relations.

This humanist interpretation was so much on the agenda that when Louis Althusser responded to the French translation of the *Manuscripts* in the Communist journal *La Pensée* in 1962 he attempted to draw a strict line between the early and late Marx, relegating the early work to a surpassed period of political ideology that was left unpublished for good reason.[6] We can see this also in Fromm's interpretation of Freud with the concept of alienation that allowed him to see Marx and Freud as parallel thinkers: through an analysis of the external factors that condition and limit human beings, the capacity for freedom and conscious action can be revivified and returned to the humanist subject. As he said, "by being driven by forces unknown to him, man is not free. He can attain

freedom (and health) only by becoming aware of these motivating forces, that is, of reality, and thus he can become the master of his life (within the limitations of reality) rather than the slave of blind forces."[7] Both Marx and Freud were interpreted as pointing to barriers that need to be removed for the free, self-determining human subject to emerge.

Humanist Marxism was the basis for critique of alienation in both West and East not only in the West. The *Praxis School*, based in Zagreb and Belgrade, gathering annually at the Korčula Summer School and expressing itself in the international journal *Praxis*, developed a critique of Soviet authoritarianism in dialogue with critical voices in the West. Gajo Petrović emphasized that Marx's humanism was a philosophy of *praxis* and that action requires an orientation to the future, so that humanism is oriented to "historically created human possibilities."[8] Ivan Svitak elaborated a certain convergence thesis between East and West, suggesting that the industrial maturity of the Soviet Union had led to its adoption of "a modified version of the American way of life" by making a high level of consumption its main priority.[9] Future possibility thus seemed to be aligned with a critique of consumer society and a recovery of the creative activity of social individuals. A major point of orientation for this was the current state of industrial self-management in Yugoslavia. Without overlooking its difficulties, self-management within the more independent countries of state socialism provided a starting-point for the development of industrial democracy as the form of work organization that would fit with Marxist humanism. Mihailo Marković argued that the "natural extension and integration of various bodies of self-management into a whole would be a practical negation of the state and would put an end to professional politics."[10] While the rejection of the authoritarian state was more a matter of immediate reaction in the West, in the East it provoked analysis of the failure of state socialism and an attempt to recover a humanist Marx from official state ideology. The fact that private property had already been abolished in Soviet-style societies showed that social revolution had to go beyond it. As Marković said, "the essential characteristic of revolution is a radical transformation of the essential internal limit of a certain social formation."[11]

It was the goal of Marxist humanism—with some considerable success I would say—to mark the limit of consumer society in its twin forms of capitalism and state socialism and to propose a future form of active individua participation in authentic social life grounded in work relations and extending throughout all institutions. One aspect of this approach that needed especial underlining was the role of the individual due to the neglect or suppression of the individual in all current forms of Marxism. In this respect existentialism, especially but not exclusively of the French variety, came to play an essential supplementary role to the rediscovery of the early Marx.

Fromm, in support of his claim that "Marx's aim [was] the development of the human personality," referred to Marx's philosophy as *humanist existentialism*.[12] The Czech philosopher Karel Kosík argued that "the pseudoconcrete of the alienated everyday world is destroyed through *estrangement*, through *existential modification*, and through *revolutionary transformation*."[13] In his critique of orthodox Marxism's one-sided focus on structural change, Kosík suggested that a prior individual act turns merely accepted reality into an active attempt to live authentically. Without such an existential modification the subsumption of the individual to social structures would persist after revolutionary change. Kosík utilized his appropriation of phenomenology and existentialism to show that philosophy is an opening of human reality toward being. Whereas in contemporary society "man is *walled in* in his socialness"—it is seen as a limitation—Marx's philosophy of praxis is oriented to "the process of forming a socio-human reality as well as man's *openness* toward being and toward the truth of objects."[14] Existentialism came to the aid of Marxism in order to revivify its relation to philosophy and to understand philosophy as an active stance in the world.

The key figure for the existentialism of the period was Jean-Paul Sartre and its ground was provided by Sartre's 1936 text *Transcendence of the Ego* in which he criticized the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl. Husserl is one of the most significant figures in 20th century philosophy whose influence went far beyond those who remained faithful to his ideas. Husserl had distinguished between the concrete, or individual human, ego and the transcendental ego. The transcendental ego emerged through what was called a transcendental reduction in which the question of the reality of the world was neither affirmed nor denied but simply set aside. This allowed for the human world as a world of *meaning* to emerge and become systematically investigated. In philosophical language, *transcendental* refers not to the immediate contents of experience but to the conditions or grounds which allow those contents to appear. Phenomenology, in Husserl's terms, would investigate the meaning of events in the human world in relation to the ultimate source of such meanings. This duality was expressed in terms of that between the concrete, or socio-historical, individual subject and the transcendental ego which is anonymous, non-individual, and stands outside of history.

Against Husserl, Sartre argued that whatever might be called transcendental is not an ego but a pure impersonal spontaneity with no egoic features.[15] The consequence was that

> The phenomenologists have plunged man back into the world; they have given full measure to man's agonies and also to his rebellions. Unfortunately, as long as the *I* remains a structure of absolute consciousness, one will still be able to reproach phenomenology for being an escapist doctrine … It

> seems to us that this reproach no longer has any justification if one makes *me* an existent, strictly contemporaneous with the world, whose existence has the same essential characteristics as the world.[16]

A subject that was thoroughly worldly could not seek its authenticity in ascending beyond immediate historical conditions but only through confronting them on the basis of its own responsibility. This emphasis on individual choice and freedom was the acid bath out of which humanist Marxism could emerge without any remaining stain linking it to orthodox, authoritarian, state-centred, Soviet Marxism. By making meaning dependent on individual free choice Sartre seemed to totter on a slippery slope toward egotism or even solipsism.

In 1948, Herbert Marcuse had criticized Sartre's existentialism as a positivist tract which lost the transcendence of the given world that it was the job of philosophy to furnish.[17] However, when he republished the essay in 1972, Marcuse changed his tune:

> The basic existentialist concept is rescued through the consciousness which declares war on this reality—in the knowledge that reality will remain the victor. For how long? This question, which has no answer, does not alter the validity of the position which is today the only possible one for the thinking person.[18]

In this way existentialist choice became fundamental to Marxist humanism: a subject fully immersed in the world but nevertheless with the freedom to choose to revolt could enter into the historical analysis and revolutionary transformation proposed by Marxism with sacrifice of neither individual value nor responsibility. To this extent, it was as much anti-authoritarian and anarchist as Marxist—as the practice of the New Left often was.

This humanist subject was taken to subtend all of the different forms of oppression and exploitation. In Brazil, Paulo Freire began from this point to develop further Sartre's critique of education as a form of digestion in which students are passively fed knowledge by professors.[19] It entered into Simone de Beauvoir's examination of woman's situation and possibilities. It allowed Sartre to declare in his introduction to Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* that "the Third World finds *itself* and speaks to *itself* in this voice."[20] To be sure, the critique of consumerism co-existed somewhat uneasily with the critique of colonialism, but they were held together by the concept of human liberation as the development of human capacities in a social form. Kwame Nkrumah emphasized the necessity for a new socialist philosophy that could synthesize the humanist basis of traditional African society with Islamic and Euro-Christian humanism.[21]

Existential choice filled the hole brought about in Marxism, of whatever kind, by the change in the class structure and world order since Marx's time. The existential decision of the individual taken alone in free choice but in favour of the freedom of all appeared to be able to hold together decolonization, women's liberation, the socialism of the working class, and the search for individual meaning, in one great theory of human liberation. Perhaps the most significant index of this is that Herbert Marcuse's influential *One-Dimensional Man*—a book arguably the most characteristic of the 1960s—could hover without resolution between the expectation that advanced industrial society could contain its contradictions and that an explosive break could occur.[22] Marcuse presented a mountain of evidence for containment yet clearly appealed to the reader to follow him in enacting the moment of freedom in its ungrounded leap from enclosure within a given reality toward a commitment to making a new world.

2. Reflections on Humanist Marxism a Half-Century Later

I want now to reflect on the philosophical legacy of the 1960s, focussing on how we must depart from it, in order to specify some of the salient features of the contemporary philosophical situation. But prior to that I will mention very quickly some salient political differences because what we are seeking is a philosophy that could articulate our historical time in relation to a meaningful political project that would in some sense continue the legacy of the Sixties. The 1960s was an era of decolonization in what was then referred to as the Third World alongside an internal radicalism within the East-West division of the industrialized world. The former was oriented towards national liberation movements that aimed to end imperialist exploitation and cultural subjugation. The latter was oriented to a critique of advanced consumerism in the West and the aspiration to match or surpass Western consumerism in the East. It was the capitulation of both the social-democratic left and Soviet Marxism to a consumerist model that allowed the New Left to synthesize a critique of consumerism with support for national liberation movements in the Third World. It was necessary to address the Cold War division of the world into East and West, the welfare state compromise in the West that raised the standard of living of the working class, the family wage that sent women back to the domestic sphere, the rise of consumer capitalism, institutionalized racism and decolonization in the so-called Third World. These events overlapped and reinforced each other in many ways. As Kwame Nkrumah pointed out:

> In the industrially more developed countries, capitalism, far from disappearing, became infinitely stronger. This strength was only achieved by the sacrifice of two principles which had inspired

> early capitalism, namely the subjugation of the working classes within each individual country and the exclusion of the State from any say in the control of capitalist enterprise. By abandoning these two principles and substituting for them 'welfare states' based on high working-class living standards and on a State-regulated capitalism at home, the developed countries succeeded in exporting their internal problem and transferring the conflict between rich and poor from the national to the international stage.[23]

The background of this radicalism in the West was the welfare state compromise that followed the Second World War. The working class had been brought into the system through a social welfare package including unemployment insurance, subsidized higher education, and progressive wage legislation. In the current neo-liberal age, after decades of right-wing attacks on even the mildest forms of social welfare, it is surprising to recall to what extent the gains of social democracy and the welfare state were taken for granted at that time. The main reason was that social democrats had bought into Cold War ideology and supported the war in Vietnam as well as benefitting from imperialist exploitation. Radical movements assumed this welfare state background and fought for its extension to still-unfranchised groups. Thus, the critique of consumerism co-existed somewhat uneasily with the aim of establishing a decent standard of living in the Third World. They were held together by the aim of a *different model of development* that would both spread material wealth more equally and also develop cooperative work and social relations. In its critical focus it was an era of anti-imperialism and many political issues within the advanced West were understood on the model of national liberation—such as Quebec liberation, women's liberation, Black liberation (especially in the U.S.A.), Red Power, etc. In our time only the remnants of a welfare state survive. The capitalist economy is no longer held sufficiently within the bounds of the nation-state. We can perhaps simplify its current form as a duality: On one hand a rapacious extractivist resource economy with destructive consequences for local ecologies and indigenous peoples. On the other, an emerging digital economy whose form sometimes threatens to escape a capitalist model. While a lot more could, and should, be said about these political and historical differences, here I want just to indicate quickly the sort of political issues that a philosophy for our time would have to address.

The clearest and most influential rejection of Marxist humanism came in volume 1 of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, which appeared in 1976 and was translated into English two years later. He identified what he called the "repressive hypothesis" that put into parallel the repression of sexuality with the rise of capitalism due to the

incompatibility of pleasure with work. Against this, he asserted that the idea of sex as repressed feeds a facile pose of transgression, characterizing

> a society which has been loudly castigating itself for its hypocrisy for more than a century, which speaks verbosely of its own silence, takes great pains to relate in detail the things it does not say, denounces the powers it exercises, and promises to liberate itself from the very laws that have made it function.[24]

Foucault's own programme was, in contrast, to investigate the productive power of discourses about sex and, beyond sex, this idea of the productivity of discourse in constituting subjectivities has become the general figure of social analysis since then. From this point of view, Freud, instead of being a great liberator, became the producer of discourses that constituted constraining subjectivities. Marx was treated more carefully, mentioned only once in Foucault's text to show that the bourgeoisie took a long time to acknowledge the bodies and sex of the proletariat.[25] However, the direct reversal of the form of critique suggested that "it is a ruse to make prohibition into the basic and constitutive element from which one would be able to write the history of what has been said concerning sex starting from the modern epoch."[26] If this approach *were* to be applied to Marx, it would suggest that it is also a ruse to claim that labour in its capitalist form is a prohibition, a containment, or a loss of the worker's truly human powers. Perhaps this might explain why Marx has largely disappeared from the writings of those who begin from the notion of discursive productivity.

Foucault's reversal of the model of critique was elaborated in direct opposition to the Marxist humanist figure of alienation. Whether it applied very well to Freud or Marx is open to debate, but it certainly applied to the synthesis of Marx and Freud through the concept of alienation that immediately preceded it. It leads us to question the humanist premise expressed succinctly in Fromm's phrase that I mentioned previously, that one can "attain freedom (and health) only by becoming aware of these motivating forces [and] become the master of his life (within the limitations of reality) rather than the slave of blind forces."[27] Everything at issue depends on this small, almost-parenthetical insert "within the limitations of reality." If there are limits to being a master rather than a slave, how do we know these limits? Are there elements of human being that are not captured adequately within the alternative of master or slave? If there is no original human subject, and therefore no human essence, how can social revolution claim to establish human creative powers in an authentic social form?

While we can mark the historical reversal of humanist Marxism with reference to Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis, it does not suffice to answer the question of how the emancipatory role of the philosophy of

the Sixties might be transformed and renewed in the light of new political and philosophical challenges. Indeed, the outright rejection of Marxist humanism would rather seem to motivate a wholescale abandonment of a philosophy of human liberation.[28] I will thus undertake a more detailed examination of the specific features of humanist Marxism which have demanded re-evaluation. Let us take each of the three parts in turn: Marxism, humanism, existentialism.

Marxism was understood in the terms of Marx's early critique of capitalist society such that the later, detailed, and theoretically rich critique of political economy in *Capital* was interpreted as if it added nothing significant to the concept of alienation.[29] While in the 1960s Marxist humanism and Althusserian structuralism were viewed as an either-or decision between the early and late Marx, it is now possible to see that the late critique of political economy is a *development* of the early alienation theory and therefore to seek a precise definition of what aspects are significantly improved. I want to make just two observations about this advance.

When Marx returns in *Capital* to the dialectical relation between humanity and nature that he described initially in his early work, he significantly adds technology as the mediation between humanity and nature.[30] He describes the transhistorical, or ontological, features of labour in its components of work, the natural material worked upon, and the instruments (or technology) used in work. Technology is the specifically human aspect of labour which is both a product of a previous labour process and operative in living labour. The category of technology is interestingly elastic. Marx says,

> In a wider sense we may include among the instruments of labour … all the objective conditions necessary for carrying on the labour process. … [T]he earth itself is a universal instrument of this kind, for it provides the worker with the ground beneath his feet and a 'field of employment' for his own particular process. Instruments of this kind, which have already been mediated through past labour, include workshops, canals, etc.[31]

This wider sense of technology thus includes the earth as it has been modified by previous human activity as well as the earth unmodified as a 'ground' insofar as it is a necessary condition for living labour—such as water, air, gravity, etc. In this sense, Marx includes what Hegel calls first and second nature as aspects of technology. Technology, even "in a wider sense," seems a strange name for this. We would now likely call it the environment, or even ecology, as well as the built environment. By introducing this wider sense of technology Marx aims at a sense of nature, or environment, which may well be altered by human activity but has not been in its totality the object of human activity. Marx did not draw this conclusion, but it is implied by his expanded conception of technology. Nature and

the built environment are the cumulative, unintended upshot of previous labour that supports and conditions subsequent living labour. Since human activity aims at specific goals, this cumulative historical totality of original nature and built environment modified through technology cannot be itself understood as an intended product of human action. In this sense, Marx himself seems to me not guilty of the Prometheanism of the domination of nature with which he is often charged but which does apply to the dominant official versions of Marxism. The philosophical issue becomes one of the initial natural ecology, its transformation by technology into the built environment, and the surplus labour through which human activity exceeds simple reproduction and allows the development of technology that alters the character of the labour process historically.

Interestingly, while in Volume One Marx *utilizes* the surplus productivity of labour to explain the surplus value that is appropriated from the labour process by the capitalist, he does not *explain* its origin until the discussion of ground rent in Volume Three. There it becomes apparent that the surplus productivity of labour in the end rests on a natural fact that is more evident in agricultural labour due to the direct interchange between human labour and nature.

> The natural basis of surplus-labour in general, that is, a natural prerequisite without which such labour cannot be performed, is that Nature must supply—in the form of animal or vegetable products of the land, in fisheries, etc.—the necessary means of subsistence under conditions of an expenditure of labour which does not consume the entire working day. This natural productivity of agricultural labour (which includes here the labour of simple gathering, hunting, fishing, and cattle-raising) is the basis of all surplus-labour, as all labour is primarily and initially directed toward the appropriation and production of food.[32]

I call this natural fact that makes surplus productivity possible *natural fecundity*. It inheres in the natural ecology prior to human intervention through technology even though it can be multiplied by such intervention. In this sense, the late Marx grounds the dialectic of humanity and nature in the fecundity of natural ecology.

While the inflection *humanist* Marxism meant a preference for the early over the late work, the inflection *Marxist* humanism meant a renewal of the humanist tradition through its extension into the sphere of work and its structures of exploitation. Marx's early theory of alienation allowed this extension of humanism to be understood as a loss and subsequent recovery of the true human subject. The alienation model is originally a trinitarian structure of an authentic internality, an externalization, and then a new internalization that incorporates some of the features of the externalization but returns them to an internal coherence. Of course, this model has been

complicated in many of its applications, but the basic structure persists: self-other-expanded selfhood. This model is what allowed Marxist humanism to assume the human subject as its starting and terminal points and thereby launch critiques of alienation in the current world. It also grounds a parallelism between individual and social critiques, the very parallelism that allowed Fromm and others to treat Marxist and Freudian critiques as in principle identical, so that the idea of a return to authenticity from social alienation and individual neurosis governed the practice of critique.

Placing the humanist subject as the point of authentic origin, the constitution of the subject as such was not a matter for concern. For that reason, the ethical basis and goal of Marxist humanism seemed to be guaranteed. Since then we have become much more conscious of the formation of the subject as a socio-psychological process such that the pluralities of gender, race, etc. are not seen simply as alienations that must be cast off, but as constructions that pluralize the notion of the human subject itself. These days there is a widespread tendency, which parallels that of the invocation of Foucault, to quote Althusser's notion of the interpellated subject as if it was characteristic of the Sixties. But if the subject is structurally generated, how can it remain ethically important? Once we understand the individual as constituted through, and not simply alienated by, social processes, the sense in which one could return to an authentic self becomes quite uncertain. As a consequence, we often seem to have lost that sense of human universality in an ethical sense that animated Marxist humanism. Our task now, I would suggest, is to understand the plural constitution of subjectivities alongside an ethical universality.

This is especially significant for the interpretation of Freud as a humanist. To be sure, Freudian analysis aims to free the subject in the sense that neuroses would no longer dominate action in an automatic sense, as Fromm claimed. But there is no sense in which the Freudian unconscious can ever be made fully conscious—so that the constitution of the subject means that it could never recover itself in a full appropriation of its own ground. A similar point can be made in reference to Marković's understanding of revolution as transgressing the internal limits of a social formation. It seems rather incredible that such limits can be made fully conscious *within* the social formation in a manner that would allow it to be actively transformed such as to breach those limits and become a new social form in which what those limits conceal could be made evident. A social form, and the transition between social forms, is not likely to become transparent in that sense.

My point is that the Marxist understanding of humanism through the alienation story over-simplified greatly the issue of how the human individual is constructed by forces that the individual cannot control—not even in

principle—and consequently the issue of how the limitations of a social order can be made apparent within it. And, even more, how such limiting perceptions and understandings might be made the object of revolutionary action.

This same issue appears within the existentialist inflection which collapsed what Husserl called the transcendental and empirical egos. For Husserl, worldly intentional meaning in its inherently dual structure of perceiver-perceived, acting-acted upon, or thinker-object of thought, meant that, in order to reveal and understand this structure, a perspective that could get beneath it to its origin was necessary. He called this the transcendental ego. I won't go into this now, but it is not at all clear *why* Husserl thought that transcendental reflection had the structure of an ego—especially since it encompassed both perceiver *and* perceived, etc. But there is no doubt that calling it an ego made it seem as if it was an ego in the same, or similar, sense in which a concrete ego, or an individual person, is an ego. Thus, there was a valid point to be made when Sartre argued that the transcendental ego in Husserl's sense was a flight from one's concrete embeddedness in the world of action. But there is no reason to reject transcendentality as such—or as I would prefer to say, the transcendental field—as the inquiry into the grounds of meaning that constitute the correlation between the concrete subject and its perceptions, actions, and thoughts. Indeed, unless we are to be left imprisoned inside the actually given social world—which is where Sartre leaves us—some transcendental inquiry into the grounds and presuppositions of a meaningful world must be possible. As Herbert Marcuse never ceased to emphasize, it is philosophy that, due to its transcendence of the existing world, preserves the conceptual basis for the transformation of social reality.[33] In short, Husserl's equivocation led to Sartre's flattening, and Sartre's flattening leads to both an appreciation of the concrete world as the only world for existing humans and the exclusion of sufficient inquiry into the grounds of this world to be able to formulate the project of its overcoming—except as the decisionistic fiat of an individual choice.

Several strands of our reflection on the dissolution of Marxist humanism converge at this point: how to perceive and act upon the essential internal limit of a certain social formation; the humanist subject as constituted and therefore not a point of origin but still, perhaps, an ethical goal; the too-simple parallelism between the individual and social subject through the paradigm of alienation.

3. What Might be a Philosophy for Our Time?

I have attempted to sketch an outline of Marxist humanism and some internal reasons for its dissolution. I want to conclude by quickly pulling some of these threads together in an attempt to say something about what such a common philosophy might be if it were to emerge.

Recall, I have suggested that the emphasis on the early Marx overlooked the role of technology and the built environment in establishing the historical dynamic between humans and nature. Nowadays, the relationship between Marx's mature critique of capitalism and technology, the built environment, and natural ecology is a pressing issue that has been addressed from many points of view. I have also suggested that the hegemony of the alienation-story over the understanding of humanism ignored the external forces that constitute subjectivity and forms of intersubjectivity. As a consequence, it over-simplified the revolutionary possibility of identifying the limit of a social formation from within it, losing the sense in which the Freudian unconscious of an individual or a historical world can never be made transparent within it such that the Marxian relationship of analysis and action became much more problematic. Finally, I have suggested that the existentialist collapsing of the distinction between the transcendental constitution of the possibility of meaning and the concrete subjectivity who enacts meaning placed too high an emphasis on what can be accomplished by individual decision and choice. How might the general outline of a philosophy for our time emerge from pushing these critiques further?

The ontological ground of such a philosophy would lie in the fecundity of nature, an excess, a surpassing of itself that is extended and given specific form within human society but which precedes and explains it. A given civilizational form is impressed upon natural fecundity in the cultural creativity and heritage built upon it. Human meaning is always shaped and defined within such a civilizational-cultural form. The struggle for human meaning as a critique of exploitation and the destruction of natural ecology thus depends on the civilizational-cultural form within which that struggle takes place. The limit of such a civilizational-cultural form cannot be made evident within the form without an encounter with its unconscious, or outside. Such an outside can only be another civilizational-cultural form. Thus, a dialogue between the civilizational-cultural forms which develop and preserve human meaning is the basis for socio-ecological critique. Such critique requires an encounter with the natural fecundity that underlies all cultural forms.

This philosophical outlook requires application to specific issues and contexts in order to go beyond the very high level of abstraction at which I have expressed it as a conclusion. It would be in some sense a development of the Marxist humanism of the 1960s but would depart from it in key respects. It is clear now that human liberation cannot occur through a clarity of consciousness to itself that could overcome the constituting and determining forces which make it what it is. Critique, especially critique of capital and consumerism, is still necessary of course, but it is now more a question of the sources of hope and their battle with nihilism. Human liberation now depends

on the more-than-human of natural ecology and the way in which its knowledge is incorporated into the culture of different places.

Footnotes:

[1] The first translation into English was actually in 1959 by Martin Milligan for Foreign Languages Publishing House (which later became Progress Publishers) in Moscow. Perhaps because this edition came from the official Soviet Communist publishing house, or perhaps because of Fromm's humanist introduction to his slightly later edition, it is Fromm's text that became significant for the philosophy of the Sixties. a translation which presumably came from an earlier collection that he co-edited. Bottomore had earlier published T.B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel (eds.), *Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology & Social Philosophy* (London: Watts, 1956; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963) which contained short excerpts from the *1844 Manuscripts* and was presumably the basis for Fromm's invitation.

[2] Erich Fromm, Foreword to *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, trans. and ed. T.B. Bottomore (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963) p. iii.

[3] Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, with a translation from Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* by T.B. Bottomore (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1971) p. 42. Nevertheless, the *1844 Manuscripts* relied on the theory of material pauperization to explain the increasing misery of the working class that would turn it into a revolutionary agent. Since work is a loss and servitude of the worker, Marx concluded that "the greater his activity, therefore, the less he possesses." This part of the *Manuscripts* was an insoluble problem for an analysis of alienation centred on consumerism, such that it often was interpreted in a purely spiritual-moral sense—which was also intended by Marx alongside the material dimension. See Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts: First Manuscript, Alienated Labour," *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, trans. and ed. T.B. Bottomore (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963) p. 122.

[4] *Ibid*., pp. 57, 71ff.

[5] Erich Fromm (ed.), *Socialist Humanism* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965) p. x. Even Herbert Marcuse's characteristic critical tendency was limited in his contribution to this collection to a critique of the purported rejection of violence in the term "humanism," for which he relied primarily on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

[6] Louis Althusser, "The '1844 Manuscripts' of Karl Marx" in *For Marx*, Trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Vintage, 1970). Originally published in *La Pensée*, December 1962.

[7] Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion: My encounter with Marx and Freud* (New York: Continuum, 1962) p. 86, see 16-8, 40-4, 85-7, 132.

[8] Gajo Petrović, *Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Doubleday: Garden City, 1967) p. 80.

[9] Ivan Svitak, *Man and His World: A Marxian View*, trans. J. Veltrusky (New York: Dell Publishing, 1970) p. 153

[10] Mihailo Marković, *From Affluence to Praxis* (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1974) p. 234.

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

[12] Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, pp. 70-1.

[13] Karel Kosík, *Dialectics of the Concrete*, translated by Karel Kovanda and James Schmidt (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1976, originally published in Czech in 1963) p. 48.

[14] *Ibid*., p. 106.

[15] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the* Ego, trans. F. Williams and R. Fitzpatrick (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 1957) pp. 98-101.
[16] *Ibid*., p. 105.
[17] Herbert Marcuse, "Existentialism: Remarks on Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'Être et le Néant*," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research,* Vol. 8, No. 3, March 1948.
[18] Herbert Marcuse, "Sartre's Existentialism" in *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, trans. Joris de Bres (London: New Left Books, 1972) p. 190.
[19] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary* Edition, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2000) pp. 76 ftn. 2, 81-2.
[20] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Bantam, 1953) p. 30; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1968) p. 10.
[21] Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonization* (Modern Reader Paperback: U.S.A., 1970) pp. 70, 106.
[22] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1968) p. xv.
[23] Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1965) p. 255.
[24] Michel Foucault, T*he History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Random House, 1978) p. 8.
[25] *Ibid*, p. 126, footnote.
[26] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[27] Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, p. 86.
[28] Marilyn Nissim-Sabat has recently contested the current postcolonial reading of Fanon that foists upon him an outright rejection of humanism as opposed to a decolonial reading that recognizes the humanist ethical spirit of Fanon alongside the deformations of that spirit by colonialism. See Marilyn Nissim-Sabat, "Decolonial Humanism: Reflections on Fanon, Marx, and the New Man," presented on June 2, 2016 at the Left Forum at John Jay College, New York City. Forthcoming in December-January 2018-9 on the blogsite Brotherwise Dispatch (brotherwise.com).
[29] This dominant figure was not deployed by all Marxist humanists, however, especially not those who attempted to establish a continuity between an earlier Marxism and the New Left. For example, see Raya Dunayevskaya, "Marx's Humanism Today," in Erich Fromm (ed.), *Socialist Humanism,* pp. 68-70.
[30] As soon as one appreciates the analyses of technology and surplus productivity from *Capital, Vol. 1,* it is clear that the working class can be exploited to a greater degree and yet simultaneously gain a higher standard of living. As a consequence, Marx's claim for the crucial role of the working class within capitalism as a revolutionary force becomes complicated, to say the least, and probably unsustainable.
[31] *Ibid*., p. 286-7.
[32] Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. 3*, ed. Frederick Engels (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1972) p. 632.
[33] Herbert Marcuse, "The Concept of Essence," in *Negations*, (tr.) J. J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1968), p. 87; Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (Boston: Beacon, 1969) pp. 251–57; Herbert Marcuse, "On Science and Phenomenology," *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, *Vol. 2: In Honor of Philipp Frank* (Proceedings of the Boston Colloquium for the Philosophy of Science, 1962-4), (ed.) R. S. Cohen and M. W. Wartofsky (New York: Humanities Press, 1965), pp. 280.