

Nataša Zečević

BA student, Faculty of Music, University of Arts, Belgrade

natasha28393@gmail.com

**Nikola Dedić, Rade Pantić and Sanela Nikolić (eds.),
*Savremena marksistička teorija umetnosti [Contemporary
Marxist Theory of Art]*, Belgrade, Orion Art–Faculty
of Media and Communications, 2015; 644 pp, ISBN:
978-86-6389-022-0**

The collection *Savremena marksistička teorija umetnosti [Contemporary Marxist Theory of Art]* has been prepared within the collaboration of the editors and authors whose theoretical approaches represent the latest founding in humanities, and who hail from various Serbian academic institutions (Faculty of Media and Communications, Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts, Faculty of Music, Institute of Musicology SASA, Faculty of Philology) and from the region (University of Zadar, Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb). A certain number of texts have been written by students of interdisciplinary Ph.D studies of the University of Art in Belgrade. The collection presents extensive critical studies of modern aesthetics and theories of art derived from the interpretations of the philosophy of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The notion “contemporary”, in this case, refers to the period from World War II until today, which in the history of development of Marxist thought is referred to as *neo* or *post* Marxism. The authors generally take interdisciplinary positions, therefore, this collection includes the application of Marxist concepts to the discussions in the fields of philosophy of art, sociology of art, aesthetic, and the history of art, musicology, film studies, and media theory. In this regard, this is not just the review of modern aesthetics and the theory of art, which is derived from interpretation of Marxist philosophy, but also representation of the current theoretical scene in Serbia and the former Yugoslavia since it reflects the themes the authors have engaged in their professional work.

Overall 44 essays in this collection compile the summary of critical reviews, interpretations and intellections of Marxism related to art and culture. The essays are classified according to subject in the following seven chapters: “The classics of

Marxism”, “French Marxism”, “Anglo-American Marxism”, “Yugoslav Marxism”, “Marxism and Discussion of the Avant-Garde”, “Marxism and Feminism” and “Marxism, the Third World and Biopolitics”. Two categories of essay are prominent within these seven chapters: the monographic arguments about certain Marxist theorists and their work from the field of aesthetics, and, namely, discussions about certain segments, problems or traditions within modern Marxism. (p. 7)

Considering the question of what Marxist aesthetics represent, the introductory text of review stands out in particular: “On the issue of Marxist Aesthetics Foundation” written by Nikola Dedić. According to the editors, this essay is especially significant because within it: “there is presented the methodological and theoretical basis of the review concept and underlined the importance of this specific theory for modern attitudes towards Marxist intellectual tradition.” (p. 8) In this essay, Dedić follows the development path of Marxist aesthetics, which from the very beginning implied the relation between traditional philosophy, normative aesthetics and Marxism as the platform for criticism of such aesthetics. Considering that problem, Dedić writes: “According to the position that all relations and products of the society are subject to transformation and ultimately historically created, Marxism is critical, i.e. non-normative theoretical platform. From this point of view, Marxism is not just one of philosophical or economic school of theory, but comprehensive metadisciplinary theoretical and ideological platform for comprehending of humans, history and society and its practical, qualitative transcendence.” (p. 13)

As Dedić explains, today it is possible to speak of different, often diametrically opposed interpretations, namely the spheres where Marx and Engels’ philosophy are applied, and “one of the most challenging and contradictory elements of Marxist theory is the issue of aesthetics founded in the Marxist manner.” (p. 14) Having this in mind, as the author further notes, there are two basic problems. One of them is that Marx and Engels never conceived systematic aesthetics theory or philosophy of art, while the other is the fact that classical aesthetics was based upon the attitude that there are universal, ultimate, determinable and stable values of one piece, independent of its production and reception context, which is, initially, normative criterion. Therefore, the author concludes that: “[...] the possibility of [the] existence of Marxist aesthetics was based on the problem of extracting ideological criteria of normative aesthetics from theoretical apparatus, and founding of materialistic and historical criteria of non-normative aesthetics.” (p. 14) From this point of view, as Dedić elaborates, the first problem of creating Marxist aesthetics was to construct a systematic and overall aesthetics theory in the manner of Marx and Engels, meaning: “[...] to form [an] aesthetical system without [the] ideological remains of Kant’s autonomy of art and without judgment of taste, i.e. to form materialistically-based aesthetics”. (p. 17) In fact, it means that: “[...] materialistic aesthetic [...] implies decomposition of aesthetics as a normative discipline.” (p. 17) Hence, it is the attempt to construct non-normative aesthetics that will not indicate “universal” and “unalterable” art canons, but historicity of these categories, namely historical, social, i.e. class determinants of art production.

One of the specific qualities of this review is the focus on Yugoslav Marxism, particularly to which one of the chapters is dedicated. This chapter is considered the first extensive critical approach to Marxist practices connected with one specific historical project – in this case the Yugoslav socialistic project – that was worldwide and unique. In this respect, the editors note that Yugoslav Marxism is: “among the rare intellectual traditions coming from this region, which achieved visible international reception and which recognition has become internationally relevant – from Oto Bihalji Merin as one of the most significant world theorists of avant-garde and neo avant-garde art after World War II, to Praxis philosophy, and finally to [the] modern theory of Slavoj Žižek.” (p. 8) It is also very important to underline the observation that: “[...] Yugoslav Marxism doesn't present just timely reception of international theory in humanistic field, but [a] unique contribution to critical thoughts at international level, which is, unfortunately, still unknown nowadays.” (p. 8)

The historical range and a great number of issues included in this review reflect one of the primary messages of this publication: regarding Marxism in the context of theory of art and culture, it should be always considered as a distinctly heterogeneous and plural collection of discourses. Furthermore, this review has the character of a textbook since it critically covers the crucial historical concepts of Marxist theory. Having these qualities, it represents the foundation for the next step, and that is potential construction of new Marxist theory, the one that would discuss functions of art and culture in a modern capitalistic world.