Soviet Epistemologies and the Materialist Ontology of Poor Life:

Andrei Platonov, Alexander Bogdanov and Lev Vygotsky

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Abstract

This thesis provides new perspectives on the epistemic conditions of pre- and post-revolutionary Soviet thought (1910s–early 1930s) and constructs a transdisciplinary entry point into a materialist ontology of 'poor life'. The concept of poor life engages contemporary debates on class composition and individuation from the materialist viewpoint of self-organising labour causality and social mediation. The thesis opens with a critical examination of the 'Western' and 'Eastern' divide in Marxist philosophy and shifts discussion from the official doctrine of Bolshevism to the under-represented epistemologies of Empirio-Marxism and Spinozist-Hegelianism in the philosophy and political theory of Alexander Bogdanov, the writings and art criticism of Andrei Platonov and the experimental philosophy and psychology of Lev Vygotsky. A transdisciplinary, post-revolutionary logic assumes that theory should start where Marx ended and that it should *act* in a Marxist fashion across all conceptual and practical realms. The reconstruction of these epistemological conditions leads to an alternative philosophical genealogy of Soviet avant-garde art and the writings of Andrei Platonov. The thesis explores the connections between the Empirio-Marxism of Bogdanov and the problematic of construction, 'life-building' and production in the theories of the Soviet avant-garde. Bogdanov proposes an organisational ontology of the active and productive capacity of labour to compose and construct historically determined 'life-complexes' and orders of material relations. In turn, the organisation of sensibility, things and relations, or communist 'life-building', becomes the primary theoretical and practical agenda of Proletkult, Constructivism, Productivism and the Literature of Fact. The thesis demonstrates the unique place of Andrei Platonov within these conceptual settings. The core of the thesis is a reconstruction of Platonov's method and form of writing, the aim of which is to demonstrate the conceptual reciprocity of the problems of 'life-building' and 'poor life'. Platonov stresses the negativity of partition and compartmentalisation within the compositional logic of 'life-building'. In the experience of social poverty, the self-organising force of labour produces a disjunctive unity of thinking and speech, reaction and act, time and space. Vygotsky's Spinozist-Hegelianism exposes the structural logic of this negativity. The reconstruction of his system shows how mediation produces a dialectical dramaturgy of individuation out of the compositional materiality of poverty and the given ensemble of social relations. The thesis concludes by outlining a differential unity between the three authors. The Soviet problematisation of poor life links social and ontological degrees of organisation, offering epistemological models of compositional productivity and of the individuating negativity of 'life-building'. The epistemic conditions that we reconstruct in the thesis may have vanished along with their revolutionary context, but they are likely to resurface in the course of any new experiment in radical social transformation.

Acknowledgements

Contents

Introduction

This thesis focuses on the early Soviet epistemologies developed by the writers and thinkers of the pre- and post-revolutionary decades. It constructs a concept of *poor life* that is, I argue, a crux of the interconnected systems of thought established by these key thinkers who remain hardly recognised by Anglophone philosophy. The concept of poor life unfolds through the exposition of the logically and historically determined forms and modes of writing and philosophising in the Soviet Marxist tradition. It brings together diverse practices and theories that cut across philosophy of science, literature, art theory and psychology. The transdisciplinary account of the thesis is motivated by the post-revolutionary appeal to theory as an intellectual activity that departs from Marx and acts as Marxist even if it takes the shape of philosophy of science in Alexander Bogdanov, literature in Andrei Platonov or psychology in Lev Vygotsky. This corresponds to the encyclopedic forms of writings, which rework these fields according to the results of the Marxian critical analysis and in this sense, present a post-critical paradigm of thought that attempted to construct a positive systems of knowledge for a socialist society.

The research was a long passage and a series of mediations that have led me from contemporary problem of declassification to early Soviet thought. The sociological theorisation of 'atypical employment', immigration and extreme forms of poverty in the post-colonial and the post-socialist global capitalist order has provoked a number of discussions in the field of philosophy around the process of so-called 'precarisation'[1]. These discussions include an expansion and deconstruction of the notion of the proletariat and a problematisation of the states of insecurity and vulnerability, most notably, in Giorgio Agamben's concept of 'bare life' and in Judith Butler's understanding of what she names 'precarious life'. While the sociological account of new forms of employment seeks to interpret political agency within the new class composition, the political ontology of precarity discusses the instances of survival and poverty in terms of deprivation and separation of life from its political form[2]. The

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[1] See: Robert Castel, *From Manual Workers to Wage Laborers: Transformation of the Social Question,* trans. by Richard Boyd (New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publishers, 2003); Pierre Bourdieu, *Firing Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market 2*, trans. by Loïc Wacquant (New York: Verso, 2003); Isabell Lorey, *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*, trans. by Aileen Derieg (London: Verso, 2015).
[2] See: *Radical Thought in Italy. A Potential Politics*, ed. by P. Virno and M. Hardt (Minneapolis, London: University Of Minnesota Press, 2006); especially: Giorgio Agamben, 'Form-of-Life', in Op. Cit., pp. 3-

earliest stage of this project took the above-mentioned theories and discourses as an immediate background for critique and reflection. Thus, the Soviet context of 1920 – 1930s is a focus of attention for a very particular reason. The fusion of feudal and capitalist economic and social forms in post-revolutionary Soviet society brought the agenda of declassification to the fore. The notions of class and poverty took here the most radical and historically unique shape. Poor life is a concept that reflects the consequences of the imperialist and colonial politics of the Russian Empire and the post-revolutionary aftermath of the civil war, New Economy Policy and Stalinist collectivization. In this respect, poor life is not merely a historical problem, but one that is relevant for contemporary philosophy and theory. The Soviet concept of poor life was first developed in the writings of Andrei Platonov. Poor life reflects similar issues of class composition, diversity and multiplicity of the peasantry and the proletariat, a political agency of poverty, but, nevertheless, it goes in the opposite direction. This thesis proposes that poor life shifts the discussion from the sociology of employment and the political ontology of life and form to what is best expressed by the German word *Stofflichkeit*: a materialist account of poverty in relation to fundamental questions such as perception, thinking, language, body and labour.

The problematisation of poverty in Platonov is associated with the Soviet Marxist tradition and it is impossible to understand the actual meaning of Platonov's concept without referring to the epistemological models of this very tradition. I argue that with the philosopher Alexaner Bogdanov and the psychologist Lev Vygotsky, poor life becomes an operator, which connects and articulates two opposite, but interrelated epistemological systems – the organizational ontology of Empirio-Marxism and a Spinoza-Hegelian structural dialectics of individuation. Bogdanov's theory of organization introduces the concept of life-building to refer to an operational logic of division and combination of the elements of nature into series, complexes, bodies and social systems. The degree of organization reflects biological and social dimensions of life-building and assumes the affirmative and constructive capacity of labour to bring lower elemental spontaneity into the highest levels of classless social organization. The concept of life-building bridges the theories of Soviet avant-garde art with Platonov's method of literature. On the level of the content of Platonov's work, life-building articulates the psychophysical *Stofflichkeit* of subjectivity and reflects declassification

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11; and Giogrio Agamben, 'Beyond Human Rights', in Op. Cit, pp. 159-164. See also Judith Butler, *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

from the perspective of the negative and elemental organizational capacity of poverty (poor life). Vygotsky inverts the negativity of Platonov's poor life and introduces a theory of individuation as a structural and dialectical chain of mediations that transform particular instances of poor life, such as compartmentalisation, partiality, deprivation or disability into socially organized modes of behaviour. The concept of poor life acts against static and teleological definitions of class, union, individual and form, and regards a dynamic logic of declassification, compartmentalisation, individuation, composition and organization as an expression of the historically determined structure of self-articulating mutations and transformations that has no telos, but tends to communization of the order of post-revolutionary social relations. The agency of poverty, therefore, can be seen as constitutive and negative, organizational and disorganizational, immediate and mediated. It means that contradiction and mutual critique characterises the relationship between the individual members of the Bogdanov/ Platonov/ Vygotksy constellation.

The argument of the thesis unfolds the specificity of Soviet epistemological constructions, produced before, during and after the revolution. It gives an account of a striking coexistence of empiricism, Spinozism, Hegelianism and Marxism that inhabits not only the systems of Bogdanov, Platonov and Vygotsky, but is somewhat typical of the synthetic approach to the history of philosophy in Soviet Marxism. More precisely, from the 1900s, the key figures of Russian revolutionary circles began to formulate the importance of Hegel and Spinoza for Marxism. Unlike the French Marxism of the 1960 and 1970s, it tended to avoid – although not without conflicts and contradictions – the logic of alternatives and instead elucidated what can be adopted from both Hegel and Spinoza for the revolutionary project, and why. More importantly, the logic of 'structural dialectics' in Vygotsky is not limited to the Plekhanov type of Spinozism, which fuses Spinoza and Hegel on the ground of Engels' dialectics of nature[1]. Vygotsky negotiates between structural causality and historical movement of the dialectical contradictions to establish what he terms Marxist psychology and experimental philosophy. The Spinoza/Hegel epistemological paradigm struggled with another variation of Marxism in the Soviet Union: a peculiar synthesis of empiricism and

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[1] See: Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, trans. by Progress Publishers, 5 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), III; *Spinoza in Soviet Philosophy. A Series of Essays Selected And Translated, And With An Introduction*, ed. and trans. by George L. Kline (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD, 1952).

Marxism in Bogdanov and his followers. Bogdanov thinks that empirio-criticism liberates philosophy from both dualism and immanentism because it breaks with the idea of the hierarchical subordination of matter to spirit or spirit to matter. His philosophy proposes the monist plane of environment as a field of organizational and disorganizational processes.

The question of the thesis is not to what extent these Soviet Epistemologies are Marxist in the orthodox sense of the term, but why Soviet thought constantly reveals the speculative will to reduce conflicting philosophical models to a common denominator. I argue that the revolutionary rupture with the past conditioned the synthetic approach to the history of philosophy and produced a kind of 'epistemological break'. Soviet Marxism thought of itself as a beginning of the new. Instead of asking how to *criticise* capitalist society, it questioned *what* society should do beyond capitalist history. Even though capitalism was not eliminated immediately after the revolution, and moreover, feudal forms shaped the construction of the Russian Empire, this logic of beyond determined an encyclopaedic approach to philosophy, art and psychology. In this respect, the peculiar unions of empiricism and Marxism or Hegel and Spinoza emerged out of necessity to reflect what I name a *post-critical status of thinking* that must embrace the theory of communism and rethink past systems in this respect. A non-dogmatic appeal to the history of philosophy in the post-revolutionary Marxist tradition prepared the ground for further discussions about Marx and Mach, Spinoza and Hegel, dialectics and causality, and resulted in the original and productive connections of ideas. I claim that this logic avoids the traps of the alternative between ontology of social being and social constructivism by instead introducing an organizational ontology.

At this point I shall take a brief detour though the methodological tools and operative concepts of the thesis. The research embraces at least four different forms of writings that correspond to the different fields of knowledge: philosophy of science, literature, art theory and psychology. Soviet post-revolutionary logic, nevertheless, unifies all these fields of knowledge under the umbrella of Marxist theory. This means that each of the listed fields, on the level of form have similar systematic and encyclopaedic ambitions, but the realisation of these ambitions, nevertheless, take very different shapes. The particular methodological difficulty here is literature as object of philosophy and philosophy as object of literature. The thesis abandons a disciplinary approach to the philosophical prose of Platonov and instead relies on transdisciplinary method. Peter Osborne articulates transdisciplinarity as a movement *among* and *across*

constitutive elements of the research fields. This *trans-* movement allows the establishment of a concept that does not belong to any discipline. Transdisciplinarity constitutes a non-disciplinary problem that is in our case a problem of post-revolutionary epistemology[1].

The historical ontology of poor life appears immanently within the context of Soviet history. The thesis tries to avoid illustrative thinking by analogy and reduces comparative modes of exposition to a minimum. This methodological decision confronts the traditional genre of an individual author, of the uniqueness and originality of a singular system as the object of study. I approach the Soviet context from the backdoor of the anonymous, collective, unfinished, multidirectional and mutually dependent. The very situation of the revolution and the post-revolutionary society dictates collective and laboratory forms of writing, practicing and presenting. Once Vygotsky is separated from his laboratory, it is hard to understand the political and social background of his works on disability, child pedagogy and ethnic minorities; or if Platonov is detached from the context of the avant-garde art and Proletkult it is impossible to understand his method and form of writing. The history of a lonely writer may suffer from serious misinterpretations as it normally aims to subordinate the object of study to imposed models or systems. This approach is often applied to Soviet theory and philosophy. The narrative of a distinguished dissident, 'creative' exceptionality or advanced theory normally coincides with such and such modern or contemporary system and assumes a particular methodological attitude: the historical context of Soviet theory is treated as a lake out of whose dark and muddy waters a researcher may or may not get a very good fish. This leads to two equally dissatisfying models: 1) It means that revolution produces the same theoretical results as occur in non-revolutionary times and contexts; 2) Soviet post-revolutionary thought is interesting only if it helps to illustrate established philosophical ideas.

This research goes in the opposite direction and investigates the epistemological and historical milieu of the given set of authors. The argument rests on the systematic reading of philosophical, theoretical and historical texts. The best part of the Bogdanov's legacy has not been republished since the 1920s, while the history and theoretical development of discussions within the Proletkult and related art groups is

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[1] Peter Osborne, 'Problematizing Disciplinarity, Transdisciplinary Problematic', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 32, 5-6 (2015), 3-35. See also: Peter Osborne, *Philosophy in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2000) pp. 1–19.

poorly researched and almost completely ignored in the field of philosophy. This thesis reconstructs these developments through the publications of the Proletkult's journals, pamphlets and collections of essays. It also looked at the literary, art and Narkompros-affiliated journals[1]. This primary research was conducted in The Russian State Library, Moscow and The State Public Historical Library of Russia, Moscow. Moreover, there is no official history of pre- and post-revolutionary Bogdanovism. Similar to Trotsky, but much earlier, Bogdanov was removed from the official history of the party and in the Soviet narrative he appears as an eccentric scientist or positivist. Similarly, Vygotsky and Platonov are rarely taken as Marxist thinkers and although widely translated, occupy little attention of Anglophone philosophy. These complicated and unfinished biographies, narratives and histories led me to the various empirical investigations such as, for example, a reconstruction of the relationship between Platonov and Lukács through Platonov's published secret police files. Nevertheless, I have to admit that my attempts to deal with the empirical facts from the past do not correspond to the professional work of a historian. Rather, I deal with the facts as a philosopher. The historical context helped me to penetrate the post-revolutionary logic of doing theory and opened up a perspective on the specificity of the revolutionary 'epistemological break'. That is why many of the facts are not included in this thesis and some of them appear only in footnotes.

Despite the historical background of the present research, I have to stress that the problematic of a materialist ontology of poor life is not explicitly given in the texts of the given authors, but rather recovered from and constructed out of the epistemological milieu of the given constellation. I use the word constellation in Walter Benjamin's sense of a network of relationships that constitute an idea. The idea is not derived from the empirical phenomena, but grasped though the contextual function of the group of concepts[2]. Therefore, the constellation Bogdanov-Platonov-Vygotsky is a retroactively constructed conjuncture, not a historically formed group of thinkers. My aim in bringing them together is to advance the reconstruction of Platonov's concept of poor life. This means that the triangle represent not names or group identity, but points of mutual determination and dialectical concatenation. Moreover, it would not be accurate to say that this trio is entirely external to the contemporary context of a

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[1] Narkompros is shorten form of People's Commissariat of Enlightenment.
[2] Walter Benjamin, 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue', in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne (London, New York: Verso, 1998), pp. 27-56 (pp. 34-35).

researcher. Thus, the contemporary term 'communization' was brought from outside[1] and it seems to be useful for the articulation of the temporal dynamic of the organizational ontologies of Soviet epistemologies.

The research project does not propose a strictly historicist reading of Soviet Marxism. On the contrary, it aims to reactivate the epistemological line in the Soviet tradition that has been buried under the geological layers of history, the fragments of which from time to time have been excavated in order to support particular statements, trends or ideological propositions, only to disappear again in the ocean of the historical past, as soon as a statement is proclaimed or an ideological battle is won. The sunken ship of Soviet Marxism crosses disciplines, genres of writing and ways of doing philosophy. For this reason it is hard to grasp its purpose and construction, the more so if one intends to place it within a particular trend, discipline or department. The experimental logic of early Soviet Marxism – neither literature nor philosophy in Platonov, neither political philosophy nor science in Bogdanov, neither psychology nor philosophy in Vygotsky – and its corresponding forms of expressions, such us manifestos and sketches (Platonov), course books for a working-class audience (Bogdanov), and scientific reports and unfinished manuscripts (Vygotsky) – all of this demands both a historical and immanent reading. There can be no other systematic approach to the scattered archives of Soviet Marxism. And this means that the shape of the ship was unknown even for its creators, whose writings were produced in a context of urgency, of spontaneous reaction to post-revolutionary events, debates and social demands. The ship can be assembled only retrospectively, because it did not exist as a ready-made construction during the first decades of the Soviet experiment. For instance, Bogdanov, Platonov and Vygotsky never met in person, but their projects form peculiar epistemological concatenations when seen retrospectively. Such a relation to history allows us to reactivate the Soviet archive from the perspective of today.

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[1] See: *Communization and its Discontents*, ed. by B. Noys (Wivenhoe, New York, Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2012).

Chapter Outline

The first chapter offers a historical account of the given constellation and looks closely at the examination of Soviet epistemologies in Western Marxism, art theory and art history, philosophy and comparative literature. The chapter constructs a strategic and critical reading of the models and forms of Soviet Marxism represented in the given fields of knowledge and proposes a counter-narrative for the interpretation and analysis of Vygotsky, Bogdanov and Platonov. I question an official narrative of Soviet Marxism that had been formulated both by Bolshevik leaders and Marxists in Western Europe and propose to shift the discussion from the analysis of key Bolshevik leaders to party outsiders. This challenges a historically constituted understanding of Soviet Marxism as a partisanship of theory and proposes to abandon the idea that every Soviet thinker must be treated according to the Bolshevist's axis of coordinates. The counter-narrative for Soviet Marxism thus aims to recover forgotten and repressed traditions, such as Bogdanov's and Vygotsky's epistemological alternatives to orthodox Bolshevism and the Proletkult's political autonomism that influenced writings of Platonov. This leads to the discussion of the Proletkult as a movement that has mainly been associated with art practices. I problematise a traditional perspective on the Soviet avant-garde as primarily an independently developed form of aesthetic and artistic enquiry and claim that the original conception of proletarian culture in philosophy of Alexander Bogdanov and in the theory of the Proletkult movement determined the problematic of LEF (The Left Front of the Arts) and Productivism. Through this perspective I reread the famous slogan 'art into life'. A joint political and philosophical conjunction of the Proletkult and Soviet avant-garde in turn produces a counter-narrative for Andrei Platonov. I read the appeal of the writer to the Proletkult and the Soviet avant-garde theories as a constitutive background of his philosophical mode of writings. This background functions as a tool for criticising the canonical interpretations and approaches to the themes, concepts, method and form of writing in Platonov.

The second chapter of the thesis articulates the constellation of Bogdanov and Platonov. It constitutes a conjunction of Bogdanov's philosophy and Proletkult's politics that sets out a theoretical model for the methods and art forms of the Soviet avant-garde. The chapter begins with analyses of the foundational and constitutive elements of Bogdanov's epistemology, which I term Empirio-Marxism. A strategic unity of Marxist theory of practice and empirio-critical understanding of experience

leads pre-revolutionary Bogdanov to the system of empiriomonism and later to the universal science of organization or *tektology*. I attribute to the both systems ontological status, which rests on the casual logic of the self-articulating and productive capacity of psychophysical elements to constitute the object. The neo-Kantian concept of world-view, which Bogdanov uses to explain the rise of class perspectives and the notion of world-building explicates this ontology and reveals its social dimension. The chapter then proceeds to the concept of proletarian culture in the Proletkult and Soviet avant-garde. A primary research sources allowed me to discover a corresponding idea of a proletarian encyclopaedia that appears in Bogdanov's post-revolutionary political writings and communicates various social and publishing projects related to the Proletkult. I claim that Bogdanov's concept of world-building is foundational for an understanding of Constructivism and Productivism. World-building helps to reformulate a number of concepts and theories, such as construction, facture (*faktura*), tectonics, visual orientation and life-building. In the last section of the chapter I develop a claim that the Proletkult member Andrei Platonov implements the concept of proletarian culture at the level of method and constructs an encyclopaedia for the proletariat at the level of form and content. This encyclopaedic form of writing has been previously treated in literary terms of meta-genre and cyclical narrative structure. The concept of the proletarian encyclopaedia reveals the Bogdanovian philosophical background behind Platonov's formal decisions of constancy, repetition and montage technics. The section concludes by explicating differences between positions of the LEF-affiliated theorists and Platonov, highlighting his original and innovative contribution to the 1920-1930s debates on fact and art production.

The third chapter explicates Platonov's epistemological model of a proletarian encyclopaedia at the level of content. It relies on a systematic reading of his prose, journalism and essays and embraces his literary writings of the 1920s and 1930s. The chapter unfolds a conceptual core of Platonov's system and identifies key problems of his work. The exposition of the concepts corresponds to the logic of encyclopaedia entries. According to my reading, Platonov rethinks Bogdanov's concept of the proletariat and deconstructs the notion of class and organization. The chapter links Platonov's reformulation of the problem of class to the constitution of the materialist ontology of poor life. Accordingly, this chapter argues that Platonov focuses on the status of peasants, ethnic minorities, the unemployed and the homeless to explain the correlative mechanisms of subjectivation and negative organizational and

disorganizational forces of life-building. I trace Platonov's development of the nomadic and compositional understanding of class that takes characteristics of the disjunctive unity through the key concepts of the system, such as *doubject, labouring being* and *veshchestvo* (equivalent of the English colloquial word *stuff* or is better expressed by the German word *Stoff*). The logic of compartmentalization and partition, accumulation and combination on the level of language, thinking, body function and labour expresses the negativity of poor life. The chapter concludes with a problematisation of the theory of communism in Platonov that attributes political agency to the subjective level of the poor life.

The fourth chapter focuses on the constellation of Platonov and Vygotsky. It introduces the constellation through the epistemological question of knowledge production and a problematisation of the status of philosophy in the encyclopaedic projects of Platonov and Vygotsky. The constellation also rests on the historical and sociological proximity of the two systems. I read Vygotsky's attentiveness to ethnic minorities, homelessness and disability as a political and philosophical appeal that shifts perspective form the problem of subject to the problem of individuation. This brings to the fore the issue of poor life that Vygotsky understands as a material for the socially mediating mechanisms. Vygotsky's notion of the *homo duplex* functions as a supplement to Platonov's concept of *doubject* as it addresses the logic of split, diversification and functional disjunction of thinking and speech, thought and affect. The chapter then moves to the close reading of the concept of individuation in the works of Vygotsky. I argue that the concept reveals another Soviet epistemological construction based on a strategic union between Spinoza and Hegel and suggest that individuation links a Hegelian dialectical logic of mediation with a Spinozist understanding of activity through *Das Kapital*. This model allows Vygotsky to overcome both mechanistic and teleological conceptions of an individual and a class, the social and the collective, in order to be able to sketch a political theory of 'communization' that is an 'adequate form' of individuation. It is assumed that Vygotsky argues against Bogdanov's epistemological model and in several respects specifies Platonov's materialist ontology of poor life.

A Note on Transliteration and Translation

Transliteration of Russian proper names and book titles follows the Library of Congress transliteration system without diacritics and with the exception of established and well-known names such as Vygotsky, Ilyenkov, Mayakovsky, Shklovsky, Tretyakov, Gorky ect. The alternative transliterations may appear in quotations of the secondary sources and some translated articles. Unless otherwise noted translations from the Russian primary and secondary sources are my own.

Chapter I

Mediations Instead of Dichotomies: Reopening Discussion About the Epistemologies of Soviet Marxism

Introduction: Geopolitics and Soviet Marxism After 1991.

> Historical materialism wishes to hold fast that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to the historical subject in a moment of danger. The danger threatens both the content of the tradition and those who inherit it. For both, it is one and the same thing: the danger of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. Every age must strive anew to wrest tradition away from the conformism that is working to overpower it.[1]

The researcher who takes as a basis for his or her work a concept formulated in a particular epoch inevitably faces the problem of belonging to a particular tradition. The concept as such might determine the relation and attitude of the researcher to the tradition from which it came. This does not mean that the concept bears actuality only within the framework of a historical context connected to its creation, but the concept isolated from its tradition can lose theoretical strength if simply moved from the past to the present. Instead, the researcher must rework the concept and tradition so as to be able to establish dialectical relations between the past and the present. Thus, the procedure of reworking requires not only a certain attitude to the tradition in which the concept has been formed, but also a relation to the contexts in which it existed then and materialises itself now. When referring to the Soviet legacy, it turns out that the tradition which shaped a particular conceptual apparatus was buried together with the Soviet state in 1991. The Soviet tradition is a mausoleum or Red Square full of monuments and deactivated remainders of the past. The formation of this tradition is more or less studied and more or less archived, but its existence then, and especially the materialisation of the now of this archive, most often appear in the form of political conservatism or distilled 'decommunization'. All that is left to do is to integrate the relevant concept into the

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[1] Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History' [1940], in *Selected Writings,* 4 vols*,* trans. by E. Jephcott and Others (Massachusetts, London: The Belknap of Harvard University Press, 1999), vol. IV: 1938-1940, pp. 389-400 (p. 391).

contemporary discursive models and completely abandon any attempt to understand the Soviet genealogy of the concept.

This research project, however, chooses a more difficult path to resolve this dilemma. Turning to the problem of poverty, understood as a social and political category, we found that the formulation of this problem has a unique philosophical elaboration in the work of the Soviet writer and thinker Andrei Platonov. Once we detach Platonov's concept of *poor life* from the context of revolution and the tradition of Marxism, it loses its strength and begins to serve political conservatism or distilled 'decommunization'. This is precisely the outlook on Platonov that we find in the secondary literature. We must acknowledge that Platonov, as well as his ideas and the authors we associate with him, has never been considered in the context of Soviet Marxism. To do this, we need first and foremost to understand what the signifier 'Soviet Marxism' means.

Both before and after 1991, the dogmatic split into 'East' and 'West' has determined conceptualisations of Soviet Marxism. This dichotomy, as we shall see, emerged in the days of Lenin and the Communist International, when a new Soviet orthodoxy in Marxism was established as a canon in opposition to the bourgeois understanding of Marxism. Thus, the imaginary geographical areas of the East and the West in Soviet history had a different ideological subtext to the same dichotomy as it was formed in the nineteenth century – namely, to the enlightened and civilized European continent (the West) and to the wild and backward traditional Russian society (the East).[1] In the critique developed by Lenin, 'West' signifies the geographical location of the party activist who is subject to criticism, and, because of this, geography could already be easily transformed into geopolitics. In other words, the 'West' produces 'bourgeois' capitalist theory if it does not follow the Soviet party line.[2] A somewhat different articulation appears on the other side of this dichotomy. As we shall see, the adjective 'Eastern' when joined to the noun 'Marxism' refers directly to a dark and savage barbarity, while the adjective 'Soviet' is a floating signifier that may embrace the

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[1] *Russian Philosophy: The Beginnings of Russian Philosophy. The Slavophiles, The Westernizers*, ed. by J. M. Edie, J. P. Scanlan and M-B. Zeldin (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965).
[2] This had been formulated by Lenin in: Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 'Left-Wing' Communism – An Infantile Disorder' [1920], in *Collected Works,* 45 vols, trans. by J. Fineberg and G. Hanna (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960-70), vol. 31: April-December 1920 (1966), pp. 17-118.
See also a book with the remarkable title: *Protiv filosofstvuiushchikh oruzhenostsev amerikano-angliiskogo imperializma* [Against Philosophizing Armor-bearers of the Anglo-American Imperialism], ed. by T. Oizerman, P. Trofimov (Moscow: Akademia Nauk SSSR, 1951).

'barbaric' denotation of the word 'East' and could mean the State, which it produces, or may refer to the positive connotations associated with the October revolution and its legacy. Although not fully free from the negative denotation, 'Soviet Marxism' is a still more neutral term, rather similar to the national categorization of Marxism (Spanish Marxism or British Marxism). One negative formula, fully liberated from the ambiguity of nationalism or geopolitics, is diamat (dialectical materialism), while in the Soviet context the negative equivalent is simply 'bourgeois Western philosophy'. At the same time, the theorists and philosophers who normally deviate from the canons of official Leninism often became known as representatives of 'creative Marxism'.[1]

In our attempt to deal with the reception of Soviet Marxism, we use the categories 'Western', 'Eastern' and 'Soviet' Marxism in a historical, not critical sense. We have to come to our own critical formulation of 'Soviet Marxism' after the consistent analysis of the corresponding historical narratives. For now we shall note that the theoretical and practical effort of the Soviet communists was treated after the revolution as a Marxist effort, in the sense that it was made in the context of a society struggling with the remnants of feudalism and capitalism. According to this logic, this effort could not be bourgeois or anti-Marxist, for the simple reason that its purpose was to construct communist theory and practice. The motivation could only be criticised as anti-communist or anti-Marxist afterward. In this light, the practice of the left Soviet avant-garde, to which Platonov relates, can be associated with Soviet Marxism.

In these preliminary observations, we must return to the relevance of the concept of Soviet Marxism after 1991. As has already been mentioned, Soviet Marxism has both ideological (diamat) and nationalist meanings (the Soviet state). After 1991, both disappeared and became part of the historical archive. An extremely negative attitude to this archive has led to all sorts of ideological manoeuvres when dealing with certain thinkers of the period. Thinkers either way different from the official doctrine (in fact there was many of this sort) have been depoliticised and removed from the communist tradition. These include: the Formal School of Literary Criticism, which has become known as Russian Formalism; the cultural-historical psychology of Vygotsky; the legacy of Platonov; and even LEF (The Left Front of the Arts), which has become part of the historiography of modernism. Meanwhile, the inevitable clash with the communist content in such works is normally waved away as elements of Stalinism within the text,

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[1] See, for example: *Evald Ilyenkov and Creative Soviet Marxism,* ed. by A. Levant, V. Oittinen (Lienden, Boston: Brill, 2014).

or else as a forced Stalinist mimicry resulting from the attempt to preempt censorship. When what we call the communist content is too appealing, it serves as an archival remainder of the past that cannot be activated for today's purposes. The main problem in the existing literature is that instead of dealing with the polyphonic coexistence of discourses, it often picks up only one tradition and treats a work or body of works accordingly. It gives an impression that Soviet thought consists of exceptional personalities who were opposed to the Stalinist version of diamat. It also gives an impression that these singular authors exist outside of Soviet history and that the October Revolution did not create a consolidated body of thought. More importantly, it abandons the idea that there are alternatives to the conventional readings of Marx. The aim is to recover these alternatives and treat them in relation to contemporary debates in Marxism. It is of course a challenge to apply communist practices and ideas to the contemporary reality of global capitalism, but this archive is interesting precisely because of its inapplicability in the instrumental sense of the term. This archive might help us to understand what kind of epistemic and conceptual coordination the post-revolutionary situation creates and whether this coordination intervenes in the contemporary context in a more mediated way: for example, by opening new approaches to old problems or by proposing certain formulations and solutions which it would not be possible to propose in a non-revolutionary context.

A) A Counter-Narrative for Soviet and Western Marxism.

There is a very well known official narrative of Soviet Marxism in the Western Marxist tradition. It can be recovered in the key texts of Marxist thinkers and summarised in a few lines as dissatisfaction with the Engelsian line in philosophy and with Bolshevik political theory. It is official in both senses of the word: it looks at the development of Soviet Marxism through the development of the key Bolshevik leaders and ignores the party outsiders and non-party members. As a result, it coincides with the official discourse of the Soviet State, which Western Marxism meant to criticise. Accordingly, Bolshevik Marxism culminates in Stalinism and opens up a dark Medieval Age in Soviet history. Any retreat from this narrative seems to be presented as a deviating or dissident attitude. Perry Anderson's *Considerations on Western Marxism* is remarkable in this

respect. It builds a predictable Trotskyist narrative of a great tradition of classical Bolshevism – Lenin, Bukharin, Trotsky, Preobrazhensky – which sharply declines and dies out under Stalinism:

> The most advanced country in the world in the development of historical materialism, which had outdone all Europe by the variety and vigour of its theorists, was turned within a decade into a semi-literate backwater, formidable only by the weight of its censorship and the crudity of its propaganda.[1]

Thus, the only reason to contemplate Bolshevism is the mystery of the October aftermath. What was at stake in Western Marxism was to understand how Bolshevism was responsible or not responsible for Stalinism and to rethink the failure of the revolution in order to avoid the repetition of the same elsewhere.

There is nothing wrong in the ambition to understand Stalinism, but it seems to us that Western Marxism thought of itself as a lonely fighter and ignored similar concerns and reflections within the Soviet Union. For instance, the Bogdanov-Lenin debate was reduced in the West to the question of 'What Is Orthodox Marxism?', while political differences between the Bolshevik party and Proletkult were regarded as dissimilarities between universalism and vulgar classism. Moreover, on the philosophical front, the critique of the Engelsian line, of the dialectics of nature and Lenin's theory of reflection, led to the uncompromising division between 'West' and 'East'. This division was formulated by the Third International and supported by the communist parties across Europe.[2] The question is, however, how do we treat those who do not fit this division? What were the members of the circles of Bakhtin, Vygotsky, LEF and Proletkult: Marxists or non-Marxists? Is Voloshinov's analysis of ideology and language similar to structuralist epistemology or it is an 'Eastern' epistemology? Who was Proletkultist writer Andrei Platonov and how do we understand his critique of the progressivist ideologies of Bolshevism and Stalinism? How should we treat the return to Hegel in Lifshitz? And why is he a marginal outsider in the history of Marxism in

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[1] Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 20.
[2] Karl Korsch, 'The Present State of the Problem of Marxism and Philosophy – An Anti-Critique' [1930], in *Marxism and Philosophy*, trans. by F. Halliday (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008), pp. 98-144 (pp. 138-139).

comparison to his more famous friend Lukács? Finally, does this division make sense in the aftermath of 1991, and what is the place of the abovementioned figures in the history of philosophy?

Accordingly, there are two corresponding approaches to Vygotsky's work. His Marxism is considered as an exotic Soviet rudiment, which should be explained, but at the same time could be easily removed. This mainly applies to the Anglo-American researchers, who usually work in the field of psychology and education.[1] The converse case is careful recovery of all traces of Marx, Hegel or Spinoza in Vygotsky without taking into account method, since it is in the interest of confirming that Vygotsky was Marxist, Hegelian Marxist or Spinozist – the choice depends on academic preference. Thus, such examination may fall into the propaedeutic comparison of Hegelian and Marxian conception of history with Vygotsky's one[2] or into the equation of Vygotsky's developmental stages with the evolution of social formations in history[3]. Andrey Maidansky in his study of Russian Spinozist tradition occasionally appeals to Hegel, but his treatment of Vygotsky is based on a purely Spinozist interpretation[4]. Similar approach characterizes a philosophically informed work of a Russian psychologist Alexander Surmava[5]. At the same time, some recent studies in psychology confront anti-dialectical and cognitivist approach. For instance, there is a growing interest to the problem of the dramaturgy among the Vygotskian psychologists. Thus, Manolis Dafermos acknowledges the importance of Marxist tradition for Vygotsky's theory by showing that the notion of development cannot be separated from such dialectical categories as crisis and drama[6]. Nikolai Veresov stresses importance of the conceptual framework of drama in Vygotky's dialectical theory of development and challenges

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[1] Willem Doise analysed abstracts and keywords used by psychologist researchers of Vygotsky in the 'East' and 'West' from 1974 to 1994. The data shows that British and US scholars worked mainly with the empirical and cognitive problems in Vygotsky, such as child education, behaviour and psychology of language. Conversely, and not surprisingly, the authors from the communist block studied such general topics as thinking, language, dialectics and communism. See: Willem Doise, Christian Staerkle, Alain Clémence, 'Vygotsky in the East and West. A Textual Analysis of Key Words and Abstracts in Recent Psychology Journals (1974-1994)', *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, January-February, 2 (1996), 79-89.

[2] See: Martin J. Parcker, 'Is Vygotsky Relevant? Vygotsky's Marxist Psychology', *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 15, 1 (2008), 8-31.

[3] See: Peter E. Langford, *Vygotsky's Developmental and Educational Psychology* (Hove and New York: Psychology Press, 2005), pp. 27-39; 84-88; 157-160.

[4] Andrey Maidansky, 'The Russian Spinozists', *Studies in East European Thought*, 55 (2003), 199-216; Andrey Maidansky, *Chitaia Spinozu* [Reading Spinoza] (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012).

[5] Alexander Surmava, *Myshlenie i deiatel'nost'* [Thinking and Activity] (Moscow: NIU MIET, 2012).

[6] Manolis Dafermos, 'Reflection on the Relationship between Cultural-Historical Theory and Dialectics', *Psychological Science & Education*, 20, 3 (2015), pp. 16–24.

teleological conception of the social formations[1]. However, Spinoza seems to disappear form the analysis. The majority of contemporary readers of Vygotsky has been raised in the context of a radical choice between Hegel and Spinoza, and therefore, cannot accept the system of thought that brings together these two thinkers[2]. I found so far only one work dedicated to Hegel and Spinoza in Vygotsky. However, both Vygotsky and Spinoza have been transformed in this work into the Hegelian analytical philosophers. Consequently, Soviet context completely disappeared from this study[3]. It means that Vygotsky does not fit the existing divisions, but in many works he appears as a Hegelian Marxist or a Spinozist proper. The questions are, thus, of the same nature as stated above. Is the return to Spinoza in the Soviet Union limited by Plekhanov's type of philosophy? What happens with Hegel? Is the critique of Engels and the positivism in Vygotsky 'Western' or 'Eastern'? Is Vygotsky dissident, anti-Marxist or 'enlightened' Westerner in the 'backward' East?

In order to answer these questions we have first to analyse the discourse of a transition from 'classical' Bolshevism to 'neoclassical' Stalinism in its relation to the question of the party. The party was an organic body of Marxism. Before Stalinism, the international communist movement had a very particular construction and theoretical agenda. The party was understood as a linkage between theory and practice, intellectuals and masses. This justifies Anderson's presentation of Marxism as a history of complicated relationships between the intellectuals and the party. Thus, a separation from the party, even if for a good reason, is tantamount to immediate isolation from the movement, and therefore, from practice.[4] This perspective obscures the critique of Marxism within Marxism and masks the problem of the party-form, but at the same

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[1] Nikolai Veresov 'Forgotten Methodology. Vygotsky's Case', in *Methodological Thinking in Psychology: 60 Years Gone Astray?*, ed. A. Toomela and J. Valsiner (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2010), pp. 267–95; Nikolai Veresov, 'Duality of Categories or Dialectical Concepts?', in *Integrative Psychological and Behavioural Science*, 50, 2 (2016), 244-256. About drama of development see also: *Dramatic Interactions in Education. Vygotskian and Sociocultural Approaches to Drama, Education and Research*, ed. by Susan Davis, Hannah Grainger Clemson, Beth Ferholt, Satu-Mari Jasson and Ana Marjanovic-Shane (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

[2] I allude here to the French debates about Hegel and Spinoza: Pierre Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza* [1979], trans. by S. M. Ruddick (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

[3] See: Jan Derry, *Vygotsky. Philosophy and Education* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2013). I do not take into account the enormous number of secondary literature related to the field of intellectual history. In most of the cases such commentaries cover the whole range of Vygotsky's philosophical interests, but another question is how they have been interpreted. See for example: Alex Kozulin, *Vygotsky's Psychology: A Biography of Ideas* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990); René Van der Veer, Jaan Valsiner, *Understanding Vygotsky: A Quest for Synthesis* (Cambridge, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

[4] Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, pp. 24-48.

time, it shows that the party was a central issue of Marxist identity. For instance, Merleau-Ponty treats Sartre's deviations from Marxism in terms of his position as a party outsider. This is precisely what makes Sartre an ultra-leftist idealist and anti-Marxist .[1]

This is in spite of deep reflections about the party and Marxism. In this connection Merleau-Ponty offers a brilliant critique of Trotskyism. According to him, Trotsky was blind to the Thermidorian reaction in the mid-1920s precisely because of his uncritical perception of the party-form. Trotsky could not grasp a contradiction between the party and the proletariat, between the 'socialist infrastructure' (collectivisation and planning) and the anti-socialist course of development, due to the fact that Marxism has never thought about these questions and fetishised the 'superstructures' of planning without seeing that they can belong to various political forms. In order to be able to see these contradictions, Trotsky would have had to go beyond the Marxism of that time and question the dialectical immanence of truth, which does not know the 'antinomies between proletariat and its party' or between 'economic and political forms'.[2] A naturalistic understanding of being and the idea of a successive historical development, writes Merleau-Ponty,

> taught Trotsky that dialectic is buried in historical matter, that it can fail to develop if not taken up by the will of the most enlightened, that this will cannot, at each moment and in the immediate, coincide with the will of all the proletariat's factions, and that it is only after the event, when the dialectic is victorious, that the whole proletariat rallies to it and the revolution appears as a maturation; thus, provided that it be only temporarily, the dialectic can lose contact with the proletariat … Finally, Trotsky learned that even if the Party is mistaken and degenerates, even if it is caught in the revolutionary ebb, the internal mechanism of permanent revolution can suddenly bring it back to itself.[3]

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[1] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, trans. by J. Bien (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 95-201.
[2] Ibid., pp. 75-85.
[3] Ibid., p. 87.

As a consequence, Trotsky was not able to reflect on his failures and continued to recreate Bolshevism.[1] There is another consequence of Trotsky's case too. It is thanks to the functioning of Marxism under the leadership of the Third International that anything beyond Lenin and party philosophers has been considered as a non-Marxist or ultra-leftist theory. Although Karl Korsch admits that the ideology of Lenin's materialism was a dictatorship that invaded Russia and covered all Western communist parties,[2] he remains Leninist in the sense of his restless attempt to understand Lenin's philosophy.[3] It sounds even more paradoxical if we take into account his claim to differentiate Marxism from 'the *system of intellectual oppression* established in Russia'.[4]

The position of Lukács in the debates about dialectical materialism is particularly interesting, since he presents a geopolitical anomaly – a no-man's-land in the Western and Eastern Marxism divide. In the context of the 1920s, party-minded Marxism was, with a few exceptions, a philosophy of vulgar and mechanistic materialism. Lukács's extraordinary presentation of Marxist philosophy on the basis of Hegelianism and Neo-Kantianism in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) echoed Korsch's attempt to bring philosophy back into Marxism. The book was a great surprise for communist leaders while remaining at the same time detached from the politics of young German philosophers. The paradox is that however valued and influential in Frankfurt-related circles the book was, Lukács immediately received the reputation within these circles of being a idealist metaphysician and simultaneously was accused by the Comintern leaders and Soviet party-philosophers of messianic utopianism, subjectivism and revisionism.[5] The same controversy characterises *The Young Hegel* (1938). Conceived within the walls of the Moscow's Institute of Philosophy and realised during a period of active collaboration with Lukács's institute fellow and close friend Mikhail Lifshitz, it was

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[1] Ibid., p. 88.

[2] Karl Korsch, 'The present State of the Problem of Marxism and Philosophy – An Anti-Critique' [1930], pp. 138-139.

[3] Ibid., pp. 117-143; Karl Korsch, 'Marxism and Philosophy' [1923], in *Marxism and Philosophy*, trans. by F. Halliday (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008), pp. 29-97 (pp. 32-52).

[4] Karl Korsch, 'The present State of the Problem of Marxism and Philosophy – An Anti-Critique' [1930], p. 143.

[5] The same objections Lukács raised himself in 1967, in the famous preface to *History and Class Consciousness:* Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics* [1923], trans. by R. Livingstone (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1971), p. XVIII. About the influence on German philosophers, with a particular focus on Adorno, see: Rolf Wiggerhaus, *The Frankfurt School. Its History, Theories and Political Significance*, trans. by M. Robertson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), pp. 66-81. About the development of Lukács's political views and the reception of his philosophy in international communist circles before and after the publication of *History and Class Consciousness*, see: Michael Löwy, *George Lukács – From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, trans. by P. Camiller (London: NLB, 1979), pp. 145-192.

defended as a Doctorate thesis in the same institution in 1942, but was published in the USSR only in 1987. Thus, in the East, Lukács' émigré period was considered as a gradual, but insufficiently radical, correction of his past revisionist views,[1] while in the West it was treated as a dramatic transition towards Stalinist conservatism. Paradoxically, Lukács was to some extent equally controversial for both the Eastern and the Western Marxist camps.

In the beginning of the essay 'What is Orthodox Marxism?' (1919), Lukács proposes a critical revision of what must be considered orthodoxy in Marxism. It is not a statement of faith that derives from Marx's work and articulates a dogmatic position; rather it is the method that has to become a philosophical tenet.[2] The specific metaphysical inflection of Soviet debates about the essence of matter and form, or subject and object, must find a new epistemological resolution. Thus Lukács follows the Western line of argument and 'denaturalises' materialism, attributing the question of matter exclusively to the understanding of social activity. The practical embodiment of dialectical materialism is to be found in the forcefully constructed 'bond between consciousness and action'. In other words, dialectical materialism as method is a force of becoming conscious in deed and act. Theory 'is essentially the intellectual expression of the revolutionary process itself … theory does nothing but arrest and make conscious each necessary step, it becomes at the same time the necessary premise of the following one'.[3] The ontologisation of the historical process and de-ontologisation of thinking and spirit leads towards anthropological interpretations of Hegel.

Lukács attributes to the 'contemplative', formal dialectics of Engels and to Machist empiricism the characteristics of dualism, since both separate method from being. Equally, Lenin represents voluntaristic and fatalistic views, because the 'obedience to laws' of nature excludes a historical understanding of social practice. The ideology of natural laws, in turn, corresponds to the logic of capitalist rationality. In order to present the process of rationalisation as a pure fact, calculability and quantitative measurement tends to abstract and reify social relations. The atomistic presentation of facts thereby creates partial systems that dialectics aims to penetrate and

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[1] Lukács's recently published investigative records from Lubianka prison give a sense of the ideological and political claims of the Stalinists in relation to Lukács: *Besedy na Lubianke. Sledstvennoe delo Derdia Lukacha. Materialy k biografii* [Lubianka's Conversations. Investigative Records of Georg Lukács. Materials for the Biography]*, ed. by V. Sereda, A. Stikalin (Moscow: RAN, Institut Slavianovedeniia, 2011).
[2] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics* [1923], p. 1.
[3] Ibid., pp. 2-3.

disenchant, by revealing the concrete totality.[1] Orthodox Marxism, it is concluded, is a 'struggle against the insidious effects of bourgeois ideology on the thought of the proletariat'.[2]

The conclusions of 'What is Orthodox Marxism?' resonate with the statements of the Proletkult movement. The struggle with ideology in Lukács corresponds to the prospect of *de-alienation* and, in Proletkultist programmes, to the *socialisation* of art and science. It explains why, while holding the post of Deputy People's Commissar for Education and Culture during the Hungarian Commune in 1919, Lukács implemented radical proletkultist ideas such as the proletarian theatre and programmes for sexual education.[3] This agenda almost replicated the activities of Anatoly Lunacharsky's People's Commissariat for Enlightenment, which was grounded on Bogdanov's theory of proletarian culture. However, for Lukács the party remains a mediating link between the reified consciousness of the proletariat and a movement towards the correct understanding of its historical mission. The party directs the proletarian and the proletariat directs the party.[4] In Proletkult, as we shall see, the proletariat develops its point of view independently and autonomously.

Although Lukács aimed to overcome Hegel through Marx, he operated within the logic of a simple reversal. The dialectical unity of the party and the proletariat is the same mystification of being that brought Trotsky to the reinvention of Bolshevism. Thought comes *post festum* in the costume of a party philosopher, in order to articulate the deed of a proletarian spirit. This was the main point of Lukács' self-critique,[5] but it did not affect his understanding of the party-form. Instead, he manages to incorporate reflection theory into *The Young Hegel* book, so as to prove the historical truth of Leninism.[6] In order to save the dialectical unity of the party and the proletariat, of the party and philosophy, Lukács sides with Lenin's programme of ontology for Marxism, which is of course understood here as a social ontology; however, in Lukács's view, this develops the Eastern line of Marxist thought as opposed to bourgeois philosophy.[7]

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[1] Ibid., p. 3-7.
[2] Ibid., p. 24.
[3] Michael Löwy, *George Lukács – From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, pp. 150-152.
[4] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics* [1923], pp. 295-339.
[5] Ibid., pp. XXII-XXIII.
[6] Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel. Studies in the Relation Between Dialectics and Economics* [1948], trans. by R. Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1975), pp. XIV-XXX.
[7] Georg Lukács, 'Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins 1', in *Werke* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand 1984), XIII; Georg Lukács, 1986. 'Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins 2', in *Werke,* Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1986), XIV.

Party philosophy was identified with Soviet Marxism, therefore the post-revolutionary projects that developed outside the party have for a long time occupied the interest of non-Marxist thinkers and researchers.[1] Thus, if one asks why Western Marxism missed what exactly has happened in Soviet theory outside the Third International, then one should go beyond what was called Marxism in the first half of the twentieth century. However, before we can go further, an additional critique needs to be presented. The critique is of an anti-colonial nature. We would like to reread the Western/Eastern Marxism narrative by pointing to the representation of repressed Marxist epistemologies, which are the central object of our study. These epistemologies derive from official Bolshevism, but resulted in the original conception of Proletkult, that is, a political form and a theory of organisation. On the other hand, Proletkult bridges the traditions of empiricism, Hegelianism and Spinozism in Soviet Marxism, thus representing a unified political and philosophical conjuncture. The most interesting representative of Proletkult and the main figure of our study is Andrei Platonov. He will play a key role in our reading.

Our critique will question the appeal to Lenin's authority that is central to Western Marxism. Although we are not proposing to reject or forget Lenin, in our view there must be an objective analysis of what was called in the Soviet Union *Leniniana* – a genre and a name for the body of work in art and literature devoted to Lenin.[2] *Leniniana* as knowledge production has to be treated in relation to its ideological limits. Since the object of our study is early Soviet epistemologies, we are going to tackle only the most appropriate and symptomatic examples of the Western Marxist critique. Our reading may appear to be narrow and selective if we think of its aim only as a reconstruction of the intellectual history of Marxism across Western and Eastern borders. However, the actual aim is to reread Western Marxism with regards to its representation of these epistemologies. Therefore, we are not going to consider the reception of Soviet diamat

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[1] See, for example, the archive-based studies of Italian slavists. About the reception of empirio-criticism among the populists and Marxists in the Russian Empire: Daniela Steila, *Scienza e rivoluzione. La recezione dell'empiriocriticismo nella cultura russa (1877-1910)* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1996). An inclusive view of 'party Marxism' that extends to the populist parties, the so-called legal Marxists, the Socialist Revolutionary Party and all fractions of RSDRP is presented in a recent work of: Guido Carpi, *Istoriia Russkogo Marksizma* [The History of Russian Marxism] (Moscow: Common Place, 2016). See also: *Storia del marxismo. I. Socialdemocrazia, revisionismo, rivoluzione (1848-1945),* ed. by S. Petrucciani (Roma: Carocci, 2015).

[2] An example of the *Leniniana* genre is a forthcoming book of Žižek: Slavoj Žižek, *Lenin 2017: Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through* (London: Verso, 2017). See also *Lenin Reloaded: Towards a Politics of Truth*, ed. by S. Budgen, S. Kouvelakis, S. Žižek (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

or interpretations of Soviet history and the production of Sovietology in Slavic Studies departments during the Cold War. The main focus will be a *counter-narrative* to the official Western and Eastern Marxism, because they are connected in their attempt to discredit certain conceptions of Soviet Marxism.

The conjuncture of the pre-October and the post-October debates on proletarian culture is overlooked in Western Marxism and reduced to the debates on empiricism and vulgar sociologism as they were presented in Lenin's famous *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1908). Bogdanov's work was never the subject of special study, since it was generally agreed that his project deviates from Orthodox Marxism, particularly because it breaks with the Leninist conception of the party and the proletariat. Thus Althusser points to the brutal classism of the slogan 'proletarian science' that was resurrected in the post-war communist movement. This classism obviously meant something different in the French context, but Althusser rushes to link Bogdanov and Proletkult to Stalinist positivism and diamat. Although he briefly remarks that French communists 'knew nothing of Bogdanov and Proletkult', he then adds, remarkably – 'or about Lenin's historic struggle against political and theoretical Leftism'.[1] In fact, Lenin's writings against political and theoretical leftism were in part a critique of Proletkult and Bogdanov; and it is through Lenin's work that Proletkult as a movement received its most merciless critique, gaining its reputation as one further infantile left-wing disorder.[2]

It is a paradox of Western Marxism that, despite the anti-dogmatic pathos, along with its critique of vulgar materialism, economism and diamat, it has managed to establish a statement of faith about Lenin's *Empirio-Criticism*. A chorus of Marxist voices attributed to this book the status of political wisdom. Thus the discussion between Bogdanov and Lenin about the philosophical foundations of Marxism has special importance for Korsch. For him, it provides an answer to the question of what constitutes philosophy for Marxism. He remarks that at first this discussion was regarded as unimportant, but that later it led to the split in the Bolshevik party, after Lenin's publication of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.[3] In this discussion Korsch sides with Lenin on the ground of orthodoxy: any philosophy foreign to the classical Marxist tradition is non-Marxist, and it is due to the separation of Marxism from philosophy that

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[1] Louis Althusser, *For Marx* [1965], trans. by B. Brewster (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 22-23.
[2] It is very symptomatic that the critique of proletarian consciousness as the standpoint of communist consciousness is accompanied in Althusser by lamentations about the unavoidably petty bourgeois consciousness of an academic professor: Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy And Other Essays* [1968], trans. by B. Brewster (New York, London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 68-70.
[3] Karl Korsch, 'Marxism and Philosophy' [1923], p. 32, f.

'it was not regarded as impossible … for a leading Marxist theoretician to be a follower of Arthur Schopenhauer in his private philosophical life'. The anti-philosophical position of the Second International has led to the rejection of the philosophical content of Marxism and to the revision of a Marxist system supposedly lacking philosophical content.[1] Korsch's programme is to restore the philosophical roots of Marxism, which he locates in German Idealism. This programme signifies a shift from the empirical positivism of the Second International to Hegelian philosophy and establishes a split between Western (Hegelian) and Eastern (empiricist) Marxism. According to Korsch, Marxism is not 'a transcendental Beyond' of German idealism, but a new form of knowledge linked to German idealism through the mediation of a new historical process of proletarian struggle.[2] The relationship between social revolution and ideology is crucial, since philosophy is an ideological problem and it must be abolished simultaneously with the abolition of the bourgeois state and society.[3]

However, the special status of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* primarily relates to 'the *practical question*'. Lenin's restoration of orthodoxy is a political, not a theoretical attempt to break with reactionary currents in Russian Marxism: 'Lenin decides philosophical questions only on the basis of non-philosophical considerations and results'.[4] The standpoint of the party is the location from which Lenin's gesture can be understood. Nevertheless, Korsch admits that Lenin treats philosophy only in instrumentalist terms and that it leads him to the negation of philosophy before it realises its historical task. In other words, in his fight with Bogdanov and his followers, Lenin gives up on rigorous philosophical argument in the name of political urgency. He jumps ahead of philosophy so as to judge categories and problems of philosophy from the point of view of post-philosophy, as if it has already been accomplished. Consequently, the philosophical argument of the book appears naive.[5]

Korsch cites an extravagant passage from Lenin in which he deflates the argument about the experiential relationality of subject and object by claiming that in pre-historic times there was no subjective experience.[6] Žižek, in his familiar anecdotal manner, remarks that it is precisely this realist naiveté that unites Lenin's argument with

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[1] Ibid., pp. 33-34.
[2] Ibid., p. 47.
[3] Ibid, pp. 71-76.
[4] Karl Korsch, 'The Present State of the Problem of Marxism and Philosophy – An Anti-Critique' [1930], p. 128.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Korsch admits that Lenin borrowed this argument from Plekhanov: Ibid., pp. 128-129, f.

current trends in so-called speculative realism.[1] Lenin's chapter 'Did Nature Exist Prior to Man?' does indeed echo Meillassoux's question: 'what is it that happened 4.56 billion years ago?'[2] However, this leads Meillassoux to postulate a necessary contingent status of being, while Lenin suggests that being exists necessarily, precisely because it is fundamentally independent of the subject. An object that is nature exists prior to a subject, but this does not mean that the subject (and object) is contingent, as it exists within nature and is a part of its laws; therefore the subject exists necessarily.[3]

For Korsch, Lenin's argument goes back to debates that philosophy has already overcome. Korsch obviously looks at the history of philosophy from the point of view of successive teleological developments. For him any anachronistic shifts signify backwardness. As we have pointed out above, his view is similar to the Lukácsian one: Lenin returns to the separation of thought and being that characterises seventeenth- and eighteenth-century materialism and idealism.[4] It is true that Lenin's argument is neither original nor Marxist. In fact, it is hard to justify its significance. Korsch prizes the politicisation of philosophy, the return of a philosophical question in Lenin's book. However, and somewhat surprisingly, Korsch is ready to forgive Lenin's brutal philosophical argumentation, in spite of his own contention that in the Soviet Union *Empirio-Criticism* has turned into the official doctrine of vulgar materialism.[5] By contrast, Lefebvre interprets the instrumentalist approach to philosophy in the spirit of a conspiracy theory. For him, the Stalinist dialectics of nature was a tactical strategy that aimed to obscure real practical and theoretical questions. In the very moment of seizing power, Stalin refocused attention away from what was at stake by plunging minds 'into the depths of Nature and cosmological speculation'.[6] The interpretation of *Empirio-Criticism* proposed by Althusser is even more paradoxical. For him *Empirio-Criticism* demarcates the line between academic philosophers full of idealist fantasies and philosophy as theory, or, in other words, as a tactics for the critique of philosophical

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[1] Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 625.
[2] Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. by R. Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 16.
[3] Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 'Materialism and Empirio-Criticism. Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy' [1908], in *Collected Works,* 45 vols, trans. by J. Fineberg and G. Hanna (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960-70), vol. 31: April-December 1920 (1966), pp. 17-388 (pp. 75-86).
[4] Karl Korsch, 'The Present State of the Problem of Marxism and Philosophy – An Anti-Critique' [1930], p. 132.
[5] Ibid., pp. 123-125.
[6] Henri Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism* [1940], trans. by S. Kipfer (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 3.

ideologies. Therefore the vulgarity of Lenin's thesis is not important. As Lenin stresses himself, he had no intention to pretend to be a professional philosopher:

> The real question is not whether Marx, Engels and Lenin are or are not real philosophers, whether their philosophical statements are formally irreproachable, whether they do or do not make foolish statements about Kant's 'thing-in-itself', whether their materialism is or is not pre-critical, etc. For all these questions are and always have been posed inside a certain *practice of philosophy.*[1]

Lenin proposes a fundamental distinction between science and philosophy.[2] With regards to the striking method of Lenin's critique of empiricism by way of empiricism, Althusser has little to say, because Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* shows his return to dialectic and reveals his conception of 'scientific practice'.[3] What matters is a new type of philosophising – a practical philosophising.

It is true that Lenin did his best to win the battle with empiricism, but perhaps the empiricist argument of Bogdanov had a point. And yet whether this was the case or not is difficult for us to say, because nobody looked at Bogdanov's reply to Lenin.[4] It seems that if something similar had been written not by Lenin, but by the unknown Ivanov, no one would even pay attention. As a consequence, Marxism existed within the problematic of Leninism and militancy. This is true even of Negri, whose book on Lenin investigates similar issues. Although the conception of the autonomy of labour

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[1] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy And Other Essays* [1968], p. 32.
[2] Ibid., pp. 47-48.
[3] Ibid., pp. 51-52.
[4] A pioneering work of Sochor about Bogdanov and his ideological battle with Lenin, and Jensen's overview of Bogdanov's philosophy, remain the main sources for English-speaking researchers: Zenovia A. Sochor, *Revolution and culture: The Bogdanov-Lenin Controversy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988); Kenneth Martin Jensen, *Beyond Marx and Mach: Aleksandr Bogdanov's Philosophy of Living Experience* (Reidel: Dordrecht, 1978). Bogdanov's tektology received some attention in the field of cybernetics and systems theory. See: Vadim N. Sadovsky, Vladimir V. Kelle, 'Alexander Alexandrovich Bogdanov and "Tektology"', in: Alexander Bogdanov, *Tektology. Book 1* (Hull: Centre for Systems Studies Press, 1996), pp. III-XXIX (pp. XVI-XX). See also a recent publication: *Aleksandr Bogdanov Revisited*, ed. by V. Oittinen (Helsinki: Aleksanteri Institute, 2009). The Historical Materialism Book Series and Brill Publishers plan to publish ten volumes of Bogdanov's major works in English. The first volume appeared in 2016: Alexander Bogdanov, *The Philosophy of Living Experience. Popular Outlines* [1912b], trans. by D. G. Rowley (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016).

power and the political form of *centro sociale* associated with autonomism has a close proximity to Proletkult's workers' clubs and studios, it seems that Proletkult has never been a point of reference for him.[1]

Nevertheless, in the late 2000s Negri suggested there was a 'second interpretative line' in Soviet theory and politics that had been defeated by what he defines as a 'transcendentalist or transcendental' line. These two related and antagonistic lines correspond to the Deleuze-informed conception of modern philosophy, in which transcendentalism is defined as the line passing from Descartes to Hegel, while, resisting it, materialism is traced from Machiavelli to Spinoza and Marx.[2] The scheme of competing lines, according to Negri, can also be recovered in the Soviet context and appears as the following:

> I maintain that inside this current there were extremely important historical, political, and subversive acts or attitudes: the genesis itself of the Workers' Movement, for example, of the history of the most radical forms of Enlightenment. At the same time, we also need to say that this line was defeated by transcendentalism. This is what it means to make history.[3]

On the level of philosophy 'it is a creative materialism, within which you can find the surprise of a [Lev Semyonovich] Vygotsky who anticipates [Michel] Foucault, or a [Mikhail Mikhailovich] Bakhtin who anticipates [Gilles] Deleuze'.[4] Negrian *counter-narrative* suffers from the trans-historical Manichaeism that may well fit with what he negatively defined as transcendentalism. What is significant here is not the metaphysics of philosophical antagonism between Hegel and Spinoza; in fact we will demonstrate that the relationship between the two is rather synthetic and dialectical in the Soviet context. Rather our focus is on precisely those fields of knowledge that we define as the core of the Soviet epistemological construction. What Negri mentions as the workers' movement correspond in our reconstruction to the Proletkult, while what he calls

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[1] Antonio Negri, *Factory of Strategy. Thirty-Three Lessons on Lenin* [1978], trans. by A. Bove (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

[2] Antonio Negri, Raf Valvola Scelsi, *Goodbye Mr. Socialism*, trans. by P. Thomas (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008), pp. 21-22.

[3] Ibid., p. 22.

[4] Ibid., pp. 30-31.

'radical forms of Enlightenment' defines the intersections of Bogdanov's proletarian culture and the theories and practices of avant-garde art and literature. Within this setting we consider the writings of Platonov and the theory of Vygotsky – each complements the other's attempts to rethink the notion of the proletariat through the materialist ontology of poverty (*poor life*).

With regards to the anticipation of Foucault, we may only guess what exactly Negri means here. Research may confirm that the understanding of power and subjectivation is important not only for Vygotsky, who sketched a theory of *homo duplex* – a interiorisation of shared social activity such as the division of labour into the mental function – but also for Bogdanov, who in a similar way treated the formation of 'authoritarian thinking' – a reproduction of the subordinating and organising role of labour within the mental forms.[1] The dialectical dramatisation of this dualism of thought and body finds a further articulation in Platonov's prose.[2] Nevertheless, this problematic finds a different epistemological articulation that could be compared with French philosophical developments of the 1970s. Depending on the purpose of such a comparison, this may nuance both Foucault and Vygotsky or may lead to another trans-historical manifestation. However, our task is rather to show what is specific to Soviet Marxism and how this specificity may contribute to what is known as modernity.

B) A Counter-Narrative for the Soviet Avant-Garde and Art Theory.

In our view, this lacuna between Bogdanov and Lenin leads to the cycle of endless and counterproductive discussions about the party and the proletariat and theory and practice (understood within the framework of Leninism). However, the pedestal cannot be left empty. Since the early Proletkult movement had links with productivist art

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'Concrete Human Psychology. An Unpublished Manuscript by Vygotsky' [1929a], trans. by A. A. Puzyrei, *Soviet Psychology*, 27, 2, (1989), 53–77 (pp. 58-60); Alexander Bogdanov, *Elementy proletarskoi kul'tury v razvitii rabochego classa. Lektsii prochitannye v Moskovskom proletkul'te vesnoi 1919 goda* [The Elements of Proletarian Culture in the Development of Working Class. Lectures Delivered at Moscow Proletkul't in Spring 1919] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, Vserossiiskii Soviet Proletkul'ta, 1920), pp. 5-39.

[2] See, for example: Andrei Platonov, *Happy Moscow* [1933–36], trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler, A. Livingstone, N. Bourova and E. Naiman (London: Harvill, 2013), pp. 7-118.

(*proizvodstvennoe iskusstvo*),[1] its legacy is apparent in the theories of the Soviet avant-garde formulated by LEF (The Left Front of the Arts) circles. In Bogdanov's theory of proletarian culture, the transition from capitalism to communism assumes the transformation of social relations from hierarchical 'authoritarianism' to a state of 'monist' 'comradely cooperation', where the division of labour – hierarchy and subordination – is abolished. The new form of labour relations is already explicit in industrial production due to the transfer of specialisation to the machine and the collectivisation of workers through unionisation. This process has to be accomplished by the socialisation of the means of production and the proletariat's control of the factories. The model of proletarian culture is a kind of laboratory for the development of the comradely and collectivist type of emancipated relations that the proletariat shall bring to all aspects of social life, from gender and family relations to art and knowledge production.[2] The doctrine of productivist art also begins with the socialisation and collectivisation of artistic labour, assuming that it would lead post-revolutionary art to the formation of a new mode of production and finally to the abolition of art as we know it. The artist will produce new forms of material culture, and consequently new forms of social relations, emancipated from commodity fetishism and alienation.[3]

Retrospectively, Proletkult became a shadow of the much-studied archive of INKhUK (Institute of Artistic Culture) and The Left Front of the Arts (LEF). However, historically it comes first, and in fact determines the artistic experimentation of INKhUK

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[1] The more accurate translation of *proizvodstvennoe iskusstvo* would be *productionist art*, because semantically the adjective 'productivist' may also refer to the process of production and the effectiveness of production. The Russian adjective *proizvodstvennoe* does not have these connotations. Some translate it as *production art*, but this brings new problems with translating derivative neologisms, such as *proizvodstvenniki* – productionists, not production artists or workers or *proizvodstvennichestvo* – productionism. The suffix 'stvo' in Russian forms nouns and it means a state, a situation, activity or a current. For example, avtor*stvo* (authorship) or kantian*stvo* (Kantianism). Thus, in Russian the 'ism' is absent, because it does not correspond to the morphology of *proizvodstvo* (production). Otherwise, similarly to *konstruktivizm* (constructivism), the 'ism' would be preferable for the productivists themselves, but this absent 'ism' led them to the creation of the neologism *proizvodstvennichestvo*, which sounds quite extravagant in Russian. It stresses the semantic connotation of a permanent state of activity, which the English 'ism' does not have. Since productivism is the generally accepted and the most used translation, we will keep it, but where context demands we will modify it to 'productivist' art or 'productivists'.

[2] Alexander Bogdanov, *Elementy proletarskoi kul'tury v razvitii rabochego classa. Lektsii prochitannye v Moskovskom proletkul'te vesnoi 1919 goda* [The Elements of Proletarian Culture in the Development of Working Class. Lectures Delivered at Moscow Proletkul't in Spring 1919].

[3] See, for example: Boris Arvatov, *Iskusstvo i Proizvodstvo* [Art and Production] (Moscow: Proletkul't, 1926); Nikolai Tarabukin, *Ot Mol'berta k mashine* [From the Easel to the Machine] (Moscow: Rabotnik Prosveshcheniia, 1923). This work is available in English, but in a shortened version: Nikolai Tarabukin, 'From the Easel to the Machine', in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, trans. by Ch. Lodder (London: Harber and Row, 1982), pp. 135-142. About commodity and socialist object see: Boris Arvatov, 'Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing (Toward the Formulation of the Question)' [1926], trans. by Ch. Kiaer, *October*, 81, Summer (1997), pp. 119-128.

and LEF. For instance, in the Proletkult journal *Gorn*, the principles of art in production were already formulated in the 1918 plan of work for Moscow's branch of the proletarian art studio. The paper declares that trade unions and Proletkult's branches should send founders, weavers and textile workers to the art studio course. Thus the workers would transfer their industrial skills to the practice of art production and in turn would change the concept of art by improving the respective production specialisations in the factory. A construction worker could be an architect and a print worker could be a painter. The workers who complete this course will then set up the workshops at the factories so as to introduce proletarian art for production. Only in this way can printing and cotton printing be exempted from the bourgeois stereotypes:

> It is not the exhibitions, not the manor houses to which the proletariat brings creativity. It is not behind the locked doors of the museum-cemeteries, but at the plants and factories where the proletariat will manifest creativity. And bringing it to life, the proletariat will carry art into the streets. On the walls of houses and in the objects made by him, the proletariat will show artistic creativity, so that all proletarians speak and understand each other through art.[1]

Before Popova's *prozodezhda* (clothing for production), Proletkult prepared workers to achieve the same results, arranging the ground for the theory and practice of productivist art. Thus Popova, Tretyakov and other representatives of the intelligentsia were induced to reflect on how they could participate in the same process. In this regard Proletkult was implicit in the discourse of the Soviet avant-garde.

Nevertheless, this political and philosophical background is normally not of interest to Anglophone art history and art theory. LEF is presented in this work as a separate entity and the Proletkult influence is normally ignored. For instance, Kristina Kieaer links productivist art to the 'Constructivist programme' of the mid-1920s.[2] According to her, the outstanding art practices within productivism were the result of bending the dogmatic doctrine of art in production. Conversely, Kieaer assumes that

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[1] *Plan organizatsii izobrazitel'nogo otdela moskovskogo proletariata* [The Organisation Plan of the Art Department of the Moscow Proletariat], *Gorn*, 1 (1918), pp. 66-67 (p. 66).
[2] Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions. The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005), p. 2.

where artists followed the doctrine, the results were rather controversial at best.[1] It seems that this opposition between 'bending' and 'obeying' is implicit in the conclusion of her book, which concerns the two sides of LEF: the bright side is linked to the dis-alienating capacity of the socialist object and the dark side to Stalinist transparency and its rationalisation of the public sphere.[2] The same is true for the otherwise outstanding study of productivist art undertaken by Maria Gough. Based on extensive archive research, it touches on the main theoretical and practical debates in productivist art, but Gough confines them within the constructivist laboratory of INKHUK. This leads her to the confusing unification of productivism with constructivism and fails to explain why the main theorists of productivist art abandoned the notion of construction in favour of the theory and practice of production.[3] The negative characteristics of productivist theory are more directly linked to proletkultist dogmatism in the classic study by Christina Lodder, in which productivist art exhibits the transition of constructivism from its laboratory period to the field of design and crafts.[4] Analysis of Proletkult is nevertheless reduced to a single remark about the movement, devoid of any coherent theory of art.[5]

The ignorance of Proletkult is not a matter of lack of information, because there are a lot of obvious links. For instance, the main theorist of productivist art, Boris Arvatov, worked as a secretary of the Moscow Proletkult, while Rodchenko, Tretyakov and Eisenstein, among others, collaborated with Proletkult studios. Some of these facts are documented in Kieaer and Gough's books,[6] but it seems that the problem lies in a conceptual refusal to pass outside of the field of art. Kerstin Stakemeier comes to a similar conclusion. She admits that both Kiaer and Gough discuss formal inventions

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[1] Ibid., pp. 13-17.

[2] Ibid., p. 261. See also preceding discussion about Tretyakov's play 'I Want a Child!' and Lisitsky's stage design: Ibid., pp. 243-264.

[3] Maria Gough, *The Artist As Producer. Constructivism and Revolution* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2005). Zalambani makes a clear distinction in relation to the LEF circles, identifying productivists (Brik, Arvatov, Kushner), life-builders (Chuzhak), factographists (Tretyakov), formalists (Tinyanov, Shklovsky), cubo-futurists (Kruchenykh, Kamenskii), constructivists (Lavinskii, Rodchenko, Stepanova, Tatlin) and filmmakers (Eisenstein, Kuleshov, Vertov, Shub). This diverse community created conflicting programmes and platforms for art that overlap but never subsume one another: Maria Zalambani, *L'Arte Nella Produzione. Avanguardia e rivoluzione nella Russia sovietica degli anni '20* (Ravenna: Pleiadi, Longo Editore (Collana da Franco Mollia), 1998), p. 76, f.

[4] See: Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), especially Chapter 3 'Towards Theoretical Basis: Fusing The Formal and Utilitarian', pp. 73-108.

[5] Ibid., p. 75.

[6] See, for example Arvatov's biographical sketch in: Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions. The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism*, p. 27. For a brief depiction of INKHUKH's formation see: Maria Gough, *The Artist As Producer. Constructivism and Revolution*, pp. 2-6.

made outside the field of art, and analyse the aesthetic value of non-artistic objects, with the aim of presenting productivism as a practice that can be recognised as art.[1] But she also adds: 'it is significant that the Proletkul't is hardly mentioned in either of the books, because its intrinsic importance for the development of Productivism seems insufficient to compensate for its failure to produce objects of high artistic value'.[2]

Buchloh reproduces a similar logic of constructivism's decline after the transition from its laboratory period to productivist art. Accordingly, constructivism passes from the expanded modernist aesthetics that 'did not depart much further from the modernist framework of bourgeois aesthetics than the point of establishing models of epistemological and semiotic critique'[3] to the new utilitarian and industrialised forms of art. The optimism about technologies and media led constructivists to totalitarian Stalinism.[4] Yve Alain Bois goes even further. He acknowledges the superior value of the modernist epistemological and semiotic critique formulated by Buchloh, but then concludes that the total instrumentalisation of art is inevitable when the critical modernist tradition is abandoned. In other words, the 'bright side' of the Soviet avant-garde conforms to the standards of European modernist epistemologies, while the utilitarian aesthetics and its function in the context of Stalinism signifies a break or a black hole, which art-historical narrative can only explain by turning to ethical and moral arguments against propaganda and instrumentalisation.[5] An alternative proposition would be to examine this black hole by looking at the philosophical core of the productivist programme and recovering its epistemological foundation.

The situation with Proletkult may differ when we cross the Atlantic. In the Russian, German and Italian contexts the interrelations between Proletkult and the Soviet avant-garde are a common point of departure.[6] Nevertheless, this point of departure leads in two main directions: the collection of empirical evidence and case

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[1] Kerstin Stakemeier, 'Entkunstung. Artistic Models for the End of Art' (PhD, University College London, 2012), p. 62.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'From Faktura to Factography', *October*, 30, Autumn (1984), pp. 82-119 (p. 94).
[4] Ibid., pp. 109-110.
[5] Yve-Alain Bois, 'El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility', *Art in America* 76, 4, April (1988), pp. 161-181.
[6] The classic Russian source is Anatolii Il'ich Mazaev, *Konzepziia proizvodstvennogo iskusstva 20-kh godov* [The Conception of 1920's Production Art] (Moscow: Nauka, 1975). An informative overview of Bogdanov's and Proletkult's art theory in relation to productivist art can be found in: Maria Zalambani, *L'Arte Nella Produzione. Avanguardia e rivoluzione nella Russia sovietica degli anni '20*. For German sources see: Kerstin Stakemeier, 'Entkunstung. Artistic Models for the End of Art', pp. 26-78. See also a case study of Eisenstein's and Tretyakov's involvement in the Proletkult theatre in a work by the Austrian philosopher: Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution. Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century*, trans. by A. Derieg (Los Angeles: SEMIOTEXT(E), 2007), pp. 149-162.

studies or documentation of similarities and differences. Thus, in Gerald Raunig's book, Proletkult theatre appears as a trans-historical example of molecular politics, and it is beyond the author's intention to look closely at the theory of organisation in Proletkult-related work.[1] A strongly negative perception of productivist art and Proletkult characterises Zalambani's schematic fusion of productivism, Proletkult and Stalinism.[2] Chubarov's argument is more nuanced. For him, Proletkult and productivism differ in their conceptualisation of the proletariat. In productivism, the notion of the proletariat refers not to the class belonging that is supposed to contain new forms of sensibility and vision, but to the formation and cultivation of the collective sensibility that the proletariat may inaugurate. These take the new form of disalienated social relations, including the socialisation of property and the reorganisation of habits. However, Chubarov refers only to LEF polemics against Proletkult and does not involve materials and evidence from the other side of the barricade.[3] In our study we will pay special attention to the deconstruction of the category of the proletariat within and without the Proletkult in the works of Bogdanov, Platonov and Vygotsky.

In this 'art story' we have to take a step back and look closely at some of Benjamin's publications. In art curriculums, *Author as Producer* (1934) often functions as an introduction to the Soviet avant-garde and the problematic of productivism. Although it has recently been acknowledged that this text is indebted not only to Soviet practices, but also to the Soviet theory,[4] this Soviet debt has an ambivalent status. Maria Gough observes that the enthusiastic appeal to Tretyakov in the text is never further developed in Benjamin's work, and this despite the fact that in the preparatory notes for one of the Paris lectures he names Tretyakov 'co-theorist'.[5] Moreover, according to Gough's reconstruction, Tretyakov's four-month lecturing visit to Germany and Austria in 1931 provoked important debates among the local left intellectuals; it may well be that Benjamin attended his lectures.[6]

Nevertheless, Benjamin articulates the Soviet experiences of 'co-theorist' Tretyakov in the generic mode of the brave revolutionary who goes to the village to

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[1] Gerald Raunig, Op. Cit.
[2] Maria Zalambani, Op. Cit.
[3] Igor' Chubarov, *Kollektivnaia chuvstvennost': teorii i praktiki levogo avangarda* [The Collective Sensibility: Theories and Practices of the Left Avant-Garde] (Moscow: Vysshaia shkola ekonomiki, 2014), pp. 150; 193-198.
[4] See the very informative reconstruction of Soviet influences on the text in: Maria Gough, 'Paris, Capital of the Soviet Avant-Guarde', *October*, 101, Summer (2002), pp. 53-83.
[5] Ibid., pp. 58-60.
[6] Ibid., pp. 74-76.

persuade peasants to join a collective farm. It is as if Benjamin is giving philosophical voice to 'Tretyakov's example'.[1] In fact, the excitement about Tretyakov's gesture amounts to an unconscious exoticisation of the Soviet artist. If Tretyakov is just an example, Brecht is a more direct intellectual reference. Indeed, Brecht is not introduced in the same way. He is treated as a theorist and discussed at length.[2] However, Benjamin's formula of the artwork as articulation of 'living social relations' and of artists as those who reflect a 'position within the production process' is in fact a summary of the earlier discussions of the 1920s concerning art and production. Moreover, Tretyakov and Brecht had a quite substantial intellectual exchange and a long-term friendship.[3] Thus the language of 'technical innovation', that is, the appropriation of the means of production in art as well as the transformation of the 'production apparatus',[4] is terminology that both Tretyakov and Brecht share; and it had already been developed in 1917 on the pages of Proletkult's and LEF's journals. As early as 1923 Tretyakov asks: 'Isn't art one productive process among other modes of production? What kind of relationship does art have to life? What is art's role in the latter?' The article was published in the Proletkult journal *Gorn*, where similar discussion had taken place since 1918.[5]

More interesting, because less apparent, is the relationship of Benjamin to Arvatov.[6] The correspondence here is not in terminology but relates to certain specific formulations. In *Iskusstvo i Proizvodstvo* ('Art and Production', 1926), Arvatov shows how capitalist art emerged out of the medieval crafts and explains that artistic production remains patriarchal even in the contemporary form due to its individualistic and anti-social character. The return to the fresco, as well as the formation of non-objective art and constructivism, does not replace the bourgeois mode of art production, but only deepens the contradiction between the individualistic function of art and the growing necessity of integrating art into social life. In Arvatov's narrative, the actual *Aufhebung*

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[1] Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer' [1934], in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. by A. Bostock (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 85-103 (p. 89). 'Das Beispiel Tretiakows' in German: Walter Benjamin, 'Der Autor als Produzent: Ansprache im Institut zum Studium des Fascismus in Paris am 27. April 1934', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 7 vols, ed. by R. Tiedemann and H. Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977) II, pp. 683-701 (p. 687).
[2] Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer' [1934], pp. 93-100.
[3] See: Robert Leach, 'Brecht's Teacher', *Modern Drama*, 32 (1989), pp. 502-511.
[4] Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer' [1934], pp. 93-95
[5] Sergei Tret'iakov, 'Art in the Revolution and the Revolution in Art (Aesthetic Consumption and Production)' [1923], *October* 118, Fall (2006), pp. 11-18 (p. 14).
[6] See the discussion about Arvatov and Benjamin in John Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday. Revolutionary Praxis and the Fate of Cultural Theory* (Verso: London, 2006), pp. 51-58.

of this contradiction is embodied by productionist art, the only movement that switches from the problem of art-form to the problem of art method in its relation to labour.[1] In other words, it is the only art that questions its position in production and tries to collectivise and socialise its means of production. The 'proletarian artist' has to 'organise creatively any material, whether that be noise in music, street jargon in poetry, iron or aluminium in art industry, circus tricks in the theatre'.[2] Art as a commodity-form corresponds to the easel painting that segregates an artist from social production.[3] By contrast, the proletariat will attain as a matter of necessity to the 'socialisation of art labour' and the 'abolition of private property' at the level of the artistic means of production.[4]

We are now approaching the most important proposition: the integration of art into industrial production is not the *aestheticisation* of industrial objects, but the *transformation of production* as such.[5] The following statement almost coincides with that of Benjamin: 'Instead of socializing aesthetics, scholars aestheticized the social environment.'[6] It is striking that *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* (1936) can be read in parallel with *Art and Production* (1926) as its negative mirror image. It is as if Benjamin gives philosophical voice to 'Arvatov's example'. What is definite is that some of Benjamin's texts recollect his Soviet encounters with all those anonymous 'examples' glorified in the famous formula 'Such is the aestheticizing of politics, as practiced by fascism. Communism replies by politicizing art'.[7] Communism did indeed reply, but this reply is known mainly as a case study of 'Soviet examples'. The similarity between the two formulas was noticed several times, just as was the fact that Benjamin was in Moscow in 1926, the year when Arvatov published his work. However, this did not provoke a rethinking of Benjamin's attitude and, more importantly, a deepening knowledge about the theoretical and political foundation of productivism. Thus, Chubarov and Roberts acknowledge the necessity of

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[1] Boris Arvatov, *Iskusstvo i Proizvodstvo* [Art and Production], p. 85.
[2] Ibid., p. 98.
[3] Arvatov labels the individualistic mode of production in the easel painting (*stankovaia kartina*) 'easelism' (*stankovizm*), thus transforming a particular technique into a critical concept. 'Easelism' functions in the productionist discourse as a negative concept that characterises painting in general and bourgeois representational art in particular.
[4] Ibid., p. 103.
[5] Ibid., p. 91.
[6] Ibid., p.106.
[7] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* [1936], trans. and ed. by M. W. Jennings, B. Doherty, T. Y. Levin (Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 42.

revisiting the historiography of Benjamin's formula, but the former does not go beyond recognising this task, while the latter focuses on the notion of the everyday instead.[1] Dobrenko makes a more conventional 'post-Soviet' move. Nuancing Groys's argument about the generic proximity of the Soviet avant-garde to Stalinism, he accuses Arvatov of aestheticisation of the social environment against his own will. This somehow protects Benjamin from association with the Soviet troubles.[2]

It is obvious that Benjamin's Soviet period was just an episode in his fruitful and original philosophical development. It is also obvious that the traces of this Soviet problematic, although usually considered as Brechtian traces, are not foundational for his discourse. Finally, it is obvious that Tretyakov and Arvatov situate their formula in a completely different context and within a completely different tradition. However, it is still striking that in these texts Soviet intellectuals appear as unrecognisable noise – as the noise of the local aborigines whose names Benjamin might forget after his return to Germany. Alexei Penzin remarks that despite its acute observations, *Moscow Diary* (1926–27) does not escape the logic of naïve exoticisation of the Soviet everyday and the Soviet people. When Benjamin attributes the waste of time to the 'Asiatic' way of life, the reader is reminded of the colonial travel writings of the Marquise de Custine.[3] In other words, it is the *attitude* of 'Western Marxism' to the 'Asiatic' other that is striking.

The acknowledgment of the philosophical and epistemological foundation of the Proletkult's theory and practice may challenge the standard interpretative schemes of the Soviet avant-garde. In this regard we also have to mention the classic 1974 book by Peter Bürger. His *Theory of the Avant-Guarde* is a starting point for many art theorists who wish to model the Soviet avant-garde's epistemological construction. In his work, Bürger attempts to distinguish the avant-garde from modernism on the basis of 'the principle of the sublation of art in the praxis of life'.[4] The formula has ever since been attributed to the Soviet avant-garde. According to Bürger, the avant-garde – 'art within

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[1] See: Igor' Chubarov, *Kollektivnaia chuvstvennost': teorii i praktiki levogo avangarda* [The Collective Sensibility: Theories and Practices of the Left Avant-Garde], p. 190. We will come back to Roberts's point in due course: John Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday. Revolutionary Praxis and the Fate of Cultural Theory*, p. 51.

[2] Evgeny Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, trans. by J. M. Savage (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 40-46; Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism. Avant-Garde, Aesthetic, Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. by Ch. Rougle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[3] Alexei Penzin, 'Iskusstvo i biopolitika. Sovetskii avangard 1920-kh gg. i poslerevoliutsionnye formy zhizhni'[Art and Biopolitics. Soviet Avant-garde of 1920s and Post-revolutionary Forms of Life], in *Kul'tura i revoliutsiia: fragmenty sovetskogo opyta 1920-1930 gg,* ed. by E. V. Petrovskaia (Mocow: RAN, Institut filosofii, 2012), pp. 47-90 (p. 65).

[4] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Guarde*, trans. by M. Shaw (Manchester, Minneapolis: Manchester University Press, University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 51.

the praxis of life' – imposes a negative judgement on the institution of art, while on the side of modernist art Bürger finds expressed the bourgeois ideal of autonomy. It is an 'art in antagonistic relationship with the praxis of life' that preserves the institution of art by the very gesture of detaching itself from social practices. Thus, autonomy preserves and heteronomy destroys.

Bürger draws a schematic picture of the abstract oppositions between autonomy and heteronomy. These barely function either as critical or as sociological categories. Although he admits that it is for further research to investigate what kind of role art as an institution plays in socialist countries,[1] if we take the conjuncture of the Soviet avant-garde and what is in fact the very problematic formulation of the unification, integration or sublation of art in life, then immediately there arise more complex questions about the dialectics of autonomy and heteronomy. Bürger's 'sublation of art in the praxis of life' means organisation of everyday life according to the principles of art, 'when ... praxis is aesthetic and art is practical'.[2] The exemplary case of this sublation is Duchamp's intervention into mass production.[3] However, this is precisely what distinguishes the Soviet post-revolutionary model from the avant-garde that existed outside the revolutionary situation. The productivist platform, in conjuncture with proletarian culture, aimed to socialise art and in turn to communise society. Consequently, it intended to transform art into the production of the new forms of material culture. This does not mean that there is an 'epistemological break' between the European and Soviet avant-gardes. Rather, the revolution opened up a possibility of radicalising the capacity of artists to penetrate social relations.

Exactly for this reason, John Roberts's question – 'why intervene in the factory in the first place, given that what distinguishes the critical force of art is precisely its relative absence from the strictures of the value process'[4] – does not make much sense, because the intention of the Soviet avant-garde was to become a new mode of production, not a new mode of art (or a new 'ism'). Moreover, it is not 'the absence of a discussion on the value-form that prevents Productivism asking the most obvious question of its revolutionary efforts',[5] but a particular conception of art that makes up

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[1] Ibid., p. 114 f. References to Sergei Tretyakov and Boris Arvatov appear only in footnotes: Ibid, pp.: 112 f., 114 f.
[2] Ibid., p. 51.
[3] Ibid., pp. 51-52.
[4] John Roberts, 'Productivism and Its Contradictions', *Third Text*, 23, 5, September (2009), 527-536 (p. 532).
[5] Ibid.

these not quite 'obvious' revolutionary efforts. If one is not taking into account the Bogdanovian conception of organisation and use value, it is hard to understand why in the Soviet avant-garde art is discussed in relation to tectonics (Gan), life-building (Chuzhak) or production (Arvatov). The theory and practice of productivism is normative and constitutive: the commodity-form is to be destroyed and dis-alienated social relations are to be constituted through the use value of the new material culture.[1] This is the problematic: where art is seen as a force of production, critique is seen as a preliminary work towards affirmative activities and practices. In this sense the entire tendency constitutes not a critical, but rather a post-critical art. Therefore, productivism is not 'the utopian dissolution of art into the everyday'[2] – and this returns us to Bürger's problematic formulation – but the transformation of everyday life according to the principles of 'comradely cooperation' or 'proletarian monism', in Arvatov's terms;[3] a transformation that was historically possible under the conditions of the October revolution. That is to say, art's aim is not to be immanent to life, but to transform itself into the 'proletarian monism' in which art as we know it will disappear.

The exclusion of productivism from Proletkult's politics and philosophy produces a disciplinary art-historical understanding of the Soviet avant-garde that suits the globalised narrative of art history with its historical, regional and national niches – and with 'Western' modernist art as a chief guide to the archive shelves. On the other hand, the canonised interpretations produce misleading genealogies and ideological readings.[4] The epistemological perspective of Bogdanov's philosophy, Proletkult and productivism may help to reveal concatenations between 'the second line' of Marxism, avant-garde art and Platonov.

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[1] See: Boris Arvatov, 'Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing (Toward the Formulation of the Question)' [1926]; Alexei Gan, 'Nasha Bor'ba' [Our Struggle] [1920], in *Formalnyi metod. Antologiia russkogo modernizma,* ed. by S. Oushakine, III vols (Moscow, Ekaterinburg: Kabinetnyi uchenyi, 2016), vol. 1: Systems, pp. 861-863.
[2] John Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday. Revolutionary Praxis and the Fate of Cultural Theory*, p. 58.
[3] See Arvatov's chapter 'Cooperation in Art': Boris Arvatov, *Iskusstvo i Proizvodstvo* [Art and Production]*,* pp. 101-104.
[4] See the critique of the Cold War narrative about constructivism in: Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Cold War Constructivism', in *Reconstructing Modernism. Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945-1964,* ed. by S. Guilbaut (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1986), pp. 85-110.

C) A Counter-Narrative for Andrei Platonov.

Platonov's legacy has been persistently detached and separated out from the Marxist tradition and left avant-garde discourses. Instead, there have been attempts to analyse theoretical aspects of Platonov's oeuvre by connecting his writings with various philosophical traditions from phenomenology and psychoanalysis to Russian cosmism and religious philosophy. There are several reasons for this. Being an official member of Proletkult, Platonov has never belonged to any specific artistic group or literary journal, but was critically engaged in debates about LEF and the factographical platform in literature.[1] This background has been obscured, because the important part of his legacy – novels, short stories, essays, scientific articles, diaries and correspondence – remained unpublished until the mid-2000s, and most of the work is still unavailable to the English-speaking world.

Moreover, unlike Rodchenko or Tretyakov, Platonov never travelled abroad to represent new Soviet art and did not enjoy the privileges of a new intellectual left elite. A resident of the Voronezh Region,[2] of half-peasant and half-working class origin, Platonov had an exemplary communist biography. A worker at various factories and workshops before the revolution, an assistant of a machinist and a correspondent at the front line during the civil war, an engineer and a Proletkult activist in the early 1920s, he was busy with building irrigational systems and peasant communes, fighting droughts and famine, and propagating communism and electrification in the local newspapers. His texts cross the disciplinary borders of philosophy, science, political commentary and literature, while his mode of writing varies from manifesto and essay to novel and short story. Platonov moved to Moscow in 1926, at a time when the climate of early avant-garde experimentation had been gradually supplanted by the realist canon. His literary career went terribly wrong after Stalin's personal attack on his critical story about collectivisation *For The Future's Sake. A Poor Man's Chronicle* (1931). If Tretyakov was enthusiastically building kolkhoz under the supervision of party workers, engineer Platonov knew the village first-hand as a member of the community and activist. Being a

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[1] See: Andrei Platonov, 'Fabrika Literatury' [Factory of Literature] [1926c], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), vol. VIII, pp. 45-56. There is also an English translation, but it was made after the old and heavily corrected edition: Andrei Platonov, 'Factory of Literature' [1926d], *Molecular Red Reader,* trans. by A. Kalashyan (London: Verso, 2015), pp. 37-45. See also: Andrei Platonov, 'Anti-Sexus' [1926b], trans. by A. O. Fisher, *Cabinet*, 51, Fall (2013), 48–53.
[2] Southwest of the European part of Russia

supporter of the peasants' communes, his critique of collectivisation had both political and economic grounds.[1]

There is no space here to analyse an endless series of openly Stalinist articles that appeared in leading journals and discussed Platonov's work under the rubric of such categories as the 'kulak hireling' novel,[2] but we do need to take a look at the most remarkable piece from this set of criticisms. Alexander Gurvich was the first author who mentioned the timeless and unhistorical character of Platonov's writings. This interpretation, which stresses the lack of importance assigned to the Soviet context, would be very popular in post-Soviet studies. According to Gurvich, Platonov uses repetitive narrative structures that express the development of a pessimist metaphysics of life or, to put it in terms more closely related to the author's jargon, the 'animist cosmology of an individual'.[3] The weak and modest life of a human, an animal or a plant merges with nature, while history and social life represent no more than the appearance of life. In his writings Platonov always refers to the problem of an antagonism between the individual and social, desire and need, freedom and necessity; and this antagonism is to be solved by means of a metaphysical and religious way of thinking about common life in which the individual would disappear in collective, nature or space. His communism is a 'monastery of socialist belief',[4] because the asceticism and the suffering of his characters indicate a Christian nature that has nothing to do with communism.[5] In addition to his anti-historicism, Gurvich also attacked Platonov's understanding of class. Lenin's theory of spontaneity and organisation warns against Platonov's characters, their subjectivity and class belonging, since they act and behave according to the logic of disorganised masses. Platonov's protagonist is usually a 'lumpenised holy fool' who wanders or just passively exists in an absolutely unconscious, instinctive manner, and who most often acts at random, whether in the

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[1] See Voronezh's biography of Platonov: Oleg Lasunskii, *Zhitel' rodnogo goroda* [The Citizen of a Hometown] (Voronezh: Tsentr dukhovnogo vozrozhdeniia Chernozhemnogo kraia, 2007). About the Moscow period see: Natal'ia Kornienko, 'Andrei Platonov po ego pis'mam' [Andrei Platonov from His Letters], in Andrei Platonov, *'Ia prozhil zhizn'': Pis'ma. 1920-1950'* (Moscow: Artel', 2013), pp. 7-72.
[2] See: Roman Poddubtsev, 'Tvorchestvo Andreia Platonova v otsenkakh sovetskoi kritiki 1920-1940 godov' [Andrei Platonov's Work in Soviet Criticism of 1920-1940s] (PhD, Moscow: Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2013), p. 8; Elena Antonova, 'Knigi Andreia Platonova v kritike 1927-1930 gg' [Andrei Platonov's Publications in the Criticism of 1927-1930s], *Strana filosofov Andreia Platonova: problemy tvorchestva*, 6 (2005), 527-546.
[3] Alexandr Gurvich, 'Andrei Platonov' [1937], in *Andrei Plaronov. Vospominaniia Sovremennikov. Materialy k biografii*, ed. by N. V. Kornienko, E. D. Shubina (Moscow: Sovremennyi Pisatel', 1994), pp. 358-412 (p. 404).
[4] Ibid., p. 382.
[5] Ibid., pp. 368-388.

face of exploitation or great revolutionary events.[1] The proletariat as presented by Platonov is a piece of disorganised matter, floating unwillingly and contemplating itself in the uncontrolled chaos of nature. Accordingly, Platonov hypostases and naturalises spontaneity to such a degree that chaos and contingency become the essence of the world. In such a pessimism of spontaneity, the human is nothing but a feeble element of natural disorder. And due to this, the literary critic Mikhail Maizel concludes, Platonov deviates from Lenin's idea of the development of the working class from spontaneity to 'plannability' in class struggle.[2] What is also particular about these and many other publications of the period is that they suggest a canonical understanding of Platonov as the author of a religious philosophy of 'compassion', 'Christian humility',[3] animism, an active nihilism towards the State and the humanism of private individualistic spontaneity against the social totality.[4]

The severe party-minded criticism of the 1930s has contributed to Platonov's gradual oblivion. He was banned for decades in the Soviet Union. Some writings were partially rehabilitated only in the late 1960s, but the main novels were first published abroad. This paucity of materials is not the only reason why Platonov has been depoliticised and excluded from the Soviet Marxist tradition. The Cold War battles over his legacy pose the main difficulty. In the attempt to rehabilitate Platonov as a socialist writer, Soviet scholars often mutilated their own theoretical presumptions. They traced the influence of Marxism on Platonov, but this was done in a very specific Marxist-Leninist way. The appeal to Marxism in analyses of themes and categories in Platonov's corpus manifested only a quite indiscriminate desire to publish or write about yet another writer banned in the Soviet Union. It cannot be said to have arisen from appropriate research interests. Therefore Marxism plays in these texts a decorative role: it is a necessary, even ritualistic element of any book that was published in the Soviet Union.[5] The research into Platonov's work carried out in dissident intellectual circles

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[1] Mikhail Maizel', 'Oshybki mastera' [The Master's Mistakes] [1930], *Strana filosofov Andreia Platonova: problemy tvorchestva*, 6 (2005), 536-543 (p. 537).
[2] Ibid., pp. 537-539.
[3] Alexandr Gurvich, 'Andrei Platonov' [1937], pp.: 367, 369.
[4] Leopol'd Averbach, 'O tselostnykh masshtabakh i chastnykh Makarakh' [The View of Totality and the View of Makar's Particularity] [1929], in *Andrei Plaronov. Vospominaniia Sovremennikov. Materialy k biografii*, ed. by N. V. Kornienko, E. D. Shubina (Moscow: Sovremennyi Pisatel', 1994), pp. 256-265 (p. 543).
[5] The most remarkable examples of such an approach are the works of Alexandr Gladkov, 'V prekrasnom i iarostnom mire (O rasskazakh Andreia Platonova)' [In the Fierce and Beautiful World (On Andrei Platonov's Short Stories)], *Novyi Mir*, 49, 11 (1963), pp. 227-234; and Lev Alekseevich Shubin, 'Andrei

was rather one-sided, often ideologically motivated and written in non-academic forms such as essays, personal stories or manifestos, with no quotations or bibliography. Some interpreters set aside Platonov's communist ideas and Proletkult background in order to purify his profile as an imaginary predecessor of Soviet dissidents. Thus another problem is that the first late Soviet editions and even dissident publications of Platonov in Samizdat (the grassroots editions of censored publications often reproduced by hand) were partly rewritten, proofread stylistically, and scrubbed clean of some of their political allusions by their editors. Therefore, intellectuals with anti-Soviet political views removed speculations about communism, while scholars working in official publishing houses deleted 'anarchists' and 'Trotskyist' elements.[1] The most famous novels, such as *Chevengur* and *The Foundation Pit*, were reprinted in editions corresponding to the author's versions only in the 2000s, while some new manuscripts have been discovered only recently in Platonov's own archive.[2]

Nevertheless, Platonov has occupied a central position in post-Soviet cultural and literature studies since the early 1980s and has engaged the interest of various international research projects. However, since his essays remained unpublished until very recently, the main theoretical preoccupation of researchers was the avant-garde language of his prose and his philosophical mode of writing. In Platonov everything is unusual: narrative, style, grammatical usage, vocabulary and syntax. He created his own linguistic universe – a universe that is difficult to understand, imitate and reproduce, as it

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Platonov', *Voprosy literatury*, 6, 1967, pp. 26-54. Here the official canon of quotations from Marx, Engels and Lenin accompanies interpretation and dictates the main lines of criticism.

[1] See: Natal'ia Kornienko, 'Nasledie A. Platonova – ispytanie dlia filologicheskoi nauki' [Andrei Platonov's Legacy – An Ordeal for Philology], *Strana filosofov Andreia Platonova: problemy tvorchestva*, 4 (2000), 117-137.

[2] The Platonov Working Group of the Gorky Institute of World Literature releases academic publications concerning the writer. The head of the group, Natal'ia Kornienko, had conducted a huge amount of textual, research and publishing work. She co-edited the first publication of Platonov's collected works in eight volumes (2004—2011) and the first two volumes of complete works (2004–2016). Both editions contain careful contextual commentaries and archive materials. Kornienko collected and edited memoirs of Platonov's contemporaries, literary criticism in the press about Platonov from the 1920–1930s, and biographical materials and reports of discussions about Platonov's works. See: *Andrei Plaronov. Vospominaniia Sovremennikov. Materialy k biografii* [Andrei Platonov in the Memoirs of Contemporaries. Materials for the Biography], ed. by N. V. Kornienko, E. D. Shubina (Moscow: Sovremennyi Pisatel', 1994). *Arkhiv A. P. Platonova*, I [The Archive of Andrei Platonovich Platonov, I], ed. by N. V. Kornienko (Moscow: IMLI. 2009). The Platonov Working Group also published the notebooks of the writer: Andrei Platonov, *Zapisnye Knizhki* [The Notebooks], ed. by N. Kornienko, 2nd edn. (Moscow: Nasledie, 2006); and his correspondence: Andrei Platonov, *'Ia prozhil zhizn'': Pis'ma. 1920-1950'* ['I Have Lived Life': Correspondence. 1920-1950] (Moscow: Artel', 2013). Since the institute acquired a Platonov's archive in 2006, there has taken place – for the first time – the issue of new manuscripts, materials and documents. The texts are commented upon and introduced into scientific circulation. Due to the fragile state of manuscripts and the ongoing work in the archive, it is still closed to the general public.

is foreign both to the standards of the Russian spoken and literary language. Thus Platonov's works are considered in the context of a larger narrative of modernist literature. On the one hand, the writer is equated with Kafka, Beckett and Joyce, and on the other with the tradition of philosophical prose associated with Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy.[1]

The massive army of Platonov researchers can be compared to Kafka or Benjamin studies in the West. There is a huge corpus of secondary sources on Platonov's writings in different disciplines – not only in Russian, but also in German and English. However, the principal characteristic of the field is a broadly positivistic attitude to the text. Most of the studies produced have been undertaken in the field of linguistics and philology. This approach grew up not only as a response to the censorship and misreading of Platonov, but also due to the necessity of giving an objective and academic commentary on the recently published and republished works of Platonov, as well as to historicise and bring order to the various earlier interpretations and approaches.[2] Many works about Platonov depart from the analysis of his philosophical ideas. Research of this kind is most often comprised of comparative literature, criticism and intellectual history. For this reason, it is difficult to present such monographs as a single, unified body of work, since they often overlap both methodologically and conceptually with the research carried out in other disciplines. Instead, it is better to place individual works in one or another group on the basis of their discursive similarity, in order to avoid unproductive disciplinary debates. If we take an inter-disciplinary view, 'Platonov studies' can be roughly divided according to three main discursive frameworks, which provide readings of Platonov's philosophical and

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[1] For comparison with Kafka see: Robert Hodel, 'Platonov – Kafka – Walser: Opyt podgotovitel'nogo issledovaniia' [Platonov – Kafka – Walser: Preliminary Research Results], in *Tvorchestvo Andreia Platonova. Issledovaniia i materialy, 4*, ed. by E. I. Kolesnikova (Saint Petersburg: Nauka, 2008), pp. 48-61. For comparison with Dostoevsky's 'ontological poetics' and 'eternal questions' see: Alexei Bulygin, Alexandr Gushchin, *Plach ob umershem boge. Povest'-pritcha Andreia Platonova "Kotlovan"* [The Lamentation About the Dead God. The Novella-parable 'The Foundation Pit'] (Saint Petersburg: BOREY-PRINT, 1997), pp. 60-65, p. 73.

[2] The bibliography about Platonov in the Russian language consists of approximately 2000 research works: books, articles, reviews and biographies, and this is apart from PhD dissertations. This information is from the recent bibliographical source book for Platonov, presented in the Russian language: *Andrei Platonovich Platonov. Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* [Andrei Platonovich Platonov. Life and Work] (Moscow: Pashkov Dom, 2001). See the review of Anglo-American secondary literature on Platonov in: Ben Dhooge, Thomas Langerak, 'Platonov Revisited: Past and Present Views on the Land of the Philosophers', *Russian Literature*, 73, 1-2 (2013), pp. 1-14; Elena Kulikova, *Interpretatsiia tvorchestva Andreia Platonova v sovremennom angloiazychnom literaturovedenii* [Interpretation of Andrei Platonov's Work in Anglophone Literary Studies] (Moscow: MGUP imeni Ivana Fedorova, 2013).

political background – sovietological / metaphysical / psychoanalytical. These frameworks are provisional and chosen for our research purposes only. They will help us to build up our critique and establish a counter-narrative for Platonov.

The sovietological reading of Platonov became widespread in the 1980s, during Perestroika, and the period of transition in the 1990s. That discursive framework attributed to Platonov the role of a dissident fighting against the Stalinist regime and the Soviet order. Thus scholars enhanced their critique of *real socialism* and Marxism through the figure of a rediscovered writer who was banned under Stalin and left unpublished. The studies place on the theoretical agenda such themes as repression and revolutionary violence, the individual and the totalitarian regime, the ignorant masses and the intellectuals. The first liberal readings of Platonov coincide with the publication of the censored versions of his novels and short stories. They quickly became a bible for the dissident movement and liberal intellectuals in Russia. The characteristic features of these works are studies of Platonov's biography combined with excursions into Soviet intellectual history and Platonov's philosophical and literary influences. [1]

It is important to be aware that despite the historical differences, the lines of analysis and methodology in the sovietological readings are reminiscent of Stalin-era literary criticism. Researchers borrowed a lot of ideas from their orthodox and dogmatic colleagues, only changing the ultimate evaluation from negative to positive. In other words, what was counted as reactionary and outdated in the 1930s became progressive and 'avant-gardist' in the 1980s, while, vice versa, what was important and crucial in the Soviet Union – for example, the assessment of the writings in relation to their background in the working class – became rather pointless after the collapse of socialism. For instance, a number of sovietological readings pick up and develop the arguments of Stalinist critics, such as Gurvich's remarks about a merging of life with nature or the analysis of spontaneity and organisation made by Maizel. From 1970 onwards, the 'anarchist' aspect of a natural man losses its negative political connotations. Platonov's peculiar language and deep insight into peasant life begin to signify the 'village prose' tradition of the 1950–60s, which celebrates a traditionalist pre-revolutionary commune under the tsarist regime. Thus the first Soviet biography of Platonov written by Chalmaev is based on the nationalist interpretation of the writer's

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[1] Anastasiia Rybalchenko, 'A. Platonov v interpretatsii russkikh pisatelei vtoroi poloviny XX veka' [Andrei Platonov in the Interpretation of Russian Writers of the Second Half of the Twentieth Century], *Philologicheskii klass*, 2, 28 (2012), pp. 11-20. See also: Mikhail Geller, *Andrei Platonov v poiskakh schastiia* [Andrei Platonov in Search of Happiness] (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1982).

collectivism and peasantry.[1] The 'organic thinking' of Platonov's peasants becomes a local variant of philosophical Rousseauism,[2] while the importance of spontaneity for Platonov is linked to a new Perestroika-era concept of personal responsibility and freedom, where the 'natural' is abolished by the 'spiritual' and mass ignorance and backwardness are confronted with the resistance of a single hero.[3] This is how the notion of an individual organiser of collective life replaced the political concept of leadership.

Although Sovietological interpretations continue to exist until today, the symbolic culmination of such readings can be considered a 1989 special issue of the country's main academic journal in the field, *Questions of Philosophy,* titled 'Andrei Platonov – Writer and Philosopher'. The contributors, writing in the light of Perestroika's liberalism, recycled familiar discourses about 'religious atheism' and Platonov's humanism,[4] or linked the pre-logical thinking of the peasant to Stalinism. As a result it turns out that Platonov was a rigid critic of the communist project and its realisation by the brutal uneducated Soviet masses.[5] Therefore in 1980s the only task was to alter the ideological significance of 1930s critique. This has some far-reaching consequences for post-Soviet Platonov studies, which in a way have continued the tradition of a Stalinist criticism without realising it. Discussions about humanism and the fight for individualism against the totalitarian State are still in use in Platonov studies. They repeat yet again the arguments that were first revived in the 1980s.[6]

There is only one exceptional text in the issue. Valery Podoroga's article 'The Eunuch of the Soul: Positions of Reading and the World' proposes a poststructuralist

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[1] Viktor A. Chalmaev, *Andrei Platonov* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1978). If in the late 1970s Chalmaev's reading was, in a way, an extreme variation on the party principle, by virtue of its thematisation of the poor masses in literature, in the 1990s he expresses such conservatism even more openly: Viktor Chalmaev, 'Plennik svobody ("Nechaiannye" i vechnye katastrofy v prekrasnom i iarostnom mire Andreia Platonova') [Prisoner of Freedom (The 'Accidental' and Essential Catastrophes in the Fierce and Beautiful World of Andrei Platonov)], in *Strana filosofov Andreia Platonova: problemy tvorchestva*, 1, (1994), pp. 3-50

[2] L. G. Babenko, 'Chelovek i mir v rasskazakh A. Platonova 20-kh godov' [Man and World in Andrei Platonov's Short Stories of 1920s], *Problemy stilia i zhanra v sovetskoi literature*, 8 (1976), pp. 77-85.

[3] See: Nina Malugina, *Estetika Andreia Platonova* [The Aesthetics of Andrei Platonov], (Irkutsk: Irkutskii Universitet, 1985), pp. 12-41, p. 119; Natal'ia Georgievna Poltavtseva, *Filosofskaia proza A. Platonova* [Philosophical Prose of Andrei Platonov] (Rostov-on-Don: RGU, 1981).

[4] Svetlana Semenova, 'Serdechnyi myslitel'' [Heartful Thinker], *Voprosy Philosophii*, 3 (1989), 26-31.

[5] Dmitrii Furman, 'Sotvorenie novoi zemli i novogo neba' [Creating a New Earth and a New Heaven], *Voprosy Filosofii*, 3, pp. 34-36.

[6] Vera Dmitrievna Serafimova, *A. Platonov i filosofsko-esteticheskie iskaniia russkoi literatury 2-i poloviny XX veka* [Andrei Platonov and Philosophical-Aesthetical Quest of Russian Literature of the Second Half of the Twentieth Century] (Moscow: Prometei, 2006). Serafimova virtually dedicates this work to the justification of Platonov's humanism and liberalism against 'totalitarianism'.

methodology for the analysis of Platonov's literature that was unusual in the period. Podoroga's philosophy is in some respects close to Jameson's cultural theory. It is based on the method of 'analytical anthropology', where cultural materials, such as texts, art objects and films, are employed as a tool to reveal the anthropological content of an object being researched. This method joins together poststructuralist readings of the texts, phenomenology and the Adornian critical analysis of culture. Podoroga understands Platonov's revolutionary prose in terms of the phenomenology of perception, 'a special art of seeing' of the revolutionary events. The village life and the revolutionary violence are depicted here in a manner similar to Dziga Vertov's kino-eye. Platonov alienates the reader from the immediate horror of observed events – of hunger, mass executions or death – by externalising and depersonalising events and action through the minimal topological grammar of spatial positions and objectifying linguistic devices.[1] It is precisely this field of vision that obscures the authorial position, but just as in Vertov, Platonov's kino-eye does not simply observe the chronicles of revolutionary events, but organises a communist point of view on the social totality.

Sovietological interpretations led to a common understanding of Platonov's work in terms of the anti-historicity of his broader philosophical concerns, in which revolution and Soviet history have little if any place. What we call here 'metaphysical interpretations' mainly investigate Platonov's subject – a poor peasant or a nomadic community – from the point of view of Russsian religious philosophy or existentialism. The broader spectrum of ontological problems developed by Platonov is linked to the paradigm of a secular materialist Christian doctrine of the post-revolutionary Cosmism movement.[2] Because of Platonov's preoccupation with the production and reproduction of life and his view of communism as the new form of life after the end of capitalist history, his natural philosophy and monist understanding of being are often seen as a continuation of Gnosticism and the neo-Christian programme of immortality developed

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[1] See: Valerii Alexandrovich Podoroga, 'Evnukh dushi: Pozitsii chteniia i mir Platonova' [The Eunuch of the Soul: Positions of Reading and the World of Platonov], *Voprosy Philosophii*, 3 (1989), pp. 21-26. Podoroga expanded and translated this article into English: Valerii Podoroga, 'The Eunuch of the Soul: Positions of Reading and the World of Platonov', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 90. 2 (1991), 357–408. Podoroga's text remains one of the best Russian-language publications on Platonov. We will return to this text in due course.
[2] This is characterised by scientific speculations about the abolition of death and colonisation of space in communist society. See, for example, works of Tsiolkovsky: Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, *Selected works*, trans. by G. Yankovsky (Moscow: Mir Publishers, 1968).

by Nikolai Fedorov in his doctrine *Philosophy of the Common Task*.[1] Fedorov inverts the Orthodox understanding of life, death and life after death, arguing that the resurrection is not a miracle of God after the Second Advent, but a scientific practice that people are able to implement in the modern era thanks to the development of science and technologies.[2] Platonov's remarks on the abolition of sex and the slavery of biological reproduction are then recognised as a variant on Rozanov's apologetics for the traditional family and community or Berdyaev's argument about the differences between Western rationality and Eastern Orthodox spirituality. Even the understanding of the declassed peasants and their contradictory existence under the party-form in Soviet society is thought to represent a contribution to the ontology of the so-called *sobornost*, i.e. the theory of a spontaneously organised spiritual community and the gnostic ethics of poverty.[3] There are also more conservative religious interpretations, in which Platonov's oeuvre is reduced to a version of Orthodox and Christian thinking. Researchers discuss biblical allusions and references to medieval and modern Orthodox religious thinkers in his works.[4] It should be noted that the majority of such

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[1] In her account of English criticism on Platonov, Kulikova states that the theosophical and religious interpretations of the writer's ideas came from the Russian right-wing émigré milieu: Elena Kulikova, *Interpretatsiia tvorchestva Andreia Platonova v sovremennom angloiazychnom literaturovedenii* [Interpretation of Andrei Platonov's Work in Anglophone Literary Studies]. At approximately the same time, the Soviet philosopher Semenova compared the religious ideas of Fedorov with Platonov's concept of death and memory. She concluded that the writer simply adopted Fedorov to his prose: Svetlana Semenova, 'V usilii k budushchemu vremeni (filosofiia A. Platonova)' [In Effort of Future Time (The Philosophy of Andrei Platonov)], *Literaturnaia Gruziia,* 11 (1979), pp. 104-121. Following Semenova's work, many scholars have developed similar comparisons. See, for example: Oleg Pavlov, 'Metafizika rysskoi prozy' [The Metaphysics of Russian Prose], *Oktiabr'*, 1 (1998), 167-183; Aleksei Varlamov, 'Na adovom dne communizma. A. Platonov ot 'Chevengura' do 'Kotlovana' [In the Deep Hell of Communism. Andrei Platonov from 'Chevengur' to 'The Foundation Pit'], *Oktiabr'*, 7 (2010), 122-161; Alexei Teskey, *Platonov and Fyodorov: The influence of Christian Philosophy On a Soviet writer* (Amersham: Avebury, 1982); Natal'ia Mikhailovna Efimova, *Ontologiia russkogo kosmizma (N. Fedorov, K. Tsiolkovsky, A. Platonov)* [The Anthology of Russian Cosmism (Nikolai Fedorov, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, Andrei Platonov)] (Kirov: Viatskii gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyi universitet, 2006).
[2] Nikolai F. Fedorov, *What Was Man Created For? The Philosophy of the Common Task: Selected Works*, trans. by E. Koutaissoff and M. Minto (London: Honeyglen, 1990).
[3] About Rozanov and Berdyaev's influences see: Evgenii Iablokov 'Lunnye motivy u V. Rozonova i A. Platonova' [The Motives of the Moon in Vasily Rozanov and Andrei Platonov], *Rozanovskie chteniia*, (1993), 32-33; About *sobornost'* and Solovyov's influence see: Elena Tolstaya-Segal, 'Literaturnyi material v proze Andreia Platonova' [Literary Materials in Andrei Platonov's Work], in *Voz'mi Na Radost': To Honour Jeanne Van Der Eng-Liedmeier*, ed. by B. J. Amsenga, J. Pama, W. G. Weststeijn (Amsterdam: Adviescommissie voor de Leerplanontwikkeling Russisch, 1980), pp. 193–204; Leonid Karasev, 'O nachalakh cheloveka (V. Solovyov i A. Platonov)' [On the Origins of Man. (Vladimir Solovyov and Andrei Platonov], *Sviaz' vremen*, 1 (2001), 188-192.
[4] See, for example: Elena Proskurina, *Poetika misterial'nosti v proze Andreia Platonova kontsa 20-30-kh godov* [The Poetics of Mystery in Andrei Platonov's Work of the Late 1920-30s] (Novosibirsk: Sibirskii Khronograf, 2001); Alexander A. Dyrdin, *Dychovnoe i esteticheskoe v russkoi filosofskoi proze XX veka* [The Spiritual and the Aesthetical in the Russian Philosophical Prose of Twentieth Century] (Ul'ianovsk: UlGTY, 2004).

comparisons do not stand up to academic scrutiny and are reminiscent of antiscientific clerical propaganda. Such a religious perspective contradicts the Marxist and materialist topics found in Platonov's writings – the dialectics of matter and consciousness, the understanding of class and gender, the attempt to give voice to the speech and thinking of the historically repressed peasantry, and the status of the poorest class, not to mention the furious criticism of religion in 1920s and 1930s.

However, today more and more researchers pay attention to Platonov's atheistic views. Viugin notes that for Platonov, religion, and the Orthodox Church in particular, are valuable only as a form of popular consciousness and thinking; they are structures that cannot be thrown out or destroyed all at once.[1] Viugin also argues that the writer is not alien to a Feuerbachian integrity of religion and atheism, in the sense that the Christian religious consciousness humanises god, so that atheism only concludes a pre-existing anthropocentric logic.[2] As proof of this statement, he gives a remarkable example from Platonov's Notebooks:

> There is a god and there is no god. Both are faithful. God became immediately present etc., therefore he was divided among everything and as it were destroyed himself in that act. And his 'successors', having in themselves the god's 'coal', claim that there is no god – and that is right. 'There is a God', – claim others, and this is true as well. That is all atheism and religion.[3]

The religious background to Platonov's ideas is enormously exaggerated. Although Fedorov was a very popular figure among both left- and right-wing intellectuals and artists in the post-revolutionary context, and such inspiration cannot be ignored, it should be kept in mind that it was a common trend, a necessary reference and the point of departure for critique in much early Soviet culture. Fedorov, who was called the 'Moscow Socrates' due to his way of life and class origin, was the living prototype of the people's thinker. He developed his thought in spoken form only and spent his money on a philosophic commune for poor children. For this reason, Fedorov was

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[1] Valerii Iur'evich V'iugin, *Andrei Platonov: Poetika Zagadki* [Andrei Platonov: The Poetics of Enigma] (Saint Petersburg: RKhGI, 2004), pp. 309-310.
[2] Ibid., pp. 315-322.
[3] Andrei Platonov, *Zapisnye Knizhki* [The Notebooks], ed. by N. Kornienko, 2nd edn. (Moscow: Nasledie, 2006), p. 257.

highly respected by Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Tsiolkovsky, Platonov and even by the young Gorky.[1] His thought was important in combination with his praxis. Seifrid supports this argument: 'What made Fedorov's eccentric philosophy appealing to Russian intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' was that like Marx 'Fedorov wanted to change the world rather than just analyse it'. According to his philosophy: 'people must rebel against their slavery to the "blind forces of nature" and become aware of themselves … humanity should first master a series of practical tasks aimed at transforming the earth into a truly hospitable home'.[2] While Fedorov was very well known and enormously popular, there is nothing to suggest that any other religious doctrines enjoyed a similar degree of support on the left. Platonov was a prominent reader of philosophy, but there is no evidence that he was a follower of any one particular current or a doctrine, be it cosmism or Bogdanov's organisational theory.[3]

Platonov's depoliticisation via a metaphysical interpretive trend corresponds to the post-1991 moment in Russia, which legitimated not only a religious renaissance in the domain of theory, but also the return of phenomenology and existentialism. In many works, Platonov's peasant appears either as an illustrator of Heideggerian notions of homelessness and Being-toward-death – questioning the negativity of life forces and nothingness [4] and suffering from longing (*toská*) and boredom [5] – or else as a 'metaphysician of everyday life' and an example of a Husserlian 'life-world of practical consciousness'.[6] Many studies of this kind give an impression that Platonov merely echoes the models of existential philosophy. More nuanced readings, however, admit

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[1] Svetlana Semenova, 'Filosofiia voskresheniia u N. F. Fedorova' [The Philosophy of Resurrection in Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov], in N. F. Fedorov, *Sobranie Sochinenii* (Moscow: Progress, 1995), I, pp. 5-33 (pp. 5-12).

[2] Thomas Seifrid, *A Companion to Andrei Platonov's 'The Foundation Pit'* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2009), pp. 49-50.

[3] Tolstaya-Segal mentions eclecticism of Platonov's conceptual approach that includes dialectical materialism, philosophy of life, cosmism and positivism: Elena Tolstaya-Segal, Naturfilosofskie temy v tvorchestve A. Platonova 20-kh-30-kh godov [The Themes of Natural Philosophy in Andrei Platonov's Work of 1920-1930s], *Slavica Hierosolymitana*, IV (1979), 223—254 (p. 343); About eclecticism write also Günther: Hans Günther, 'A mixture of living creatures: Man and Animal in the Works of Andrei Platonov', *Ulbandus: The Slavic Review of Columbia University*, 14 (2012a), 251-272.

[4] Mikhail N. Zolotonosov, 'Lozhnoe solntse' [A Fallacious Sun], in *Andrei Platonov. Mir Tvorchestva*, ed. by N. V. Kornienko, E. D. Shubina (Moscow: Sovremennyi pisatel, 1994), pp. 246-283; Mikhail Epstein, 'Iazyk bytiia u Andreia Platonova' [The Language of Being in Andrei Platonov], *Voprosy Literatury*, 2 (2006), 146-164.

[5] Iurii Levin, 'Ot sintaksisa k smyslu i dal'she (o "Kotlovane" A. Platonova)' [From Syntax to Sense and Further (On 'The Foundation Pit' of Andrei Platonov)], *Voprosy Iazykoznaniia*, 1 (1991), 170-173; Larisa Cherviakova, '*Filosofiia Sushchestvovaniia' Andreia Platonova* [Andrei Platonov's 'Philosophy of Existence'] (Saratov: Saratovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2010).

[6] Natalia Poltavtseva, 'The Husserlian, the Cosmicist and the Pushkinian in Platonov', *Essays in Poetics. Essays in Poetics. The Journal of the British Neo-Formalist Corcle. Platonov Special Issue In Two Volumes*, 2, 27 (2001), 97-113 (p. 106).

that the feelings of longing (*toská*) and boredom to which Platanov's characters give voice are not an absolute condition, but are rather the starting point of the movement towards the experience of comradeship. This is in contrast with existentialism, for which there exist no ascensions to non-alienated being.[1] Nevertheless, in most cases, apologists of existentialism deny the political value of Platonov's comradeship and prefer to isolate his works in a concept of cyclical life functioning: of death and continuous biological reproduction[2] or of 'models of existential consciousness'.[3] Karasev makes the same analytical manoeuvre when he tries to remove political, social and historical contexts in order to find 'ontological layers' in Platonov's texts. He studies the writer's metaphysical systematicity by way of the appearance of repetitive concepts, which he argues add up to an ontology of void and substance. Platonov's characters struggle with the devastating entropy of the empty spaces of steppes and deserts by attempting to achieve a density of collective life. This accumulation of density – a substance against the void and the emptiness of nature – is a 'struggle for life'. Despite the abstract metaphysical framework of this analysis, Karasev comes to a thought-provoking conclusion. The struggle of substance (density, life) with void (nature) leads Platonov to a *corporeal understanding of communism* as the accumulation of bodily proximity.[4] Similar observations about a corporal understanding of communism occur in many other works.[5] The concept precisely reflects Platonov's views; however, in order to refine it, it is necessary to consider how this understanding of communism is integrated into Platonov's materialism and how it deals with the problematisation of class in his writings. The conception of 'corporeal communism' inevitably involves political arguments, for the simple reason that the concept of

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[1] Alexandra Piskunova, Valerii Piskunov, 'Sokrovennyi Platonov. K vykhodu v svet romana "Chevengur", povestei "Kotlovan" i "Iuvenil'noe more" [The Innermost Platonov. To the Publications of 'Chevengur', 'The Foundation Pit' and 'The Sea of Youth'], *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1 (1989), 17-29 (p. 19).

[2] Natal'ia Vital'evna Zlydneva, *Motivika prozy Andreia Platonova* [The Motivation of Andrei Platonov's Prose] (Moscow: Institut slavianovedeniia RAN, 2006), p. 16.

[3] Larisa Cherviakova, '*Filosofiia Sushchestvovaniia' Andreia Platonova* [Andrei Platonov's 'Philosophy of Existence'], pp. 8-9.

[4] Leonid Karasev, *Dvizhenie po sklonu v sochineniiakh A. Platonova* [Downhill Travel in Andrei Platonov's Work] (Moscow: RGGY, 2002), pp. 38-69.

[5] See: Hisako Kubo, 'Novoe telo: communizm i telesnost' u Andreia Platonova' [A New Body. Communism and Corporeality in Andrei Platonov], in *Osushchestvlennaia vozmozhnost' A. Platonova i XX vek. Materialy III Mezhdunarodnykh Platonovskikh chtenii*, ed. by E. G. Mushchenko (Voronezh: Voronezhskii universitet, 2001), pp. 23–29; Nina Malygina, *Khudozhestvennyi mir Andreia Platonova* [Artistic World of Andrei Platonov] (Moscow: MPU, 1995), pp. 140-145; Natal'ia Mikhailovna Efimova, *Ontologiia russkogo kosmizma (N. Fedorov, K. Tsiolkovsky, A. Platonov)* [The Anthology of Russian Cosmism (Nikolai Fedorov, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, Andrei Platonov)], pp. 84-86.

communism is politically charged. Corporeal communism crosses the borders that bring together avant-garde discussions of life-building and Bogdanov's theory of labour causality. It does not constitute a communism of the cosmic forces of substance and void, but the communism of the nomadic post-revolutionary peasants, who build Soviet forms of life out of the available materials. In our view, this has to involve an analysis of Platonov's arguments about the dialectics of body and thought, as well as the active and constitutive status of poverty and the poor.

The Marxist part of Platonov's legacy had been repressed for decades due to historical circumstances. Marxism lost its topicality for scholars, but since the early 1990s, when the Marxist tradition began to be re-examined, Platonov's writings have attracted the attention of many Marxist philosophers and cultural theorists. Nevertheless, the dominant interpretation continues to attribute to Platonov a Heideggerian outlook. Almost all of Platonov's writings depict the open and empty spaces of the steppe and desert. Fredric Jameson compares this devastated nature with the representation in Western modernist literature of the nineteenth century of what he calls the 'catastrophe of modernity': the smashing to pieces of the traditional social structures that resulted in the world's transformation into rough matter. The primary components of rough matter have to be formed into new organisations, as was the case in industrial capitalism. In industrial capitalism two types of time clash again and again – the time of production (working hours) and the time of the struggle with 'vegetative being' or 'vegetal time' – the time of life, growth and death. This second time is always forgotten because of the excess of new social relations and exchanges under capitalism. In other words, modernisation and the break with nature open into a brief moment of naked being and vegetative life, which will then be quickly covered over by the accumulating layers of capitalist culture.[1] Likewise, Slavoj Žižek theorises the end of capitalism in Platonov as the catastrophism of modernity, pointing to the apocalyptic theme of the 'end of history' in early avant-garde discourses.[2] It is not surprising that, apart from the political ontology of nature, Jameson and Žižek are also occupied with Platonov's notions of longing (*toská*) and desire (for communism), which unlike in Russian existentialist theories obtain a psychoanalytic colouration.[3] This boredom with

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[1] Fredric Jameson, 'Utopia, Modernism and Death', in *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 73–128 (pp. 81-86).
[2] Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010), pp. 6-15.
[3] Fredric Jameson, 'Utopia, Modernism and Death', pp. 91-113; Slavoj Žižek, 'Sexuality in the Posthuman Age', *Stasis,* 4, 1 (2016), 54-69.

nature and archaic Russian life, as well as the desire for communism and comradeship, are treated from the perspective of Lacanian theory in Jonathan Flatley's book *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*,[1] and are developed in relation to sex, gender and post-revolutionary melancholy by Artemy Magun, Igor Chybarov and Aaron Shuster.[2] Furthermore, the problematisation of desire and sex in Platonov can be found in earlier research carried out in the field of Slavic Studies.[3] However, sometimes the will to discover similarities between Platonov and Western thought provokes misinterpretations: where Platonov writes about *necessity* and *need*, researchers often see *desire*, and where he writes about longing (*toská*), they see the Lacanian 'lack' and melancholic feeling of loss. In our argument we insist that Platonov is not concerned with a psychoanalytic ontology of desire and lack, and that if he does use some Freudian motives they need to be interpreted more precisely.

Even if Jameson writes from the position of the Western reader of the 1990s – the reader whose experience of urban life has led him to forget the vegetal time of life and in this sense to 'forget modernism' more broadly – such a treatment seems to miss a similar experience of 'naked being' belonging to the capitalist present, namely in wars and immigration, privatisation and the expropriation of land. There is nothing sublime in Platonov's 'naked being'. It rather points to the distribution of poverty in the village – a condition that applies equally both to social and natural phenomena. The immanence of poverty, the *poor life*, to use Platonov's own term, and its political agency, are what is at stake here. In comparison with the 1990s the negative nature of Platonov also reveals itself in the problem of climate change, and, what is more, Platonov already predicts this in the 1920s and 1930s. This aspect of the work has been brought to attention only recently by McKenzie Wark, who acknowledges Platonov and

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[1] Jonathan Flatley, 'Andrei Platonov's Revolutionary Melancholia: Friendship and Toska in Chevengur', in *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 158–90.

[2] See: Artemy Magun, 'Otritsatel'naia revoliutsiia Andreia Platonova' [Negative Revolution of Andrei Platonov], *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 106 (2010), 65–95 (pp. 65-66); Igor' Chubarov, 'Smert' pola ili "bezmolvie liubvi"' (Obrazy seksual'nosti i smerti v proizvedeniiakh Andreia Platonova i Nikolaia Fedorova)' [The Death of Sex or Silence of Love (The Image of Sexuality and Death in Works of Andrei Platonov and Nikolai Fedorov)], *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 107 (2011), 231 – 252; Igor Chubarov, 'Die 'literarischen' Maschinen Andrej Platonovs, in *Maschinentheorien/Theoriemaschinen*, ed. by Hg. H-C. Von Herrmann and W. Velminsk (Berlin: Lang, Peter, Gmbh, 2012), pp. 83-96; Aaron Schuster, 'Sex and Anti-Sex. The Monstrous Modern Couple', *Cabinet,* 51, Fall (2013), pp. 41-47.

[3] See: Eric Naiman, 'Andrej Platonov and the Inadmissibility of Desire', *Russian Literature*, 23 (1988), pp. 321-322; Eliot Borenstein, *Men Without Women: Masculinity and Revolution in Russian Fiction, 1917-1929* (Durham: Duke University, 2000), pp. 191-224; Philip Ross Bullock, *The Feminine in the Prose of Andrey Platonov* (Oxford: Legenda, 2005).

Bogdanov's proximity and tries to build a theory of the Anthropocene on the basis of their materialism.[1]

Unlike in early Western Marxism, the problematisation of nature and ecology is central for both Bogdanov and Platonov. Wark's is definitely an interesting attempt to bring this fact to light, but the limitations of his contribution derive from the fact that the conceptual core of Soviet theory mutates into popular intellectual history – a narrative into which the discourses of contemporary climate science, feminist materialism and Deleuzo-Guattarian minoritarian or molecular politics are variously intermixed. Wark makes several historical and geographical manoeuvres, and not all of these are free of historical myths, faked facts and inaccurate exposition of concepts. As a result, the theories of which he makes use together mount up to an incoherent and mosaic-like cacophony of voices. Bogdanov and Platonov in Wark's analyses become almost identical twins, despite the fact that the work he is citing contradicts such direct and non-mediated bonding. For instance, unlike Bogdanov, Platonov was an open critic of technicism and Taylorism. His thinking is dialectical and assumes that negativity is a primary force of social determination. This was never accepted in Bogdanov's philosophy. Nevertheless, Wark's intuition about Platonov's ecologically informed thinking and molecular materialist perspective is not without justice.[2] A similar materialist perspective characterises Oxana Timofeeva's study on animality and nature. She places at the centre of the analysis Platonov's concept of *poor life*, which she uses to discuss the revolutionary agency of the non-human actors who appear in the writer's prose.[3] The trend represented by the 'new materialism' may however be a misleading trajectory, since animals and nature never seem to perform the human role of revolutionary fighters. Rather what they reveal, and here Timofeeva is absolutely right, is the universal state of poverty and exploitation, equally present both in social life and in the animal kingdom. On this basis Timofeeva develops a new understanding of Platonov's longing (*toská*) as the 'urgency to act' against the cosmic state of poverty. Her interpretation of poor life breaks with the dominant psychoanalytical and Heideggerian interpretations.[4] Timofeeva is the only scholar who pays attention to this

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[1] Mckenzie Wark, *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene* (London: Verso Books, 2015).

[2] See the detailed critique of Wark in our review of 'Molecular Red': Maria Chehonadskih, 'The Anthropocene in 90 Minutes', *Mute* (2015) <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/anthropocene-90-minutes > [Accessed 18 January 2017].

[3] Oxana Timofeeva, *History of Animals: an Essay on Negativity, Immanence and Freedom* (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Academie, 2012).

[4] Ibid., pp. 131-134.

concept, and it provides her with a powerful tool for shifting the discussion from the existential to the materialist mode.

Podoroga's programme of analytical anthropology and the abovementioned studies by the younger generation of Marxist philosophers in Russia can be seen as an effort to situate Russian literature and Soviet essayistic writing within the history of philosophy. Karasev numbered Platonov among the writers of philosophical prose and he insists on the consciously over-developed theoretical views of Platonov.[1] The treatment of Platonov's legacy as part of a local philosophical tradition can also be found in Magun's study.[2] In the first two decades after the revolution, philosophy was a transdisciplinary project in Marxism, and many philosophers were at the same time poets, mathematicians, writers or activists. Their approach differed considerably from the academic and canonical style of doing philosophy in Western countries. Platonov's corpus of writings is a part of this Soviet tradition and it can be understood as a *specific form of philosophical thinking*. The circle of Podoroga's followers has started to work in this direction, but has not set itself a similar methodological task. The complicated relationship between philosophy and Marxism will be explored further in our study.

The study of Platonov is a large research field and it is still growing and developing in Russia, as well as internationally. However, as we have already mentioned above, the Marxist and philosophical legacy of Platonov has not yet been studied thoroughly. There are many ongoing problems relating to the interpretation of Soviet philosophy and culture in general. In spite of the fact that the general tendency is towards a more careful and less simplistic approach to the Soviet legacy, ideological readings in the fashion of the Cold War, overgeneralisations or complete ignorance of the socialist historical and intellectual contexts are commonplace in many philosophical studies of Platonov. Studies of Platonov that situate themselves in the context of Russian religious philosophy, and of Fedorov's thought in particular, are numerous. However, comparison of Platonov with Fedorov encounters a problem in the atheism of the former, and it is more than difficult to apply his political views to the tradition of the Orthodox Church. On the other hand, apart from general remarks made to support the idea that Platonov's work represents a continuation of the religious philosophical

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[1] Leonid Karasev, *Dvizhenie po sklonu v sochineniiakh A. Platonova* [Downhill Travel in Andrei Platonov's Work].

[2] Artemy Magun, 'Otritsatel'naia revoliutsiia Andreia Platonova' [Negative Revolution of Andrei Platonov], pp. 65-66.

tradition, no scholar has attempted to provide any specific, undogmatic understanding of Platonov's alleged religiosity and mysticism of a kind that might help to define his ideas and political views. The same is true when it comes to the comparisons of Platonov with existentialism, modernist literature or particular psychoanalytical concepts. Without any doubt, there are many similarities and links between the writer's legacy and these traditions, but there is also some uniqueness and peculiarity in Platonov that cannot be ignored. This is the combination of an existential and ontological problematic with Marxist and Soviet understandings of society and nature. Platonov is an interesting figure precisely because he experiments with traditions and ideas that look so completely opposed to one another that it is impossible to imagine their conjunction in different, less radical historical and cultural contexts.

We will argue that Platonov's class theory developed in a dialogue with different Bolshevik and Marxist thinkers. Lenin's electrification plan [1] inspired Platonov's scientific and engineering inventions and became the basis for his Marxist understanding of nature and communism. The theory of spontaneity and organisation, of party-form and the Soviets, also played an important role for Platonov. He refers to the debates about Bogdanov's ideas of organisation, life-building and technologies in order to develop his own view on these questions. This Marxist context of the writer's ideas remains unknown, and while there are some historical investigations concerning the connections between Platonov with Bogdanov, only Wark's study details their philosophical links. [2]

Poor and declassed subjects inhabit almost every story and novel by Platonov. However, no specific research has been made on the problem of class in Platonov's writings; there are only sovietological commentaries and fragmentary thoughts about this topic scattered throughout some of the articles mentioned above. Platonov's understanding of poverty and the class relation is interspersed throughout his novels, short sorties and essays and never appears in systematic form, hence the size of the corpus of Platonov's texts that the present research will examine. The point of departure is the 1920s and early 1930s, when Platonov reflected on the post-revolutionary class structure, collectivisation and the theory of communism. Philosophical interpretations of Platonov are the main secondary sources in our study. However, as the materials and

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[1]Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 'Notes on Electrification' [1921], in *Collected Works,* 45 vols, trans. by J. Fineberg and G. Hanna (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960-70), vol. 42: 1917-1923 (1977), pp. 280-281.
[2] Mckenzie Wark, *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene.*

problems under discussion are poorly investigated, where it is necessary we will turn to other disciplines for advice. Methodologically, this decision is a necessary condition for the reconstruction of Platonov's ontology and the development of an independent philosophical interpretation. Hence, our task is not to show the 'true' face of Platonov's philosophy, but to rethink Platonov's questions in the light of the problem of Soviet Marxist epistemologies. Avoiding the reduction of Platonov to either religious metaphysical problems or a caricature of the Bolsheviks, the present research attempts to exercise a dialectical approach and to explicate the contradictions in Platonov's thought in order to provide new means of interpretation free of simplifications and ideological one-sidedness.

Even within the new Marxist readings, the tendency to interpret Platonov coincides with the traditional approach to read literature within the established philosophical problematic. Chubarov is the only exception here. His study places Platonov within the ambit of the theories and practices of constructivism and productivism.[1] With this single exception, all other readings ignore the autonomous status of Soviet epistemologies and as a result, even if unconsciously, regard Proletkult and the left avant-garde as theories and practices that lack self-determination. The operation of withholding Platonov from the milieu of Soviet epistemologies and the incorporation of his project into the Western modernist tradition (Kafka and Beckett) – or else of a particular concept into the authoritative traditions of Western thought (Freudian, Heideggerian or Deleuzian) – is used to confirm the proposition that Platonov has a weight within the narrative of modernist art. In the same sense, it shows that his work is absolutely suitable for the existing interpretative models of 'Western' modernity.

The counter-narrative for Platonov thus brings his legacy back into the milieu of Soviet epistemologies and at the same time recovers the autonomous status of his work. The history of a lonely figure is a favourite genre of art history and literary theory, but just as much as Rodchenko, Lisitsky, Schklovsky or Vertov, Platonov cannot be fully understood if one separates him from his Soviet intellectual and epistemological context. The present research uses newly published Russian-language editions of Platonov's works and archive materials, which include novels, correspondence, notebooks, scientific articles, and his essays on art, literature and philosophy. Since

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[1] Igor' Chubarov, *Kollektivnaia chuvstvennost': teorii i praktiki levogo avangarda* [The Collective Sensibility: Theories and Practices of the Left Avant-Garde].

Platonov's archive is still closed for the general public, we rely on publications with extracts from manuscripts and drafts, as well as philological, historical and theoretical commentaries on his texts.[1] Our counter-narrative for Platonov, therefore, relies on a systematic approach to his legacy. Instead of merely interpreting, it constructs the conceptual core – the materialist ontology of poor life – immanent to Platonov's project and treats it within the constellation of Bogdanov, Proletkult and Vygotsky.

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Motivating our critical examination of Western Marxism was the goal of demonstrating a double-coded reception of Soviet Marxism. It has been revealed that membership of the official communist party is the driving force of demarcation between Marxist and non-Marxist theories. The party would be identical to the unity of theory and practice, the October revolution and post-revolutionary Marxist theory. The contradiction between exercises in party critique and the necessity of remaining within the tradition is the unconscious of Western Marxism and the main cause of reproduction of scholastic accounts of Soviet history, politics and theory, exemplified by what we called the genre of *Leniniana*. In a contemporary context, this contradiction replicates the rigid reproduction of dichotomies and divisions between 'Western' and 'Eastern' on the one hand, and, on the other, between 'Non-Soviet' within the Soviet and negatively Soviet –

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[1] V'iugin's comparative analysis of *Chevengur*'s earlier drafts, which has helped to expand philosophical commentaries, is particularly interesting. See: Valerii Iur'evich V'iugin, 'Iz nabliudenii nad rukopis'iu romana "Chevengur" (Ot avtobiografii k khudozhestvennoi obobshchennosti) [From the Investigations of 'Chevengur's' Manuscript (From Autobiography to Creative Generalisations)], in *Tvorchestvo Andreia Platonova. Issledovaniia i materialy,* 1, ed. by RAN, Institute of Russian Literature (Saint-Petersburg: Nauka, 1995), pp. 128-147; Valerii Iur'evich V'iugin, 'Final "Chevengura" (K tvorcheskoi istorii proizvedeniia)' [The Epilogue of 'Chevengur'. To the Creative History of the Work], in *Tvorchestvo Andreia Platonova. Issledovaniia i materialy, 2,* ed. by V. U. V'iugin (Saint-Petersburg: Nauka, 2000a), pp. 166-253. Valerii Iur'evich V'iugin, 'Povest' Kotlovan v kontekste tvorchestva A. Platonova' ['The Foundation Pit' in the Context of Platonov's Work], in *Kotlovan. Text, materialy tvorcheskoi istorii* (Saint Petersburg: Nauka, 2000b), pp. 5-18 (p. 13). He also summarised the main ideas of his research on Platonov in English publication: Valerii Iurevich Viugin, 'The Poetics of Enigma and the Enigma of Poetics', *Essays in Poetics. The Journal of the British Neo-Formalist Corcle. Platonov Special Issue In Two Volumes*, 1, 26 (2001), pp. 1-13. Besides this, V'iugin published the first academic edition of *The Foundation Pit*, including earlier drafts of the manuscript: Andrei Platonov, *Kotlovan. Text, materialy tvorcheskoi istorii* [The Foundation Pit. Text, The Materials of Its Historical Origin] [1930a], ed. by V. U. V'iugin (Saint Petersburg: Nauka, 2000).

dissidents (Platonov) versus conformists, modernists (avant-garde art) versus Stalinists, or non-Marxists (Vygotsky and Bogdanov) versus Marxists proper (Lenin).

The discovery of the 'second interpretative line' within Soviet materialism by Negri coincides with our intention to rethink Soviet Marxism and its epistemological constructions. Joining Vygotsky with Platonov, Bogdanov and Proletkult with Productivism, and Productivism and Proletkult with Platonov leads us to the articulation of a counter-narrative for Soviet Marxism. This constellation involves a critical examination of Soviet avant-garde discourses and Platonov studies across the disciplinary borders of philosophy, art, critical theory and literary studies.

We want to stress that the previous suppression of Proletkult does not provoke us to take a defensive position in the fashion of a 'decolonial turn'. It does not mean a return to 'authentic' local knowledge and epistemologies hidden behind the grand narrative of the communist party. We aim to show that 'local knowledge' is linked to the grand narrative and that it is simultaneous to its historical situatedness *within* this narrative. The local borrows its intellectual and political energies from the structure in which it is set. Both in its critical and affirmative pathos it derives from, and begins with, the 'grand narrative' of Bolshevism and the October revolution.

Neither do we want to proclaim the return of the repressed. Bogdanov and Proletkult do not present for us the philosophical and political alternative buried in a historical past. Such work cannot be transported from its moment of origin into our present times in the manner of a resurrected monster. We have to be clear that our own concern is with the development of an epistemological framework that allows us to unfold Platonov's philosophy and politics. It allows us to see how Bolshevism and Proletkult infected him and what resulted from this encounter. Bogdanov opens for us a window onto Platonov's project, as does the conjuncture of Lenin and Proletkult. Bogdanov is also an entry point into the problem of Soviet productivism and the controversies of the avant-garde art and politics. The relationship between Platonov and Vygotsky must be established in a different way. Here we rather see how Vygotsky takes up Platonov's problematic and places it in a different context. He manages to overcome certain problems that we find in Platonov's negative category of poor life. In Platonov and Vygotsky we can trace the problematisation of central Marxist issues, such as object and subject, matter and form, and social and collective. In this respect what remains crucial is the concept of *poor life* and the approach to the notion of poverty.

The relevant question to pose to such an exposition would be as follows. Why still concern ourselves with Marxism if our constellation breaks with the accepted understanding of what Marxism is? If historically similar manoeuvres and gestures drove some philosophers away from Marxism, why not abandon this notion altogether? Soviet Marxism as such could be treated as post-Marxism, because, as we shall see, it does not continue the critique of political economy and capitalism, but instead relates itself to Marxism as a legacy and foundation for a post-capitalist history in which the critique of capitalism is irrelevant. In this respect, Lenin's *State and Revolution* and later writings are also post-Marxist. That is why one tends to label his work Bolshevik theory. Nevertheless, with regards to Bogdanov, Platonov and Vygotsky, Bolshevism would be a problematic name, while post-Marxism is taken to refer to the movement beyond traditional Marxism that occurred in France and Italy during the 1980s. The best solution seems to be to consider the dialectics of 'Soviet Marxism' as a name for a political project that had a beginning and an end, and a particular epistemological construction that was related to the legacy of Marx in a specifically Soviet, post-critical sense.

Another point to make is that the focus on party and movement, capitalism and revolution represents a Western perspective, and one which was blind to the aftermath of the revolution. The Western idea is that Stalinism represented the dark times that closed a great epoch of revolutionary enthusiasm and that there was no single positive conclusion to be derived from the post-revolutionary Soviet experience. Our concerns are diametrically opposed to this agenda. The question is what comes *after the revolution*: what set of problems and decisions emerges out of the revolutionary experience? Merleau-Ponty correctly says that it is a mistake to think that a revolution will carry out an immanent negative movement until communism is established. The problem of permanent revolution is precisely that, according to Merleau-Ponty, it mystifies the restlessness of the revolutionary negativity that is the restlessness of work against counterrevolution. It is the fantasy of the party to think that positive affirmation is tantamount to the conservation of all unsolved problems. Quite the opposite is the case. Any actual revolution establishes an order and then abolishes itself in the new post-revolutionary positivity.[1] It is an idealist utopia to think that participation and enthusiasm are inexhaustible. The aftermath of revolution is what we discuss here in

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[1] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, pp. 89-90.

terms of the construction of Soviet epistemology. It articulates the unique historical and social experience of living and writing *under* and *after* the revolution.

Chapter II
The Project of a Proletarian Encyclopaedia in Empirio-Marxism and the Soviet Avant-garde

Introduction: A Constellation of Bogdanov and Platonov

> The point of objective nonrelative perception corresponds to a centre of ultimate organization. Only having departed from the world and from oneself is it possible to see what all of this is and what all of this wants to be.
> Andrei Platonov (1922)[1]

> *The basis of kino-eye*:
> The establishment of a visual (kino-eye) and auditory (radio-ear) class bond between the proletarians of all nations and lands on a platform of the communist deciphering of world relations.
> Dziga Vertov (1922)[2]

The articulation of a constellation demands that we first present the decisions and choices made in this chapter. The constellation of Platonov and Bogdanov cuts through the debates in philosophy, art and the political theory of the Proletkult movement.[3] It brings together thinkers that at first glance may seem distant to each other. However, it is through the constellation that a set of unified ontological assumptions unfolds and a compound epistemological whole reveals itself. The articulation of the constellation assumes that the method of Platonov's prose can be examined from the perspective of an early Soviet universalism that bridges the concept of proletarian culture and the understanding of sensibility and perception in terms of a Marxian theory of praxis. This

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[1] Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'Proletarskaia poeziia' [Proletarian Poetry] [1922], in *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2004), vol. I (2), pp. 162–67 (pp. 163–64). The English translation of the quotation is taken from Valerii Podoroga, 'The Eunuch of the Soul: Positions of Reading and the World of Platonov', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 90. 2 (1991), 357–408 (p. 357).

[2] Dziga Vertov, Kino-Eye [1922], in *The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, trans. by K. O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 60–79 (p. 66). Translation corrected.

[3] Proletkult is a contraction of Proletarian Cultural-Enlightenment Organisations. Proletkul't was a mass autonomous proletarian organisation that existed from 1917 to 1932. Lunacharsky opened the first branch of Proletkult in Petersburg in the week prior to the October Revolution and Bogdanov organised a Moscow branch soon after the October Revolution. Proletkult had art studios, various educational programmes and scientific clubs. Proletkult lost its autonomy in 1922 after its reorganisation into the associations of proletarian writers, artists, musicians and dramatic study, subordinated to Narkompros. By the end of the 1920s, most of the Proletkult's associations had become supporters of traditional art and Stalin's politics. About early Proletkult see: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Education and the Arts Under Lunacharsky. October 1917–1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 89–100.

involves a close reading of the epistemological construction of the Soviet avant-garde that leads to the discovery of a strong connection between what we may call Empirio-Marxism and the art theory of the 1920s.

The interest in empiricism among the pre-revolutionary Marxists of the Russian Empire corresponds to the positivist orientation of the Second International, according to which Marx's negative attitude to contemplative philosophical discourse has to be understood as a claim to reliance on the methods of the empirical sciences.[1] Before the October Revolution, Bogdanov was in close philosophical dialogue with Anatoly Lunacharsky and Maxim Gorky. They shared an appreciation of positivism and were great supporters of so-called Machism. Lunacharsky was Avenarius's student in Zurich in 1895 and wrote a number of introductory articles, popularising empirio-criticism for a Russian audience.[2] Bogdanov was a student of physics at Moscow University and a graduate of medicine at the University of Kharkiv (Ukraine).[3] He praised holistic

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[1] See my summery of the corresponding discussions in Chapter 1.

[2] It includes a summery of Avenarius's *Kritik der reinen Erfahrung*. See: Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, *R. Avenarius: Kritika chistogo opyta, v populiarnom izlozhenii A. Lunacharskogo – Novaia teoriia positivnogo idealisma (Holzapfel. panideal). Kriticheskoe izlozhenie A. Lunacharskogo* [Critique of Pure Experience in a Popular Outline of Anatoly Lunacharsky. New Theory of Positive Idealism *(Holzapfel. panideal)*. Critical Outline of Anatoly Lunacharsky] (Moscow: Izdanie S. Dorovatovskago and A. Charyshnikova, 1905). About Lunacharsky's period of study in Zurich see: Daniela Steila, 'V.V. Tronin i A.V. Lunacharsky v Tsurikhe: sud'by dvukh russkikh filosofov-emigrantov' [Tronin and Lunacharsky in Zurich. Destiny of Two Russian Philosophers and Emigrants], in *Russkaia emigratsiia do 1917 goda – laboratoriia liberal'noi i revoliutsionnoi mysli* (Saint Petersburg: Evropeiskii Dom, 1997), pp. 128–42. Lunacharsky and Gorky, however, were also enthusiastic readers of Nietzsche. They managed to synthesise the scientific theory of Avenarius and a Marxist-grounded idea of collectivism with the Nietzschean will to power and critique of morality. See a programmatic article of Gorky: Maxim Gorky, 'Razrushenie lichnosti' [Destruction of the Personality], in *Ocherki Filosofii kollektivizma. Sbornik pervyi* (Sankt Peterburg: Znanie, 1909), pp. 351–403. About Lunacharsky's relationship to empirio-criticism and Nietzsche see: Daniela Steila, *Scienza e rivoluzione. La recezione dell'empiriocriticismo nella cultura russa (1877–1910)* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1996), pp. 145–56.

[3] The biography of Bogdanov is typical of many Marxist activists of that time. He was born in 1873 in Grodno province (now Poland) and was the child of a teacher, Malinovsky. Like many other Bolsheviks, he took a pen-name for the sake of his conspiratorial activities. Bogdanov was expelled from Moscow University after his arrest for activist-related activities and was exiled first to Tula (Central Russia) in 1894 and then to Vologda (Northwest Russia) in 1989. In Tula, Bogdanov led a Marxist reading group for the local factory workers together with other exiled activists and future members of the Bolshevik party. He joined the Bolsheviks in 1903 and was expelled in 1910 from the central committee of the party for his ultra-left positions. Unlike Lenin he spent most of his time in Russia and actively participated in the first Russian revolution in 1905. Bogdanov was a leader of the Vpered fraction of the Bolshevik Party from 1909 to 1911. Vpered organised a proletarian university for Russian working-class activists in Capri and Bologna between 1909 and 1910. Bogdanov left Vpered in 1911 and returned to Russia the following year. In 1917 he established Proletkult and was a principal theoretician of the movement. In 1920 Bogdanov was pushed out of the Proletkult's Central Committee. He left the organisation in 1921 and dedicated his life to science. Bogdanov died after an unsuccessful blood-transfusion experiment in 1928. See Bogdanov's biography in: Alexander Alexandrovich Bogdanov, 'Avtobiografiia' [Autobiography], in *Neizvestnyi Bogdanov*, 3 vols, ed. by N. S. Antonova, N. V. Drozdova (Moscow: IZ "AIRO – XX", 1995), I, pp. 18–21. In English: Georges Haupt and Jean-Jaques Marie, *Makers of the Russian Revolution: Biographies of Bolshevik Leaders* (London: Allen & Unwin LTd, 1974), pp. 286–92.

methods and proposed to unmask the philosophical justification of individualism and dualism by developing a conception of experience as a homogeneous field of collective praxis.

However, this is not an obvious reference point in relation to the avant-garde, since there is no consistent presence of the problem of experience. Indeed, with one minor exception, there are no open references to empiricism, Mach or Bogdanov in the published archive of the Soviet avant-garde. It was more common to praise Lenin, and one can easily recall Dziga Vertov's 'Three Songs About Lenin' or Aleksandr Rodchenko's 'Worker's Club', with a portrait of the leader of the proletariat on a wall. This speaks to the fact that Lenin had colossal authority among artists. Nonetheless, Empiricist Marxism was a very popular local tradition and Bogdanov had a greater intellectual authority in the art community due to his establishment of Proletkult. There are no official portraits of Bogdanov, but his philosophy in fact populates every single art-related book. This has been acknowledged only in Soviet publications, where avant-gardism is associated exclusively with Bogdanov's ideas and political views.[1] The further development of Engelsian Marxism that is undertaken in Lenin's work, and which resulted in the doctrine of dialectical materialism, can be considered as a political struggle with Bogdanov's authority, not only in politics, but also in theory.

One can observe that the Soviet avant-garde proposed a set of interrelated but contradictory concepts, among them construction, tectonics, visual orientation, factography, production, montage of life and life-building. This series of concepts refers simultaneously to what would normally be treated as attributes of the formal method in art and to a theory of social constructivism that departs from the discussion about the new Soviet man and ends up with Stalinist's 'engineers of the human soul'. The contradiction implied by the coexistence of an aesthetic account with a constructivist vitalism may lead to the separation of the positive and negative sides of the Soviet avant-garde, or to the subsumption of both aspects beneath a blanket judgement that sees in both theories an immanent totalitarianism. The confusion, however, comes from a false genealogical attribution of these concepts to formalist aesthetics and social constructivism. What has to be accounted for, and what is normally ignored, in relation to these concepts is the background of Empirio-Marxism. This forgotten page of Soviet

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[1] See, for example, a militant Leninist critique of Bogdanovist productivism in: Anatolii Il'ich Mazaev, *Konzepziia proizvodstvennogo iskusstva 20-kh godov* [The Conception of 1920s Production Art] (Moscow: Nauka, 1975).

philosophy and political theory may clarify, nuance and in fact redefine the epistemological principles involved with the conceptual series that was set out above.

Bogdanov's philosophy mediates methodologies and practices of art production, while Platonov's literature radicalises, enriches, shifts and brings into practice the philosophical and political claims of Bogdanov and Proletkult. The unity of philosophy, radical politics and avant-garde art in this constellation relies upon an uneasy negotiation between the negation of the abovementioned fields of knowledge in a new universal theory of organisation, and the reformulation of philosophy, radical politics and art in the new terms of post-revolutionary proletarian knowledge.

A) Strategic Unity of Marxism and Empiricism in Bogdanov

Bogdanov once attributed to his philosophy the title of 'Marxian theory of praxis',[1] but for several reasons, the more appropriate name for this philosophy would be a labour theory of thinking. He brings together the notorious *Empiriokritizismus*, the philosophy of language of Ludwig Noiré and Max Müller and the early Bolsheviks' understanding of Marx. This fusion first results in the philosophy of empiriomonism (1900s)[2] and then leads Bogdanov to the universal science of organisation or *tektology* (1910s).[3] Both doctrines correspond to the political idea of proletarian culture, implemented in the Proletkult movement after the October Revolution in 1917.

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[1] Alexander Bogdanov, 'Taina Nauki' [The Enigma of Science] [1918g], in *Russkii pozitivizm. Lesevich, Iushkevich, Bogdanov*, ed. by S. S. Gusev, A. F. Zamaleeva, A. I. Novikova 1995 (Saint Petersburg: Nauka), pp. 259-286 (p. 261).

[2] The main philosophical work by Bogdanov is *Empiriomonism*, in three volumes. Our analysis mainly relies on this work. See: Alexander Alexandrovich Bogdanov, *Empiriomonizm: Stat'i po filosofii* [Empiriomonism. Articles on Philosophy] [1905–6] (Moscow: Knizhnyi Klub Knigovek, 2014). Another important source for us is Alexander Bogdanov, *The Philosophy of Living Experience. Popular Outlines* [1912b], trans. by D. G. Rowley (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016). In this book, Bogdanov presents his main philosophical ideas in a popular manner. Such a popular exposition of philosophy was common among Russian revolutionary circles. It represented a specific genre, designed for working-class activists. We also refer to the Russian original where necessary: Alexander Bogdanov, *Filosofiia zhivogo opyta. Materializm, Empiriokritistizm, Dialekticheskii materializm, Empiriomonizm. Populiarnye ocherki* [The Philosophy of Living Experience. Materialism, Empiriocriticism, Dialectical Materialism, Empiriomonism. Popular Outlines] [1912a], 3rd ed. (Petrograd: Izdatel'stvo M. I. Semenova, 1923).

[3] See: Alexander Bogdanov, *Tektologiia. Vseobshchaia organizatsionnaia nauka* [Tektology. The Universal Organisational Science] [1913–21] (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1989). Only the first part of 'Tektology' was translated into English: Alexander Bogdanov, *Tektology. Book 1*, trans. by A. Kartashov, V. Kelle, P. Bystrov (Hull: Centre for Systems Studies Press, 1996).

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The conceptual core of Bogdanov's labour theory lies in Richard Avenarius and Ernst Mach's epistemology of experience.[1] For Mach, Bogdanov claims, experience of the outer world is given in the conjunctions of the object's attributes. Decomposition of these attributes gives elementary sensations of space, time, colour, form and size, but the elements of experience are sensations only in psychical reality, whereas the same elements may belong to the physical bodies as attributes.[2] For Mach, object and sensations are one and the same thing, the only difference between the outer and inner processes is that they are connected and related to each other in a different way. Here Bogdanov complements Mach's analysis with Avenarius's conception of *dependent* and *independent series of experience.* This explains the difference of connectivity in the psychical and physical elements in terms of stability and contingency. If objects and sensations were the same thing, the former would depend on the contingent associative logic of the human psyche. Instead, reflection (*otrazhenie*) should be understood as a complex system of exchanges and feedbacks between the psychical and the physical: 'by changing its living environment, a living organism is indirectly changing itself, because changed environment in turn influences the living organism'.[3]

Bogdanov uses the term 'reflection' (*otrazhenie*) for polemical reasons. It is clear that the argument tackles Plekhanov's simple correlation of matter and thinking in reflection. In Plekhanov, thinking appears as the highest state of self-moving matter and reflection (*otrazhenie*) of the objective world in thinking is identical to the procedure of translation of the matter's influences – knowledge of sensations – into representations. Lenin joined this discussion later in 1909, almost repeating Plekhanov's arguments in his notorious theory of reflection.[4] Bogdanov sees reflection as the chain of feedbacks, interchanges and recompositions taking place between the physical and the psychical. The stability of the psychical is guaranteed by the influences of and exchanges with the physical. This assumption allows one to rethink the standpoint of experience in terms of a univocal plan of environment: the unity of the psychical and the physical unfolds as

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[1] See: Richard Avenarius, *Kritik der reinen Erfahrung* (Leipzig: Fues's Verlag (R. Reisland), 1888). Ernst Mach, *The Analysis of Sensations and the Relation of the Physical to the Psychical* [1906], trans. by C. M. Williams and S. Waterlow (New York: Dover Publications, 1959).
[2] Alexander Alexandrovich Bogdanov, *Empiriomonizm: Stat'i po filosofii* [Empiriomonism. Articles on Philosophy] [1905–6], pp. 10–13.
[3] Ibid., p. 107.
[4] About Plekhanov's epistemology see: Daniela Steila, *Genesis and Development of Plekhanov's Theory of Knowledge. A Marxist Between Anthropological Materialism and Physiology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991). About Lenin's theory of reflection and 'epistemological' debates between Lenin and Bogdanov see: Daniela Steila, *Scienza e rivoluzione. La recezione dell'empiriocriticismo nella cultura russa (1877–1910)*, pp. 223–58.

an exchange of sensations and properties of the object within an environment that is itself neutral to this distinction.

The environmental conception separates Bogdanov not only from the eighteenth-century mechanistic materialism and Soviet dialectical materialism that derives form it, but also from empiriocriticism. For Avenarius the outer world is independent, 'distinct' and free of contingency, whereas in the inner world connections depend on the incidentally changing conditions and states of an organism.[1] This classical reformulation of the rift between objective and subjective does not satisfy Bogdanov:

> [It] is the habit of separating 'psyche' and 'matter' by a whole chasm, considering them to be things that are absolutely heterogeneous and completely incommensurable … in reality there is no such absolute distinction, and even elements of experience in both 'worlds' are the same – only in a different interconnectedness. If that incredibly rapid flow of atoms and subatomic movements that constitutes matter appears in our normal experience as solid 'matter', then why should the living flow of psychical processes not appear in our normal experience as the organised tissue of the 'brain'?[2]

If environment is a chaos of elements, it must involve the organising force of resistance. The objective is not simply what is stable and distinct, but what is organised in experience as stable and distinct in the process of exchange and feedback.

The Russian word *stikhiinost'* is crucial for understanding Bogdanov's resolution of dualism. 'Stikhiinost'' corresponds to the English spontaneity, but it literally means chaos and elements of nature – *stikhiia*. 'Stikhiinost'' is the word that Lenin employs for the conceptualisation of the disorganised masses as opposed to the discipline of the proletarian party and it is the word that Bogdanov uses to ontologise organisation. Environment is the mediator of the reflected psychophysical or life-complexes. The heterogeneity of the environment only appears in perception as homogeneity and wholeness, but it can be further broken down into infinitely smaller elements. Conversely, this biological dimension of environment – the infinitely smaller

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[1] Alexander Alexandrovich Bogdanov, *Empiriomonizm: Stat'i po filosofii* [Empiriomonism. Articles on Philosophy] [1905–6], pp. 15–23.
[2] Alexander Bogdanov, *The Philosophy of Living Experience. Popular Outlines* [1912b], p. 232. Translation corrected.

elements of the inorganic world – appears in human perception as a pure indifference, but as a 'monist tendency' it can be regarded as the same complexes of elements at their lowest level of organisation.[1] Homogeneity thus exists in the relations between elements, but not in the elements themselves.[2] This constructive organisational force of the interconnectedness between elements of experience is a monist point of view onto the otherwise heterogeneous self-organising flow of the psychical and physical concatenations of the life-complexes: 'The universe presents itself to us as an endless flow of organising activity. The ether of electrical and light waves was probably that primeval universal environment from which matter with its forces – and later on also life – crystallised'[3]. Taken as an isolated entity, the psychic and physical complex is a pure state of spontaneity, a pure *stikhiinost'*, or the lowest level of organisation. It preserves higher organisational forms only in analysis and in the practical composition of the elements into new series. Answering Plekhanov's question 'What existed prior to human experience?', Bogdanov claims:

> If we completely abstract ourselves from humanity and its methods of labour and cognition, then there would be no physical experience, no world of regular phenomena. There would remain only the elemental spontaneity [*stikhiinost'*] of the universe, which would know no laws, since it could not measure, calculate, or communicate. In order to understand it and to master it, we are obliged once again to introduce humanity, which would exert its efforts to struggle with that spontaneity [*stikhiinost'*], to know it, change it, and organise it. Then, once again, we would obtain physical experience, with its objective – i.e. socially worked-out and socially useful – regularity.[4]

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[1] Alexander Alexandrovich Bogdanov, *Empiriomonizm: Stat'i po filosofii* [Empiriomonism. Articles on Philosophy] [1905–6], pp. 106–11.
[2] Ibid., p. 13.
[3] Alexander Bogdanov, *The Philosophy of Living Experience. Popular Outlines* [1912b], p. 232.
[4] Ibid., p. 219. For the account of 'stikhiinost'' see the Russian original of this quote: Alexander Bogdanov, *Filosofiia zhivogo opyta. Materializm, Empiriokritistizm, Dialekticheskii materializm, Empiriomonizm. Populiarnye ocherki* [The Philosophy of Living Experience. Materialism, Empiriocriticism, Dialectical Materialism, Empiriomonism. Popular Outlines] [1912a], p. 241.

Organisation is the ability to bring elements of the 'lowest' life in nature and 'unconscious' life in society to the non-contradictory and rational form of the psychophysical unity.

As this implies, Bogdanov does not reduce experience to sensations, because for him 'elements' represent both the physical and psychical dimensions of life. Unlike in empiriocriticism, perception is not a pre-given subject position, but a historically formed quality of the subject. The ideas of size, space, time and colour are rather mediated by a series of organising practical steps. A colour becomes an element of experience only after the operation of separation and the abstraction of the property of colour from an object. Perception of colour does not exist prior to the practical operation and appears rather as a pure indifference within the set of psychical and physical concatenations. This means that objectivity is a historically produced entity that must have an equal meaning for the praxis of many people: 'The objective character of the physical world is what exists not only for me, but for all, and is that what has distinct meaning for all […] Objectivity of the physical series lies in its universal significance (*obshcheznachimost*)'.[1] Thus, Bogdanov's main disagreement with empiriocriticism lies in his rejection of the treatment of the object as an inert stability. Following Marx, he insists on the unity of subject and object in practice.

Such a Marxist move would normally lead to the dismissal of the field of experience in favour of the field of social practice. For instance, Lukács admits the impossibility of uniting object and subject according to the principles of rationalism and empiricism, in our case 'stability' and 'contingency'. Such principles unavoidably meet the 'frontiers' of the irrational, because nothing guides the projection of the rational forms into the projected object. According to Lukács, the antinomy between the 'non-authentic' subject and 'authentic' object must lead to the production of 'the subject of production'. In other words, philosophy has to move from the logic of isolated entities to the dialectical unity of subject and object, where the object is seen as a product of the subject. An object as a product of the subject, or concrete objectivity (*Vergegenständlichung*), is at the level of relations between things, not things themselves.[2] Nevertheless, within a similar practice-oriented procedure Bogdanov chooses a different direction and at first it may seem that he reproduces the trap of the

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[1] Alexander Alexandrovich Bogdanov, *Empiriomonizm: Stat'i po filosofii* [Empiriomonism. Articles on Philosophy] [1905-1906], p. 21.

[2] See: Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics* [1923], trans. by R. Livingstone (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1971), pp. 119–49.

irrational. If Lukács relies on the Hegelian principle of totality, Bogdanov's totality remains strictly speaking empiricist. Although the unity of subject and object is praxis, this praxis is understood as the generative causality of labour organisation.

Most notably, Bogdanov does not reject the notion of experience, but distinguishes between individual and social experience, and individual and social *modes of organisation*. The existence of deities is objective not in an absolute, but in a social sense. For so long as peasants believe in wood goblins or house spirits and think that deities are part of physical reality, deities exist for this social group. The non-critical forms of 'folk knowledge' and the critical forms of 'scientific knowledge' are objective, because they derive from the social practices of peasants and intellectuals respectively. Similarly, in commodity fetishism, social relations between people appear as relations between things. This form of objectivity characterises 'exchange society' and it may disappear when the point of view of socialist means of production is taken into account.[1] And when an individual or a group use collectively accumulated knowledge to create a new system on this basis, it will not be a quantitative difference that will determine objectivity, but rather a qualitative one. Thus, objectivity could be 'on the side of only one person who was at variance with all the rest of humanity', because 'majority and organisation are not only not the same thing, but down to the present day they have increasingly appeared to be on opposite sides.[2] In other words, folk knowledge may evolve to the level of scientific and critical knowledge, while an individual mode of organisation could become a universal point of view, but this happens only when analysis and exchange between groups brings along with it a *social mode of organisation*, and, therefore, mutual understanding and a gradual transformation of points of view.

Universal significance (*obshcheznachimost*) is related to the concurrence of the psychical with the physical. The 'antithesis of the physical and psychical series comes out of the difference between socially organised experience, and experience organised individually'.[3] The question of dualism is to be solved by looking at these two series as 'biological and organised tendencies', namely, species being and experiences of social being.[4] This duality can be overcome only in further collective organisation of

[1] Alexander Bogdanov, *The Philosophy of Living Experience. Popular Outlines* [1912b], pp. 214–15.
[2] Ibid., p. 214.
[3] Alexander Alexandrovich Bogdanov, *Empiriomonizm: Stat'i po filosofii* [Empiriomonism. Articles on Philosophy] [1905–6], p. 30.
[4] Ibid., p. 34.

experience, when humanity will achieve harmony and the non-contradictory rational coexistence of the physical and the psychical. Thus it is the organisational task of practical epistemology to accomplish such a harmony:

> Knowledge has to deal […] with the entire complexes, which aren't given directly, but have been formed by knowledge from the variety of elements of experience […] Exactly this active-organizational work of knowledge is able, in our opinion, to break with dualist contradictions and introduce a truly harmonious worldview. [1] […] It will be an organisational type of monism that systematises experience, monism of the knowing method.[2]

Empiriomonism tends to reformulate the biological and the social in terms of the organisational logic of psychophysical complexes. Practice comes out of experience and at the same time articulates the degree of organisation. A low and partial degree of organisation corresponds to *stikhiinist'* of nature and to irrational capitalist social relations, while homogeneous wholeness corresponds to the worldview of the proletarian collectivist culture in relation to labour. This means that the development of knowledge progresses – at least tendentially – from the individual and conflicting partial systems of knowledge to a universal epistemology. To make an exit from partial and irrational systems would mean to reach the state of universal significance (*obshcheznachimost*) in experience. Unless there is universal significance, which is the same as classless society, it is impossible to grasp totality, since totality is the field of experience and in class society this experience cannot be anything but partial.

The perspective of labour is able to detect a degree of organisation and to rethink the history of society in terms of its capacities to advance *stikhiinist'*. As a result, Bogdanov's philosophy of elements de facto proposes a monist ontology of labour. Labour is understood here as a practical and analytical operation of division and combination – junctions and disjunctions that make use of the elements of nature according to the needs of production. The psychophysical complexes appear first in labour activity; they are the extracted material to be analysed. In the wake of the rise of

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[1] In Bogdanov, 'worldview' corresponds to the neo-Kantian notion of *Weltanschauung*.
[2] Ibid., p. 44.

labour technics (*tekhniki*)[1], the sum of the elements grows, but their usage depends on 'technical and cognitive goals'.[2] The labouring subject appeals either to actions or the attributes of objects out of necessity. In machinery and manufacturing, labour uses particular sets of elements that differ from the elements used in mechanics or chemistry. This is what Bogdanov called 'practical analysis and synthesis'[3].

The process of taking up an element out of experience involves close interactions between physical and intellectual labour. Even though this interaction is not immediate, and in some cases (for example, in theoretical activity) it includes various forms of mediation, physical labour still grounds any kind of activity. Bogdanov gives an example of abstract category-formation and claims that the invention of the concept of the atom was determined by the development of the technics (*tekhniki*) of splitting and crushing.[4] The same scheme of physical labour-determinism applies to social relations, or, as Bogdanov calls it, to the 'organisation of people'[5]. It also means that any kind of activity is defined as productive. In this sense, reality is a sum of the efforts made by labour and of the materials' resistances to labour. The labouring subjects shape reality by taking up an element from experience; and this process of shaping and composing the elements of experience Bogdanov identifies with the Marxian *Verdinglichung*.[6]

An element of experience is a product of labour, while labour's use of the elements of experience corresponds to use value, on the grounds that it emerges from a social need to distinguish and differentiate experience in order to develop production. Finally, the value of labour is the amount of energy spent in the process of an element's 'extraction'.[7] As a result, it turns out that even before labour power enters any economic

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[1] Here and elsewhere we use the word technics in a German sense of *Technik* that derives from the Greek *tekhne* and refers to the art of material production. In the context of the nineteenth century philosophy of technology, the discourse of *Technik* attributes to the new profession of an engineer a status of the creative inventor (a *Techniker*), who attains a high level of sophistication in the engineering in the process of education (*Bildung*). See: Eric Schatzberg, '*Technik* Comes to America: Changing Meanings of Technology before 1930', *Technology and Culture,* 47, 3 (2006), 486-512 (pp. 494-501). This German meaning of technics fully applies to its Soviet equivalent *tekhnika*. It refers to material and cultural skills, as well as to machinery. We will discuss the German philosophy of technology in relation to Bogdanov in due course.

[2] Alexander Bogdanov, 'Empiriomonizm' [1913], in *Russkii pozitivizm. Lesevich, Iushkevich, Bogdanov*, ed. by S. S. Gysev, A. F. Zamaleeva, A. I. Novikova 1995 (Saint Petersburg: Nauka), pp. 203-240 (p. 213).

[3] Alexander Bogdanov, *The Philosophy of Living Experience. Popular Outlines* [1912b], p. 70.

[4] Ibid., p. 209.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Alexander Bogdanov, 'Empiriomonizm' [1913], in *Russkii pozitivizm. Lesevich, Iushkevich, Bogdanov*, p. 211.

[7] Alexander Bogdanov, *The Philosophy of Living Experience. Popular Outlines* [1912b], p. 209.

relations, the fact of 'extraction' of an element already implies economic properties. Either way, use value appears as an ontological principle of usefulness and value as an essentially vitalist quality. In other words, Bogdanov does not distinguish between the content of production and the economic forms of this content.[1]

The unity of act and cognition in the use value of labour appears as a trans-historical monist plan of social development. Cognition begins with the simple generalisation of experience. Thus, reflexive and instinctive human actions, such as the negotiation of obstacles, are the result of a long practical generalisation first in the act of jumping and then in the concept of 'obstacle'.[2] The cognitive activity moves to the stage of the labour act only after the practical generalisation of experience. The synthetic psychophysical series of perception, act and cognition performs the role of the principal functional unit in the social organisation of experience. Accordingly, the repetitive rhythm of movements associated with labour, and also the reflexive reaction in the form of 'labour shouts', have contributed to the emergence of the first action verbs. The origin of the first words in shouts relates to the adaptation of a body to the process of labour. In turn, the origin of speech and language corresponds to the development of the body's movements in labour. A primitive root of the first word signifies movement and a number of words form a 'technical rule' that generalises the series of actions.[3]

Bogdanov borrows this linguistic theory of 'labour shouts' from Ludwig Noiré, who claims that at the beginning of speech development man had 'a limited store of sounds with which he accompanied his action, and which associated themselves with the objects produced or modified by the action. This is the period of the objective creation of language'.[4] Polynesians, Noiré continues, 'describe thinking as "talking in the stomach"', i.e. as an internal process.[5] However, Noiré approaches the problem of

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[1] Together with economist Skvortsov-Stepanov, Bogdanov wrote two volumes presenting an introduction to political economy. The work represents a similar interpretation of value form. See: Alexander Bogdanov, Ivan Stepanov, *Kurs Politicheskoi Economii* [A Course of Political Economy], 2 vols (Sankt-Peterburg: Znanie, 1920).

[2] Alexander Bogdanov, 'Metody truda I metody poznaniia' [The Methods of Labour and the Methods of Cognition] [1918c], in *Russkii pozitivizm. Lesevich, Iushkevich, Bogdanov*, ed. by S. S. Gysev, A. F. Zamaleeva and A. I. Novikova (Saint Petersburg: Nauka, 1995), pp. 241-258 (p. 242–44).

[3] Alexander Bogdanov, 'Empiriomonizm' [1913], in *Russkii pozitivizm. Lesevich, Iushkevich, Bogdanov*, p. 210. It seems that Bogdanov developed his concept of 'technical rule' using Max Müller's empirical observations. Müller claims that the first words expressed only one attribute of a thing, which means that language begins not from a concrete thing or a single act, whether this be a form of labour or a bodily motion in space, but from a general idea that reflects and generalises many acts and relations: Max F. Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green, And Co, 1880), p. 431.

[4] Ludwig Noiré, *Max Müller and the Philosophy of Language* (London: Longmans, Green, And Co, 1879), p. 100.

[5] Ibid., p. 35.

the labour-act from the perspective of the Schopenhauerian will to act, while Bogdanov reduces the origin of the action to the physiology of the body.[1] He is interested in the technical side of the problem, namely, how language and labour proceed from the creation of technical rules and the description of events, to arrive finally at processes of induction and deduction.[2] Thus Bogdanov treats cognition as social adaptation to the environment through the mediation of action and labour.

The syncretism of thinking and speech is typical of nineteenth-century philosophy of language. According to both Ludwig Noiré and Max Müller, reason and language arise synchronously: 'Language and thought are inseparable. Words without thought are dead sounds; thoughts without words are nothing. To think is to speak low; to speak is to think aloud. The word is the thought incarnate'.[3] It is argued that the unification of thinking and speech supposedly contributes to the Spinozistic resolution of the problem of thinking and speech: '*Ratio et oratio* are one, they are related to each other like body and mind, the outer and the inner; they are distinguishable, but not separable'.[4] In other words, Noiré's understanding of word in terms of a spontaneous expression of will and Müller's unity of word and reason refer back to the logocentric theories of thinking and speech[5]. However, Bogdanov goes even further. In his theory the first signal systems, such as shouts, already involve a word and anticipate thinking. Therefore, thinking is correlative to the Pavlovian second signal system. In the Soviet context, the reflexological concept of language, as well as the logocentric model of thinking had been called into question by Lev Vygotsky.[6] The verbalisation of thinking, or, better, the verbal vocalisation of thinking, ignores affective (non-verbal and non-vocal) expressions of thought. Furthermore, the synchronicity of thinking and speech

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[1] A remarkable example of this Schopenhauerian trace is the following: 'The will for a long time remained absolute autocrat; all speech aimed at practical effects, sympathetical agreement, and incitation to common action. From the earliest, instinctive utterances of will, which, in the shape of sounds simultaneously uttered, encouraged men to perform the primitive acts of digging, plaiting, ect., up to the kindling eloquence of the popular orator who fires the souls of his audience with martial enthusiasm'. In: Ibid., p. 44.

[2] Alexander Bogdanov, 'Metody truda I metody poznaniia' [The Methods of Labour and The Methods of Cognition] [1918c], in *Russkii pozitivizm. Lesevich, Iushkevich, Bogdanov*, pp. 244–54.

[3] Max F. Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, p. 439.

[4] Ludwig Noiré, *Max Müller and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 17.

[5] Noiré explicitly frames his ideas within the so-called 'logos theory' of language in: Ludwig Noiré, *The Origin of Language And the Logos Theory* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1985). We will discuss the problem of logocentrism in the fourth chapter.

[6] Lev Vygotsky, 'Thinking and Speech' [1934b], in *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky,* trans. by N. Minick, R. W. Rieber and A. S. Carton, 6 vols (New York, London: Plenum Press, 1987-99), vol. I: *Problems of General Psychology* (1987), pp. 39–285. We will demonstrate how Vygotsky's counter-argument concerning the disjuncture of thinking and speech arises out of his disagreement with this wrongly understood Spinozism.

liquidates the temporal and spatial dimensions of the various activities of speaking and writing, therefore uniting at least two different modes of cognitive expression. Even Müller rejects the 'interjectional' origin of language: 'Language begins where interjections end', he writes. 'There is a huge difference between a word "to laugh" and the interjection "ha, ha!" If language's origin is "interjectional", then why did an animal's faculty of uttering interjections never lead them to human speech?'[1] The reflexological model of speech indeed fails to explain how labour shouts manage to create a concrete acoustic image of an action and then to integrate it with a more abstract concept of that action.

Bogdanov's fragile unity of the physical and the psychical is premised on a physiological determinism that includes an idea of a telos: the immediacy of the 'labour shouts' undergoes particular forms of mediation, together with the division and diversification of labour. The serial chain of spontaneity–perception–act–cognition gradually recomposes itself by eliminating *stikhiinost'* in the new forms of 'labour causality'. The sequence of labour causality proceeds from spontaneous sociomorphism – that is, the 'substitution'[2] of natural phenomena by anthropocentric motivations and actions, such as the animation of forests by wood goblins or the anthropologisation of lightening as the wrath of gods – to 'authoritarian causality', in which the division of labour first produces relations of domination and then the dualism of the mind and body. The separation of the organiser from the organising activity determines the development of authoritarian thinking. A soul appears as a body executor (*ispolnitel*) and the ruler as an active administrator (*organizator*) of a passive and dependent labourer.[3] In an 'exchange society' the dominant point of view of the bourgeoisie hypostasises the dualism of the organising and the executive (*ispolnitelnaia*) function, transforming it into the ideology of the market economy. The rule of exchange appears as a force that governs society. The subservience of the society to the economy deepens

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[1] Max F. Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, p. 420.

[2] 'Substitution', or 'fundamental metaphor', is a term of Max Müller. It describes the means of transportation of concepts from the field of labour practice into the field of natural phenomena, where they can be used for the description of the external world. See: Alexander Bogdanov, *The Philosophy of Living Experience. Popular Outlines* [1912b], pp. 221–32. About Bogdanov's interpretation of Ludwig Noiré and Max Müller see also: Craig Brandist, *The Dimensions of Hegemony* (London: Brill, 2015), p. 45.

[3] The pair of the organiser (*organizator)* and the executor (*ispolnitel'*) stresses active and subordinate roles in production. The Russian noun *ispolnitel'* refers to a wage labourer who passively performs a given task or executes orders and commands without a right to make independent decisions. The same word is used for the musical performance and the executive branch of the government (*ispolnitel'naia vlast'*). The semantic connotation of passivity and dependency of *ispolnitel'* is missing in the analogous English verb 'to execute'.

the same scheme of 'authoritarian causality' in relation to the body and mind. In industrial societies, the sequences of various labour causalities coexist in a contradictory manner. The specialisation of labour does not eliminate these differences, but, on the contrary, creates partial and isolated systems, expressing the growing contradiction between the peasant, bourgeois and proletarian points of view. [1] Bogdanov's epistemology is no more and no less than the procedure of the organisation of experience into the perfect 'ordered world of relations'. [2] However, a universal organisation is not possible in the divided and competitive capitalist realm of differences and classes. In such a world, people do not share knowledge and have contradictory worldviews based on their class interests. Therefore the proletariat must consciously understand the logic of labour causality in order to organise knowledge in agreement with its class interests.

It is not by chance that we earlier compared Lukács with Bogdanov. Applying a different method, they share a Marxist idea of the unity of subject and object in practice, and for both thinkers this unity is the standpoint of the proletariat. For the former, the proletariat is reified labour power and the subject of production, a commodity and a person. This subject-object position leads it to a self-comprehending and universal point of view that takes in the totality of capitalism. [3] For the latter, the universal point of view of the proletariat relates to the collective capacity of industrial labour to eliminate dualism between object and subject. In both cases, passivity within the structural position of objectification and subordination leads to the self-awareness of labour and the potential destruction of capitalism. Nevertheless, if the Lukácsian standpoint of the proletariat is equal to the self-consciousness of the capitalist totality, for Bogdanov the point of view of the proletariat is the collective worldview of humanity that constructs the totality out of partial and isolated capitalist systems:

> The highest step […] is the *human collective*, in our time already a system composed of many millions of individuals. In labour and in cognition, humanity works out its own 'reality' – its own objective experience with its strict regularity and coherent organisation. The practice of this great social organism is nothing other than *world-building*

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[1] Alexander Bogdanov, *The Philosophy of Living Experience. Popular Outlines* [1912b], pp. 226–27.
[2] Alexander Alexandrovich Bogdanov, *Empiriomonizm: Stat'i po filosofii* [Empiriomonism. Articles on Philosophy] [1905–06], p. 46.
[3] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, p. 168.

[…] This world, which has been constructed and continues to be under construction – the realm of the conquest of elemental spontaneity (*stikhii*) by life and thought, the kingdom of the socially organised elements of the universe – is the most grandiose and perfected that we know; it is the incarnation of life in nature. Such is our picture of the world: an unbroken series of forms of organisation of elements – of forms that develop in struggle and interaction without any beginning in the past, without any end in the future.[1]

Bogdanov thinks that after his system of empiriomonism has been completed, it will be possible to produce a new form of monist substitution or a common denominator for the life-complexes – the total organisation or the non-contradictory theorem of social life. That is why empiriomonism is the last possible philosophy. Similarly to Lenin's conception of the state and to the avant-garde's problematisation of art, philosophy can be seen withering away, and its demise is associated with a new epoch of the Soviets, productivism and universal organisational science that will intervene more directly in the world-building process. Under the post-revolutionary hegemony of the proletariat, it will be possible to proceed from critical philosophy to a constitutive universal science of organisation – *tektology* – and autonomist proletarian organisation – Proletkult. The ambition of tektology is to develop the 'organisational point of view' and overcome existing disciplinary boundaries between the social and natural sciences. *Tektology* develops a structural and systemic approach. It implements empirical instruments and tools to analyse so-called 'organisational' and 'disorganisational' tendencies in economic, social and natural life.

B) Bogdanov's Proletarian Encyclopaedia: Proletkult and the Soviet Avant-garde.

The universal science of organisation requires one understandable language (universal significance) that could resolve all complexities into simple schemes and structures.

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[1] Alexander Bogdanov, *The Philosophy of Living Experience. Popular Outlines* [1912b], p. 226; and Alexander Bogdanov, *Filosofiia zhivogo opyta. Materializm, Empiriokritistizm, Dialekticheskii materializm, Empiriomonizm. Populiarnye ocherki* [The Philosophy of Living Experience. Materialism, Empiriocriticism, Dialectical Materialism, Empiriomonism. Popular Outlines] [1912a], p. 256.

Bogdanov, as well as Lenin and Lunacharsky, supported the Romanisation of the Russian language. Bogdanov even argued that post-revolutionary proletarian culture has to develop a new and unique international proletarian language, understandable across the globe (he thought that English was a perfect candidate for the role).[1] And yet another thing that has to be taken into account is the post-revolutionary project of a *Soviet Enlightenment*. The formulation of this project began long before the October Revolution and can be attributed just as much to the nineteenth-century populist movement (*narodniki*), which aimed to educate the illiterate masses of peasants both culturally and politically, as it can to Lenin's political project for a conscious worker. Lenin's project grounds his theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat.[2] For example, in the famous pre-revolutionary pamphlet 'What Is to Be Done?', Lenin tackles the question of the political awareness of a worker in the spirit of enlightenment ideas. He claims that the spontaneous (*stikhiinaia*) struggle of workers for better labour conditions could be transformed into a conscious struggle for socialism only if a worker is able to recognise the historical mission of its class. However, this mission was formulated not by workers, but by the intellectuals, including Marx and Engels, who were not representatives of the working class. From this it follows that only the union of the revolutionary intelligentsia and the workers can constitute a political project that would overcome the limits of economic struggle. Accordingly, social democrats should think about appropriate forms of agitation and political education.[3] It is not surprising that Lunacharsky, the first commissar of Narkompros (the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment),[4] compares the party avant-garde with enlightened absolutism:

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[1] See: Alexander Alexandrovich Bogdanov, 'Proletarskaia kul'tura i mezhdunarodnyi iazyk (Tezisy doklada)' [Proletarian Culture and International Language (Proceedings of a Paper)] [1919c], in *O proletarskoi kulture* (1904–24) (Moscow: Kniga, 1925), pp. 328–32.

[2] About the Enlightenment legacy in the Russian nineteenth-century revolutionary movement and in the Soviet Union, see general historical overview of: Yinghong Cheng, 'From the Enlightenment to the Soviet New Man', in *Creating the New Man: From Enlightenment Ideals to Socialist Realities (Perspectives on the Global Past)* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), pp. 8–47.

[3] See: Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 'What Is To Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement' [1902], in *Collected Works,* 45 vols, trans. by J. Fineberg and G. Hanna (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960–70), vol. 5, pp. 347–530.

[4] Narkompros was founded in 1917, straight after the October revolution. The abbreviation 'narkompros' that is *Narodnyi komissariat prosveshcheniia* is often translated as 'People's Commissariat of Education', but *prosveshchenie* in Russian literally means 'enlightenment'. Confusion comes from the synonymous usage of the words 'education' and 'enlightenment' before and after the revolution. This is due to the fact that mass illiteracy in the Russian Empire created circumstances under which the idea of public education appeared identical with the idea of enlightenment. Nevertheless, Narkompros would argue that if education does not correspond to communist principles then it has little value. Under Lunacharsky's leadership, Narkompros implemented free and universal access to education, created unique communitarian system of pre-school and school education, established programmes for the elimination of

A people sunk in ignorance cannot receive full self-government, and the precondition of people's government is possible only given enlightenment of those same masses to which power is to be given. Until this is achieved, the way out which must be chosen is 'enlightened absolutism'. There is no power of the intelligentsia. There must be power of the vanguard of the people, of that part of the people which represent the interests, correctly understood, of the majority; of that part of the people in which its creative strength lies. That creative strength or power is the proletariat, and the present form of government cannot but be a dictatorship of the proletariat.[1]

Lunacharsky's 'enlightened absolutism' presupposes an army of various mediators, such as artists, intellectuals, educators and party representatives, who can articulate in a proper form the 'correctly understood interests' of the proletariat. Take as a whole, the project of the Soviet Enlightenment was supposed to culminate in the realm of rational thinking.

However, unlike Lenin and Lunacharsky, Bogdanov insisted on the radical autonomy of the proletariat from the party and believed that its culture could replace the bourgeois point of view only if the proletariat as a class develops its worldview independently. In 1918, at the first *All-Russian Conference of Proletarian Cultural-Enlightenment Organisations*, which took place in Moscow, Bogdanov argued that

[the] body of knowledge accumulated by the bourgeoisie was useful to the proletariat only when reformulated in proletarian terms as the basis of a monistic, all-embracing 'organizational science' [...] The Worker's University must do for the proletariat what Diderot and the

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illiteracy, promoted women's emancipation and gender equality, campaigned against religious prejudices and dealt with many other issues, including art and publishing projects. About the activity of Lunacharsky in Narkompros see: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Education and the Arts Under Lunacharsky. October 1917–1921.*

[1] Anatoly Lunacharsky, 'Speech at the First All-Russia Congress On Education' [1918], in *On Education. Selected Articles and Speeches*, trans. by R. English (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1981), pp. 10–30 (p. 16). We have to note that the original title says 'Congress on Enlightenment'.

encyclopaedists had done for the French bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century.[1]

A new proletarian Diderot does not need an old class. In fact, in order to realise the encyclopaedia, it has to destroy the old class and the Bolshevik party. The new proletarian encyclopaedia demands the *socialisation of science*, after which knowledge production would be a tool for collective world-building.[2] A member of the Proletkult specifies this formulation and calls for the 'proletarianisation of science': similar to Marx, who 'proletarianized the economy, ideologists of the proletarian culture must proletarianise the natural and social sciences'.[3] The class background of the new science was defined quite clearly. Bogdanov sees the establishment of the Proletarian University, 'a school of comradeship' and 'encyclopaedic knowledge', as the only means of socialisation, which the traditional bureaucratic university, with the 'authoritarianism of professors and intellectuals', cannot provide.[4] The chief editor of the Proletkult's publishing house 'Proletarian culture' puts the point more directly still: the proletarian encyclopaedia is proletarian culture in practice.[5]

The Proletarian University was opened in Moscow in 1918. Bogdanov drafted the programme, prioritising innovative, experimental forms of learning, while establishing as main priorities the equality of professors and students and the publication of the proletarian encyclopaedia. The teaching modules corresponded to the

[1] Fitzpatrick summarises the speech in: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Education and the Arts Under Lunacharsky. October 1917–1921*, pp. 95–96. Bogdanov writes about the necessity of a proletarian encyclopaedia and a new programme of proletarian Enlightenment elsewhere. See, for example, his pre-revolutionary work: Alexander Bogdanov, *Kul'turnye zadachi nashego vremeni* [The Cultural Tasks of Our Time] (Moscow: Izdanie S. Dorovatovskago i A. Charushnikova, 1911). In the earlier article 'The Assembling of Man', he stresses that the universal figure of an encyclopaedist disappears together with specialisation of philosophy. The contemporary philosopher-specialist presents a fragmented worldview, while capital takes the universal function of philosophy and gathers workers under the roofs of the factories, assembling a fragmented man into universal form: Alexander Alexandrovich Bogdanov, 'Sobiranie cheloveka' [The Assembling of Man] [1905], in Novyi *Mir* (Moscow: Kommunist, 1910), pp. 25–28.

[2] Alexander Bogdanov, *Nauka i rabochii class. Doklad, chitannyi na konferentsii Proletarskikh Kul'turno-Prosvetitel'nykh Obshchestv goroda Moskvy 23 fevralia 1918 g.* [Science and the Working Class. Theses Presented at the Conference of the Proletarian Cultural-Enlightenment Societies of Moscow, February 1918] (Moscow: Izdanie Soiuza Rabochikh Potrebitel'nykh Obshchstv, 1919a), p. 15.

[3] M. Smitt, 'Proletarizatsia nauki' [Proletarisation of Science], *Proletarskaia Kul'tura*, 11–12 (1919), 27-33 (p. 31).

[4] Alexander Bogdanov, *Nauka i rabochii class. Doklad, chitannyi na konferentsii Proletarskikh Kul'turno-Prosvetitel'nykh Obshchestv goroda Moskvy 23 fevralia 1918 g.* [Science and the Working Class. Theses presented at the Conference of the Proletarian Cultural-Enlightenment Societies of Moscow, February 1918], p. 16.

[5] Pavel Ivanovich Lebedev-Polianskii, *O proletarskoi kulture. Stenogramma rechi, proiznesennoi v Moskve 20 noiabria 1920 g.* [On Proletarian Culture. Verbatim Report of a Speech Delivered in Moscow on 20 November, 1920] (Rostov-on-Don: Donskoe oblastnoe otdelenie gos. izdatel'stva, 1921) pp. 9-11.

ideas of tektology.[1] Bogdanov admits that the idea of the proletarian university emerged out of the Marxist reading group that he had established with factory workers while in exile in Tula. To avoid arrest, activists held their improvised meetings in the forests and in the workers' huts. And it was there that the idea of universal and encyclopaedic knowledge was formulated by the workers, who in turn educated Bogdanov and other activists in technical disciplines related to industrial production. Thus, discussions about political economy quickly came to include various topics associated with both the social and the exact sciences. Bogdanov's and Gorky's schools in Italy were continuations of the proletarian university.[2] We would like to stress that these ideas were formulated at the beginning of the 1900s and applied in 1918, decades before the discussions in 1968 about the oppressive master and obedient student that were associated with French Maoism, or the implementation of a shared model of political education between workers and intellectuals that is associated with Italian *operaismo*.

Due to intensified civil war and a lack of funding, the government closed the Proletarian University the same year, but not only practical problems were behind the closure. The Proletarian University was an independent autonomist platform. Similarly to Proletkult, it competed directly with Lenin's party. In this sense, Lunacharsky's 'enlightened absolutism' could be understood as a compromise between the statism of Lenin and the autonomism of Bogdanov. In 1920 Proletkult became a branch of Narkompros. The decision was justified with reference to the dominant influence on Proletkult of the 'foreign bourgeois elements' – 'futurism and Machism' – and a 'decadent philosophy'.[3] The dictatorship of the proletariat was an official ideology, but class science and art were seen as a philosophical extravagance.[4] In the view of Lenin and of many other Bolsheviks, the project for Soviet Enlightenment coincided with the task of Westernisation. The ideology of catching up with the West in economic and

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[1] Alexander Bogdanov, 'Proletarskii Universitet' [The Proletarian University], *Proletarskaia Kul'tura*, 5 (1918f), pp. 9–22. The programme of lectures for the Literary and Publishing Department of the Caucasian and Eastern bureau of Proletkult gives a general idea of Bogdanov's proletarian education. It includes courses on the origin of species, political economy, history of socialism, history of the worker's movement, the constitution of the Soviet Republics in relation to the world revolution, the history of the Russian communist party and the history of literature and art. See: Alexander Alexandrovich Bogdanov, *Konspekty obshchikh lektsii dlia studiitsev proletkul'ta. Vypusk 2. Ekonomika i kul'turnoe razvitie* [Synopsis of Lectures for the Proletkult's Studio Students. Part 2. Economy and Cultural Development] (Rostov-on-Don: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1920b), p. 2.
[2] Alexander Bogdanov, 'Proletarskii Universitet' [The Proletarian University], pp. 10–14.
[3] Pismo C.K.R.K.P, 'O proletkul'takh' [Letter from the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), 'On Proletkults'], *Vestnik Rabotnikov Iskusstv*, 2–3 (1920), p. 67.
[4] See the summary of the discussions and the defense of proletarian science in: Nikolai Sizov, 'Proletariat i nauka' [The Proletariat and Science], *Gorn*, 8 (1923), pp. 89–102.

cultural development assumed the appropriation of bourgeois culture for socialist needs. By contrast, the classism of Proletkult resisted the influences of Westernisation, which it treated as a means to restore capitalism in the post-revolutionary society.[1]

The proletariat is a *world-builder* and proletarian monism is a higher stage of social development, in which collectivism replaces social differences and individualism in the process of the active construction of a univocal plan of life-complexes. Therefore, for Bogdanov, the elimination of spontaneity, affects and contradictions *is* communism. Here we approach the main problem with his thinking. Bogdanov never questioned the positive science, rationalism and technological optimism of the nineteenth century. It may seem that he anticipates the violent struggle with the 'backward' *stikhiinost'* of the peasants. But before drawing any conclusions about total organisation, we have to admit that Bogdanov was one of the few Soviet Marxists who openly criticised not just particular members of the party, but also the very idea of authority and party as such. Paradoxically, the concept of universal significance turns out to be a critique of the non-scientific dogmatism of the party philosophy, and it appears in practice as a tool for consensus decision-making, as opposed to the dictatorship of the majority or tyranny of the minority.[2] In response to the critique of his paper on scientific methods, presented at The Communist Academy in 1927, Bogdanov formulates this quite precisely. He stresses that ritual references to Marx and Engels could not mask the fact that Soviet dialectical materialism does not correspond to Marx and that the latest developments in the field of science contradict the Engelsian dialectics of nature. Dogmatism derives from the inexact usage of concepts, and only the development of a single scientific apparatus can bring about the universal validity of theory. A proper debate means not abolition of differences in opinion, but destruction of fetishism and ideological dogmas. The possibility for discussion proper begins only when fetishism in words and actions is eliminated. 'Universal significance' brings mutual understanding and consensus on this basis:[3] logical positivism was seen as a panacea in relation to the fetish character of

[1] See the critique of capitalist modernisation in: S. Zander, 'Proletarskaia kul'tura i proletarskaia revolutsiia (K itogam nedavnei diskussii)' [Proletarian Culture and Proletarian Revolution (The Outcomes of Recent Discussion)] *Gorn*, 8 (1923), pp. 67–86.
[2] Alexander Bogdanov, *Elementy proletarskoi kul'tury v razvitii rabochego classa. Lektsii prochitannye v Moskovskom proletkul'te vesnoi 1919 goda* [The Elements of Proletarian Culture in the Development of the Working Class. Lectures Delivered at Moscow Proletkult in Spring 1919] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, Vserossiiskii Soviet Proletkul'ta, 1920a), pp. 77–81.
[3] Bogdanov's paper, a discussion of the paper and his response were printed in the journal of The Communist Academy: Alexander Alexandrovich Bogdanov, 'Predely nauchnosti rassuzhdeniia' [The Limits of Scientificness of a Reasoning], *Vestnik Kommunisticheskoi Akademii*, 21 (1927a), pp. 243–63;

Soviet power. However, it is not clear how universal significance can avoid becoming the same kind of dogmatic rule.

Bogdanov's sensitivity to authoritarianism reflects his troubled experience within the Bolshevik party. For him, party dogmatism is just another aspect of the authoritarian causality of the bourgeois past. In order to destroy it, the proletariat must tackle any sort of fetishism, be it intellectual trends, religious beliefs, idolisation of party leaders or the commodity form and private property.[1] Alienation and fetishism is undoubtedly reduced to the problem of ideology, while ideology is correlative to modes of production. This is not very far from a determinism of the productive forces. Bogdanov ignores analysis of the capitalist economic system, and this leads him to his abstract propositions concerning the collective mode of production. It is argued that when a person masters collective experience, authority and power automatically give way to competency and expertise. Such a view of consensus also aims to solve the dilemma of dictatorship. It follows from Bogdanov's concept of socially organised experience and the theory of universal significance that collective experience can be elaborated as much by a concrete person as by the entire class. The most competent 'proletarian thinker', Marx, is just one example of such collective understanding.[2] In other words, Marx does not outweigh the collective. In the background to his work there are generations of collective labour and experience. Therefore, the collective is not a crowd or a group, but a particular relation to the generations of labour. It is self-consciousness of a particular kind.

A comradely relation to past and present humanity; to the woman and her domestic labour; to the children who are 'the future comrades' and not the slaves of fathers – this is the 'cooperation of generations', which proletarian culture should cultivate and build.[3] The commemoration of past struggles and efforts in the present reminds one of Benjamin's attitude to history, but this is a specifically proletarian attitude, to treat 'all co-workers, close and distant, all fighters for a common cause, all the class, the entire past and the future of the labouring humanity as comrades, as the

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Preniia po dokladu Bogdanova (Shatunovskii, Korev, Asmus, Vainshtein, Bammel', Kan) [Debate on the Paper. (Shatunovskii, Korev, Asmus, Vainshtein, Bammel, Kan)], *Vestnik Kommunisticheskoi Akademii*, 21 (1927), pp. 263–90; and Alexander Alexandrovich Bogdanov, 'Zakliuchitel'noe slovo' [Concluding Response], *Vestnik Kommunisticheskoi Akademii*, 21 (1927b), pp. 283–90.
[1] Alexander Bogdanov, *Elementy proletarskoi kultury v razvitii rabochego classa. Lektsii prochitannye v Moskovskom proletkul'te vesnoi 1919 goda* [The Elements of Proletarian Culture in the Development of the Working Class. Lectures Delivered at Moscow Proletkult in Spring 1919], pp. 52–59.
[2] Ibid., pp. 55–56.
[3] Ibid., pp. 48–49.

members of one, continuous labouring whole'.[1] It is this collective labouring unity that the industrial proletariat implements by organising things and people, self-organising itself into the collective – i.e. the Proletkult – and producing its own culture in the process and, consequently, becoming the organiser of ideas.[2] Bogdanov repeats this formula elsewhere. For instance, in a manifesto style at the Proletkult's conference in 1918:

> The proletariat organises things in its labour, itself in its struggle and its experience in both. This class is an organiser by nature. The proletariat is destined to break down all the barriers of humanity, to put an end to all the anarchy. It is the successor of all classes who took the stage at the arena of history. Their organisational experience is its rightful inheritance. It is destined to bring this inheritance into the shapeliness of order, to the form of universal science.[3]

In numerous works on proletarian culture, Bogdanov stresses that each class produces its own culture and point of view. The concept of 'proletarian culture' means precisely the culture of the new industrial proletariat and post-revolutionary collective labour, not the culture of professional revolutionaries and their party. This culture first of all has to overcome authoritarian causality, the split between organising and executing in the new causality of 'comradely cooperation'. If the intellectuals by definition reproduce authoritarian causality in their party structures and everyday behaviour, industrial production universalises labour and tends to eliminate competition and individualistic leadership. Transition to machine-labour assumes gradual intellectualisation of the relationship between the worker and the machine. From simple control of the machine, labour passes to an active and organising role, operating on the level of the structure of the machinery, solving technical problems and making organisational decisions. The worker becomes the operator of the machinery and the executive of machine

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[1] Ibid., p. 49.
[2] Ibid., p. 85.
[3] Alexander Bogdanov, *Nauka i rabochii class. Doklad, chitannyi na konferentsii Proletarskikh Kul'turno-Prosvetitel'nykh Obshchestv goroda Moskvy 23 fevralia 1918 g.* [Science and the Working Class. Theses presented at the Conference of the Proletarian Cultural-Enlightenment Societies of Moscow, February 1918], p. 13.

operations.[1] The final abolition of authoritarian causality happens under conditions of total automation in the collectivist social system, when the worker becomes the 'scientifically educated organiser'. An engineer is the only present prototype of such an 'organiser-executor'[2].

Bogdanov's determinism of the productive forces is not identical to Plekhanov's. A productive organising capacity, and the self-organising logic of ordered series and complexes, presupposes the structure-oriented materialism of physics rather then sociological determinism. That is why Bogdanov's theory of art corresponds to the same organisational ontology:

> The principles of artistic creativity are shapeliness and harmony, and therefore organization. Artistic creativity, combined and often alloyed with cognition, as may be seen in many pieces of belles-lettres, poetry and painting, organizes understanding, feelings and emotions by its own methods. In art the organization of ideas and the organization of things are inseparable. For instance, an architectural construction, a statue, or a painting as they are, might be regarded as systems of 'dead' elements – of stone, metal, canvases and paint; but the lively meanings of pieces of art belong to the complexes of images and emotions to which they give life in a human psyche.[3]

Since art is an organisational force too, it is by definition 'the life in the world'. In this respect the conceptions of *l'art pour l'art* and socially engaged art (*grazhdanskogo* or 'civil' art) represent false ideological assumptions, because both models impose limitations on art. The former isolates it, while the latter abridges the autonomy of art so as to deal with any subject of life. Art is autonomous in the same way as Proletkult: it self-organises 'the forces of life quite independently of whether it has any social aims or not'.[4] Unfortunately, Bogdanov admits, proletarian critique has been identified rather

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[1] Alexander Bogdanov, *Elementy proletarskoi kul'tury v razvitii rabochego classa. Lektsii prochitannye v Moskovskom proletkul'te vesnoi 1919 goda* [The Elements of Proletarian Culture in the Development of the Working Class. Lectures Delivered at Moscow Proletkult in Spring 1919], pp. 33–42.
[2] Ibid., pp. 37–39.
[3] Alexander Bogdanov, *Tektology. Book 1*, p. 3. Translation modified. Compare with: Alexander Bogdanov, *Tektologiia. Vseobshchaia organizatsionnaia nauka* [Tektology. The Universal Organisation Science] [1913–21], p. 70.
[4] Alexander Bogdanov, 'Proletarian Poetry', *Labour Monthly*, IV, 5–6, May–June (1923b), 276-285 (p. 279). The English translation is a shortened version of the original text, published as 'What is Proletarian

with the struggle for class interests.[1] The limitation of monist autonomy leads to the same authoritarian causality, to the subordination of art to politics and narrow interests. Proletarian art is alien to authoritarianism and if a poet of proletarian origin celebrates the party leaders, this art is not proletarian:

> The labouring and struggling collective cannot help but appreciate their leaders – the organizers, – but precisely as spokesmen of the *common (obshchikh)* objectives, of the *general (obshchei)* will of the collective, and as representatives of its universal (*obshchei*) power. Yet it is a purely authoritarian or perhaps even royalist understanding of life when the great world drama of our epoch is presented as a risky gamble that a genius masterfully leads against other political players, and in which 'the world', i.e. the masses, are only 'to watch it excitedly', in order to applaud and then to crown the winner.[2]

The theory is quite paradoxical: an account of proletarian art without a proletariat. At the very least the theory may seem to suggest that intellectuals are closer than the proletariat to the idea of the collective life. Bogdanov suggests allying with the representatives of other classes who deeply share in the idea of a collectivist mode of life.[3] The bourgeois classes may rise above their class and occupy a proletarian point of view. In this sense, proletarian science and art embraces the progressive elements of all classes.[4] This suggests that Bogdanov does not have any theory of art. He assesses art on the basis of organisational characteristics that are supposedly implicit to it, but, at the same time, he attributes the same characteristics to science, everyday relations (*byt*) and intellectual production in general. Art is one of the many forces within the structural logic of labour causality, and the proletariat is a structural self-organising 'unit' rather than a subject. Labour and art could be modelled in a particular, collectivist way if such

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Poetry?' in Alexander Bogdanov, 'Chto takoe proletarskaia poeziia?' [What is Proletarian Poetry?], *Iskusstvo i rabochii klass* (Moscow: Proletarskaia Kul'tura, 1918a), pp. 3–30.
[1] Alexander Bogdanov, 'O khudozhestvennom nasledstve' [On the Artistic Inheritance], in *Iskusstvo i rabochii klass* (Moscow: Proletarskaia Kul'tura, 1918e), pp. 31–54 (pp. 51–52).
[2] Alexander Bogdanov, 'Chto takoe proletarskaia poeziia?' [What is Proletarian Poetry?], p. 22.
[3] Ibid., p. 24.
[4] Alexander Bogdanov, *Nauka i rabochii class. Doklad, chitannyi na konferentsii Proletarskikh Kul'turno-Prosvetitel'nykh Obshchestv goroda Moskvy 23 fevralia 1918 g.* [Science and the Working Class. Theses presented at the Conference of the Proletarian Cultural-Enlightenment Societies of Moscow, February 1918], pp. 9–11.

and such conditions of a system were to be taken into account. In turn, perfect modelling or world-building would need to eliminate *stikhiinost'* in order to be able to discuss with mathematical exactness such and such conditional possibilities.

It is not hard to see how Bogdanov's world-building and scientific organiser is close to the productivist figures of the life-builder and engineer-constructor. Following Proletkult's priority of art in production,[1] Osip Brik and David Arkin go so far as almost to translate Bogdanov's philosophy into productivist agitation. Art as production assumes a conscious relation to the production process, writes Brik. Art is a labour of shaping and composing an object according to the usefulness of a colour and a form. A worker is not just an executor of mechanical tasks, but 'an active participant in the creative process of making a thing'. Art has to return to the social environment and it must be situated 'within the making of a thing'.[2] Arkin deepens this general formula, proposing a term of material culture for understanding art in production. In the traditional practice of bourgeois art, the 'forms of creativity' and the 'forms of being' were antagonistic to each other. In order to bring them to a new unity, an artist has to return to the production of material culture and everyday life – *byt*. *Byt* in Old Medieval Russian means 'beingness', and Arkin's proposal to reconcile 'forms of creativity' with *byt* is to be understood as an intervention into the *formy bytiia* (forms of being) and the abolition of the *formy byta* (forms of the everyday).[3]

A 'constructor of the mass action' and a fighter with 'emotional outrage' and 'disorganised intellect', Alexei Gan,[4] was an open proponent of Bogdanov. In the manifesto 'Constructivism', Gan provides a three-page-long quotation from Bogdanov to support an argument about importance of organisation, production and cultural building (*kulturnoe stroitelstvo*). Similar to Arkin, Gan claims that intellectual and material production replaces representational art and speculative activities. This new

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[1] It should be emphasised that the terminology of art production and the art worker functioned not only in Proletkult, but also at the official state and legal levels. See, for example, a collection on art production legislation: V. Melik-Khaspabov, B. Kozin, *Sbornik zakonov i postanovlenii o trude rabotnikov iskusstv i khydozhestvennom proizvodstve* [Collection of Laws and Acts on Labour of Art Workers and Artistic Production] (Moscow: Vserabis, 1925).

[2] Osip Brik, 'V poriadke dnia' [The Order of Priority], in *Iskusstvo v proizvodstve* (Moscow: Khudozhestvenno-Proizvodstvennyi Sovet Otdela IZO Narkomprossa, 1921), pp. 7-8 (p. 8).

[3] David Arkin, 'Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo i material'naia kul'tura' [Fine Arts and Material Culture], in *Iskusstvo v proizvodstve* (Moscow: Khudozhestvenno-Proizvodstvennyi Sovet Otdela IZO Narkomprossa, 1921), pp. 13-18 (pp. 13–14).

[4] Alexei Gan, 'Konstruktivisty' [Constructivists] [1922a], in *Formal'nyi metod. Antologiia russkogo modernizma,* ed. by S. Oushakine, III vols (Moscow, Ekaterinburg: Kabinetnyi uchenyi, 2016), vol. 1: Systems, 864-866 (p. 864). See also English edition of Gan texts in: Alexei Gan, *Constructivism*, trans. by C. Lodder (Chicago, Barcelona: Tenov Books, 2014).

mode of production saves only 'solid material and formal foundations of art, such as line, flatness, volume and action',[1] along with the purposeful activity of 'materialistically grounded' artistic labour.[2] Constructivism is Bogdanov's organisational science, which seeks a form of 'organisation and cementation for the mass labour processes, mass actions in the whole of social production'.[3] It may lead to the conclusion that the famous three disciplines of constructivism – construction, facture (*faktura*) and tectonics – fully correspond to the principles of organisation. It has even been noted that tectonics is a cipher for tektology.[4] Gan says that he borrows this term from geology,[5] but it is highly likely that he simply tries to avoid a direct affiliation with the dissident Bogdanov. In any case, Bogdanov's philosophy seems to be foundational, and one can read the theory of constructivism back into empiriomonism and tektology: *faktura* is the process of extraction and manufacturing of the elements of nature, while construction is the aggregation of the complexes of elements into a purposeful organisational plan – tectonics.[6]

The epistemology of labour causality and the ontology of the labouring being grounds the avant-gardist dismissal of the artistic exclusivity of creative work. In comparison to the colossal 'uprising of all objects' produced 'by an anonymous collective of artist-creators' in a process 'of the dialectical development of matter', art appears as a meaningless bagatelle.[7] The organisational point of view appeals to Nikolai Chuzak as a grandiose cosmogony of all-embracing life-building:

> People who look at art from the point of view of communist
> monism inevitably come to the conclusion that **art is only a**
> **quantitatively individual, temporary, and predominantly**

[1] Alexei Gan, 'Konstruktivizm' [Constructivism] [1922b], in *Formal'nyi metod. Antologiia russkogo modernizma,* ed. by S. Oushakine, III vols (Moscow, Ekaterinburg: Kabinetnyi uchenyi, 2016), vol. 1: Systems, 867-907 (p. 894).

[2] Ibid., p. 894.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Kristin Romberg, 'Alexei Gan: vvedenie v tektoniky' [Alexei Gan: Introduction to Tectonics], in *Formal'nyi metod. Antologiia russkogo modernizma,* ed. by S. Oushakine, III vols (Moscow, Ekaterinburg: Kabinetnyi uchenyi, 2016), vol. 1: *Systems*, pp. 845-858 (p. 851–52).

[5] Alexei Gan, 'Konstruktivizm' [Constructivism] [1922b], p. 901.

[6] See the explanation of the three disciplines in: Ibid., pp. 901–2. Tectonics is the most obscure principle. Gan clarifies it in: Alexei Gan, 'Konstruktivizm v tipografskom proizvodstve' [Constructivism in Typography Production] [1925], in *Formal'nyi metod. Antologiia russkogo modernizma,* ed. by S. Oushakine, III vols (Moscow, Ekaterinburg: Kabinetnyi uchenyi, 2016), vol. 1: *Systems*, pp. 908-914 (p. 912).

[7] Nikolai Chuzak, 'Under the Banner of Life-Building (An Attempt to Understand the Art of Today)' [1923b], *Art in Translation*, trans. by Ch. Lodder, vol. 1, 1 (2009), 119-151 (p. 122).

emotional method of life-building, and, as such, cannot remain isolated, or what is more, self-sustaining compared with other approaches to life-building.[1]

According to Chuzhak, the manifestation of art in production proposed by Brik and his fellows leads only to empty labelling and inane agitation, while the study of *faktura* and construction by Tatlin and Gan, as much as the substitution of Taylorism for the theatrical performances in Meyerhold's biomechanics, suggest a concrete articulation of productivist theory.[2] Nevertheless, the multitude of movements masks the problem of an absent unifying theory: 'Every pen pusher declares his own trend […] Our efforts must be dedicated to the realization of the guiding philosophy of art, **as one of the methods of life-building**'.[3] Finally, productivism is a dialectical moment of the development of futurism that will be abolished in the new form of communist life.[4] If empiriomonism is the last philosophy, futurism, constructivism and productivism are the last art movements: 'So called representability is not the deed of the class of builders'.[5] This Bogdanovian revision of contemporary art history has nevertheless never become a guiding philosophy, unlike life-building, which has been known ever since as a principal concept of the Soviet avant-garde.

A similar Bogdanovian detour into the various currents of art practice, albeit more grandiose still, was that of the proletkultist Boris Arvatov.[6] In 'Art and Production', at once a presentation of research and an energetic manifesto, the history of art is shown to unfold within the terms of Bogdanov's history of labour.[7] According to this narrative, art has always been part of production: for instance, crafts, frescos and architecture served the everyday needs of pre-modern societies. However, under the rule of capitalism, art distinguishes itself from a merely task-executing, subordinated practice to become instead an individualistic, self-organising activity. Easel painting is one significant example of the contemplative representational function of art in

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[1] Ibid., p. 121.
[2] Ibid., p. 131–39.
[3] Ibid., p. 139.
[4] Ibid., p. 145.
[5] Nikolai Chuzhak, 'Bez rulia i bez peril (K nashei politike v literature)' [Without the Handlebars and Handrail (On Our Politics in Literature)], *Oktiabr' Mysli*, 1 (1924), 38-49 (p. 46).
[6] Chuzhak identifies Arvatov as a proletkultist in: Nikolai Chuzhak, 'Under the Banner of Life-Building (An Attempt to Understand the Art of Today)' [1923b], p. 137.
[7] Boris Arvatov, *Iskusstvo i Proizvodstvo* [Art and Production] (Moscow: Proletkul't, 1926). Although there is no reference to Bogdanov, the terminology and exposition of the argument almost repeats the popular outlines of empiriomonism.

bourgeois society. Arvatov seeks the new forms of a 'proletarian monism'[1] in which the executing and organising functions could be united and the productive capacity of art to shape the environment could be restored. The figure of the engineer-constructor expresses the monism of the executing and organising functions, according to which art dissolves in the unity of invention and construction to become a new 'form of being' or communism.[2]

If avant-gardists took the organisational theory to establish as a direct task the abolition of art and its transformation into world-building activities, Bogdanov's image of art was nevertheless, and strictly speaking, the opposite of utilitarianism. He even disassociated proletarian culture from Taylorism and Gastev's NOT (Scientific Organisation of Labour). Although under the conditions of post-revolutionary chaos – with chaos in the factories, high rates of worker illiteracy and the collapse of labour discipline – the implementation of Taylor's system was necessary, Bogdanov argues that this measure must be temporary. Taylorism is a mind-numbing system of control and exploitation, which blocks the intellectual development of labour power. It improves modes of exploitation rather than developing modes of production.[3] Taylorism does indeed contradict comradely cooperation between workers and furthers authoritarian causality in social relations, but, like many other Bolsheviks, Bogdanov nevertheless 'critically supports' Taylorism as a provisional measure for increasing the productivity of labour.[4] All the same, this critical support is rather different from the fanaticism of the factory worker and manager Gastev. The NOT movement insisted on the rationalisation of work and the measurement of time spent on each labour operation. Avant-gardists even tried to implement Gastev's approach to intellectual labour.[5] Bogdanov, however, openly criticised Gastev's 'biomechanical' system of scientific management and metrics as a one-sided and reductionist technicism.[6] Needless to say

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[1] Ibid., p. 97.
[2] Ibid., pp.: 117–18; 129–30.
[3] Alexander Bogdanov, *Mezhdu chelovekom i mashinoi* [Between Man and Machine] (Moscow: B, 1918d), pp. 9–15.
[4] Ibid. See also the critique of Soviet Taylorism in: Zenovia A. Sochor, 'Soviet Taylorism Revisited', *Soviet Studies*, 33, 2 (1981), 246–64.
[5] See: Alexei Penzin, 'Iskusstvo i biopolitika. Sovetskii avangard 1920-kh gg. i poslerevoliutsionnye formy zhizni' [Art and Biopolitics. The Soviet Avant-garde of the 1920s and the Post-revolutionary Forms of Life], in *Kul'tura i revoliutsiia: fragmenty sovietskogo opyta 1920-1930 gg,* ed. by E. V. Petrovskaia (Mocow: RAN, Institut filosofii, 2012), pp. 47–90.
[6] Bogdanov and Gastev had a polemical exchange in the journal 'Proletarian Culture'. Gastev proposed his biomechanical understanding of proletarian culture: Alexei Gastev, 'O tendentsiiakh proletarskoi kul'tury' [On the Tendencies of Proletarian Culture], *Proletarskaia Kul'tura*, 9–10 (1919), 35–45; and Bogdanov replied to this article with a severe criticism of technological determinism and the oppressive

that the avant-gardist experiments with Taylorism were foreign to Bogdanov. If philosophy ceases to exist due to the necessity of constructing the science of tektology, the task of art, according to Bogdanov, is less radical and much more modest. Art is the education of the senses. It organises feelings and emotions into images. The unity of form and content, 'harmony' and creativity are those epithets which Bogdanov uses to discuss proletarian art.[1] Proletarian art seeks simplicity of classical form and rejects sophistication.[2]

Despite the radical organisational rhetoric, this ideal of art is in fact not very different from the traditional taste of other Bolsheviks: 'It is sad to see a proletarian poet, who is looking for the best art forms, and thinks to find them in some kind of grimacing intelligentsia-advertiser like Mayakovsky'.[3] The proletariat must learn from Gogol, Pushkin, Tolstoy[4] and other artists whom Mayakovsky promised to throw off the steamboat of modernity. From here follows a central proposition, which coincides with the Bolsheviks' dialectics of the old and the new: 'By creating a new art, collectivism transforms the old and makes it its own educational and organizational tool'.[5] The proletariat never rejects the culture of the past, but takes elements from this culture and reworks them according to the tasks of the moment.[6] Art is a collectivist practice, but this only means that the collective provides the materials, instruments, theories, experience and direction for the creation of the art work. It is essential that the proletariat harmonise its own experience with that of the past. Only in this sense is

mechanisation of the worker: Alexander Bogdanov, 'O tendentsiiakh proletarskoi kul'tury (Otvet Gastevy)' [On the Tendencies of Proletarian Culture (Response to Gastev)], *Proletarskaya Kul'tura*, 9-10 (1919b), 46–52.

[1] Alexander Bogdanov, *Nauka i rabochii class. Doklad, chitannyi na konferentsii Proletarskikh Kul'turno-Prosvetitel'nykh Obshchestv goroda Moskvy 23 fevralia 1918 g.* [Science and the Working Class. Theses presented at the Conference of the Proletarian Cultural-Enlightenment Societies of Moscow, February 1918], pp. 72–73. Lunacharsky shares similar ideas and defines art as the 'organisation of the life of feelings' and proletarian art as 'an expression of the prosess of the emotional life organisation': Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, *Idealizm i materializm. Kul'tura burzhuaznaia i proletarskaia* [Idealism and Materialism. Bourgeois and Proletarian Cultures] (Petrograd: Put' k znaniiu, 1923), p. 90.

[2] Alexander Bogdanov, 'Prostota ili utonchennost'?' [Simplicity or Sophistication?], *Proletarskaia kul'tura*, 13–14 (1920c), 58–67.

[3] Alexander Bogdanov, *Nauka i rabochii class. Doklad, chitannyi na konferentsii Proletarskikh Kul'turno-Prosvetitel'nykh Obshchestv goroda Moskvy 23 fevralia 1918 g.* [Science and the Working Class. Theses presented at the Conference of the Proletarian Cultural-Enlightenment Societies of Moscow, February 1918], p. 73.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Alexander Bogdanov, *Nauka ob obshchestvennom soznanii. Kratkii kurs ideologicheskoi nauki v voprosakh i otvetakh* [The Science of Social Consciousness. The Short Course of Ideological Science in Questions and Answers], 3rd edn. (Moscow: Kniga, 1923a), p. 292

[6] Alexander Bogdanov, *Elementy proletarskoi kul'tury v razvitii rabochego classa. Lektsii prochitannye v Moskovskom proletkul'te vesnoi 1919 goda* [The Elements of Proletarian Culture in the Development of the Working Class. Lectures Delivered at Moscow Proletkult in Spring 1919], p. 14.

proletarian art and science universal and not just class culture. The organisation of experience according to proletarian principles assumes the revelation of what has already existed as *stikhiinost'*, or in other words, in 'unconscious' form.[1] Put differently, the heritage of the old culture must become conscious of itself in the new proletarian point of view.

Philosophy withers away, but Pushkin and Tolstoy must remain. Even if Bogdanov hasn't seen a contradiction between his avant-gardist philosophical system and his reactionary programme for art, this eternal contradiction has tremendous consequences for the fate of Proletkult and its disciples. Despite Bogdanov's antipathies, the best representatives of the 'grimacing intelligentsia' worked for the studios of Proletkult art, literature and theatre.[2] Sergei Tretyakov, Nikolai Tarabukin and Boris Arvatov, among others, published articles in the Proletkult's journals. They even tried to adopt Bogdanov's theory to their own conception of art. Tarabukin understands the organisation of emotions in empiricist terms, as the orientation of a subject in the natural and social environment. An artist does not copy but organises nature at the canvas, building a landscape according to compositional laws. Painting establishes a particular 'point of view' for the perceiving recipient. 'The artist is the organizer of our visual orientation', Tarabukin concludes.[3] Chuzhak also accepts the emotional concept of art: 'Art is an original, mainly emotional (only mainly and it only differs from science in this advantage) dialectical approach to the life-building'[4]. The content of the constructivist 'dialectical modelling' consists of 'the tangible thing' and 'the idea, the thing in its model'.[5]

Proletkultists had at least two distinct understandings of the old and the new formula. A strong rejection of Bogdanov's aesthetical principles is linked to the refusal to follow the traditions of the old art. Gan is categorically against aesthetics in general and art in particular. Accordingly, organisational theory must go beyond aesthetics and instead arrive at the question of the material and formal means of production. The organisation of feelings and images localises bourgeois art, but after the revolution such

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[1] Ibid., pp. 86–90.
[2] See, for example a report on the work of the literary department: N. Pavlovich, 'Rabota literaturnogo otdela' [The Work of the Literary Department], *Gorn*, 1 (1918), pp. 44–46.
[3] Nikolai Tarabukin, *Khudozhnik v klube*. [The Artist in a Club] (Moscow: VZSPS, 1926), pp. 5–6.
[4] Nikolai Chuzhak, 'Under the Banner of Life-Building (An Attempt to Understand the Art of Today)' [1923b], p. 142. Translation is modified. See the Russian original: Nikolai Fedorovich Chuzak, 'Pod znakom zhiznestroeniia (Opyt osoznaniia iskusstva dnia)', *LEF*, 1 (1923a), 12-39 (p. 38)
[5] Ibid., p. 145.

organisational technics impose limits on constructivist tasks. The only valuable heritage of the old culture is its accumulated means of artistic production.[1] The position of Moscow Proletkult is rather similar to Gan's militant rejection of the old art. The 1918 organisational blueprint for Proletkult's art studios follow the doctrine of art in production.[2] This doctrine of the introduction of machine production in art was also reproduced in numerous articles by Proletkult's artists.[3] The form of their production art reminds one of constructivism and cubism.[4] The supervisor of the Proletkult's art studio admits that proletarian artists prefer contemporary art and the expositions of the experimental museum.[5]

On the other side of the barricade one finds dissatisfaction with the new radical art and the militant classism of some Proletkult's members, conceived as a response to the leadership of the intelligentsia within proletarian organisations. A theorist of proletkult, Platon Kerzhentsev, complains that after the international success of Proletkult's theatre, workers left their factories to become professional actors. This petty bourgeois professionalism contradicts the very idea of proletarian culture, he warns.[6] An old ally of Bogdanov and the editor of Proletkult's journal, Fedor Kalinin, manages to transform the idea of a cultural heritage into a radical class principle:

> The proletariat takes from the old culture only materials and samples, organizing them according to and in agreement with its class nature and the prospect of the development of an ideal to which it aspires. The remainders of the old culture give a chance to understand the soul of the died out classes and protect us from the repetition of what has already passed […] [A worker] sculpts a form-model from such viscous material as the proletariat, who is the most capable due to its social and class position to consciously strive for the ideas of socialist culture. This form-

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[1] Alexei Gan, 'Konstruktivizm' [Constructivism] [1922b], pp. 877–89.

[2] Plan organizatsii izobrazitel'nogo otdela moskovskogo proletariata [The Organisation Plan of the Art Department of the Moscow Proletariat], *Gorn,* 1 (1918), 66-67 (p. 66).

[3] See, for example: B. Ivanov, 'Rabochii i izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo' [Worker and Fine Arts], *Gorn*, 2–3 (1919), 92–93.

[4] This is at least how the images – reproduced in the Proletkult's journal – of the banners for the trade unions look like: Dva znameni, vypolnennye v masterskikh IZO Moskovskogo proletkul'ta dlia professional'nykh soiuzov [Two Banners Made in the Studios of The Moscow's Proletkult Art Department for the Trade Unions], *Gorn*, 2 (7) (1922), 158–59.

[5] For example, the proposal to dedicate the entire room to a single painting. E. Khersonskaia, 'Iz tovarishcheskikh besed o zhivopisi' [From the Comradely Conversations About Painting], *Gorn*, 2–3 (1919), 94–95.

[6] Platon Kerzhentsev, 'O professionalizme' [About Professionalism], *Gorn*, 2–3 (1919), 69–71.

model has to serve as a sample, which would facilitate leveling off the gigantic mountain of the workers' and peasants' government.[1]

Bogdanov's contradictory statements about alliances with the intelligentsia and simultaneous demand to create a simple form were regarded as an appeal to classical art, which (it would follow) must be examined by the proletariat independently of the influence of the bourgeois classes. This claim led to violent reactions against intellectuals within the organisation. The Petersburg branch of Proletkult proclaimed the necessity of purifying proletarian art of the influence of the representatives of the avant-garde intelligentsia.[2] More conservative journals *Gudki* (The Horns) and *Griadushchee* (Forthcoming) made threats against Mayakovsky, Malevich, Tatlin, Punin and other avant-gardists who purported to define the tastes of the proletariat and who in effect marginalised proletarian artists.[3] While Bogdanov time and again warns Proletkult artists to abandon militaristic habits of critique and a too violent hostility toward other classes,[4] his demand that avant-gardists be criticised only led to a deepening of misunderstandings. Bogdanov advises not to confuse proletarian art with primitive agitation which depicts 'capitalists, and siding with them the bourgeois intelligentsia […] as if they are personally envious, savage and dishonest people',[5] but *Gudki* only sent more threats to Mayakovsky. On the pages of Proletkult journals Bogdanov tirelessly explained his conception of proletarian culture, analysing and citing innumerable proletarian poets and critiquing them for poor poetic form and narrow content;[6] but his proposal that artists produce a simpler art and follow Pushkin only turned the idea of Proletkult against Bogdanov himself. After he resigned from the organisation in 1921, Proletkult soon became a militant laboratory for the development of the future socialist-realist canon in art and literature. In 1926, a new leader of Proletkult penned an odious political text against Bogdanov's understanding of

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[1] Fedor Kalinin, 'Put' proletarskoi kul'tury i kul'tury burzhuaznoi' [The Path of Proletarian and Bourgeois Cultures], *Gorn*, 1 (1918), pp. 26–27.
[2] Pavel Bessal'ko, Fedor Kalinin, *Problemy proletarskoi kul'tury* [The Problems of Proletarian Culture] (Petersburg: Antei, 1919).
[3] O. Olenev, 'Nakonets-to!' [Finally!], *Gudki*, 1 (1919), 17–19; P. Iarovoi, 'Cherez soderzhanie k tekhnike, cherez tekhniky k massam' [From Content to Technics. From Technics to Masses], *Griadushchee*, 1–3 (1921), 51–60; V. Polianskii, 'Pis'ma o literaturnoi kritike' [Letters About Literary Criticism], *Griadushchee*, 4–6 (1921), 42–48.
[4] Alexander Bogdanov, 'Kritika Proletarskogo Iskusstva' [The Criticism of Proletarian Art], in *Iskusstvo i rabochii klass* (Moscow: Proletarskaia Kul'tura, 1918b), pp. 55–79 (p. 62).
[5] Ibid., p. 68.
[6] Ibid., pp. 65–71.

proletarian culture that practically reformulated the very idea of Proletkult, combining classist militancy with a Leninist dictatorship of the proletariat in art and culture. The book stressed the leading role of the party and praised the subordinate function of Proletkult. [1] Bogdanov's own, contradictory theory could hardly underpin the transformation of Proletkult into a Stalinist organisation; but even today the movement is remembered as a caricature of class politics.

Although Bogdanov's position does not provide a clear idea of the imaginary ideal form of proletarian art, it is unlikely that socialist realism could constitute such an ideal. The politicisation of art and the subordination of its form to propaganda in the name of the party and of socialism was not a guiding principle for Bogdanov. In his version of Proletkult as an all-embracing strategy of organisation, proletarian art was a name for a new mode of collective vision and perception. Bogdanov calls for the new proletarian intelligentsia to serve as a basis for proletarian culture, while avant-gardists, such as Arvatov, conversely call for the proletarianisation of the left intelligentsia.[2] This contradiction between intellectualisation of the workers and proletarianisation of the intellectuals reproduces itself in the practices of Proletkult and LEF-affiliated artists. The former prefer to leave the factory gates in favour of the professionalisation of art, while the latter enter factory production. The literary critic and theorist of factography Viktor Pertsov formulates this contradiction in the following way: 'The death of painting is by no means the death of art, and the work of the artist-constructivist, unfortunately, shares only one common property with the work of a lathe operator or a mechanic, namely the fact that both now make it in three dimensions'.[3]

The name of the proletariat is the name for a new, collective mode of vision and new practices of life-building. In Bogdanov it appears as a posited axiom or a variable in the theorem, and it has only one communist solution. However, in reality, this name became a signifier for classist essentialism. Furthermore, in a Stalinist culture of the Soviet people, it ceases to exist altogether. All of the talk of engineering, of abolition of social differences, of universal significance and the new human collectivism – this was certainly dangerously close to Stalinist total collectivisation. Nevertheless, it would be more precise to say that various Bogdanovian disciples, such as Gorky, were trying to

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[1] Valer'ian Pletnev, *Tri tochki zreniia na proletarskuiu kul'turu* [Three Perspectives on Proletarian Culture] (Moscow: Proletkul't, 1926).
[2] Maria Zalambani, *L'Arte Nella Produzione. Avanguardia e rivoluzione nella Russia sovietica degli anni '20* (Ravenna: Pleiadi, Longo Editore (Collana da Franco Mollia), 1998), pp. 77–78.
[3] Quoted in Ibid., p. 104.

correct the platform of Stalinist culture by means of 'tektological methods'. The violent dismantling of 'differences' and the notorious formula of 'engineers of the human soul' add little to the critique of authoritarian causality. However, it is precisely the failures of rationalism, and the contradictory coexistence of proletarian autonomism with the task of total organisation, that substantiate such interpretations of Bogdanov's systems. In our analysis we have aimed to demonstrate and expose these contradiction. A nuanced reading shows that Bogdanov's world-building and comradely cooperation shapes the laboratory of avant-garde art, and that this remains, despite the close proximity with Bolshevism, a unique and distinct radical autonomist platform. The obscurity of the name of the proletariat, who is the educator of the senses and the organiser of visual orientation – the life-builder and the organ of collectivism – in fact points to the universalism of the early experimental politics of post-revolutionary Soviet philosophy and theory.

C) Platonov's Encyclopaedia for the Proletariat: The Philosophical Functioning of Constancy, Narrative and Perception

> His international face now expressed no clear feeling and it was impossible to determine
> his origin – whether his family were oppressed labourers or professors; all the traits of
> his personality had been erased by the Revolution.[1]

The proletarian point of view together with the contradictions that are implicit to it become a main preoccupation of Andrei Platonov. He transfers the autonomist conception of Proletkult into the field of literature to produce an encyclopaedia for the proletariat. In the course of this transposition, Platonov tests the axioms and dogmas of proletarian culture by way of the reality principle. His proletarians study Esperanto, admire engineering and the exact sciences, but unlike Bogdanov's industrial labourers, their class origin is the peasantry and the declassed orphans of the civil war. At times they act as violent fighters, devastating villages, executing the bourgeoisie and kulaks; but at other times they utter philosophical propositions. They are declassed wandering travellers and active life-builders, a faceless multinational assemblage of the poor and

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[1] Andrei Platonov *Chevengur* [1926–28b], trans. by R. Chandler (unpublished manuscript drafts provided by the author, 2014), p. 49.

revolutionary communists, scientists and comrades of the animals and plants. In other words, Platonov's prose is the proletarian encyclopaedia of a really existing multitude of the poor.

This encyclopaedia covers the period of the 1920s and 1930s and it reflects different historical events, ranging from revolution and civil war to collectivisation and the sovietisation of Central Asia. Nevertheless, each concrete work departs from the same political problem of how to build communism: of what communism means and how the communist idea meets the concrete conditions and reality of the post-revolutionary society. The general political question of communism develops with respect to the problem of class relations in the Soviet provinces. This complex question roots the philosophical development of particular concepts that finally shape the system of Platonov's ideas.

The most convincing and direct proof of the writer's encyclopaedic logic is the numerous acknowledgements of Platonov's systematicity: narrative integrity and constancy[1] founded in the repetition of the same images, motifs, concepts and even heroes that give in sum one complete work – a meta-text, or meta-genre, as many philologists prefer to call it.[2] Many researchers identify Platonov's plots as 'road literature'.[3] Usually they consist of the journey of a lonely stranger across the country – who is, to speak in Gramscian terminology, an organic intellectual, a self-educated peasant or worker. In *Chevengur* (1926–28), the orphan Sasha Dvanov becomes a communist in the year of the revolution, joins the Bolsheviks and goes on a party errand to support the revolution in a village. During his long journey, Dvanov discovers 'communism in one village', established by poor peasants. The communism of the

[1] See: Heli Kostov, *Mifopoetika Andreia Platonova v romane 'Shchastlivaia Moskva'* [Mythopoetics of Andrei Platonov in the novel 'Happy Moscow'] (Helsinki: Slavica Helsingiensia, 2000), p. 72; Leonid Karasev, *Dvizhenie po sklonu v sochineniiakh A. Platonova* [Downhill Travel in Andrei Platonov's Work] (Moscow: RGGY, 2002); Ben Dhooge, 'Tvorcheskoe preobrazovanie iazyka i avtorskaia konzeptualizatsiia mira u A. Platonova' [The Artistic Transformation of Language and Authorial Conceptualisation of the World in Andrei Platonov] (PhD, Ghent University, 2007b), pp. 98–99.
[2] See: Valerii Iur'evich V'iugin, *Andrei Platonov: Poetika Zagadki* [Andrei Platonov: The Poetics of Enigma] (Saint Petersburg: RKhGI, 2004), p. 227; Diuzhina, Natal'ia, 'Tvorchestvo A. Platonova v politicheskom i kul'turnom kontekste (povest' Kotlovan i Sharmanka)' [Works of Andrei Platonov in Political and Cultural Context ('The Foundation Pit' and 'The Barrel Organ')] (PhD, Institut Mirivoi Literatury Rossiiskoi Akademii Nayk, 2004), p. 3; Natal'ia Kornienko, 'Povestvovatel'naia strategiia Platonova v svete tekstologii' [Narrative Strategy of Andrei Platonov in the Light of Textology], *Strana filosofov Andreia Platonova: Problemy tvorchestva*, 2 (1995), 312–35 (p. 314); Nina Petrovna Khriashcheva, *Kipiashchaia vselennaia A. Platonova* [The Boiling Universe of Andrei Platonov] (Ekaterinbugr: Sterlimak, 1998), pp. 8–9; 28; Nina Malygina, *Andrei Platonov: poetika 'vozvrashcheniia'* [Andrei Platonov: The Poetics of 'Return'] (Moscow: TEIS, 2005), pp. 171–89.
[3] Ibid., p. 172.

Chevengur village is accompanied by various absurd experiments with urban planning and farming, permanent terror and hunger. The wandering organic intellectuals are a supplement to the wandering masses, classes and communities, and they are all accompanied in their migration by animals, plants and natural landscape. The protagonist of Dzhan (1936; Soul in English translation), Nazar Chagataev, returns to his native town in Turkestan on a party errand to find the lost nomadic nation Dzhan, from which he had come, in order to establish a socialist order. *Dzhan* was written after Platonov's two journeys in Turkestan as a member of writers' delegations. This was during the period when the civil war in Turkestan had just ended and a campaign against traditional nomadic forms of life had been initiated. The task of the delegation was to write an orthodox socialist realist story about a successful 'civilising' process in the local communities. The central problem of Platonov's Dzhan may seem to conform to this brief, narrating as it does the story of a 'Red Moses' leading the nomadic inhabitants of the Asian desert to socialism. However, Chagataev goes back to Moscow when his mission has ended and one is left with doubts about the future of communism in the desert.[1]

Within this ascetic environment one also meets bureaucrats and party members who usually manipulate the poor wanderers. *Makar The Doubtful* and *Makar Drawing His Boundaries* (1929–30), as well as *For the Future's Sake. A Poor Man's Chronicle* (1931), were a direct reaction to Stalin's agenda of collectivisation. The stories expose in a satirical form Platonov's experience of working in Central Russia in the late 1920s and criticise the party bureaucracy, the impoverishment of the peasants and their alienation from everyday political decisions. In *Makar The Doubtful*, a poor and uneducated peasant travels to Moscow to find a temporary job in order to pay penalties for violations of labour discipline, while in *For the Future's Sake. A Poor Man's Chronicle*, a worker travels to the provinces to work as an electrical engineer. On their way, they meet different people, face various social situations and express criticism towards what they see.[2]

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[1] Another version of the story ends with a repetition of the novel's beginning. After the Chagataev experiment, the Dzhan people went their separate ways to all the countries of the world to begin there a new life.

[2] *Makar The Doubtful* was first written as a play for peasant radio and then was adapted as a novella. It was harshly criticised in the press for its anarchist ideas, which provoked a response from Platonov – the novella *Makar Drawing His Boundaries*. This shows how Makar becomes an active party member and changes his political views. However, when he acts as a party activist, the new pro-Stalinist Makar in fact furthers his anti-Stalinism.

The most famous work of Platonov, *The Foundation Pit* (1930), was also created in the context of the first five-year plan. It unfolds by way of a series of meetings between the protagonist Voshchev and the residents of a small provincial town, who are involved in the construction of an enormous proletarian house. While Voshchev challenges the representatives of different class groups, engaging in a Socratic inquiry into truth, the project acquires a more and more grandiose plan, before finally coming to an end with no result. The same motif of 'truth-seeking' is presented in *Happy Moscow* (1933–36). In the novel, the protagonist Moskva (Moscow) Chesnova is a synecdoche of Moscow as a city.[1] Moskva passes through various transformations – professional and personal, social and political: she is a poor orphan child, a new Soviet middle-class professional and a part of privileged party circles, a critic of the nomenclature lifestyle, a disabled working-class woman and finally a declassed homeless proletarian at the novel's end.

At first glance it may seem that all these stories assert the hopelessness of any efforts to accomplish the socialist transformation of life. In *The Foundation Pit*, a symbol of the future of socialism – a little girl – is dying and the proletarian house has never been completed, like many other ambitious projects of Stalin's era. In *Chevengur*, a group of pro-tsarist Cossacks and soldiers devastate the self-managed communism in the village, while the main character commits suicide in despair over the Chevengur experiment. In the early short story *The Extinguished Lamp of Ilyich* (1926) a young worker, together with peasants, organises the first power plant and cooperative in the village. However, kulaks burn the power plant in order to force the peasants to use their expensive old mill. The whole story is biographical, and in response to accusations of hopelessness and pessimism Platonov claims:

> The story portrays a cooperative association of the poor, who built a
> power plant. And I was a technician-builder of that power plant (the plot
> is reality). All the poor of the village accepted the light [electricity – MC]
> enthusiastically, but I, who had conducted the propaganda of
> electrification in the media and among the population for many years, am
> condemned as an enemy of electrification [...] [The] power plant [...]

[1] Viola Viktorovna Eidinova '"Shchastlivaia Moskva" kak modifikatsiia stilia i slova A. Platonova: struktura podmeny' ['Happy Moscow' as Modification of Style: The Structure of Substitution], *Strana filosofov Andreia Platonova: problemy tvorchestva*, 3 (1999), pp. 222–33.

won over the kulaks economically as the electric mill is cheaper than the kulak's wind-driven generators. The only truth […] is that the kulak-millers set on fire the power plant […] I could write that the power station is built again (and it really happened), but I would have to write then that the kulaks fight against it again and could not finish my story. The end is not in literature, but in life.[1]

Platonov's commentary explains that the pessimism of his stories has to do with real conditions. The driving force of his characters is communism, although its practical realisation is usually far from being achieved. That is why popular discussions about utopia and anti-utopia in Platonov[2] cannot explain Platonov's assertion that the 'end is not in literature, but in life'. An ideal or 'utopia' are not the tools through which Platonov explores communist life-building. Instead of ideals, Platonov assesses concrete conditions, i.e. Lenin's 'the concrete analysis of the concrete situation'. However, he does this, not for the purpose of manifesting the situation or the documentation of the event, as many productivist writers would do, but to reveal the complexity in the given conditions. Unlike in Lenin's doctrine, though, for Platonov it is not enough to provide a proper Marxist analysis of the situation and predict what might happen. The writer goes further, and in the 'writer's direction': the next step is to encode the situation in various narrative strategies and concepts in order to proceed from an analytical to a philosophical perspective on what the whole situation is about. Ovechkin correctly suggests that from the point of view of Marxism and communism, Platonov never writes anti-utopias as such, but includes all objections and doubts concerning his utopias within the text itself.[3] To think about communist- and socialist-building as something concrete may involve discussing the historical existence of the working class and peasants, but at the same time, empirical analysis is just a first necessary step in the construction of a philosophical level of understanding.

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[1] Andrei Platonov, 'Protiv khalturnykh sudei' [Against Irresponsible Judges] [1929], in *Andrei Plaronov. Vospominaniia Sovremennikov. Materialy k biografii*, ed. by N. V. Kornienko, E. D. Shubina (Moscow: Sovremennyi Pisatel, 1994), pp. 250–53 (p. 252).

[2] David M. Bethea, 'Chevengur: On the Road with the Bolshevik Utopia', in *The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction* (Princeton: Prinston University Press, 1989), pp. 145–85; Hans Günther, *Po obe storony utopii. Konteksty tvorchestva A. Platonova* [On Both Sides of Utopia: The Context of Andrei Platonov's Work] (Moscow: NLO, 2012b).

[3] Sergei Ovechkin, *Proletariat Budushchego* [The Proletariat of the Future] (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'skii Dom 'SKIFIIA'; GIZ 'Novoe kul'turnoe prostranstvo', 2008), p. 31.

The principle of repetitive plots corresponds to the encyclopaedic form of Platonov's work. He has only one complete novel, *Chevengur*, but philological research on the manuscripts allows us to define four others, unfinished or lost.[1] According to Kornienko, each of the conceived novels includes a set of corresponding texts: stories, dramas, novellas and sketches. Thus, she suggests considering Platonov's work as a series of cycles or 'satellites' of the novel.[2] The idea that groups of texts may function as 'satellites' of the main work seems to be productive for the structural analysis of the writer's recurring themes and concepts. What is given in an abstract and reduced form in the larger works may have a more pointed political and historical character in the 'satellites'. Thus, the elaboration of materialism takes place in its most articulated form in Platonov's early science fiction stories that are connected to his main science fiction work, *The Ethereal Tract (*1926–27). An anti-fascist story, *Rubbish Wind* (1933), and the story from the Turkmen cycle, *Takyr* (1934), introduce the *poor life* concept, central for *Dzhan*.

However, it is doubtful that 'cyclisation' determines the formation of a novel. Unlike a novel, each part of a cycle can exist as an autonomous work of a smaller genre. Cyclisation gives to a work the status of a fragment, but the fragment inhabits the whole.[3] In other words, the fragment creates assemblages where the whole is not simply a successive accumulation of the parts, as in the materials for a novel, but where the parts articulate the whole in a holistic manner. In practical terms this means that the mode of meta-textual construction is rather a critique of extended narrative strategies and of the novel itself in particular. The cycle is born in a time of revolution, and it emerges from discussions concerning the crisis of a novel-form that is no longer able to respond to the needs of proletarian culture. Reports, notes, diaries, documentaries, chronicles, memoirs and sketches replaced the novel not only in the experimental factographical forms of the LEF writers, but also in early revolutionary modernist

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[1] The unfinished *Happy Moscow* (1932-36), the lost *Travel from Leningrad to Moscow* (1937–41), and unfound novels *Stratilat* (1928–32) and *Travel to Mankind* (1940). See: Natal'ia Kornienko, 'Povestvovatel'naia strategiia Platonova v svete tekstologii' [The Narrative Strategy of Andrei Platonov in the Light of Textology], pp. 313–14.

[2] Ibid.

[3] It was admitted by: Svetlana Igorevna Krasovskaia, *Khudozhestvennaia proza Andreia Platonova: zhanry i zhanrovye protsessy* [Literary Work of Andrei Platonov: Genre and Genre Processes] (Blagoveshchensk: Blagoveshchenskii Pedagogicheskii Universitet, 2005), pp. 9–11.

prose.[1] It seems that a novel as such is not the goal here. The goal is rather 'to create something prominent (literature, technics[2], philosophy – it does not matter in which area)'.[3] For this reason, in his journalism Platonov writes about the struggle with drought and in real life he builds electricity stations in villages, while in his literature he reflects on this experience and practical work. Besides, all the scientific inventions that are depicted in the stories, such as inventions in agriculture to aid in the struggle against seasonal drought, are in fact the real discoveries of the writer. In turn, these inventions influence Platonov's philosophical conception of materialism. [4]

Literature is a part of broader concerns, and it is not surprising that Platonov's texts develop the same images and concepts in various forms, from the literary to the scientific and essayistic. Platonov writes in a letter to his partner: 'My ideals are monotonous and constant. I won't be a writer if I state only the invariable ideas. No one would read it. I have to vulgarise and vary my thoughts to make acceptable works'.[5] In other words, he uses the medium of literature as a tool to frame his complete and closed system of ideas. The Soviet literary critic Gurvich was the first to mention the conceptual constancy of Platonov's thinking:

> Platonov's worldview is stable, not movable. He reacts to changes in
> reality, but its conception remains invariable […] The world and the
> person – this is his visual field. Platonov never writes about the given, the
> particular, the only or as Hegel says, *about this*. About this child, about
> this old woman, about this female, about this Bolshevik. He writes about
> a childhood in general, about an old age, about loneliness, about death,
> about a birth, about orphanhood in general […] The time of action is

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[1] Krasovskaia names Boris Pilnyak, Alexander Serafimovich, Fyodor Sologub and Osip Mandelstam as other examples. About cyclisation and crisis of novel in the post-revolutionary literature see: Ibid., pp. 30–48.

[2] Platonov means *tekhnika* here - machinery and the art of material production.

[3] Andrei Platonov, *'Ia prozhyl zhizn'': Pis'ma. 1920-1950'* ['I Have Lived Life': Correspondence. 1920-1950] (Moscow: Artel', 2013), pp. 180–81.

[4] For example, Platonov received a patent on his device 'An Electric Moisturizer for the Root Systems and the Root-Inhabited Soil Layer of Earth', mentioned in *The Ethereal Tract*: Nina Malygina, *Andrei Platonov: poetika 'vozvrashcheniia'* [Abdrei Platonov: The Poetics of 'Return'], p. 17. About the relationship between science and philosophy in Platonov's *The Ethereal Tract* see also Nina Malygina, Irina Matveeva, 'Komentarii' [Comments], in Andrei Platonov, *Works,* 8 vols (Moskow: Vremia, 2011), vol III, pp. 513–20.

[5] Andrei Platonov, *'Ia prozhyl zhizn'': Pis'ma. 1920–1950'* ['I Have Lived Life': Correspondence. 1920-1950], p. 199.

eternity. The place of action is 'a huge globular surface of the earth'. These scales easily accommodate Platonov's stories.[1]

It is true that while Platonov's drafts include biographical facts and detailed descriptions of his heroes' experiences, the final versions do not allow for the division of characters according to criteria of positive or negative, personal or fictional: 'From here, there is a special perception of Platonov's characters: a reader is free to see not in the only one, but in each of them a guide to the author's ideas'.[2] The leading characters of Platonov's stories inhabit a single textual space and continue unfinished or interrupted themes from his earlier work. These characters do not act as heroes or anti-heroes. They also lack psychological characteristics. For instance, in the drafts of *The Foundation Pit* the protagonist Voshchev has the surname of the writer, but in the later versions Platonov alienates the protagonist from its creator and destroys the hierarchy of the characters.[3] Therefore it would be more correct to say that there is no protagonist at all, but only various figures and prototypes that are equally important for the story.

Love admits the depersonalisation of the characters in *The Foundation Pit*, but her remark is a fair assessment of the majority of Platonov's works: 'they seems to be merely flat characters, figures without a profound psychological portrait. They are almost without exception referred to by their surnames only, and as a result seem to lack an individual face'.[4] Platonov's characters are faceless and almost identical to each other. We can say only that they are poor, exhausted and average: '[On] the faces of all Platonov's heroes appears a prototypical similarity, a certain average, typical, mass, approximate human as such. It almost does not matter who is exactly before us: Voshchev (from *The Foundation Pit*) or Alexander Dvanov (from *Chevengur*), Prushevsky or Serbinov'.[5] Platonov's 'reddish member of the commune with the

[1] Alexandr Gurvich, 'Andrei Platonov' [1937], in *Andrei Plaronov. Vospominaniia Sovremennikov. Materialy k biografii*, ed. by N. V. Kornienko and E. D. Shubina (Moscow: Sovremennyi Pisatel', 1994), pp. 358–412 (pp. 401–3).

[2] Valerii Iur'evich V'iugin, 'Povest' Kotlovan v contekste tvorchestva A. Platonova' ['The Foundation Pit' in the Context of Platonov's Work], in *Kotlovan. Text, materialy tvorcheskoi istorii* (Saint Petersburg: Nauka, 2000b), pp. 5–18 (p. 13).

[3] See: Andrei Platonov, *Kotlovan. Text, materialy tvorcheskoi istorii* [The Foundation Pit. Text, The Materials of Its Historical Origin] [1930a], ed. by V. U. V'iugin (Saint Petersburg: Nauka, 2000).

[4] Katharina H. Love, 'The structure of space in Platonov's Kotlovan', in *Dutch Contribution to the Eleventh International Congress of Slavists, Bratislava, August 30 – September 9, 1993. Literature*, ed. by W. G. Weststeijn (Amsterdan – Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994), pp. 117–30 (pp. 121–22).

[5] Mikhail Mikheev, *V mir Platonova cherez ego iazyk: Predpolozheniia, fakty, istolkovaniia, dogadki* [To Platonov's World Through His Language: Assumptions, Facts, Interpretations, Guesses] (Moscow: MGY, 2003), p. 103.

monotonous mass face' (*Chevengur*), the man with 'average Tambov's face' (*For The Future's Sake. A Poor Man's Chronicle*) or 'Dvanov's general face' (*Chevengur*)[1] remind one of Malevich's and Filonov's formalist paintings of peasants and workers. They are abstract prototypes with depersonalised faces, exhausted by labour. What is more, Platonov often describes these faces as 'international'. There are plenty of such 'international' faces: the Mongolian face of the communist Chepurny (*Chevengur*), the 'non-Russian' faces of the declassed nomadic people (*Chevengur*, *Dzhan*), a face belonging to 'the western man' who died after torture in the fascist concentration camp in Germany (*Rubbish Wind*).[2] Platonov's heroes have different national and cultural backgrounds, but nonetheless they represent the same category: the proletariat. The idea behind 'the international' and 'non-Russian' faces is the idea of an average multinational proletariat that makes up one class. There is a significant explanation of the 'non-Russianness' of the nomadic declassed people in *Chevengur*: 'This is the true international proletariat: look – they're not Russians, they're not Armenians, they're not Tartars – they're not anything! I bring you live international'.[3] It is precisely this multinational, and one can even say anti-colonial, perspective that leads Platonov to the deconstruction of the dominant image of the white industrial working class that was so typical among the hardliners in Proletkult.

The role of a personality partially performs the peculiarities of the heroes' speech. However, this speech still creates 'class appearance' rather than subjectivity and collective body rather than personal characteristics:

> A certain nomenclature of linguistic actions belongs to every type of body that is constructed as a character; yet it is not so much that it 'belongs' but rather that it is language itself that becomes the subject of action, and not specific characters. Language creates bodies: Zhachev (the body of the pseudocripple), Chiklin (the ideal body of labor and terror), Voshchev (the body of exhaustion, a perverse body), Dvanov (the body of revolutionary askesis, intellectualism) […] Given its sovereignty over concrete physical action, language carries on the perpetual

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[1] Andrei Platonov *Chevengur* [1926–28b], trans. by R. Chandler, p. 82.
[2] The draft title of the anti-fascist story *Rubbish Wind* is *The Story About The Destiny of One Western Man*. See: Natal'ia Kornienko, 'Komentarii' [Comments], in: Andrei Platonov, *Works* 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2010), vol. IV, pp. 577–620 (p. 596).
[3] Andrei Platonov *Chevengur* [1926–28b], trans. by R. Chandler, p. 35.

transformation of individual bodies – it constantly derealises any activity, deed, and moment of characters.[1]

There is no protagonist and no individual in Platonov's works, but at the same time, as Podoroga correctly notices, such words as *collectivisation, revolution, industrialisation, communism, substance* and *existence* have individuality, but no clear terminological boundary.[2] In such expressions as 'the kolkhoz, carried away by the dance, paid no mind to his word' or 'outside the kolkhoz sat down by the fence', *kolkhoz* becomes a singular person.[3]

Platonov uses the language of the streets and villages mixed with the New Soviet Language, and his aim was to express a post-revolutionary class imagination and the process of new identity construction. At the same time: no one spoke such a language. It is a broken and abusive speech, the result of the exposure of peasants' and workers' concrete thinking to the abstract and scientific language of Marxism-Leninism; but there were no workers and peasants who would express their ideas in such a philosophical manner. Soviet literary critics berated Platonov for illiteracy and childishness, creating a myth about the 'rough diamond' and naive provincial man who spoke in the same way as his characters.[4] It is now confirmed that Platonov consciously invented various strategies to develop his unique language. He uses a wide range of stylistic devices connected with written and oral Russian speech, including *skaz*,[5] archaic words and

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[1] Valerii Podoroga, 'The Eunuch of the Soul: Positions of Reading and the World of Platonov', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 90. 2 (1991), 357–408 (p. 357).

[2] Valerii Aleksandrovich Podoroga, *Mimezis. Materialy po analiticheskoi antropologii* [Mimesis. The Materials of Analytical Anthropology], 2 vols (Moscow: Kul'turnaia revoliutsiia, 2011), vol. II, p. 286.

[3] Cited in: Thomas Seifrid, *A Companion to Andrei Platonov's 'The Foundation Pit'* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2009), p. 162. Platonov animates language by using different devices. Dhooge lists a simultaneous usage of the abstract and concrete connotations of words that leads to the materialisation of the abstract and the abstraction of the concrete, for example 'uninterrupted progress of the general line': here the abstract term becomes concrete and animated; mixes analyticism and syntheticism ('thinking thoughts') or uses a grammatical replacement and meaning substitution that gives 'silent institution', 'meaningful child' and 'barefooted place'. See: Ben Dhooge, 'Tvorcheskoe preobrazovanie iazyka i avtorskaia konzeptualizatsiia mira u A. Platonova' [The Artistic Transformation of Language and Authorial Conceptualisation of the World in Andrei Platonov], pp. 155–61.

[4] This corresponds to an image of the self-educated man who never studied at the university and simply wrote as an illiterate resident of the Voronezh region. See the critique of such a position in Ibid., pp. 87–89.

[5] Boris Eikhenbaum, representative of the Russian formalist school and a close friend of many Soviet avant-garde writers, theorised *skaz* for the first time in relation to the works of Gogol and Leskov. He defines *skaz* as the mimicry of oral performance in storytelling, where the plot is less important than stylistic devices. See: Boris Eikhembaum, *Skvoz' literaturu* [Through Literature] (Leningrad: Academia, 1924), p. 171. The Russian word *skas* literally means 'to tell' and it is also a root of the words *rasskaz* (short story) and *skazat'* (to say). Krasovskaia links the appeal of *skaz* in Platonov to the creation of a new historical narrative concerning the battle of the proletariat and the transformation of the world after

Marxist-Leninist rhetoric. The typical description of Platonov's style of writing looks as follows:

> This style is characterized by imitation of skaz and peasant speech, of ornamental prose, revolutionary and bureaucratic language, by violations of syntax and grammar, by neologisms, tautology, contamination […] he does not observe the usual, conventional semantic connections between words, but introduces new, unexpected word combinations, which may lead to new and often surprising meanings.[1]

Platonov reflected the historical development of a new Soviet language made of revolutionary slogans, the vocabulary of Marxian political economy, the jargon of the Bolsheviks and party bureaucrats and its absorption by the illiterate peasants and workers. Historical research shows that for most of the post-revolutionary population, especially in the provinces, the language of the party was foreign and unintelligible, so that 'they themselves perforce began to absorb the new vocabulary […] often garbled its unfamiliar, bookish terms or reconfigured them as something more comprehensible, however absurd'.[2] Thus, '"*deistvyushchaya* armia" – "acting army" – became "*devstvyushchaya* armia" – "virginal army" – because "acting" and "virginity" sound identical in Russian; "militsioner" ("militiaman") became "litsimer" ("hypocrite")'[3]. Platonov recalls this linguistic confusion and constructs the same hybridised words. He often takes pieces from the newspapers and political slogans; uses speeches from the meetings, party and local committee sessions; makes sketches from the living language of the workers. Pieces of everyday speech collected by Platonov can be found in his notebooks, but these notes are rarely used as they are in his prose.

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the revolution. No genre could be better suited for this narrative than *skaz,* which is based on legends, folklore and the scheme of cosmogenic narrative: Svetlana Igorevna Krasovskaia, *Khudozhestvennaia proza Andreia Platonova: zhanry i zhanrovye protsessy* [The Literary Work of Andrei Platonov: Genre and Genre Processes], pp. 67–70.

[1] Willem G. Weststeijn, 'Metaphor in the work of Andrej Platonov', in *Dutch Contribution to the Eleventh International Congress of Slavists, Bratislava, August 30 – September 9, 1993. Literature*, ed. by W. G. Weststeijn (Amsterdan – Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994), pp. 331–40 (p. 331).

[2] Thomas Seifrid, *A Companion to Andrei Platonov's 'The Foundation Pit'*, p. 156.

[3] Ibid., pp. 154–55. See also a sociological study of the oral and written language of the red army solders conducted by a psychologist Isaac Shpil'rein and his colleagues in 1920s: I. N. Shpil'rein, D. I. Reitynbarg, G. O. Netskii, *Iazyk Krasnoarmeitsa* [The Language of a Red Solder] (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1928).

Platonov collides philosophical categories and concepts with the 'immanent' perspective of the topic of the day, political events, newspaper's headline. In the novel *Chevengur*, red army commissar and ex-peasant Stepan Kopenkin makes from the term 'subject' the word 'doubject' (*dub"ect*), which results from the combination of the two Russian words 'object' (*ob"ekt*) and 'subject' (*sub"ekt*), but also from the word oak (*dub*), which in figurative expression means stupidity and strength at the same time.[1] *Doubject* is certainly an incorrect usage of the word 'subject', but we don't know if Platonov heard it somewhere or invented it himself. What is important is that *doubject* becomes a specific concept, designed to assist proletarian thinking in considering the dialectical unity of subject and object.

There are certainly more immediate and straightforward political usages of revolutionary words in Platonov too, for example when he directly parodies the language of newspapers and party manifestos. Platonov expresses certain specifics of Soviet politics – of a time when it was necessary to explain and didactically chew over each new concept proposed by the party – including the famous secrets of Stalin's metaphorical slogans and schemes – because the life of a person often depended on the correctness of the interpretation. Platonov grants himself permission to sneer at Stalin's style and, therefore, breaks the rules of the game.[2] The language of the Bolsheviks and Stalin's manifestos is very metaphorical, and sometimes it is semantically close to the physicality of Platonov's mode of writing. Similarly to many of Platonov's neologisms, Soviet political terms have a topological and agricultural origin. The most famous slogans, such as 'general line of the party', 'all-round collectivisation' (*sploshnaia* – literally meaning solid and massive collectivisation), 'distortions of the party line', 'right-wing deviations' and 'the bend of the general party line' are strongly connected to these topographical characteristics. The 'bend' corresponds to the Russian verb *peregibat*; however, Stalin invented his own neologism, the noun *peregib*, which means both flexing of space and that someone went too far and crossed the line.[3] Platonov

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[1] Natal'ia Kornienko, *'Skazano russkim iazykom…' Andrei Platonov i Mikhail Sholokhov* ['It has been spelled out in Russian…' Andrei Platonov and Mikhail Sholokhov] (Moscow: IMLI RAN, 2003), p. 59.

[2] About the mixture of popular and scientific languages in relation to Stalin's speeches see: Mikhail Iur'evich Mikheev, *V mir Platonova cherez ego iazyk* [Platonov's World Through His Language], p. 328; Valerii Iur'evich V'iugin, *Andrei Platonov: Poetika* Zagadki [Andrei Platonov: The Poetics of Enigma], pp. 347–49. Boris Groys writes about the privatisation of philosophy and language in Stalin: Boris Groys, *The Communist Postscript* (London: Verso, 2010).

[3] Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, 'Dizzy with Success. Concerning Questions of the Collective-Farm Movement' [1930], in *Works,* 14 vols, trans. by Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute of the C.C., C.P.S.U. (B.) (Foreign Languages Publishing House: Moscow, 1954), vol. 12, pp. 197–205.

plays with the obscurity and equivocality of these terms and invents his own response, carrying the same postulates to the point of absurdity. In the following passage from 'For the Future's Sake. A Poor Man's Chronicle', he is paraphrasing all the above-mentioned formulas, and introduces his own neologisms extrapolated from Stalin's article 'Dizzy with Success. Concerning Questions of the Collective-Farm Movement' and its key the formula 'the bend of the general party line':

> Such a singular phenomenon in the neighbourhood was subsequently designated as an *unbending*, and Evseev won fame as an *unbender*, as opposed to a *rebender*. I use the circumstances here to declare the true facts of the matter: *the bends of collectivisation* were not general, there were places that were free from *dizzying mistakes* and there *the party line remained continuous* and didn't go into a *crooked bend*. But, unfortunately, there weren't too many of these places. So what was the reason for such an *uninterrupted progress of the general line*? [1]

This example is representative of many of Platonov's texts, and the same operations of abstraction, politicisation, metaphorisation and the transformation of everyday words into neologisms can be found everywhere. Thus, 'Platonov uses two main devices: first, as we see, he interprets an abstract ideological definition through the use of the common man, the person from the people, and secondly, he makes an inverse operation, when he overloads the simplest and clearest everyday words and expressions […] with a set of ideological associations', to such an extent that these words become 'so terribly improbable and confusing that, finally, they lose their initial meaning'.[2]

This might push us to believe that Platonov was first of all concerned with how to resist the new Soviet language, and that he considered it a language of terror and oppression. Moreover, we might infer that his heroes deny Soviet language, do not understand the revolution or even reject it. However, we do not find anywhere in Platonov a denial of the language of revolution. On the contrary, his heroes try to animate and philosophise this language, so that such concepts as 'class', 'communism'

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[1] Andrei Platonov, 'Vprok. Bedniatskaai khronika' [For The Future's Sake. A Poor Man's Chronicle] [1931], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), vol. II, pp. 284–350 (p. 298). Italics mine.
[2] Mikhail Mikheev, *V mir Platonova cherez ego iazyk: Predpolozheniia, fakty, istolkovaniia, dogadki* [To Platonov's World Through His Language: Assumptions, Facts, Interpretations, Guesses], p. 331.

and 'revolution' would correspond to concrete experience rather then to abstract definitions taken from political literacy courses.[1] The methods of language deformation in Platonov have the purpose of actualising and concretising new Soviet language, archaisms and dialects.

This represents a philosophical reconfiguration of the everyday, not a 'philosophizing of the everyday' by means of language, but the constitution of a particular type of philosophy by means of language. Platonov gathers together proletarian viewpoints that are dispersed in time and space and re-assembles them as the encyclopaedic entries for a proletarian philosophy. 'There's nowhere for life to go, so you think thoughts into your head!', says the working-class character Chiklin.[2] Relying on this unusual phrase, Dooghe builds up a theoretical explanation of Platonov's notions of thinking. He argues that in this phrase Platonov actualises the Russian existential verb 'to live' that, like such verbs as 'to be' and 'to exist', does not normally express an action.[3] Apart from 'nowhere for life to go' there is another peculiar expression – 'to think thoughts into the head'. What is happening with these existential verbs and nouns that express an intellectual activity (a thinking, to think) is the concretisation 'of thought process and its rooting in a body' or the situation of these processes in the mind.[4] The same is true for feelings and sensations, human actions and abstract ideas: they all have a concrete place located in a body, a head, a throat, a stomach, a chest and even in the sexual organs:[5] 'Everyone has an entire imperialism encamped down below'.[6] Feelings, thoughts and ideology can also enter and exit a human body, can be accumulated and spent. As a result of long labour activity the quantity of vital energy and the quantity of life increases.[7] For example:

> Voshchev was made redundant from the small machine factory
> where he obtained the means for his own existence. His

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[1] By 'political literacy campaign courses' I mean the Bolshevik campaign of *likbez* – liquidation of illiteracy and liquidation of political illiteracy – that had been implemented in the 1920s.
[2] Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit* [1930c], trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler and O. Meerson (New York: New York Review of Books, 2009), p. 26.
[3] Ben Dhooge, 'Tvorcheskoe preobrazovanie iazyka i avtorskaia konzeptualizatsiia mira u A. Platonova' [The Artistic Transformation of Language and the Authorial Conceptualisation of the World in Andrei Platonov], pp. 444–46.
[4] Ibid., pp. 447, 469.
[5] Ibid., pp. 486–508
[6] Andrei Platonov *Chevengur* [1926–28b], trans. by R. Chandler, p. 68.
[7] Ben Dhooge, 'Tvorcheskoe preobrazovanie iazyka i avtorskaia konzeptualizatsiia mira u A. Platonova' [The Artistic Transformation of Language and the Authorial Conceptualisation of the World in Andrei Platonov], pp. 508–12.

> dismissal notice stated that he was being removed from production on account of *weakening strength in him* and *thoughtfulness amid the general tempo of labor.*[1]

Philosophical reasoning is incorporated in grammar, or, better, philosophy is situated in the grammar of the text. Platonov's grammatical units might be considered as 'constants', 'ideologemes' and 'key conceptual words'.[2] Finally, it is argued that Platonov 'thinks within grammar'[3] and for this reason depends on the specificities of the Russian language. However, as it has been stressed, this language is neither standard spoken, nor standard literary written language, but rather Platonov's sub-language. That is what makes the Russian and English reader of Platonov more or less equal: whether we read Platonov in Russian or in translation, his language sounds foreign.[4] This foreignness helps Platonov to create and design philosophical categories and concepts from the essentially non-philosophical, synthetic Russian language. That is why his is a people's philosophy or simply a philosophical language that the worker could in theory accept as his or her own. In our research the task is to grasp this philosophy and translate it into an essentially analytic English language.

What exactly is this sub-language made of, and what makes it the 'philosophical language of a worker'? Dooghe is the only researcher who points to Platonov's connection to empiricism. He sees a direct interrelation of his conceptualisation of body and thinking with Locke's and Condillac's ideas about the external nature of impressions, which enter into the tabula rasa of human reason. Analogies to other thinkers of the eighteenth century, the mechanical philosophy of nature, and in particular La Mettrie's 'Man a Machine', are also seen as appropriate.[5] However, eighteenth-century empiricism cannot explain why it is that, in Platonov, it is not only feelings and reason that are corporeal – able to collect thoughts and impressions in a

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[1]Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit* [1930c], trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler and O. Meerson, p. 1. Italics mine.

[2] Konstantin Abrekovich Barsht, *Poetika prozy A. Platonova* [The Poetics of Andrei Platonov's Literary Work] (Saint Petersburg: SPBGY, 2000), p. 8.

[3] Svetlana Semenova, 'Serdechnyi myslitel'' [Heartful Thinker], *Voprosy Filosofii*, 3 (1989), 26–31 (p. 27).

[4] However, in order to get access to this foreignness, the translator of Platonov must transport it into his or her native language. This basically means that the translator has to create a sub-language inside of the language, and that is what the English translator Robert Chandler does in his brilliant translations of Platonov.

[5] Ben Dhooge, 'Tvorcheskoe preobrazovanie iazyka i avtorskaia konzeptualizatsiia mira u A. Platonova' [The Artistic Transformation of Language and the Authorial Conceptualisation of the World in Andrei Platonov], p. 583.

mechanical way – but also actions and social and political phenomena (communism is both idea and praxis). Moreover, mechanistic empiricism does not link thought to exchange, production and reproduction – social phenomena we meet everywhere in Platonov.

In fact, this empiricist position is situated in close relation to Bogdanov's organisation of emotions and the avant-gardist reformulation of this theory in terms of 'visual orientation' and 'emotional life-building'. In an early Proletkultist article, Platonov states that proletarian art has to begin with the organisation of 'immaterial things' – images and symbols of things, words. He distinguishes three elements of a word – idea, image and sound. The organisation of poetry according to the triangular properties of a word is the process of gathering of all wandering feelings and senses into one thought. The word-becoming of thought penetrates reality better then empty abstractions, because it makes conscious both sensibility and proletarian experience. From the organisation of triangular words into thoughts, and we may add, into proletarian thinking, humankind will proceed to the organisation of matter and world-building.[1] We will return to this question in the next chapter, when we discuss the embodiment of language in Platonov, but for now it is also important to stress that Platonov's language implies Bogdanov's labour causality, according to which a labour act produces thinking: 'Initially the old man was silent, since all others at first produced not thought but a certain pressure in the dark warmth, and then the warmth somehow spoke its way out, cooling as it flowed'.[2] This is the point of view of labour experience, the articulation of what is seen and what happens from the perspective of a labouring body: it speaks as it labours. The laboratory of Platonov's proletarian language is the laboratory of the new philosophy, of the new point of view. The proletarian thinking expresses labouring being – the molecular and cosmic world of the elements' causalities and concatenations, their production and reproduction in the life complexes. Platonov's text is immanent to such thinking.

The point of view of proletarian thinking not only articulates labour experience, but also perceives strange and peculiar events as everyday and banal. The Platonov of the 1920s, and to some extent of the 1930s, looks at such phenomena as terror, violence, and victimhood without any sentiments or moral reasoning. The objective tone of the

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[1] Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'Proletarskaia poeziia' [Proletarian Poetry] [1922], in *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2004), vol. I (2), pp. 162–67 (pp. 164–65).
[2] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by A. Olcott (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1978), p. 236. Translation corrected.

narration has no subjective function, and the reader has to decide how to deal with the given situations independently. Relevant examples include mass terror in the village of Chevengur, a 'class conscious horse' acting as a revolutionary proletarian; a fisherman who drowned with the intention 'to live in death for a while and then come back again';[1] and a speaking bear, murdering kulaks in *The Foundation Pit*. However, it is clearly implied in the texts that the common sense point of view on the absurdity of 'the proletarian horse' or 'the poorest working-class bear' belongs to the party bureaucrat or urban intellectual. These figures often appear in the texts as rigid critics of the point of view of proletarian thinking.

As Olga Meerson observes, Platonov often forces a reader to agree with the worst or most contradictory characters.[2] She finds a significant example of such a trick in a scene from *The Foundation Pit*, depicting the meeting of a bear and the party bureaucrat Pashkin.[3] This bureaucrat wants to find and promote the poorest worker in town. According to rumours, his ideal candidate is a class-conscious blacksmith's apprentice who works the longest shifts and hates kulaks. However, neither Pashkin nor the reader knows that this hired worker is not human, but a bear:

> We, readers, 'enter' the smithy only after witnessing Pashkin's disappointment. Yet we still don't know its cause […] When we finally find ourselves within the smithy, with another visitor, Chiklin – whom nothing can surprise because he (a) knows about the bear (b) has the correct Marxist class consciousness himself […] we end up no better, in relation to confusing class-conscious bears with human beings, than the despised functionary bureaucrat Pashkin.[4]

The bear surprises neither the workman Chiklin, nor the storyteller, but only the reader and Pashkin. In this way the storyteller directs the sympathy of the reader to the conformist Pashkin, for whom a bear cannot be counted as a worker. The episode

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[1] Andrei Platonov, 'Chevengur (Three Chapters from the Novel)' [1926–28d], in: *The Portable Platonov. For the Centenary of Andrei Platonov's Birth*, trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler (Moscow: Glas New Russian Writing, 1999), pp. 13–87 (p. 26).
[2] Olga Meerson, *"Svobodnaia veshch'". Poetika neostraneniia u Andreia Platonova* [Liberated Thing. The Poetics of Non-Estrangement in Andrei Platonov] (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 2001b), p. 21.
[3] See: Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit* [1930c], trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler and O. Meerson, pp. 107–8.
[4] Olga Meerson, 'Andrei Platonov's Re-familiarization: The Perils and Potencies of Perceptive Inertia', *Essays in Poetics. The Journal of the British Neo-Formalist Corcle. Platonov Special Issue In Two Volumes*, 1, 26 (2001a), 21–37 (pp. 24–25).

grounds a number of surrealist interpretations,[1] but the bear is as real for Chiklin as it was for the Voronezh region of the beginning of the 1920s. The biographer of Platonov found out that there was a real bear-blacksmith, who worked at one of the suburban Voronezh's smithies, and Platonov's brother confirmed that the young writer saw this bear many times.[2] For Chiklin and Platonov what the bear does in the smithy is more important then who he is – a human or an animal. In the proletarian world of experience, the working-class bear and the 'class conscious horse' are similar to Bogdanov's actually existing wood goblins or house spirits. One could say that, to sign up to the surrealist reading of Platonov's text, one would also need to sign up to the position of the party and the intellectuals. That is why Platonov creates multiple entry points to the issue of labour causality and does not expose the proletarian point of view directly. Indeed, why would he at once challenge the bourgeois point of view *and* convince those who do not belong to the bourgeois world to accept it as their own? The bourgeoisie cannot be changed, and if it sees in Platonov's novels utopias, absurdities or surrealism, that is because the bourgeoisie stands its own class point of view. Platonov in fact violently forces a reader to penetrate and analyse the logic of class separation.

The equivalent status of the hard-working bear and the hard-working man embraces Platonov's concept of poor life. Poor life is the state of being in which all nature is exposed to exploitation. This is to say that capitalism creates a 'working-class' life in which plants, animals and humans are equally mistreated. The bear introduces a reader into the natural philosophy of the writer, in which labour is a constitutive element of life's production and reproduction. These monist Bogdanovain categories are casually interrelated, and they shape the immanence of labouring and self-organising being.

A new form of knowledge and perception was needed to make the labouring being visible. For Platonov, the proletarian point of view first of all has to be stated and pronounced, but one needs a special device to be able to show it. His literature is not a

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[1] The canonical view of Platonov as a surrealist before surrealism was first stated by the Russian poet Joseph Brodsky: Joseph Brodsky, 'Preface to The Foundation Pit' [1973], in Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit* (New York: Ardis Publishing, 2004, preface); it was then repeated many times by other literary critics and scholars. See for example: Alexei Bulygin, Alexandr Gyshchin, *Plach ob ymershem boge. Povest'-pritcha Andreia Platonova 'Kotlovan'* [The Lament for the Dead God. The Novella-parable 'The Foundation Pit'] (Saint Petersburg: BOREY-PRINT, 1997); Robert Hodel, 'Platonov – Kafka – Walser: Opyt podgotovitel'nogo issledovaniia' [Platonov – Kafka – Walser: Preliminary Research Results], in *Tvorchestvo Andreia Platonova. Issledovaniia i materiali, 4*, ed. by E. I. Kolesnikova (Saint Petersburg: Nauka, 2008), pp. 48–61 (pp. 48–61).
[2] See: Oleg Lazunskii, *Zhitel' rodnogo goroda* [The Citizen of a Hometown] (Voronezh: Tsentr dukhovnogo vozrozhdeniia Chernozhemnogo kraia, 2007), p. 26.

narration of stories about heroic struggle and revolutionary events (although there are elements in his works of story and of chronicle), but a field of vision. It shows poverty and the behaviour of the party and the worker as it is, not as it should be. The happy end must be in life, not in literature, as Platonov says. The alienating capacity of the text to observe and bring together the disparate pieces of everyday life relates to the construction of the triangular word that sees, perceives and makes experience conscious. It is, almost, the point of view of the observing consciousness that grasps the immanence of life-building and constructs a mode of vision of the totality. Podoroga admits that this device of observation in Platonov's literature is 'a special art of seeing' or 'a special culture of the eye'.[1] The triangular word organises experience into materialist thought, but there must be adopted a position of the 'objective nonrelative perception' that 'corresponds to a centre of ultimate organization'.[2] Podoroga compares this nonrelative position of the eye with the so-called 'eunuch of a man's soul', an organ of vision[3] that appears in the novel *Chevengur*:

> But inside every man there also lives a little onlooker – he does not take part in either actions or suffering and he is always dispassionate and the same. His work is to see and to be a witness, but he has no say in a man's life and no one knows the reason for his solitary existence. This corner of a man's consciousness is lit up day and night, like the caretaker's room in a large building. For days and nights on end this ever-vigilant caretaker sits by a man's front door; he knows all the tenants of his building, but not one of them ever asks him for advice. The tenants come in and go out; the onlooker-caretaker follows them with his eyes. The extent of his impotent knowledge sometimes makes him seem sad, but he is always polite, and isolated, and he has a room of his own in another building. In case of fire, the caretaker telephones the firemen and goes outside to observe further events […]
> This onlooker is the eunuch of a man's soul.[4]

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[1] Valerii Podoroga, 'The Eunuch of the Soul: Positions of Reading and the World of Platonov', p. 357.
[2] Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'Proletarskaia poeziia' [Proletarian Poetry] [1922], in *Works*, 3 vols, p. 163. The English translation of the quotation is taken from Podoroga: Valerii Podoroga, Op. cit., p. 357.
[3] Ibid., p. 358.
[4] Andrei Platonov *Chevengur* [1926–28b], trans. by R. Chandler, p. 52.

The functioning of the 'eunuch of a man's soul' is perceptual. This organ provides a 'transformation of the field of vision': it turns a human eye into the perceiving eye that 'does not desire what is perceived, a dissembled eye, an eye outside the body and against it'.[1] Podoroga makes a very precise comparison of the eunuch of the soul with the kino-oko or kino-eye of Dziga Vertov. Both the kino-eye and the eunuch are designed to observe and cover the totality of events from the perspective of the heights of socialism.[2] The eunuch's role is akin to the role of Vertov's mechanical eye, creating close-ups, subjective camera viewpoints, and zooms that travel in and out of the molecular movements of time, space and matter:

> The old woman resignedly took her scarf off her head and I saw her bald skull which had cracked into its component bones, now ready to fall apart and commit to the irretrievable dust of the earth a charily accumulated, patient mind which had learned about the world though labour and hardships.[3]

The cinematically constructed field of vision in this prose nonetheless cannot be translated into visual images. There is no camera that can film the cracked skull, the class conscious horse or a 'troubled' sound of 'gurgling of acid and alkaline grasses being digested in [the] stomachs'.[4] These are the unrepresentabilities of the poor life: a paradoxical, tactual vision. If a director were to attempt to translate poor life into moving images, the film would be, at best, a B-movie zombie film, or else a naive anthropomorphisation involving speaking animals.[5] Moreover, the mechanical creatures of Vertov and Platonov are not neutral and disinterested observers; they are active organisers of the proletarian point of view:[6] 'We have come to show the world as it is

[1] Valerii Podoroga, 'The Eunuch of the Soul: Positions of Reading and the World of Platonov', p. 358.
[2] Valerii Aleksandrovich Podoroga, *Mimezis. Materialy po analiticheskoi antropologii* [Mimesis. The Materials of Analytical Anthropology], pp. 268–74.
[3] Andrei Platonov, 'The Mother Land of Electricity' [1939], in *The Return and Other Stories*, trans. by R. and E. Chandler, A. Livingstone (London: Harvill, 1999) pp. 1-12 (p. 9).
[4] Andrei Platonov, 'Soul' [1936c], in *Soul and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler with K. Grigoruk, A. Livingstone, O. Meerson and E. Naiman (London: Vintage, 2013), pp. 3–146 (p. 50).
[5] We are obliged to Igor' Chubarov for this observation. About the unrepresentability of Platonov's language and the unsuccessful attempts to stage his novels by such directors as Alexander Sokurov, see: Igor' Chubarov, *Kollektivnaia chuvstvennost': teorii i praktiki levogo avangarda* [The Collective Sensibility: Theories and Practices of the Left Avant-Garde] (Moscow: Vysshaia shkola ekonomiki, 2014), pp. 223–27.
[6] Chubarov also criticises Podoroga's objectification of the eunuch of the soul and claims that the position of the proletarian class consciousness supplements and overturns neutral observation. However, I think

and to explain to the laboring class the bourgeois structure of the world'.[1] The task of Vertov's cinema is to connect proletarians across the globe 'on a platform of the communist deciphering of world relations'[2]. This is what Platonov's literature does too. It brings together the multinational proletariat to participate in the constitution of the proletarian point of view through language and a tactual vision. The organ of the eye produces 'the montage of life'.[3] Vertov writes 'kino-thing[s] by the filmed frames' and creates 'visual thinking'.[4] Platonov writes 'not by words, imagining and copying real living languages, but rather by the pieces of the living language'.[5] This art of seeing, and of the unrepresentable non-seeing in the case of Platonov, organises the chaos of impressions into a new 'class vision'.[6] Neither method has anything to do either with objectivity or with Lenin's reflection theory. The montage of life involves the critique of representation, but it does not mean that Vertov and Platonov prefer a naturalistic photographical copy of reality. Instead they produce reality, or, better, the universal point of view of the labouring population of the earth.

The traps and falsities of the reflection theory, of the illusionism and theatricality of realism and fiction, was a topic of the day in the avant-garde discussions concerning fact and representation. The LEF's literature of fact or factography has seen as a solution in reinforcing the method of production, but unlike in Platonov, production has here been understood mainly in sociological terms, as a determinism of the new technologies and media. For Arvatov the question of *pravda* in literature corresponds to the utilitarian production of facts. If literature will become a factory for the selection and elaboration of the material, if the distribution of literary products will be socialised and methods of production collectivised, then this industrial form will supply an

that the position of observation constitutes from the beginning a proletarian point of view. The point of view, in the sense of Bogdanov's philosophy, is not identical to class consciousness. See: ibid., pp. 228–29.

[1] Dziga Vertov, 'Kino-Eye' [1922], in *The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, trans. by K. O'Brien, p. 71.

[2] Ibid., p. 66. Translation corrected.

[3] Dziga Vertov, 'Kinoki. Perevorot' [Kinoks. The Take-Over] [1923a], in *Formal'nyi metod. Antologiia russkogo modernizma,* 3 vols, ed. by S. Oushakine (Moscow, Ekaterinburg: Kabinetnyi uchenyi, 2016), vol. II: *Materials*, pp. 29–39 (p. 39). The last section of the essay where this phrase appears is omitted in the English publication: Dziga Vertov, 'Kinoks: A Revolution' [1923b], in *The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, trans. by K. O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 13–21.

[4] Dziga Vertov, 'Kino-glaz 11-yi' [Kino-Eye. The 11th] [1928], in *Formal'nyi metod. Antologiia russkogo modernizma,* 3 vols, ed. by S. Oushakine (Moscow, Ekaterinburg: Kabinetnyi uchenyi, 2016), vol. II: *Materials*, pp. 116–17 (p. 116).

[5] Andrei Platonov, 'Fabrika Literatury' [Factory of Literature] [1926c], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), vol. VIII, pp. 45–56 (p. 51). There is also an English translation, but it was made after the old and heavily corrected edition. Some terms are translated incorrectly: Andrei Platonov, 'Factory of Literature' [1926d], *Molecular Red Reader*, trans. by A. Kalashyan (London: Verso, 2015), pp. 37–45.

[6] Dziga Vertov, 'Kino-Eye' [1922], in *The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, trans. by K. O'Brien, p. 66.

immediate usefulness to art under socialism. The manufacture of the 'agit-novel' or 'agit-poems' under conditions of collectivised art production would automatically increase the capacity of the individual to produce a great quantity of text, and it would abolish the figure of the lonely bourgeois creator.[1] Factography proclaims the participation of the writer in Soviet life-building, which in practice means participation in production and refers to the Benjaminian-Tretyakovian idea of the artist as producer. On the other hand, the organisational point of view or the unity of subject and object in praxis relates to Bogdanov's abolition of specialisms and division of labour.[2] Nevertheless, Bogdanov never applied this to art practices.

The question remains: what is fact and how does one find it? For Sergei Tretyakov, fact is the journalistic elaboration of a given material into a socially and ideologically useful argument or proposal.[3] What distinguishes Platonov from the factographers is an active organisational position in relation to the composition of words into thoughts and thoughts into points of view. This difference finds articulation in Platonov's response to Arvatov's article in the text 'Factory of Literature (About the Radical Improvement of Creative Writing Devices)' (1926).[4] While admitting the importance of the transition from the individual to the collective modes of production, the text stresses the significance of method:

> I would like to clarify that I am not a supporter, but the opponent of the 'drawings from nature', life protocols and so forth. I am advocating for the smell of the authors' soul […] The author's soul should copulate with the soul of the collective through the intimate back part. You cannot even imagine an artist without it. But literature is a social phenomenon and therefore it is essential that the social

[1] Boris Arvatov, 'Utilitarizm v literature' [Utilitarianism in Literature], *Oktiabr'*, 12 (16), dekabr' (1925), pp. 100–6.

[2] See: *Literatura fakta: Pervyi sbornik materialov rabotnikov LEFa* [Literature of Fact. The First Collection of the Materials of the LEF Workers] [1929], ed. by N. Chuzhak (Moscow: Zakharov, 2000).

[3] Sergei Trat'iakov, 'The Writer and the Socialist Village' [1930b], *October*, vol. 118, Soviet Factography, Fall (2006), trans. by Devin Fore, 63–70 (p. 68).

[4] Arvatov's text opened up polemics about the collectivisation of literature in the journal *October*. Platonov submitted his *Factory of Literature* for publication, but it was rejected not only in *October*, but also in other journals. See commentaries to the *Factory of Literature* in: Andrei Platonov, *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2016), vol. II, pp. 767–72.

collective build literature under the sole leadership of the 'montage' of one person that is the master, the writer.[1]

Vertov's montage of life is the prerogative of the writer or of the master-constructor. This method of montage derived from the 'semi-finished product' or 'polufabrikat', which literally means 'half-factory product'. Platonov explains:

> Myths, historical and modern facts, and events, everyday activities and the imprinted will for a better destiny, all of these things which are proclaimed by thousands of anonymous, but lively and red mouths, by hundreds of official papers that are 'dry', but unexampled in their richness and style – all these will be a semi-finished product for writers, since all of these are made unintentionally, genuinely, sincerely, for free and by chance, and you cannot write better than that. This is optimum, this is a 100% equivalent of life refracted and enriched by a virgin soul. You can also consider as a 'semi-finished product' the personal events of authors, as long as these are real and genuine pure facts. Art is not just out there and objective but rather is the sum (or multiplication) of social, objective phenomena plus the human soul ('soul' is an individual violation of the general trends of reality that is unique and distinct as an act and for that matter the 'soul' is alive. I apologise for the old terminology. I applied a new meaning to it).[2]

The observation of facts derives from discourses, but such observations are only a chaos of impressions: 'I return what was taken from people, having kicked and dipped all these around myself'.[3] Fact has no value unless the master constructs complexes and point of view out of this noise of impressions. The collectivisation of the means of production, therefore, must reserve a key role for the master of montage, for a 'combinator' of the collected 'rigid stuff'.[4] The factory of Platonov's literature looks as follows: the collective of the montage-makers works under the supervision of literary critics, who improve the methods of literary work. Similarly to the constructors of the

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[1] Andrei Platonov, 'Fabrika Literatury' [Factory of Literature] [1926c], in *Works*, 8 vols, pp. 48–49.
[2] Ibid., p. 49.
[3] Ibid., p. 51.
[4] Ibid., p. 53f.

engineering bureau at the industrial factory, the critics study labour processes and systematise the entire work. Other members of the literary factory are correspondents. They work in a particular field and collect 'semi-finished products' according to their specialisation. The literary correspondent is a field researcher with a deep knowledge and good understanding of the topic, but only the master of the montage brings collected research data into the form of art. Platonov admits that he already works according to these principles, but the archaic form of the individual mode of production slows down the working process.[1]

The collectivisation and socialisation of art does not automatically generate high-quality literature, just as politicisation (and this can be seen as a counter-attack against both Arvatov and Benjamin) does not guarantee the manifestation of *pravda*. The enthusiastic depiction of Stalinist collectivisation leads, in the absence of proper reflection, to a positivism of facts. Tretyakov's kolkhoz essays and sketches follow from Arvatov's theoretical agitation. They are full of everyday descriptions of life,, organisational and technical details of kolkhoz building, which side-track the question of the very terminology that the writer uses. Tretyakov does not problematise the political side of collectivisation; such words as 'class enemy', 'dekulakisation' or 'uninterrupted work week' appear as signifiers of communism,[2] and hence the very facts of the Stalinist kolkhoz movement remain unquestioned. Treryakov is not able to see. There is no 'organ of the eye' in his writings. This organ might have raised his vision to the standpoint of totality; but description fixes only the subject-position of a journalist.

Tretyakov was a brilliant intellectual and a subtle poet. He could not have been unaware of this problem. With the same sincere descriptiveness and straightforwardness he complains that the 'operative writer' in the village remains a tourist, a foreign observer of an unknown reality. The village does not want to host city intellectuals, because they come without knowing anything about agriculture and do not have the necessary practical skills. Tretyakov obtained information mainly through party structures, while peasants tried to avoid a close collaboration or dialogue with him. Finally, he doubts how close to the actual state of affairs these facts are, concluding

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[1] Ibid., pp. 53–56. It is interesting that in this factory critics get the lowest salary for their work, while correspondents and montage-makers are the highest paid jobs: Ibid., p. 55.
[2] Sergei Trat'iakov, 'The Writer and the Socialist Village' [1930b], p. 65.

that, nevertheless, long-term work and practical experience will improve the situation.[1] Tretyakov does not question the very rift between the observer and what has been observed, and yet the troubles in the kolkhoz derive mainly from just this blind exoticisation of the peasant's experience. When he writes the following, it is as if the engineer Platonov is thinking of Tretyakov directly:

> As a foreigner, this person wanders around the factory and observes the electric junction boxes, gets terrified of these ordinary things as a shortsighted person of a distant object and then writes sentimentally, with exaggeration and lies, suffering and whimpering from the observed rags and crumbs of life; creates out of it the potential existence of a huge loaf of bread with high nutrition. It becomes a travelogue rather than creative writing..[2]

Platonov's *Che-Che-O. Regional Organisational and Philosophical Sketches* (1928)[3] almost correct the errors of Tretyakov's kolkhoz essays. The engineer and the organiser of the first peasant communes of the war communism period – with statistical facts in hand and a vast experience in the Voronezh region behind him – explains why collectivisation is a disaster from the economic and political point of view. Platonov insists that the original communal structure of the Russian village suggests further socialisation of the communes and the development of the small farms rather than forced integration and total industrialisation of the devastated peasant economy; and for this reason he occupies a position close to the left Socialist Revolutionary. Platonov goes even further and openly admits that dekulakisation turns into senseless violence against impoverished peasants.

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[1] See Sergei Tretyakov, 'O tom zhe (Pisatel' na kolkhoze)' [On the Same Thing (The Writer in Kolkhoz)] [1929], in *Formal'nyi metod. Antologiia russkogo modernizma,* 3 vols, ed. by S. Oushakine (Moscow, Ekaterinburg: Kabinetnyi uchenyi, 2016), vol. II: *Materials*, pp. 341–44; Sergei Tretyakov, 'Kolkhoznyi tyl' [The Kolkhoz's Front] [1930a], in *Formal'nyi metod. Antologiia russkogo modernizma,* 3 vols, ed. by S. Oushakine (Moscow, Ekaterinburg: Kabinetnyi uchenyi, 2016), vol. II: *Materials*, pp. 352–58.
[2] Andrei Platonov, 'Fabrika Literatury' [Factory of Literature] [1926c], in *Works*, 8 vols, p. 46.
[3] Andrei Platonov, 'Che-Che-O. Oblastnye organizatsionno-filosofskie ocherki' [Che-Che-O. Regional Organizational and Philosophical Sketches] [1928a], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), vol. I, pp. 198–216. The title *Che-Che-O* is the local pronunciation of the acronym for the Central Black-Earth Region that is located in the southwest of the European part of Russia, with Voronezh city at its centre.

It is not surprising that Platonov's *Factory of Literature* remained unpublished.[1] For LEF the model was unacceptable, because it supported the creative as opposed to the operative conception of writing, while for the reformed Proletkult it contradicted Lenin's theory of reflection and was indistinguishable from LEF's determinism of the productive forces. This nuance in positions explains the loneliness of Platonov, who did not fit into the existing groups and as a result was misrepresented by his contemporaries.

One peculiar position of the outsider Platonov in relation to observational tourism can be best presented by way of an allegory – his imaginary encounter with Walter Benjamin. In fact the two writers did not know one other, but they could have met in person near the Kitai-gorod wall in Moscow.[2] Otherwise, their imaginary meeting can be reconstructed only retrospectively, through a parallel reading of *Moscow Diary* and Platonov's unpublished short story *Administrative Natural Science*. In 13 December 1926 Benjamin writes:

> Some Mongols stand by the Kitai gorod wall. The winter is probably no less harsh where they come from and their ragged furs are no worse than those of the locals. Still, they are the only people one spontaneously pities on account of the climate. They stand no more than five paces from each other and offer leather briefcases for sale; each one's wares are identical to those of his neighbor. There must be some collusion behind all this, for they can hardly be serious about entering into such futile competition with each other.[3]

This absurd scene reappears in the essay *Moscow* in a small section about the labour of beggars in the spontaneous markets and on Moscow's streets.[4] What the scene captures is a certain distance between the Benjamin-flâneur and the faceless Mongols – actors in the semi-criminal theatre of the street market. The distance produces estrangement. It is

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[1]Andrei Platonov, *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2016), vol. II, pp. 767–72.

[2] Kitai-gorod is a historical district of central Moscow located inside the defensive wall. It was built in the sixteenth century. Kitai-gorod was a place of illegal street selling in the 1920s. The wall was dismantled after the reconstruction of Moscow in 1930s.

[3] Walter Benjamin, *Moscow Diary* [1926–27], trans. by R. Sieburth (Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press: 1986), p. 20.

[4] Walter Benjamin, 'Moscow' [1927], in *Selected Writings,* 4 vols*,* trans. by R. Livingstone and Others (Massachusetts, London: The Belknap of Harvard University Press, 1999), vol. II: Part 1. 1927–30, pp. 22–46 (p. 28).

a safe and necessary distance that alienates the observer from the observed: Benjamin from the 'Mongol faces' and other 'exotic' representatives of Soviet poverty.[1] In 29 December Benjamin returns to the Kitai-gorod wall, but for different reasons:

> I took a walk down the stalls that run along the Kitai gorod wall. This is the center of the old book trade. It would be futile to try to track down any finds here in non-Russian literature. Even the older Russian editions (to judge by the bindings) are hard to come by here. Still, in the recent course of years, countless libraries must have been dispersed.[2]

Platonov's library was one of these. During Benjamin's visit he had worked in Tambov. Just a few months earlier Platonov moved from Voronezh to Moscow to start a new job in the Central Committee of the Agricultural and Forestry Trade Union. However, he was dismissed three weeks later due to bureaucratic manoeuvring within the union. In the summer of 1926, the jobless Platonov had entered a long and unsuccessful struggle against his dismissal and eviction from the union's property. It must have been between July and December 1926 that he went to the Kitai-gorod wall to sell his library.[3] In *Administrative Natural Science* he recalls this experience:

> The grief of unemployment triumphed in me. I sold my valueless technical books to the impudent booksellers under the Kitai-gorod wall and bought loaves to the five-year-old son, who recognizes only full social harmony, but not unemployment. Once the son requested the gobies in tomato sauce[4]. This threatened a demolition of the remnants of the technical encyclopaedia.[5]

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[1] 'I see as many Mongol faces as I wish every day in my hotel. But recently there were figures standing out in front of it on the street, garbed in red and yellow coats, Buddhist priests, Basseches informed me, in Moscow for the moment to attend a congress. The ticket collectors in the streetcars, on the other hand, remind me of primitive people of the North. They stand at their spot in the car, enveloped in furs like Samoyed women on their sleds': Walter Benjamin, *Moscow Diary* [1926–27], trans. by R. Sieburth, p. 104.

[2] Ibid., pp. 51–52.

[3] In August 1927 Platonov writes a draft of a letter without an addressee in which he describes the situation and demands a just investigation of his case. See: Andrei Platonov, *'Ia prozhyl zhizn'': Pis'ma. 1920-1950'* ['I Have Lived Life': Correspondence. 1920-1950], pp. 243–51. The struggle against eviction continued until the end of 1927: Ibid., pp. 251–54.

[4] Gobies in tomato sauce is a variety of tinned fish – MC.

[5] Andrei Platonov, 'Administrativnoe estestvoznanie' [Administrative Science] [1927a], in *Arkhiv A. P. Platonova*, 1, ed. by N. V. Kornienko (Moscow: IMLI. 2009), pp. 32–33 (p. 32).

The retrospective meeting of Benjamin and Platonov shows the historical impossibility of a dialogue between the observer and those who inhabit what has been observed. If we change the perspective, we will see that this gap reconfigures itself within the Soviet antagonism between representation and lived experience. The LEF's literature of fact tries to cure the gap between the observer and the observed by demolishing the dualism of subject and object in praxis, but the proclaimed principle turns out to be a caricature. It was an imitation of working-class activities by intellectuals.

Not only Tretyakov's operative writing, but also Shklovsky's plotless prose is exemplary in this respect. In *Third Factory* (1926) he tries to describe rather then to narrate and offers fragmentary protocols of his meetings with different people. One such meeting is an encounter with Platonov in the Voronezh region. In 1925 Shklovsky was part of a special delegation. He travelled across the Central Russian regions on an airplane covered with revolutionary slogans. Villagers were attracted to the airplane and asked the pilot to tell them about who lives above the sky.[1] Images like this add nothing to the travel reports of intellectuals who are ashamed by their isolation from the masses. 'Comrade Platonov', pictured as a local villager who fights drought and organises collective farms, shares with Shklovsky a 'tasteless dinner' and talks 'about literature'.[2] The reader is offered no detail regarding the content of this talk. Shklovsky just affirms: 'Platonov spoke about literature, about Rozanov, about the impossibility of describing the sunset and of writing stories'.[3]

In turn, Platonov replies with the pamphlet *Anti-Sexus* (1925–26). The text was composed using the 'factory of literature' method. It is a fictional brochure that purports to have been released under the name of a Western capitalist company. It combines the 'half-factory product' of a bureaucratic paper with the LEF rhetoric that celebrated Taylorism and transforms them into the discourse of the advertisement. The pamphlet promotes an electromagnetic device for male and female masturbation. It satirises the factographist ethos of art production, which is compared here with the Fordist control over one's sex and personal life. The brochure includes fictional reviews by various intellectuals – among them Shklovsky – and by businessmen and politicians, such as

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[1] Viktor Shklovsky, *Tret'ia fabrika* [Third Factory] (Moscow: Artel' pisatelei 'Krug', 1926), p. 131. See also the English translation: Viktor Shklovsky, *Third Factory*, trans. by R. Sheldon (Chicago: Normal, Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 2003).
[2] Viktor Shklovsky, *Tret'ia fabrika* [Third Factory], pp. 125–29.
[3] Ibid., p. 129.

Henry Ford and Benito Mussolini, who praise the Anti-Sexus for its ability to liberate humanity from the archaic and irrational means of sex. Shklovsky promotes *Anti-Sexus* as a modern device for the industrialisation of instincts. [1] It has also been suggested that Shklovsky is a prototype for the party bureaucrat Serbinov in *Chevengur*. [2] Serbinov comes to the self-proclaimed communist village with the intention of reporting back to Moscow about local states of affairs. His report is a parody not only of Shklovsky, but also of the literature of fact:

> […] he wrote to the Provincial Committee that there was no executive committee in Chevengur, but there were many happy, if useless, people. Cultivated acreage had not decreased at all but had rather grown, on account of the replanned, more closely grouped town. Again though there was no one who would sit down to make a report to that effect, since in the town there was not a single secretary of interpretive production. As his conclusion, Serbinov included the idea that Chevengur had been seized by an unknown minor national group or by itinerant beggars who did not possess the art of communication [...] Serbinov left the practical conclusions to be drawn by the provincial center itself. [3]

If Benjamin is a Western tourist, Shklovsky is a coloniser. His writing reifies and reproduces the antagonism between representation and lived experience.

Platonov's critique of Shklovsky's descriptive reification echoes the position of Lukács in the 1930s debates about 'vulgar sociology' and the 'ultra-leftism' of the avant-garde. For instance, *Narrate or Describe* (1936) points to the reifying mechanisms of the descriptive method in naturalism and in socialist realist 'production' novels. [4] Lukács and Platonov also met in person, but under the different circumstances of the 1930s, in the office of the only oppositional journal *Literaturnyi Kritik* (*Literary Critic*). After a quite long political engagement, Lukács began his studies in aesthetics

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[1] Andrei Platonov, 'Anti-Sexus' [1926b], trans. by A. O. Fisher, *Cabinet*, 51, Fall (2013), 48–53.
[2] About *Third Factory* and Platonov's polemics against Shklovsky see: Aleksander Galushkin, 'K istorii lichnykh i tvorcheskikh vzaimootnoshenii A. P. Platonova i V. B. Shklovskogo' [On the History of the Personal and Intellectual Relationship Between Andrei Platonov and Viktor Shklovsky], in *Andrei Plaronov. Vospominaniia Sovremennikov. Materialy k biografii*, ed. by N. V. Kornienko, E. D. Shubina (Moscow: Sovremennyi Pisatel', 1994), pp. 172–84.
[3] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926–28a], trans. by A. Olcott, p. 310.
[4] Georg Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?' [1936], in *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, trans. by A. Kahn (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2005), pp. 110–48.

in Moscow. In his estimation, literature is a medium that fully grasps the social totality, while realism, as a concrete historical realisation of the medium, is the precondition for the struggle with reification of life and consciousness.[1] However, the Moscow battle for 'authentic' realism against the imitation realism of Soviet novels went far beyond the walls of academia. Lukács and his friend Lifshitz dreamt about the liberation of society from the rationalism and positivism of the 1920s avant-garde and formalism. Thus, in their view, the future of Soviet society paradoxically depended on which camp would win the battle. Either the artists would bring society into a state of total positivistic relativism and nihilism, or the platform of returning to Marx and the classics would create a universal socialist culture.[2] Merleau-Ponty explains that Lukács's return to classic literature in the post-revolutionary period was meant to express a Hegelian dialectics of truth. A truth is something that is always beyond the class, as class is both true and non-true: 'In Lukacs' terms, the proletariat is totality only in "intention […] It is an "objective possibility"'.[3] That is why for Lukács

> There would be a political action and a cultural action, which are not always parallel. To transfer the rules of the first to those of the second would be to make culture a form of propaganda […] It is not that he ever excluded literature from history but rather that he distinguished between the 'center' and the 'periphery' of historical dialectic, between the rhythm of political action and that of culture.[4]

Exactly for this reason, Platonov never occupied a 'central' place in the writings of either Lukács or Lifshitz. We know of only one article written by Lukacs about Platonov.[5] It is a review of Platonov's short story *Emmanuel Lewin (Immortality)*

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[1] About Lukács's struggle with reification in art see: Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave. Lukács, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of their Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 65–82.
[2] Lifshitz recalls the intellectual and political context of the 1930s struggle with the party literature in an interview with the student of Lukács László Sziklai: Mikhail Lifshitz, László Sziklai, 'Besedy Mikh. Lifshitza s L. Sziklai' [Conversations of Mikhail Lifshitz with László Sziklai], *Nadoelo. V zashchitu obyknovennogo marksizma,* ed. by V. G. Arslanov (Moscow: Iskusstvo – XXI vek, 2012), pp. 18-236.
[3] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, trans. by J. Bien (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp.: 46, 47.
[4] Ibid., p. 43.
[5] Further research in Lukács's archive is perhaps needed here. In any case, it is apparent that Platonov was not discussed in Lukács's volumes on aesthetics.

(1936),[1] published in Russian in *Literary Critic* (1937).[2] By this time Platonov had gained a reputation as an anti-Stalinist and all his attempts to publish texts were banned on account of their 'anti-Soviet' nature. Working under the duress of the ideological battles and purges, Lifshits and the other editors of *Literary Critic* had nevertheless begun to release Platonov's critical essays on literature and new short stories, written in a 'socialist realist' style.[3]

Lukács's review presents Platonov as the only socialist writer who grasps the contradiction of the socialist present in terms of a conflict between old and new, the capitalist past and the communist future. Otherwise factional and partisan, even in style and intonation, the review points to something specifically Platonovian and, in this sense, to something that in fact does not really fit the logic of a simple contradiction. According to Lukács, *Emmanuel Lewin* shows the being of socialist man in becoming. This becoming reveals the drama of a communist who lives in the imperfect present, a present full of prejudices and reminders of the capitalist past with which the protagonist constantly fights, but with no immediate result. A communist wants to cut the story short and bring communism into the present. It is communist impatience, or, we might say, the urgency of communism, that determines the activities of the main protagonist.[4] Lukács grasps Platonov's 'urgency of communism', a central philosophical theme in all his stories and novels, but he does not develop this problematic further, and it seems that Platonov's 'communist contradiction' actually echoes Lukács's earlier theme of the 'problematic' and 'unproblematic' individual:

> If the individual is unproblematic, then his aims are given to him with
> immediate obviousness, and the realisation of the world constructed by
> these given aims may involve hindrances and difficulties but never any

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[1] Andrei Platonov, 'Bessmertie' [Immortality] [1936b], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2010), vol. IV, pp. 359–78.

[2] Georg Lukács, 'Emmanuel Lewin', in *Literaturnyi Kritik*, 10 (1937), pp. 19–29 <http://mesotes.ru/lukacs/Platonov.htm> [Accessed 24 October 2016].

[3] The history of the relationship at *The Literary Critic* is quite obscure and could be traced only via publications of *The Literary Critic*. There are also a few texts on the history of the journal and Platonov's role in it. See: Alexander Galushkin, 'Andrei Platonov, I. V. Stalin i Literaturnyi Kritik' [Andrei Platonov, Joseph Stalin and 'The Literary Critic'], *Strana filosofov Andreia Platonova: Problemy tvorchestva*, 4 (2000), 815–26; Nina Malygina, *Andrei Platonov: poetika "vozvrashcheniia"* [Andrei Platonov: The Poetics of 'Return'], pp. 70–90; Natal'ia Poltavtseva, 'Platonov i Lukács (iz istorii sovietskogo iskusstva 1930-x godov)' [Platonov and Lukács. From the History of the Soviet Art of the 1930s], *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, 107 (2011), pp. 253–70.

[4] Georg Lukács, 'Emmanuel Lewin', in *Literaturnyi Kritik,* 10 (1937), pp. 19–29. <http://mesotes.ru/lukacs/Platonov.htm> [Accessed 24 October 2016].

serious threat to his interior life. Such a threat arises only when the outside world is no longer adapted to the individual's ideas and the ideas become subjective facts – ideals – in his soul.[1]

The problematic individual is reconciled with the world by finding out that 'a mere glimpse of meaning is the highest that life has to offer'.[2] The problem of Platonov's protagonist is the problem of 'idealist immediacy', that is, the problem of the irreparable rift between actual and ideal, between the lived life and the final goal of communism. In Platonov, Lukács might argue, the dialectics of the impossibility and urgency of communism constitute an ontological negativity that has no reconciliation.

This is definitely one of the most interesting problems of socialist literature. However, after Lukács left Moscow, Platonov disappeared from his horizon. Both Lukács and Lifshits would continue to reaffirm the outstanding achievements of the old classical literature, and only occasionally would they comment on contemporary art practices, mainly in negative terms. Although Platonov was a voice of the *Literary Critic*'s position in literature and one of only a few contemporary examples of 'authentic realism', he is unlikely to have shared the conservatism of Lukács and Lifshitz. Thus, it is doubtful that their programmatic return to the classical tradition is similar to Platonov's attempts to write in a 'socialist-realist' style in 1930s. Although Platonov wanted to be a socialist writer, his stories always went beyond the realist tradition. His constant failure to fit the canon was the result of his attachment to the experimental culture of the 1920s, as well as his deeply antagonistic reaction to the official literature and Stalinism. And so while Lukács prized his work in Moscow as a struggle with Stalinism, Platonov called the *Literary Critic*'s editorial board 'toothless humanists'.[3]

We don't know the real reason why Lukács and Lifshits chose not to make Platonov an exemplar of communist prose in their main works, produced elsewhere than in the polemical and propagandistic *Literary Critic*. It could be that Platonov's 'idealist

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[1] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel. A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* [1920], trans. by A. Bostock (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1971), p. 79.
[2] Ibid., p. 80.
[3] We know about Platonov's political views mainly from secret police reports. From the beginning of the 1930s Platonov had been under surveillance. Colleagues and close friends informed police officers about his activities and judgements. The informants sometimes reproduce even his terminology and manner of speaking. For instance, the definition of *The Literary Critic* editorial board as 'toothless humanists' comes from one such report. See: Vladimir Goncharov, Vladimir Nekhotin, *Andrei Platonov v dokumentakh OGPU-NKVD-NKGB. 1930–1945* [Andrei Platonov in the Documents of OGPU-NKVD-NKGB. 1930–1945], (2000) <http://www.hrono.ru/proza/platonov_a/nkvd.html> [Accessed 24 October 2016].

immediacy' and proletarian point of view was unacceptable, or that their 'toothless humanism' led them to a political compromise and 'reconciliation' with Tolstoy. The fact is that Platonov's work existed outside of a Marxist legacy. This might be taken to mean that there was something wrong with Platonov, but in fact the misrepresentations of his work show that there was something wrong with the Marxist legacy.

Platonov's position was indeed not strictly speaking Marxist, but proletkultist. He aims above all to demonstrate how proletarian thinking shapes the new people's philosophy. The people's philosophy is not just immanent to proletarian thinking, captured in the form of a novel, but a system of thought with its own ontology, epistemology and political theory, which takes the form of literature and constitutes the corpus of Platonov's texts. This people's philosophy introduces the proletkultist idea of a proletarian knowledge that poses new rules and norms of conceptual expression. In other words, it is the project of Bodganov's encyclopaedia created by the Diderot-proletarian.

<center>***</center>

Bogdanov proposes an original synthesis of empiriocriticism and a Marxist theory of practice that results in a materialist theory of self-organising labouring being. The serial concatenation of psychophysical particles constitutes bodies, complexes, and physical reality. Division and combination, analysis and synthesis are the principles of labouring being. The conjunctions of sensation, perception, act and cognition correspond to the labour-processes of the extraction, construction and organisation of the elements of nature. Thus the duality of sensations and the attributes of objects are resolved in a practice of labouring entities. The lowest labouring entity corresponds to the molecular biology of self-organising matter and the highest degree of organisation relates to socially organised experience. The degree of organisation depends on a process of constant exchange and mediation between the physical and the psychical.

The Empirio-Marxism of Bogdanov departs from an affirmative and constitutive causality that does not know negation, but relies upon the organisational and disorganisational capacities of being. The evolution of the various labouring entities results in the constitution of a social realm that resists entropy, destruction and the

spontaneity of the lower biological organisation. That is why a labouring proletariat is not only a subject, but also the highest organisational unit to have emerged historically across the entire development of the social environment. This unit or labouring entity advances previous modes of organisation due to the structural reconfiguration of labour causality in the process of industrial production. Therefore, the name of the proletariat signifies not just a sociology of class relations, but also a formation of the new organisational worldview. Similar to the Lukácsian standpoint of the proletariat as a means of grasping the totality, the proletarian worldview brings together partial systems of knowledge and production. However, the notion of totality relates here to the constitutive capacity not only to be self-conscious, but also to construct through cognition the non-contradictory field of the life-complex – a proletarian monism or the universalism of communist society.

Empirio-Marxism explains organisational and productivist theories of the Soviet avant-garde. The organisation of perception into the life-building complex assumes the constructive and constitutive means of an art that not only changes, but also shapes the forms of social being. Material culture as organisation of things, relations and people replaces the concept of art. At the same time, the negation of art assumes the reorganisation of sensibility and perception without which, according to such supporters of Bogdanov as Chuzhak, Tarabukin and Platonov, it is impossible to communise society. Following Bogdanov, Platonov opposes the theory of the socialisation and politicisation of art as partial and limiting. The monist point of view begins with the reorganisation of the sensible and of the mode of vision. It then proceeds to generate a new encyclopedia of universal proletarian knowledge.

What makes Platonov's position unique in relation to the shared field of Empirio-Marxism is his questioning of the affirmative and positive ontology of production and life-building. The dualism of subject and object is rearticulated here into the problem of the observation and the observed, of the fact and the means of production of fact. There is no immanence of the observing and the observed in the labouring actor. Instead, the field of experience – the labouring point of view – constitutes the *indifference* of the observing and the observed. In other words, the monism of practice can be reached only through the constitution of the totality by means of the articulation of the existing field of social relations. This brings the position of Platonov into close proximity with Lukács's thinking. Nevertheless, for the latter, the totality is something pre-given. It is the realm of a self-articulating sociality that can be

grasped by Marxist philosophy. For Platonov, by contrast, the totality remains a Bogdanovian construction of the proletarian point of view. The proletarian is the builder of a total mode of vision. Totality cannot be articulated otherwise than through building.

Chapter III
The Materialist Ontology of Poor Life and The Conceptual Core of the Platonov's Encyclopaedia

Introduction: From Method to Concept in Platonov's work

In the previous chapter the problem of method in Platonov's work has been linked to the epistemological question of proletarian knowledge. The encyclopaedia-form corresponds to the functioning of constancy, narrative and perception. The following exposition examines the conceptual core of Platonov's texts and proposes analyses of their content. The philosophical elaboration of the proletarian point of view on the level of content leads him to the establishment of his own system. Bogdanov's labouring being and organisational ontology is foundational for the conceptual core of Platonov's thinking. Nevertheless, it is not limited by the principles of empiriomonism. On the contrary, Platonov questions the doctrine of proletarian culture and certain assumptions of an organisational ontology, so as to establish his own understanding of labour, class and organisation.

The nature of Platonov's texts demands the elaboration of a specific approach. In order to locate the conceptual core of the writings, it has been decided to read systematically the main works and the related 'satellites'[1] with a particular focus on such topics as class and communism, life and form, matter and organisation, and nature and technologies. Such a systematic reading allows us to identify a set of recurring concepts that travel from novel to novel under the same names or in a modified form. Thus it has been revealed that Platonov creates his own conceptual apparatus that makes up what we call the materialist ontology of poor life. This led to the articulation of each theme in relation to a concept or a set of concepts. We present Platonov's system according to the logic of entries in an encyclopedia. Each entry introduces a series of interrelated concepts. The links between the entries constitute the understanding of the system.

The exposition of Platonov's system relies on a systematic reading of the texts and it does not go beyond the texts themselves. This means that the method of reading does not seek methodological tools and interpretative schemes that are external to the text systems. For this reason, there is no comparative analysis of poor life and

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[1] See the discussion about the main works and their 'satellites' in Chapter II.

Agamben's 'bare life'; the Lacanian notion of split and Platonov's notion of doubling; Deleuze-Guattari's understanding of nomadism and Platonov's nomadic nations; or of exhaustion in Beckett and Platonov. This list could extend to all other possible interconnections and similarities. Although nothing prevents us from establishing such comparisons, the decision behind our systematic reading corresponds to the task of recovering Platonov's encyclopedia in relation to Soviet epistemologies. Where necessary we allude or point directly to the differences and nuances of Platonov's concepts with regard to the above-mentioned articulation of similar problems in contemporary philosophy.

This approach does not seek to access some crystal-clear objectivity in Platonov's texts that can be considered immanent to itself. We are aware of historical distance, which divides the contemporary reader of these texts from the reader of the 1920–30s. The task does not come down to positivism in relation to textual facts and strict historicism. The facts always demand analysis and interpretation. Although historical context play a decisive role in our reading, it is used only to help us consider post-revolutionary forms of knowledge production. In this sense, the very idea of depicting Platonov's conceptual core corresponds to a retrospective effort of understanding and interpretation. Such a retrospective logic assumes a background in Soviet epistemological constructions and a post-revolutionary deconstruction of the means of literature, journalism and essay.

A) Class: Others, Mistakable, Half-Kulaks, Doubject and Other Class Creatures

> He saw comrades the likes of whom he had never encountered before, people without any understanding or appearance of class and without revolutionary worth. These were instead some sort of nameless others who lived utterly without significance, without pride, and off to one side of the impending world-wide triumph. Even the age of these others was impossible to grasp, for all that could be made out was that they were poor, had bodies that grew unwillingly, and were foreign to all.[1]

In Platonov there is a recurring motif of a bastard people wandering around in search of food and shelter. This people is often described as a nomadic nation, a collective surviving at the periphery of the country or village, or living in nature as an archaic primitive community. The conception of the bastard people is presented in *Chevengur* (1926–28) and *Dzhan* (1936). They have different national and cultural backgrounds and characterise the multinational proletariat. The colourful ethnical and cultural multiplicity of this crowd is never represented in detail. They have 'non-Russian', 'Asian' or 'familiar faces', but then the description of their persons comes to an end. Mikheev stresses that it was more important for Platonov that he shows the functioning of the bastard people according to the principles of a biological organism: they look like a swarming mass that 'was born and exists', 'creeps', 'climbs', 'disperses' or 'huddles up' in certain places. The assembling and scattering of this crowd made of various people is represented everywhere in Platonov's prose: 'Approximately ten years have passed away since Dzhan came here and scattered in the wet plants'.[2]

Platonov names his marginal declassed wanderers as '*handmade people with an unknown designation*', '*uncounted*', '*mistakable*' or '*prochie*' – 'others', in the English translation of Robert Chandler. The Russian word *prochie* also refers to the 'rest', the 'remainder'.[3] Thus *others* is the rest of the people; they don't belong to any class

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[1] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926–28a], trans. by A. Olcott (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1978), p. 228. Translation is modified.

[2] See: Mikhail Iurevich Mikheev, *V mir Platonova cherez ego iazyk* [Platonov's World Through His Language] (Moscow: MGY, 2003), pp. 114–18. All examples are taken from Mikheev: Ibid. The English translation of the quotation from *Dzhan* has been taken from: Andrei Platonov, 'Soul' [1936c], in *Soul and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler with K. Grigoruk, A. Livingstone, O. Meerson, and E. Naiman (London: Vintage, 2013), pp. 3-146 (p. 152).

[3] Due to the specificity of Platonov's avant-gardist language, and the problematic status of his published works, we may rely on several English translations of the same novel, translating directly from the Russian original where necessary. Only Robert Chandler's translations follow the most recently edited

category existing in Marxist theory, because they are too poor and detached from normal social life. 'Others' are declassed subjects, or, as Thomas Seifrid puts it, they are 'forces of matter' and the 'molecular elements, which bond life'.[1] The figure of others first appears in *Chevengur* in the following scene: the population of the communist village is anxious that they do not have a 'real' proletariat in the Chevengur. For this reason, two comrades go to find a 'proper proletariat'; and as a result they bring into the village the group of poor wandering beggars who they collect during their subsequent trip across the county. This 'real' proletariat disturbs the villagers, as it does not look like a glorious and conscious working class. This anxiety is expressed in the attempt to identify their 'appearance of class':

> 'Who did you bring us?' Chepurny asked Prokofy […]
>
> 'That's proletarians and others', Prokofy said.
>
> Chepurny was disturbed
>
> 'What others? Again the layer of residual swine?' […]
>
> 'The others are the others. Nobody. They're even worse than the proletariat.'
>
> 'Well, who are they? They had a class father, didn't they? I ask you now! You didn't pick them up out in the weeds, did you? A social place, wasn't it?'
>
> 'They are your basic disinherited,' Prokofy explained. 'They weren't living anywhere, they were wandering.'
>
> 'Wandering where?' Chepurny asked with respect, since he nourished a sense of the worth of all that was unknown and dangerous. 'Wandering where? Maybe we ought to head them off?'
>
> Prokofy was amazed at such an unconscious question. 'What wandering where? To communism, obviously! So we've already cut them off, right here'.[2]

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academic publications of Platonov. Otherwise translations can be made using the censored, coerced or heavily edited versions of the text. We write about this problem in Chapter I.

[1] Thomas Seifrid, *Andrei Platonov. Uncertainties of Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 113.

[2] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by A. Olcott, p. 226. Translation modified.

The *other*, therefore, refers to someone who remains unaccounted for due to their amorphous and marginal status, but who is also part of a multiplicity which is not countable – part of a scattered and nomadic people, an anomaly of humanity, trapped between life and death, social and biological. The *other* is also mistakable, someone whom it is difficult to identify with regards to class position and relation to production.

The nomadic Dzhan nation is another paradigmatic example of the *others*. It represents the poorest of the poor: all the possible types of declassed elements who have escaped into the desert from exploitation, violence and hard work and have since then remained in the state of *poor life*. Dzhan has nothing, only body. This nation does not even have chains, as the classical proletariat did: 'It pretends to be dead – otherwise those who are happy and strong will come to torment it again. The Dzhan have kept almost nothing for themselves, only what nobody else needs, so that nobody becomes greedy when they see them'.[1]

At first glance one gets the impression that *others* are incapable not only of having any sort of political life, but also of experiencing even an elementary self-organisation; this is because they are merely surviving and don't know what to do with their own fact of existence. *Others* in Platonov's novels are always manipulated by 'more conscious' comrades, party leaders and intellectuals, but always unsuccessfully – it is almost impossible to integrate *others* into the collective body of the workers and to establish a normalised sociality based on the collectivisation of labour and industrial production. Nazar Chagataev came to lead the Dzhan people towards communism, but once you gather *others*, this assemblage of the poor will immediately scatter. Nevertheless they remain the main political subject in Platonov's prose.

It seems that Platonov started to develop the conception of *others* from experiencing life in the village and observing the everyday social relations of the extremely poor. The really existing poverty, and its relation to class, is a main preoccupation of Platonov. What makes them keep going? Do they try to escape from the new forms of Soviet exploitation? Or do they simply represent 'wrong consciousness'? Platonov again and again struggles to define the potential political role and status of such declassed subjects. In his notebooks written in Turkestan, he states: 'The Soviet power is absolutely right: in the history of the circumstances of the war and its aftermath, when people… are giving up on any form of collectivisation, we need …

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[1] Andrei Platonov, 'Soul' [1936c], in *Soul and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler with K. Grigoruk, A. Livingstone, O. Meerson, and E. Naiman, p. 108.

only great leadership'.[1] But then Platonov contradicts himself and writes in the next pages the following: 'A tiny bird is sitting on the telegraph wire and singing haughtily. Expresses are rushing by; literary geniuses are fucking in the first-class compartments and the bird is singing. It's not clear yet who wins – the bird or the express'.[2] The party leaders went away and all the 'conscious workers' moved to Moscow to build up their careers. Only the nomads are ever-present, and these will stay in the desert and villages even after all the great projects and careers are successfully realised: 'In fact – all the "socially conscious" are seeking the only possibility – to take the train and go to Moscow. And only nomadic Turkmens don't know "Moscow" in this sense'.[3] In this statement we can find Platonov's key idea about the special status of the poor and declassed elements, which unlike the organised workers, the party representatives and the intellectuals, are ready to stay where they are in order to do something radically new. In a way theirs is a life that remains in a state of waiting, and the question is what kind of politics will be established here. In order to understand this question it is necessary to continue our analysis of others and to look closely at the structure of their subjectivity.

First of all there are always two perspectives in which the word *others* appears in the text. Podoroga correctly notices that they are represented as 'conglomerations', 'colonies' and 'masses', so that their 'individual element' is reduced to a vitalist notion of a body that 'breathes by the breath of other bodies and receives the energy to live or loses this energy thanks to a set of other bodies'.[4] This first perspective corresponds to the radical materiality of a social being. However, it is too early to conclude that Platonov proposes some sort of Deleuzian immanent materialism, as Podoroga's analysis implies.[5] There is also a second perspective, in which Platonov zooms in to the conglomerates and shows their structure and functioning. In doing so, he extracts from this structure a subject and a singularity; he then looks at this subject with a microscope in order to reconstruct its experience of labour. As we will see later on, conglomerations of *others* and their relations to matter are in fact considered dialectically: there is a typology of class consciousness inside of each conglomeration. However, the notion of

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[1] Andrei Platonov, *Zapisnye Knizhki* [The Notebooks], ed. by N. Kornienko, 2nd edn (Moscow: Nasledie, 2006), p. 139.
[2] Ibid., p. 147.
[3] Ibid., p. 146.
[4] Valerii Aleksandrovich Podoroga, *Mimezis. Materialy po analiticheskoi antropologii* [Mimesis. The Materials of Analytical Anthropology], 2 vols (Moscow: Kul'turnaia revoliutsiia, 2011), vol. II, p. 297.
[5] See: Ibid., pp. 293–307; Valerii Podoroga, 'The Eunuch of the Soul: Positions of Reading and the World of Platonov', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 90. 2 (1991), 357–408, (pp. 367–86).

class consciousness deviates from orthodox Marxism and drifts closer to the ideas of Bogdanov. Thus when 'we are in touch' with such proletarian consciousness, the typical other can appear as the people's philosopher, like Yakov Titych from *Chevengur*, and a faceless group of day workers from *The Foundation Pit* may look like animated characters from the Socratic dialogues.

The meaning of this is as follows: in Platonov's novels, oppressed 'others' have found a linguistic form of speech and an idea of philosophical thinking that could only have arisen in the revolutionary period. They escape the conditions of their existence and advance their reality; however far from communism this reality is, they are trying to practice some sort of communism. They make themselves against these conditions: 'The party people did not resemble one another. Each face had about it some self-made quality, as though the man had extracted himself from somewhere with his own solitary strengths'.[1] Platonov is trying to discuss the process of formation of the self-made people, the transformation of 'the forces of matter' into a subject. Others represent the very moment of birth of such metamorphoses:

> … the *others* had built themselves into self-made people of unknown designation; moreover, this exercise in endurance and inner resources of body had created in the *others* not only a mind full of curiosity and doubt but also a quickness of feeling capable of trading eternal bliss for a comrade who was one of them, since this comrade had no father and no property yet was able to make a man forget about both – and within them the *others* still bore hope, a hope that was confident and successful but sad as loss. What was precise in this hope was this: if the main thing – staying alive and whole – were successfully accomplished, then everything and anything else remaining would be accomplished, even if it were necessary to reduce the world to its last grave …[2]

[1] Andrei Platonov, 'Chevengur (Three Chapters from the Novel)' [1926–28d], in: *The Portable Platonov. For the Centenary of Andrei Platonov's Birth*, trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler (Moscow: Glas New Russian Writing, 1999), pp. 13-87 (p. 26).

[2] Andrei Platonov *Chevengur* [1926-28b], trans. by R. Chandler (unpublished manuscript drafts provided by the author, 2014), p. 52.

Thus, the *others* had grown from the 'inner resources of body'; this is their ontological and anthropological precondition. Let's move towards a depiction of their political origin.

The *others* also appear in the figure of a lonely stranger, a holy fool or a people's thinker who, in Russian culture, traditionally goes under the name of the so-called 'innermost man'.[1] While the working class or peasants work and are busy with the organisation of socialism in the village, the lonely stranger contemplates communism, happiness and the meaning of life. The myth about a people's thinker with a peasant background was widespread in the populist movement of the nineteenth century and it goes back to the traditional folk tales, the history of the peasant's religious nomadism and the resistance of the Old Believers' movement against the tsarist autocracy. There is evidence that Platonov took an intense interest in the history of Old Believers and sectarianism, due to the circulation of the popular utopias and myths about the independent communities living in Siberia. The appeal of the Old Believers' movement and its culture derives from the significance of the populist movement for Platonov, and it seems that it is out of this interest that his nomadic characters developed. Many interpreters of Platonov think that the example of wandering men represents an ethical ideal for Platonov. The ideal can be found in village life and in the local form of popular thinking based on intuitive knowledge and 'truth-seeking' in politics, as well as social and everyday life.[2] However, these interpreters confuse Platonov's use of the archaic forms of the folk tale, such as the narration of the wanderers and wise men, with the conceptualisation and theorisation of the nomads, which, in our view, were connected to the political debates about the Soviets and forms of communal life. What is missing in these sociological analyses is the philosophical functioning of the 'innermost man'.

This character has a great life experience, but no intellectual capacities to articulate what he thinks. Due to this, he has only intuitive knowledge, which, although it usually provides a sharp degree of understanding, is unable to frame itself in correct linguistic form. The conflict between intuition and articulation in language is one of the most important for Platonov. It represents a development of the empirio-critical statement

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[1] Andrei Platonov, 'Sokrovennyi chelovek' [The Innermost Man] [1927e], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), vol. II, pp. 161–235.
[2] See: Alexandr Evdokimov, 'Sektanstvo i Chevengur' [Sectarianism and Chevengur], *Strana filosofov Andreia Platonova: problemy tvorchestva*, 4 (2000), 542–48.

about the primacy of experience and labour, but it takes on here a quite new problematic: that of a negative dialectical schema of bodily experience and thinking.

Using 'others' to describe the declassed multitude of people, Platonov plays with the Soviet bureaucratic language of the late 1920s and the efforts of the party to categorise and calculate people according to the proper Marxian classification of class belonging. For instance, the Russian adjective *prochie* was often used in early Soviet bureaucratic documents when the identity of the subject was difficult to define:

> Dostoevsky [the name of the peasant - MC] knew this peasant: an old runaway of a deserter. He had arrived from somewhere or other in his infancy without certificate or document – and it had been impossible for him to be called up for even a single war. He possessed no date of birth or name, and officially he did not exist at all; in order to designate him somehow or other, for everyday convenience, his neighbours called the deserter 'Half-Baked', while in the register of the former village soviet he was simply not listed. There had been one secretary who had written underneath the final surname in the register: 'Others – 1; Sex – Doubtful'. But the following secretary had been unable to understand this entry and had added one more head to the count of long-horned cattle, crossing these 'Others' right through. So Half-Baked went on living, a leak from society, like millet spilt on the earth from a cart. But not long ago Dostoevsky had inscribed him with ink into the list of citizens under the title of 'Evasive middle peasant without a personally acquired surname' and had thus firmly reinforced his existence; Dostoevsky had, in a way, given birth to Half-Baked for Soviet use.[1]

Thus, ready recipes of class identification given in the party instructions and textbooks would be creatively rethought in relation to each specific person, because each person had no educators or 'class fathers'. 'Other' and 'mistakable' refer to someone who is trapped in their contradictory class identity. If nothing certain can be said about the class origin of the *others*, it is equally impossible to claim that the various groups of the rural

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[1] Andrei Platonov *Chevengur* [1926-28b], trans. by R. Chandler, p. 77.

and city population correspond to such categories as the bourgeoisie, the worker and the intellectual:

> 'Comrade Chepurny, I propose one thing' [...]
>
> 'Don't propose, give me a resolution about the liquidation of the class of residual swine'.
>
> 'I propose', Prokofy addressed him reasonably, 'one thing. If Karl Marx didn't say anything about residual classes, then there just shouldn't be any'.
>
> 'But there are. Go out on the street and you'll find either a widow or a steward or some kind of cancelled foreman to the proletariat. How can that be, I ask you?'
>
> 'I propose that inasmuch as according to Karl Marx they do not exist, they therefore should not exist'.
>
> 'And yet they live and oppress us obliquely. How can that be?'
>
> Prokofy again tensed his familiar head, seeking now at least an organisational form.[1]

The anxiety and uncertainty in one's own status generates for Platonov such class categories as *half-kulaks*,[2] a *half-White*,[3] a *half-bourgeois* and *the remnants of capitalism*,[4] a *half-intellectual*[5] and a *half-academic*.[6] Moreover, as no one is sure about either their own class belonging or about the identity of others, in many of the novels, 'wrong' and 'reactionary' classes and their sub-categories, such as kulaks (rich peasants) and *seredniaks* (middle peasant with false petty bourgeois consciousness) emerge at the moment when someone simply points out this person or group. Thus some even have an exceptional capacity to recognise in a sleeping person the poor without political

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[1] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by A. Olcott, p. 195.
[2] Andrei Platonov, 'Vprok. Bedniatskaai khronika' [For The Future's Sake. A Poor Man's Chronicle] [1931], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), vol. II, pp. 284–350.
[3] Andrei Platonov, 'Chevengur' [1926-28c], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), vol. III, pp. 9–409 (p. 222).
[4] Ibid., pp. 251–54.
[5] Ibid., pp. 379–80.
[6] Andrei Platonov, 'Efirnyi trakt' [Ethereal Tract] [1927c], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), vol. II, pp. 8–94 (p. 67–68).

consciousness.[1] Such class voluntarism is looked at in relation to the thinking of poor people. The post-revolutionary class imagination is shown in relation to the new forms of identity construction that result from the exposure of peasants' and workers' concrete thinking to the abstract political categories of Marxism and Bolshevism. This gesture of nomination also corresponds to a new historical situation, in which the radical reconfiguration of the post-revolutionary society provokes a rethinking of one's place in the new order. The main question of Platonov's heroes is, 'Who am I / Who are they / Who are we'. It is, nevertheless, difficult to answer these childish questions, as mistakable people and their comrades don't know their class origin. Thus one can be sure only about his or her own halfness and in-betweenness. The post-revolutionary half-subjects were stuck between old and new: the old and the new classes, modes of life, languages and social relations. This specific status gives to the half-subjects something like a calm in their own unrootedness. Such a half-subject mistrusts all official and written identities – thus party members and intellectuals are immediately suspected of class domination:

> Two people stood almost at point-blank range before each other. Kopyonkin watched Serbinov vigilantly, overjoyed at the danger. The coachman rested near the horses and whispered the grievance at the back of his mind. He was counting already on the deprivation of horses by the local beggars.
>
> 'This is communism here', explained Kopyonkin from his horse, 'and we here are comrades because earlier we lived without the means of life. And what kind of *doubject* are you?'
>
> 'I am a communist too', Serbinov said, giving his bona fides …
>
> 'He's come to play at commune a bit', Kopyonkin said, disillusioned, because there wasn't sufficient danger in it for him … 'you're a pen-pusher, not a Party member'.[2]

Halfness is what characterises Platonov's *doubject*. In this passage the ex-peasant Kopyonkin asks what kind of *doubject* the newcomer is and the given answer does not

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[1] Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit* [1930c], trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler and O. Meerson. (New York: New York Review of Books, 2009), p. 11.
[2] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by Olcott, p. 305–6. In the translation 'doubject' appears as 'subject'. Translation modified, italics mine.

satisfy him, because behind him is not another *doubject*, but a proper subject with an ID and party membership card. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, *doubject* is an incorrect usage of the words 'subject' and 'object'. It usually expresses the same uncertainty about one's own class and social status. Recalling the popular revolutionary slogan, 'the proletariat is the subject of history', a worker from *Chevengur* tries to present himself as such a subject: 'Let's slowly think over … After all, you and me, we are not objects now, but subjects, god-damn it! I talk now and don't understand my own respect'.[1] Another character from *Chevengur* creates a new exchange of greetings and in his attempts to use the new terminology calls his acquaintance 'a subject-human'.[2] Kopyonkin from *Chevengur* writes to his friend: 'I am living like a doubject, so think of something that is only about me, because I am far from being respected'.[3]

What does this mean? First, the invented form of address paraphrases the popular thesis about the objectification of the working class under capitalism: this new 'not object, but subject' is liberated from slavery and finally can think, reflect and discuss. However, the process of 'becoming a subject' is difficult and confusing, and it is also not clear what it means to think in the way that the subject has to think. The doubject is not a classical lumpen proletarian – not a figure whose class inbetweenness creates a shaky political identity and a readiness to join any sort of reactionary force so as to acquire the privileges of a higher class. On the contrary, most often the doubject is sceptical of all forms of domination, whether it is an attempt by the party to discipline him or her or an effort by intellectuals to teach. Doubjects prefers to unite in communes, colonies and conglomerations with similar doubjects and do not want to mix with party intellectuals and bureaucrats. There is a trace here of Bogdanov's conception of proletarian culture.[4]

Artemy Magun connects the doubject to the post-revolutionary structure of subjectivation: 'The subject by its definition … must predate its actions, but the subject

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[1] Ibid., p. 141. Translation modified.
[2] Andrei Platonov, 'Chevengur' [1926-28c], in *Works*, 8 vols, vol. III, p. 86.
[3] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by Olcott, p. 168. Translation modified.
[4] Almost all leading characters are represented in this way. As a rule, when the doubject joins 'an enemy class' of the party bureaucracy or intellectual elite, he or she faces tragic transformations. The workers Kozlov and Safronov, for example, die at the hands of the peasants angered by the policy of collectivisation: Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit* [1930c], trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler and O. Meerson. Likewise, Makar Ganushkin, who got a high position in the local party structures, is hated by all villagers: Andrei Platonov, 'Otmezhevavshiisia Makar' [Makar Defining His Boundaries] [1929-30c], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), vol. I, p. 235–8. One could add more examples. Some of them we will gradually introduce in what follows.

of the revolution has emerged over the course of events retroactively'.[1] Thus the process of nomination is a process of reality creation, or, we might say, a process of life-building: 'On the one hand, we collect others in *Chevengur*, uncounted and unregistered people. On the other hand, they are actively nominating themselves. One of them, for example, named himself Dostoevsky, and what is more, he tries to behave like Dostoevsky. The name goes ahead of reality and creates it'.[2] We would argue that it is not a name that goes ahead of reality, but, to be more accurate, a doubject. The name does not fit the reality, and the doubject is always in conflict with his or her name. This is due to the fact that 'reality' is much more complex and contradictory than the simple idea of 'identity creation'. In fact, what the doubject is able to say is that he or she cannot remain the same after the revolution, although, at the same time, the conditions for radical and immediate transformation are yet to arrive. After the civil war many returned to their villages and towns, where everything remained as it was: the prose of life moved in a groove. In this sense, 'ahead of reality' can lead to what Magun calls revolutionary melancholy: when the event has happened, but the future is not yet here, an excess, such as depression, violence or terror, may be the more common reaction to post-revolutionary reality than enthusiasm or workers' happiness, as it is depicted by socialist realism.[3] In our section on the notion of *toská* we will come back to this point.

An alternative model would be to become someone else, for example Dostoevsky, the figure from the past, a signifier of a great thinker. A lame peasant, head of the revolutionary committee, with a comic surname that refers to the anatomy of the male genitals, registers himself in the party office as Dostoevsky and proposes to rename the whole population of the village for the purposes of self-improvement. Those who will take a new name have to behave and live like a chosen character. Thus two other villagers become Christopher Columbus and Franz Mehring and Dostoevsky reports to the revolutionary committee about the chosen names 'to determine whether Columbus and Mehring were people worthy of their names being taken as examples of the life to come or if they were silent for the revolution'. However, 'The County Revolutionary Committee had yet to send an answer, so Stepan Checher and Petr Grudin lived almost without names'.[4] In other words, there is no fixed name for the doubject, not only

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[1] Artemy Magun, 'Otritsatel'naia revoliutsiia Andreia Platonova' [Negative Revolution of Andrei Platonov], *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 6 (2010), 65–95 (p. 89).
[2] Ibid.
[3] Artemy Magun, Op. cit., pp. 65–76.
[4] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by A. Olcott, p. 94.

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because the party hardly ever gives permission to register a bizarre zoo of Columbuses and Mehrings, but also because a new subject is not equal to a hero or someone's biography.

Another interesting question is why a doubject asks permission from the party. Obviously it is because this logic of renaming confuses a name with an ID. Although to have a proper name means here to forget an old given name, 'peasant' and 'proletariat' are not given names but class belongings, and the question is, who will come after these class names?[1] In fact, not the old names, but old classes have to be abolished, and together with this the old capitalist type of human being. In his early articles Platonov constantly repeats the idea that the bourgeoisie produced the proletariat. That is why the proletariat is a partial subject that is to be abolished in the process of communist formation. [2] In order to achieve a classless society, the proletariat has to build its own culture based on what Platonov calls 'the kingdom of consciousness'.[3] It is not so much a question of how to forget a lower-class surname as of how to reflect a class origin and create a new subject in the act of such self-abolition. However, approximately from 1924 onwards, the question of the human, consciousness and intuition has begun to become more complex. As we will see, it will often contradict the earlier, oversimplified Bogdanovism that conceives of the new human as a state of pure consciousness.

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[1] It should be noted that the practice of changing surnames was widespread in post-revolutionary Russia and that people registered under new names related to the events of the revolution. The most popular names were Iskra, Varlen (abbreviation from 'The World Army of Lenin'), Vektor ('The Great Communism Triumphs') etc. Thus, the real surname of Platonov was Klimentov. Platonov refers to the philosopher Plato and the writer's father's name Platon.
[2] See: Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'Vospitanie Kommunistov' [The Education of Communists] [1920j], in *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2004), vol. I (2), pp. 62–63.
[3] See: Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'U nachala Tsarstviia Soznaniia' [At the beginning of the Kingdom of Consciousness] [1921c], in *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2004), vol. I (2), pp. 143–46.

B) Dual Being and Two Organs of Thought.

> All of a sudden, quite independently, tears would come out of his eyes and flow down his face, and Sartorius would feel astonished at this phenomenon: something was living in the depths of his body, some kind of separate animal, and it was weeping silently, and taking no interest in the manufacture of balances.[1]

Platonov does not continue to use the term doubject into the 1930s, but the further development of a problem of doubling, splitting and becoming is remarkable throughout the whole of *Happy Moscow*. At least two of the main characters in *Happy Moscow* are constantly trying to become someone else due to dissatisfaction with the Stalinist urban life of the new Soviet intelligentsia. A famous Soviet space engineer with a 'countryside-like face' has a peasant background and his original surname is Chewbeard.[2] First he becomes Sartorius, because this romantic surname refers to the German historian Georg Friedrich Sartorius and corresponds to his new profession and social status. However, he feels that the life of a space engineer lacks social and practical significance, and so he applies for work as an engineer at the shabby Trust for Scales, Weights and Measures, in order to develop the most precise scales for the Soviet kolkhozes.[3] Sartorius tries to make friends and start new relationships, but feels even more depressed and bored. In order to forget himself, he works almost 24/7 and lives in the office. He solves the problem of scales and transportation, and carries out scientific research,[4] but his depression progresses to such a degree that he arrives at the idea of a new social experiment:

> … it was necessary to research the entire extent of current life by transforming it to suffer its way into another existence, even though this was forbidden by the laws of nature and the habit people have of staying themselves. Sartorius was a researcher and, rather than preserve himself

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[1] Andrei Platonov, *Happy Moscow* [1933–36], trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler, A. Livingstone, N. Bourova and E. Naiman (London: Harvill, 2013), pp. 7-118 (p. 57).
[2] Ibid., p. 40.
[3] In order to earn money, Platonov worked as a senior engineer in the Russian Federation's Republican Trust for the Production and Repair of Scales and Measures during the 1930s. See: Natal'ia Kornienko, 'Komentarii' [Comments], in A. Platonov, *Works,* 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2010), vol IV, pp. 577–620 (p. 587).
[4] Andrei Platonov, *Happy Moscow* [1933–36], trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler, A. Livingstone, N. Bourova and E. Naiman, pp. 54–64, 73–80.

for secret happiness, he intended to use events and circumstances to destroy the resistance of his personality, so that the unknown feelings of other people could enter him one by one. Since he was here and alive, he must not miss this opportunity. It was essential to enter into every other soul; otherwise what could he do with himself? Alone with himself, there was nothing to live on. And if anyone did live like that, they died long before the coffin.[1]

In the process of becoming, he loses his sight and mutates on a physiological level. Finally he feels that 'Life's fundamental obligations – concern for one's personal fate, the sense of one's own body, constantly crying out with feelings – had disappeared. It was impossible for him to remain the same uninterrupted person, he was being gripped by toská'.[2] Sartorius goes to the street market and buys 'what was necessary for his future existence' – a passport of a worker in retailing and the commanding officer of a reserve platoon called Ivan Stepanovich Grunyakhin. At the end of the novel, a worker in the factory's canteen, Grunyakhin-Sartorius-Chewbeard, leads an ordinary narrow-minded life, has an impoverished wife and in the evenings reads philosophy.[3]

Social alienation; a boredom with the everyday; the impossibility of accepting the old ways of life, such as the creation of the nuclear family and a domestic routine – this leads the protagonists of *Happy Moscow* to acts of continual self-transformation: they change professions and class positions (Moskva Chesnova and Semen Sartorius) or search for a common life by means of practices such as correspondence in Esperanto with the proletarians from around the world (Viktor Bozhko). Moskva Chesnova passes through cycles of transformation similar to Sartorius and becomes the lumpenised and disabled civil partner of reservist Komyagin – a marginal man, who loves an ID discipline and cannot complete any of his undertakings in art and literature. The figure of Moskva Chestnova embodies in itself an innate idea of the doubject and of halfness, because it is at one and the same time a woman and a synecdoche of the city of Moscow. Moskva represents all classes of Soviet society and dissolves into them. One can notice that on the sociological level this is again a diagnosis of a post-revolutionary melancholy

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[1] Ibid., p. 94–95.
[2] Ibid., p. 105.
[3] Ibid., p. 105–17.

– anxiety and doubt about the future of the revolution – but on a philosophical level it rather suggests the formula of negativity in the process of becoming a subject.

Dhooghe notices that in this novel the degree of 'compartmentalization and disintegration is almost absolute', because a human is represented here 'not as a whole, but as a collection of its component parts, as the split subject (a body, a mind, a soul)'. These component parts often 'act independently from the human will' and have a great level of autonomy. The component parts, namely the organs and processes (feelings and thoughts) take over the functions of the 'I'.[1] This strange idea of the autonomy of organs and feelings from the 'I', as well as the question of the split, is developed in the main discussion of the novel concerning the question of thinking. It takes place between the engineer Sartorius and the surgeon Sambikin. The positivist Sambikin comes to the conclusion that the spinal cord possesses some ability of rational reflection.[2] That means that human thoughts are produced by the two organs:

> But it may well turn out that the secret of life lies in man's dual consciousness. We always think two thoughts at once, we can't think just one! We have two organs for one object! They think from opposite directions, but they think about the same theme … Do you realize this could be the foundation of a truly scientific, dialectical psychology such as the world has never known? The fact that a human being is capable of thinking doubly about every subject is what has made him the finest animal on earth![3]

[1] Ben Dhooge, 'Tvorcheskoe preobrazovanie iazyka i avtorskaia konzeptualizatsiia mira u A. Platonova' [The Artistic Transformation of Language and Authorial Conceptualisation of the World in Andrei Platonov] (PhD, Ghent University, 2007b), p. 576.

[2] It is interesting that positivist ideas about the biological nature of the intellect concerned Platonov since he was very young. In 1921 he wrote the following remark, 'On Intellect', in his notebook: 'To explain and describe me in short … the spinal cord and the brain cord (their functions), especially the place of their connection under a nape … In absolute great detail … the part of a brain, where the spinal cord grades to the brain cord and characteristics of this gradual brain in relation to the brain cord and spinal cord etc.': Andrei Platonov, *Zapisnye Knizhki* [The Notebooks], p. 22. The explanation of the origin of a man in the short story *For The Future's Sake* is similar. A peasant asks an intellectual why the monkey had smartened up and had been transformed into a human. The answer is the following: 'The main scapus of an animal and a human … is the spinal column with the liquid inside of it. One end of a spine bone is a head and another one is a tail … Possibly, some animals bit off a monkey's tail and the power that usually would come to a tail went in the opposite direction – to a head. That's how monkeys smartened up!': Andrei Platonov, 'Vprok. Bedniatskaai khronika' [For The Future's Sake. A Poor Man's Chronicle] [1931], p. 329.

[3] Andrei Platonov, *Happy Moscow*, trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler, A. Livingstone, N. Bourova and E. Naiman, p. 58–59.

Sartorius argues that animals also possess 'heads and spines', and Sambikin explores his hypothesis of the 'dual being':

> It was necessary to get used to coordinate two thoughts, to uniting in a single impulse one thought that rises from out of the earth itself, from the depths of the bones, and another that descends from the heights of the skull. It was necessary that these thoughts should always meet at a single moment, that their waves should coincide and resonate. Animals are little different: they too have two thoughts arising against each impression, but their two thoughts wander off in different directions and don't join in a single impact … [Man] was able to train two feelings, two dark currents, to meet and measure their strength against each other … Clearly, none of this is perceptible … And sometimes, in illness, in unhappiness, in love, in a terrible dream, at any moment, in fact, that's far removed from the normal, we clearly sense that there are two of us – that I am one person but there's someone else inside me as well. This someone, this mysterious 'he', often mutters and sometimes weeps, he wants to get out from inside you and go a long away, he gets bored, he gets frightened … We can see there are two of us and that we've had enough of one another. We imagine the lightness, the freedom, the senseless paradise of an animal, when our consciousness was not dual but lonely. Only a moment separates us from an animal when we lose the duality of our consciousness, and very often we live in archaic times without understanding what that means.[1]

The cause of the weeping and panicking animal that lives inside of the subject is a discordance of the 'two consciousnesses' – a thinking that originates from a head and a thinking that goes 'from the depths of the bones'. To 'translate' Sambikin's statement about 'dialectical psychology', we may assert something like the following: the phenomena of doubling and division comes from the contradictory coexistence of

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[1] Ibid., p. 59–60.

physicality, which supplies intuitive and perceptual knowledge in the experiences of a body, and thinking, which developed through social experience and language.[1]

The effect of 'a little animal' inside of the subject relates to the receptive machine of the eunuch of the soul.[2] The eunuch accomplishes a partial mode of reflective thinking that comes 'from the heights of the skull'. For Magun it functions as a 'revolutionary doubject': 'It is not consciousness and not a being, but the function of *delay* of consciousness in relation to a being. The eunuch does not perceive, but watches over an experience for the possibility of integrating it later by consciousness and subject into the whole'.[3] The delay seems to relate to the function of the doubject's consciousness, while the eunuch is a function of montage that reshapes the materiality of bodily experience into a perception of the total mode of vision. The perception is a product of observation and it comes *post factum*. That is to say, the doubject collects empirical protocols and facts, but then once again has a problem with naming and articulating them. The mechanical eye of the eunuch intervenes and organises what has been seen.[4] There is another interesting episode in *Chevengur* that describes how the eunuch of the soul helps Dvanov[5] to originate thought. It appears here under the name of 'the watchman of the mind'.[6] After the watchman has opened 'the rear door', Dvanov begins to see some pictures and episodes from the past, and these pictures help him to generate an idea of how to solve some practical issues of security in *Chevengur*.[7] As we can see, the eunuch of the soul describes the functioning of perception and shows an active and 'conscious' process of interpretation of sensory information.

However, as we saw before, such integration is a complicated process, and Platonov constantly shows to the reader its drama. It is hard for the doubject to produce

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[1] In *The Sea of Youth* (1932) a mind is pictured in a similar manner: 'Vermo plunged into a vague condition of his unceasing mind. He imagined it to himself in the form of the low room full of tobacco smoke and the struggling, those broken by the fight, dialectic essences of technics (*tekhnika*) and nature'. Andrei Platonov, 'Iuvinil'noe more' [The Sea of Youth] [1932], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), vol. II, pp. 351–432 (pp. 386–87). In the context of the text, Vermo's remark about the mind illustrates his reasoning in relation to the scientific organisation of agriculture, but it may have another metaphorical meaning, too. Technics (*tekhnika*) is the advanced modern technologies, intellectual baggage or abstract thinking, while nature is a body, physical experience and intuition.
[2] See chapter II.
[3] Artemy Magun, 'Otritsatel'naia revoliutsiia Andreia Platonova', p. 86.
[4] About montage in relation to the eunuch of the soul, see Chapter II.
[5] Interestingly enough, the root of the surname Dvanov is 'dva', which means 'two'. It seems that Platonov again plays here with the notions 'double' and 'doubling'.
[6] It may be due to the fact that *Chevengur* was made of different short stories and pieces of writing. Philologists mention that there are many inconsistences in *Chevengur*'s plot and that some parts of the novel were assembled in a quite mechanical way. See: Nina Malygina, *Kommentarii* [Comments], in: Andrei Platonov, *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), vol. III, pp. 537–605 (pp. 538–40).
[7] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by A. Olcott, p. 319, p. 319–20.

thoughts and usually the body – or knowledge that comes 'from the depths of the bones' – actively participates in the process of thinking. Kopyonkin's friend Kirei hears the noise inside of his head and it disturbs the origination of his thoughts: 'Kirei began to listen to the noise in his head and waited for an idea to pop out of there, until finally the effort and the rush of blood boiled the wax in his ears'.[1] The doubject starts with the principle of concretisation and objectification of abstract categories, translating the words and their meanings to the level of space and body functions. This process is shown in the dialectical movement of the concrete and the abstract and the coincidence of the two in the proletarian body. Thus, many of Platonov's doubjects first try to imagine a word as the concrete object or thing. For example, a self-educated worker from the late short story *The Household* imagines fractions as horse cavalry in order to solve a mathematical problem:

> From the fog of his mind he has called for help to sense a common fraction in the form of cavalry, where the numerator is a fighter, and the denominator is a horse. In a decimal fraction a rider has dismounted, and there lay between him and the horse the grass of commas; then he divided them, forcing the cavalryman to ride so that he flew under the horse's stomach – to a denominator, and was then again corrected … Only with the help of such an imagined system of action has Portnov started coping successfully with science, placing it forever in the wells of mind and body.[2]

The doubject deals with books in the same way. Rail worker Ivan Alekseevich reads in the manner of a flâneur. He moves from page fifty to page two hundred and five, because this way of reading helps him to participate in the narrative and imagine what will follow in the plot.[3] Concrete and material thinking thus helps to understand things and phenomena: 'Safronov knew that socialism was a scientific matter, and so he pronounced words equally logically and scientifically, reinforcing them with two meanings – one fundamental and one reserve – the same as he would any other

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[1] Ibid., pp. 212–13.

[2] Andrei Platonov, 'Semeistvo' [The Household] [1934a], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2010), vol. IV, pp. 310–20 (p. 317).

[3] Andrei Platonov, 'Sredi Zhivotnykh i rastenii' [Among Animals and Plants] [1936d], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2010), vol. IV, pp. 379–402 (p. 390).

material'.[1] The 'reserved meaning' of Safronov is the same concrete and material substratum of things and social phenomena. If the doubject cannot imagine this sort of 'reserved meaning', it would be impossible for him or her to understand a concept. The young Platonov experienced a similar difficulty understanding mathematical formulae. His advice was to 'sense it at first' and then 'translate it in consciousness and fix it there'.[2]

Another doubject, Kopyonkin, cannot express his thoughts properly either in writing or in speech: ' … Kopyonkin could not speak fluently for more than two minutes at a time, because extraneous thoughts continually popped into his head, each mutilating the other to the point of incoherence, so that Kopyonkin would stop his own point to listen with interest to the noise inside of his head'.[3] Here is shown once again the delay of thought, but this time in relation to speech. The reason for this delay is that the privilege of public speech belongs to the educated orators; it confuses proletarians by its speed and fluency: 'a working man would not manage to think simultaneously to the speed of the speech. A proletarian's thought acts in emotion and not under his bald spot'.[4] In Platonov speech and thinking are disconnected. This is why, in the process of mastering the coordination of the two consciousnesses, proleterians tend to start from oral speech. Even if they cannot read and write, they try to develop their oral skills in dialogues and by thinking aloud:

> The man was muttering his own thoughts to himself, unable to think silently. He was unable to think in the dark. He had first to place his mental agitation into a word and only later, when he had heard the word, could he sense it clearly.[5]

Pen-and-pencil culture is a dead form. It expresses such a level of abstraction that it negates the *concrete thinking* that rises 'from the depths of the bones'. Again, speech is a way of mastering a dialectical balance between the two consciousnesses. The comic couple from *Chevengur* can illustrate this. The head of the revolutionary committee of

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[1] Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit* [1930c], trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler and O. Meerson, p. 32.
[2] Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'Slyshnye shagi (Revoliutsiia i matematika)' [Clear Steps. Revolution and Mathematics] [1921b], in *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow: IMLI RAN, 2004), vol. I (2), pp. 147–48 (p. 148).
[3] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by A. Olcott, p. 106. Translation modified.
[4] Ibid., p. 141. Translation modified.
[5] Ibid., p. 145.

the self-generated communist village Chepurny is only able to 'sense' and 'to give … a revolutionary hunch, as a guide' and his counterpart – the party bureaucrat Proshka – formulates and articulates Chepurny's feelings and thoughts into the appropriate ideological form.[1] This shows the importance of oral culture and the Socratic type of philosophy, because such a philosophy relates to praxis, while pen-and-pencil culture is instructive culture. Writing and reading are for those who have had no time to live and act, as the communist Chepurny puts it.[2]

The instructive pen-and-pencil culture can oppress and dictate what to do even in the absence of a knowledge of what one is doing. Platonov calls it 'the power of a higher mind'.[3] Practice and the theory of practice are two different things. The dead knowledge contained in Soviet Marxism's books and party documents is not applicable to the convulsive time of revolution, or, put differently, thought is not identical to the testimonies of Marxism-Leninism, because it produces a speculative account of reality. The *other* Yakov Titych from *Chevengur* formulates the position perfectly: 'The poor man is his own smartest person, because it was him who made the whole world for others, like a toy, without even wanting to', while the party bureaucrats are the 'brainy ones what write papers right up to death itself'.[4] Illiteracy is in itself an act of creation, and sometimes ignorance produces more precise thoughts and gives a sharper understanding of things than the 'proper' intellectual mind.[5]

The experience of illiteracy becomes a property of proletarian thinking. Platonov's doubjects are often depicted as worker-artisans, masters, inventors and thinkers. They are the 'really existing' counterpart to Bogdanov's engineer-organisers. Characters of this sort occur both in the early Platonov and in his late works. They are defined as the type 'who can fix up or equip anything but who has lived through his own life unequipped'.[6] They are Zakhar Pavlovich from *Chevengur*, who creates wooden objects, utilities and machines with unknown functions; Makar Ganushkin from *Makar*

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[1] Ibid., pp. 165–69.

[2] Ibid., p. 164.

[3] Ibid., p. 234.

[4] Ibid., p. 235–36.

[5] Platonov fixes the speech of the worker and remarks: 'Fedor Fedorovich spoke like many Russian people – allegorically, but exactly. His phrases, if one were to write them down, would be short and incoherent. The thing is that in order to understand Fedor Fedorovich, one should look in to his mouth and sympathize with him. Then his difficulties of speech would have an explanatory value'. Andrei Platonov, 'Che-Che-O. Oblastnye organizatsionno-filosofskie ocherki' [Che-Che-O. Regional Organizational and Philosophical Sketches] [1928a], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), vol. I, pp. 198–216 (p. 212).

[6] Andrei Platonov, 'Chevengur (Three Chapters from the Novel)' [1926–28d], in: *The Portable Platonov. For the Centenary of Andrei Platonov's Birth*, trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler, p. 21.

The Doubtful (1929–30), who constantly invents futurist-like devices for industry; the peasant Kirpichnikov from *Ethereal Tract* (1927), who becomes a scientist and discovers the living electron; the locksmith and mechanic Pukhov from *The Innermost Man* (1927); or the peasant-intellectual from the short story *Ivan The First* (1930) who reasons about renewable energy and electrification. In the early article the young writer describes the work of his father and his companions in the railroad workshops as an example of 'the finest artistry'. The artistry of such labour is defined by the fact that a worker in the 'battle with the steel and iron' shapes 'a technical exact fine form' based on 'mathematical calculation' and 'millimetre accuracy'.[1] Platonov argues that despite the manual character of heavy industrial work, workers have to possess refined artisanal skills. They almost act as constructivists in relation to the *faktura* of industrial materials.

The ideal of the master contradicts the doubject's structure of delay and compartmentalisation. The peasant Makar Ganushkin 'has been acting by his clever hands and silent head'.[2] The party bureaucrat Chumovoi calls Makar a 'spontaneous [*stikhiinaia*] head',[3] but Platonov does not think that spontaneity (*stikhiinost'*) is a proper explanation of Makar's class subjectivity. He includes in the text an alternative authorial description of Makar as a 'lower actual mind'.[4] And this capacity 'to act by hands' is attributed to the whole class of doubjects. In the 1920s Platonov explains a paradoxical combination of the 'clever hands' and the 'silent head' in a number of articles. The new proletarian culture and a new type of classless human are both a matter of the integration of the two consciousnesses in one form. The development of the concepts worker-artisan or worker-master correspond in the young Platonov to the doctrine of Proletkult, which he sees as a unification of the scattered and coincidental thoughts of the proletariat and the abolition of intuitive knowledge in the process of collective consciousness-formation. The intention is to turn the proletariat into some sort of machine of intellectual activity. However, such a literal understanding of proletarian culture characterises Platonov only in his early period. His considerations of labour and thinking

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[1] Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'Geroi truda. Kuznets, slesar' i liteishchik' [The Heroes of Labour. The Blacksmith, the Locksmith, and the Founder] [1920d], in *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2004), vol. I (2), pp. 101–5 (p. 102–3).
[2] Andrei Platonov, 'Usomnivshiisia Makar' [Makar The Doubtful] [1929–30d], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), vol. I, pp. 216–34 (p. 218).
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., p. 234.

as a synthetic but conflictual activity lead to the abandonment of the teleological idea that labour in consciousness and intellect may ultimately be abolished.[1]

At the same time, thinking as a time-based process of oral speech can occur anywhere in the act of writing, art-making or politics-producing. Here we arrive at Platonov's contradictory understanding of form and formation. It seems that both categories are negative: a form is something dead, but formation is something incomplete and partial. In any case, time organises matter; and this means that, if one does not choose to disappear in a pure duration of time, then one cannot escape becoming a form or making a form. Platonov explains:

> Knowledge is a garbage of creativity, that what was digested in the innermost of a human and thrown out. Knowledge is that which I made and stopped loving, because I have done and finished with it. The belief-creativity is that which I love. I love it, because I do not have it and do not know it. It is that which did not pass through me and did not become the past. Creativity is always a love to the future, to the something unfulfilled and impossible. The great rest, the distinct rigorous severe formedness must be in the soul of the creator. He opposes himself to the chaos, i.e. to the future, which does not exist. He is making the present from it – a stony lump of things, the world.[2]

The ideal model of intellectual and artistic activity that follows from Platonov's understanding of labour, illiteracy and thinking involves being in the middle of time and space, bringing the form from the future (time) into the present (space). Indeed, the doubject also goes ahead of reality, which means he or she is always in the future that has not yet become a reality. The doubject keeps in mind a perfect form that he or she wants to make. This ideal form is communism and the classless society, but there is no communism in reality. This contradiction is somehow unsolvable, and it seems that it is exactly this that drives the doubject to think and act.

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[1] The idea about scattered thoughts expressed in the article: Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'Golova proletariata' [A Head of the Proletariat] [1920e], in *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2004), vol. I (2), pp. 114–16 (p. 115). Similar problems to do with regulation and the coordination of the senses in the achievement of the 'active collective consciousness' were discussed in the article: Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'Kul'tura Proletariata' [The Culture of the Proletariat] [1920f], in *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2004), vol. I (2), pp. 90–100 (p. 97–98). About the organisation of labour based on the idea of a master, see the article: Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'Master-Kommunist' [A Communist-Master] [1920g], in *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2004), vol. I (2), pp. 111–13.

[2] Andrei Platonov, 'Efirnyi trakt' [Ethereal Tract] [1927c], in *Works*, 8 vols, pp. 41–42.

C) Nature and Labouring Being, Poor Life and Veshchestvo of Existence.

> Further on were reeds, and when Chagataev entered them, all their inhabitants began to
> call out, fly up or fidget about where they were. It was warm in the reeds. Not all the
> birds and animals had been scared away by this man; judging by the sounds and voices,
> some had remained where they were – so frightened that, thinking their end was near,
> they were now hurrying to reproduce and find pleasure. Chagataev knew these sounds
> from long ago; and now, listening to the weak, agonizing voices from the warm grass,
> he felt sympathy for all poor life that refuses to give up its last joy.[1]

The conflicting logic of the two consciousnesses brings us to the understanding of materialist ontology in Platonov. In fact, what makes it so difficult to coordinate two consciousnesses is what Platonov calls the *labour of life* and *poor life*. Both concepts appear in the mid-1930s in an Asian cycle of short stories and in *Happy Moscow*. Life is understood here as a substance for the production of everything that exists, including thinking. *Poor life* represents the weak and fragile status of life that can be easily consumed and spent. In a general sense, both concepts refer to the conditions of extreme poverty on the social as well as on the biological level. In a philosophical sense it is not hard to see how both concepts rely on Bogdanov's degrees of organisation. Life literally originates in earth, dirt and seeds. As one of Platonov's protagonists puts it: 'I am a by-product of my mother, no different from her menstruation'.[2] But the molecular level of spontaneity (*stikhiinost'*) in Platonov takes over even socially organised experience. The doubjected structure of subjectivity is a process of self-organisation and resistance to the entropy of compartmentalisation and decomposition, chaos and death, which determine the social experience of poverty. Responding to the critique of the 'ugliness' of his characters, the young Platonov, self-identifying as a proletarian writer, says:

> I am sure that the coming of the proletarian art will be ugly. We are growing
> from the earth, from all its soil, and everything that is on the earth, is in us too
> … The world spirit will grow from our ugliness … A human had descended

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[1] Andrei Platonov, 'Soul' [1936c], in *Soul and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler with K. Grigoruk, A. Livingstone, O. Meerson and E. Naiman, p. 22.
[2] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by A. Olcott, p. 295.

from the worm. A genius will be born from a goose. Everything was dark and dirty, but becomes bright.[1]

This naïve pathos of the half-Hegelian and half-Christian development of the absolute spirit is interesting in view of the fact that its author was a young factory worker. Platonov's idea of 'growing from the earth' can be found just as much in his early writings as in the late novels. He specifies that matter doesn't possess sublime properties of beauty and creativity. Everything existing is made of ugly and poor life-materials.

The subject is in itself a badly composed set of the elements of nature, which may turn at any moment into disjointed pieces and parts, derivative materials and functions. The *others* are the 'forces of matter' and 'conglomerations of the bodies' that live in nature as weeds. The vitalist metaphor of weeds refers to the spontaneous production of the simple forms of life that develops in the struggle for life. In the novella *Dzhan* we enter into an ontological space of organic life and the state of nature – an environment in which a drama of the living body is taking place. During the Dzhan journey, human bodies undergo different metamorphoses – from physical pain and destruction to complete merging with matter:

> … he began to pity his body and his bones; his mother had once gathered them together for him from the poverty of her flesh – not because of love and passion, not for pleasure, but out of the most everyday necessity. He felt as if he belonged to others, as if he were the last possession of those who have no possession, about to be squandered to no purpose, and he was seized by the greatest, most vital fury of his life.[2]

This describes a kind of secular process of becoming: a movement from matter to form and back to a formless state of death, molecular and inorganic matter. The state of nature is the zero ground and starting point, but everything returns to this zero ground due to death. The field of life is a process of organising and disorganising, scattering and integrating, composing and recomposing.

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[1] Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'Otvet redaktsii "Trudovoi armii" po povodu moego rasskaza "Chul'dik i Epishka"' [Response to the Editorial Board of the 'Labour Army' with Regards to My Short Story Chyldik and Epishka] [1920h], in *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2004), vol. I (2), pp. 68–69 (pp. 68–69).

[2] Andrei Platonov, 'Soul' [1936c], in *Soul and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler with K. Grigoruk, A. Livingstone, O. Meerson and E. Naiman, p. 94.

Poor life relates to this negative cyclical reproduction. The drama of existence, not only of humans, but also of all creatures, is located in its weakness, poverty and economy of life. There is nothing great and sublime in the essence of life, because there is nothing to expect and nothing to celebrate except the repetition of birth and death at a zero ground of organic life. Existence and presence in the world are not exciting, but exhausting. Poor life is a substratum of labouring nature and it initiates the consciousness that arises 'from the depths of the bones'. Platonov writes in many places that human beings are 'trying to win' life. This 'winning of life' from exhaustion and poverty takes place through wage labour as a tool of economic survival.[1] At the same time, the 'winning of life' is a means for a body to sustain life. Thus a body is understood here as a labouring mechanism:

> This sleeping man was not old, but his ordinary face had long ago turned grey from the strain of the sleeper to win life for himself, and a persistent, exhausted despair lay with bony hardness in the expression of his face, like part of the surface of a human body.[2]

In the 'orphanhood of deserted nature',[3] humans, animals and plants are 'trying to win' life from the 'labour of their body' – to reproduce themselves and survive. There is no surplus energy which can be consumed. The machine of survival cannot be interrupted and the functioning of the body – heartbeats, the circulation of blood and digestion – in this state of need is also a *labour of life*. In this sense, sleep and unconscious states of mind are subordinated to the same function – an *economy of life*: 'The sighs and snores made such a racket that people seemed not to be sleeping but to be working. Life then was so troubled that even sleep seemed like labour'.[4] People also smell of 'the worked out life' when they are sleeping.[5] Thus, sleep 'is a retreat of the working masses before the fierce world smothering a body to a fatigue'.[6] Therefore, the state of sleep and unconscious life not only helps to avoid the exploitation of *others*, but also the

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[1] Andrei Platonov, 'Usomnivshiisia Makar' [Makar The Doubtful] [1929–30d], in *Works*, 8 vols, p. 220.
[2] Andrei Platonov, 'Rubbish Wind' [1933], in *The Return and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler, A. Livingstone (London: Harvill, 1999), pp. 71-87, p. 71. Translation modified.
[3] Andrei Platonov, 'Soul' [1936c], in *Soul and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler with K. Grigoruk, A. Livingstone, O. Meerson, and E. Naiman, p. 131.
[4] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28b], trans. by R. Chandler, p. 55.
[5] Andrei Platonov, 'Iuvinil'noe more' [The Sea of Youth] [1932], in *Works*, 8 vols, p. 573.

exploitation and exhaustion of life. In order to sustain life, the inhabitants of nature have to work without any break. The *labour of life* is imposed on life as such.

All organic life is busy with this *labour of life* – a labour of survival. The face of nature is the face of the soil, trees and plants exhausted by the *labour of life.* Platonov's brook 'works the whole year round',[1] a sheep produces its wool 'from desert grass', plants are 'lowering a membrane halfway over each eye' in order to work even when they are asleep,[2] a bush 'was dusty and tired, almost dead from the labour of its own life and movement'.[3] Actually, the whole of nature is organised according to working shifts: 'While the people argued and packed among themselves the age-old labour of nature continued'.[4] Therefore the negativity of nature is the negativity of *labouring being*.

As we can see, Platonov's nature functions as means of production, because it is a labouring and producing entity. The negativity of labouring being is rooted in the real world of capitalist history. As engineer and ameliorator Platonov wrote a lot about the exploitation of earth. He had a very specific concept of 'earth's repair' based on a Marxist understanding of ecology and climate. He states that old capitalist methods of earth and soil exploitation lead to the formation of deserts and droughts. According to him, communist farming based on solar energy and other renewable sources will help to fight the devastation of nature and hunger. For peasants, Platonov writes, the earth is a means of bread production. Similar to a loom that manufactures fabric, the earth is a machine that manufactures food for humans. As with any kind of machine it needs care and repair.[5] This repair is a science of agriculture that looks as follows:

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[1] Andrei Platonov, 'Vprok. Bedniatskaai khronika' [For The Future's Sake. A Poor Man's Chronicle], p. 228.
[2] Andrei Platonov, 'Soul' [1936c], in *Soul and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler with K. Grigoruk, A. Livingstone, O. Meerson, and E. Naiman, pp. 66, 22.
[3] Ibid., p. 13.
[4] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by A. Olcott, p. 127. Translation modified.
[5] Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'Remont zemli' [Earth's Repair] [1920i], in *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2004), vol. I (2), pp. 25–26 (p. 25). From 1920 to 1935 Platonov wrote a lot on engineering, melioration and agriculture. Here we provide a list of the most significant articles (to some of which we will refer later): *Revolutionary War Council of the Earth* (1921), *Electrification (Basic Definitions)* (1921), *Earth Cheka* (*Black Revolutionary War Council)* (1922), *Equality in Suffering* (1922), *About the Liquidation of Agricultural Catastrophes* (1923), *Struggle with A Desert* (1924), *The Nursery of A New Human* (1926), *On the First Socialist Tragedy* (1934). See: Andrei Platonovich Platonov, *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2004b), vol. I (2); Andrei Platonov, 'O pervoi sotsialisticheskoi tragedii' [On the First Socialist Tragedy] [1929-30a], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), vol. VIII, pp. 640–44. See also in English: Andrei Platonov, 'On the First Socialist Tragedy' [1929-1930b], in *Happy Moscow*, trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler, A. Livingstone, N. Bourova, E. Naiman (London: Harvill, 2013), pp. 153-158.

The contemporary system of agriculture is depredation by definition and destruction of the earth's productive forces … Agriculture is a system of elementary productive forces in transformation, where an absolute quantity of productive forces, participating in the process of transformation, is constant. So to speak, profit, a product or surplus value, is made by the cost of the energy of the sun, which is participating in the economy of agriculture as an elementary productive force, because it is an energy that never decreases.[1]

This conception of repair amounts to a science of the renewable energy of the sun and electrification. Therefore, 'electrification is technically accomplished communism in production'.[2] Chepurny reasons about the power of sunlight that has to be transformed into renewable energy in the unscientific manner of the doubject: '[The] solar system would independently give the power of life to communism, since all work and effort had been invented by the exploiters, so that they left with an abnormal surplus, beyond the products of the sun'.[3] However, the negativity of nature is not reduced to social history. Nature has its own laws of production and reproduction. Nature is far from the romantic Rousseauist ideal, since what it represents is a negative dialectical force. Platonov writes:

Nature is not great and it is not abundant. Or – to be more precise – her design is so rigid that she has never yet yielded her greatness and abundance to anyone. And this is a good thing; otherwise — in historical time — we would long ago have looted and squandered all nature; we would have drunk on her right through to her very bones. We would always have had appetite enough.

[1] Andrei Platonov, 'Pervyi Ivan. Zametki o tekhnicheskom tvorchestve trudiashchikhsia liudei' [Ivan the First. Notes About Technical Creativity of the Workmen] [1930b], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2010 [1930]), vol. IV, pp. 237–53 (p. 239).

[2] Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'Elektrifikatsiia. Obshchie poniatiia' [Electrification. Basic Definitions] [1920c], in *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2004), vol. I (2), pp. 133–42 (p. 137).

[3] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by A. Olcott, p. 227. Translation modified. It is interesting that the young Platonov argues for the solar origin of life elsewhere. For example: 'We are descendants of the sun, not in a figural sense, but literally, physically … There is no body that does not consist of atoms, and no atoms that do not consist of electrons, and an electron is the element of light. The assumption that the Earth … receives and received only the light and forms life of this light by itself is most likely to be correct'. Andrei Platonov, 'Nevozmozhnoe' [The Impossible] [1921a], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), vol. I, pp. 290–302, (p. 293). He reminds us that in almost all ancient religions life originates from the light. Therefore, Platonov, a follower of Bogdanov, believes that intuition was the first step of knowing, and now the old myths took on a scientific shape. See: Ibid. This is the reason why there are so many popular myths about the sun in his works.

Had the physical world been without what is, admittedly, its most fundamental law – the law of dialectics – it would have taken people only a few centuries to destroy the world completely and to no purpose. More than that, in the absence of this law, nature would have annihilated herself to smithereens even without any people […] Nature herself, if we look straight at her, stays aloof; a quid pro quo – or even a trade with a mark up in her own favour – is the only way she can work. Technology, however, strains to achieve the opposite. The external world is defended against us by its own dialectic.[1]

This means that nature somehow keeps its autonomy in relation to the social world and exists according to its own dialectical laws of organisation. The technological impact on nature has to be in agreement with these 'natural laws' so as to prevent ecological disaster. Here Platonov alludes to the danger of the idea of progress and predicts a new destructive imperialist war, based on advanced technologies.[2] This aims to criticise Bogdanov's theory of the total scientific organisation of the universe and transformation of social life into the non-contradictory socially organised experience. The autonomy of nature illuminates impossibility of total organisation. Nature cannot exist outside of social history; and, vice versa, humanity cannot exit or abolish nature. In his notebooks Platonov reflects on this mutual dependence in a more aphoristic manner: 'The greatest change or grief has followed after the voyage of Columbus: the Earth is round, desperate, and not flat-infinite'.[3] It is impossible to exit Earth and it is impossible to exit its natural preconditions.

In the condition of extreme poverty, biological and social reproduction is also an exhausting process of labour. Food consumption, just like sexual intercourse, is often described as hard labour. Female characters are usually greatly exploited through domestic work and their husbands: 'Zarrin-Taj lay and thought that the husband is a surplus labour and suffered it'.[4] It seems that for this reason Platonov does not celebrate the vitality of biological reproduction, but regards it as a negative means of the labour

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[1] Andrei Platonov, 'On the First Socialist Tragedy' [1929-1930b], in *Happy Moscow*, trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler, A. Livingstone, N. Bourova and E. Naiman, pp. 153–54.
[2] Ibid., pp. 154–57.
[3] Andrei Platonov, *Zapisnye Knizhki* [The Notebooks], p. 132. Platonov plays with words here. The Russian noun *bezyskhodnost'* (despair) means both the state of despair and the impossibility of exiting some condition. It originates from the prefix 'bez', which means deficiency of something, and a noun *iskhod* that literally means exodus. Thus, Platonov says that the earth is desperate and 'non-exitable'.
[4] Andrei Platonov, 'Takyr' [The Takyr] [1934b], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2010), vol. IV, pp. 289–310 (p. 293).

of life: 'But all his life children had streamed down on him, and Prokhor Abramovich's soul had been buried, as a gully is buried by silt, beneath clayey accumulations of cares'.[1] Thus the labour of life includes the labour of social reproduction. In his early essay 'Proletarian Culture', Platonov writes: 'Sex became the main, central feeling in the struggle for survival, a soul of the person. And implementation of the law of sex became the highest blessing of the person'.[2] From this it follows that gender, biological reproduction, sex and the nuclear family are means of immortality in capitalist society. Opposed to the unconscious struggle for individual survival in acts of biological reproduction, communism is the common life of the new sexless human.[3] Nevertheless, as we have pointed out earlier such views characterise only the young Platonov and that the idea of pure consciousness as a perfect communist form disappears in his late works. For example, in *Anti-Sexus* and *Fools on the Periphery*,[4] his understanding of sex includes a critique of Soviet sexual control.

It seems that in the mature Platonov the question is to be solved not in the total abolition of sex, but in the abolition of the laboriousness of life that forces women to function as commodities and as birth-machines. Moreover, Platonov stresses that everything that exists has to be liberated from poor life.[5] Animals are exhausted too, but their unspeakable desire for liberation is even stronger than that of humans, due to the higher degree of suffering and the hopelessness of their existence. Commenting on Platonov's animals, Timofeeva argues that their human content has remained imprisoned by poor life.[6] Indeed, we remember that there are always two of us, as

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[1] Andrei Platonov *Chevengur* [1926-28b], trans. by R. Chandler, p. 28.

[2] Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'Kul'tura Proletariata' [The Culture of the Proletariat] [1920f], in *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2004b), vol. I (2), pp. 90–100 (p. 98).

[3] Ibid., p. 98–100. The same idea is expressed in: Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'Bor'ba Mozgov' [The Struggle of Brains] [1920a], in *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2004), vol. I (2), pp. 79–80. In fact, his new sexless human is a self-conscious male who simply refuses sexual relations with a woman. This can be made evident from *Chevengur*, where all the leading characters who are shown establishing communism are male. However, some would interpret *Chevengur* as a critique of heterosexuality or even as a homosexual novel. Although Platonov took an interest in homosexuality, and *Chevengur*, indeed, includes some homosexual motifs, it does not seem that it was his conscious intention to make 'a homosexual novel'. About homosexuality, means of friendship and its interpretations see: Jonathan Flatley, 'Andrei Platonov's Revolutionary Melancholia: Friendship and Toska in Chevengur', in *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 158–90 (pp. 179–84). See also critique of Platonov's understanding of gender: Philip Ross Bullock, *The Feminine in the Prose of Andrey Platonov* (Oxford: Legenda, 2005).

[4] Andrei Platonov, 'Anti-Sexus' [1926b], trans. by A. O. Fisher, *Cabinet*, 51, Fall (2013), 48–53. Andrei Platonov, 'Duraki na pereferii' [Fools on the Periphery] [1928b], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), vol. VII, pp. 11–56.

[5] See, for example: Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by A. Olcott, p. 157.

[6] Oxana Timofeeva, *History of Animals: an Essay on Negativity, Immanence and Freedom* (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Academie, 2012), p. 141.

Sambikin from *Happy Moscow* puts it. Thus, a human remains internally a crying animal and an animal remains what can become a human, but the latter cannot realise itself due to its inability to coordinate two consciousnesses. The human content of an animal remains in Kopyonkin's horse Strength of the Proletariat, who is a 'class animal'.[1] A sparrow is 'a truly 'proletarian bird', because it shares the winter cold with the poor people and does not fly away to 'luxurious lands'.[2] An animal not only remains a human but also possesses a class nature. This is a projection of social laws onto nature and therefore remains within the framework of a proletarian monism and the proletarian point of view.[3] The human content of an animal is a call for 'planetary change' that is 'already inscribed in the unconscious animal nature', argues Timofeeva.[4] We would add that this call is not only addressed to a human, but also recognised and humanised by a human.

If we accept this, one could argue that, together with the abolition of poor life, Platonov may return to the same idea of pure consciousness as something outside of his pessimistic understanding of labouring nature. However, poor life is the material of life or, in other words, it is what life is made of. In the science fiction story *The Impossible* (1921), Platonov writes:

> The Swedish physicist Arrhenius has a beautiful, amazing hypothesis concerning the origin of life on the earth. It is his guess that life is neither a local, nor a terrestrial phenomenon. It has been transported to us from other planets through enormous ethereal spaces in the form of the smallest and most elementary colonies of organisms … From here one can draw the following general conclusion: there are no conditions in the Universe to which life couldn't adapt. If conditions are disastrous or catastrophic, life could be simplified to an incredibly small size in order to increase its stability and endurance, and this is what saves it. Perhaps, atoms and atoms of atoms – electrons – are the same microorganism, but only in its limitary, initial form.[5]

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[1] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by A. Olcott, p. 152.
[2] Ibid., p. 133.
[3] See Chapter II.
[4] Oxana Timofeeva, *History of Animals: an Essay on Negativity, Immanence and Freedom*, p. 147.
[5] Andrei Platonov, 'Nevozmozhnoe' [The Impossible] [1921a], in *Works*, 8 vols, p. 291.

Similar reflections about atoms and electrons are repeated by the scientist Popov in the science fiction story 'Eternal Tract'. His theory includes an understanding of living and dead matter. The matter is dead, but there is a living entity inside of the electrons: the centre of the atoms is filled by matter and consists of dead electrons, which play the role of food for the living ones.[1] The dialectics of dead and living electrons in *Eternal Tract* is the dialectics of stasis and organisation. Therefore, nature, for Platonov, represents the routine of production and reproduction, because it is 'dialectised' nature; but this dialectics does not lead to the final divine form: it has no progress and end. This reproduction can be regulated or improved, but not abolished. Outside of human history nature remains rough matter, but social life brings only the logic of matter's amortisation through the struggle with the hostile conditions of nature. From this it follows that one has to accept poor life as a precondition of social life and its building material. This decision led Platonov to the deployment of a materialist ontology of poor life, which includes an elaboration of his notion of a *substance of existence* or, more accurately, a *veshchestvo of existence.*

The Russian word 'veshchestvo' can mean matter, a substance, a thing, materiality and stuff at the same time. Robert Chandler translates 'veshchestvo' as 'substance', but also sometimes as 'essence', as 'a thing' or as 'an object'. However, such translation is contextual. First of all, the root of the noun *veshchestvo* is *veshch'*, which means a thing. Second, Platonov never uses the philosophical category *substantsiia* – the *substance*. Moreover, *essence* (*sushchnost'*) in the Russian language is also a cognate of *existence* (*sushchestvovanie*). Proskurina argues that Platonov's *veshchestvo* 'has many faces: on the one hand, it is some kind of living material, the materiality of a body, on the other – it is the substance of a soul and existence'.[2] According to Mukhin *veshchestvo* means both the material component of objects and their essence. *Veshchestvo* can fill nature, a human, a body, life and existence.[3] The word *veshchestvo* started to appear in Platonov as early as in 1923.[4] The notion *veshchestvo of existence* was so important for Platonov that he almost published the

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[1] Andrei Platonov, 'Efirnyi trakt' [Ethereal Tract] [1927c], in *Works*, 8 vols, p. 11.
[2] Elena Proskurina, *Poetika misterial'nosti v proze Andreia Platonova kontsa 20-30-kh godov* [The Poetics of Mystery in Andrei Platonov's Prose of the End of 1920s and 1930s], (Novosibirsk: Sibirskii Khronograf, 2001), p. 29.
[3] Mikhail Iur'evich Mukhin, *Leksicheskaia statistika i kontseptual'naia sistema avtora* [The Lexical Statistics and the Conceptual System of an Author] (Ekaterinburg: Ural'skii Universitet, 2010), p. 141.
[4] Maria Dmitrovskaia, 'Iazyk i sozertsanie A. Platonova' [Language and Intuition of Andrei Platonov] (Habilitation Thesis, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, 1999), p. 156.

second part of *Chevengur* under this title.[1] Dmitrovskaia admits that the parallel usage of *veshchestvo, veshch', matter* and *body* correspond to the archaic meaning of Old Medieval Russian, where *veshch'* and *veshchestvo* sometimes were synonymous and where the understanding of a human body as *veshchestvo* was common. In archaic Russian *veshchestvo* meant to be a material substratum of the world. It indicated things in existence and was a synonymic figure of the word 'material'. Such expressions as 'metallic *veshchestvo*' or 'fluid *veshchestvo*' were very common in eighteenth-century Russia.[2] In this sense *veshchestvo* is close to the English colloquial word stuff, German *Stoff* and *Stofflichkeit* and Aristotelian ὕλη (*hyle*).

There is a scene in *The Foundation Pit* where the truth-seeker Voshchev collects 'the objects [*veshchi* – MC] of unhappiness and obscurity'.[3] Referring to this passage, Zlydneva concludes that *veshchestvo* here appears as a memory of *veshch'*, as the remainder of its exhaustion in the past.[4] It seems that this strange praxis of collecting the leaves, garbage and destroyed objects of material culture manifests the act of recomposing and recollecting matter. In Bogdanov's terminology, Voshchev is organising life – the *veshchestvo of existence* – into the elements – *veshchi*, and in Nikolai Fedorov's terminology he is collecting the dead molecular pieces to resurrect them in the future. Therefore, a thing means something concrete – an object of material culture or a product of labour that is to be formed or recomposed from the *veshchestvo*. The following passage from Platonov's notebook explains the usage of *veshchestvo of existence* in a political context. In 1931 he writes:

> [Materialism] The vulgar worldview anticipates that life is a combination of biological processes: 'a human' properly is some sort of result of the relations and interactions of these forces – a human is relation. This is only half true. But another half is that the human is by itself *veshchestvo*, 'materialism' included in bio-combinations. From here, and only from here – that a human is by itself *veshchestvo*, but not only the relation – can one draw the great general conclusion that the door into the secret of nature is still open for humans. If by

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[1] Ibid., p. 164.
[2] Ibid., pp. 157–59.
[3] Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit* [1930c], trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler, O. Meerson, p. 5.
[4] Natal'ia Vital'evna Zlydneva, *Motivika prozy Andreia Platonova* [The Motivation of Andrei Platonov's Prose] (Moscow: Institut slavianovedeniia RAN, 2006), p. 40.

contrast, a human is only the 'relation', 'combination' etc., those doors are closed forever.[1]

The vulgar Marxist misses the problematisation of *veshchestvo*. It is not clear against whom Platonov directs this critique. Soviet Leninism and dialectical materialism account for the question of 'matter', but we have already seen that they follow eighteenth-century materialism in resolving the problem of subject and object. What is definite is that Platonov's *veshchestvo* builds on Bogdanov's elements of experience and labour causality.[2] *Veshchestvo* is a living substance or a building material of life, while *veshchestvo of existence* considers two consciousnesses – thinking and experience – that struggle inside of a doubject. The concept also explains Platonov's dialectics of nature, which represent various corrosions of the 'human' and 'animal' material in the state of poor life.

The passage from *Makar Defining His Boundaries* (1929–30) develops the same problematic in the ironic form of a Socratic dialogue between a working-class woman and the illiterate peasant Makar. He asks her to show him her soul, because for Makar it must be a concrete thing, but his politically conscious companion replies that it is impossible to show a soul, since it is a social relation. Makar disagrees: 'Do you mean that a soul is only empty kindness, and that there is no *veshchestvo* in it? How come? Even god was a body. Although, an accidental one, a human is more essential than god after all!'[3] What disturbs Makar is alienation and the abstraction of a body from a soul. In this sense, there is no soul, but there is a stuff of existence, a *veshchestvo*. The abstract is always concrete: a body is always a mind; the social is always made of the physical labour activity of the *labouring being*. In this way Platonov describes consciousness, thinking and social relations. Therefore, poor life and the *veshchestvo* of existence are directly connected.

Veshchestvo is crucial for understanding thinking as a concrete and object-oriented activity related to the labour experience. Platonov uses Marxist terminology to discuss *veshchestvo* as a productive force antagonistic to the relations of production. *Veshchestvo* is a product of labour and the production of a thing.[4] The working class is

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[1] Andrei Platonov, *Zapisnye Knizhki* [The Notebooks], p. 79.
[2] See Chapter I and Chapter II.
[3] Andrei Platonov, 'Otmezhevavshiisia Makar' [Makar Defining His Boundaries] [1929-30c], p. 237.
[4] Maria Dmitrovskaia, 'Iazyk i sozertsanie A. Platonova' [Language and Intuition of Andrei Platonov], p. 164.

defined as those 'who silently made useful substance [*veshchestvo*]'[1] and as those who have been 'multiplied from the laboring proletariat *veshchestvo*'.[2] In the play *Fools on the Periphery* (1928), a divorced wife says that she is happy to be emancipated from marriage, which puts her in the position of an object even though she considers herself 'a relation'. A party bureaucrat corrects her: 'You are not a relation. You are a correlation of social conditions, a social superstructure, a woman on the base'.[3] The notion of *veshchestvo* criticises the alienation of the corporeal activity from the intellectual one and the pure formalism of the Soviet understanding of base and superstructure. Thus Voshchev, in a Socratic dialogue, raises the question of labour in the following manner:[4]

- And for the sake of what do you think, torture yourself? ...

- [People think for the sake of truth, as do I. The meaning of life is in the world now … I want it to be in thought]

- I have got my body that has been weakening without a truth. I cannot feed by labour …

- What is your truth! – Said those … who spoke before … – You are not working after all, not living out the *veshchestvo* of existence. From where can you remember a thought!

- But why do you need a truth? – Asked another man… – It will be good only in your mind, but disgusting outside …

- In order to live, one needs the mood of a body connected to a mind, but I don't know a truth. I wanted to ask you about it.

- But what is a thought apart from a brain? – Asked the artisan with dried lips baked in silence, thus missing the point [...]

Since Voshchev did not know the origin of a thought, a man with a poor and exhausted beard said […] :

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[1] Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit* [1930c], trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler, O. Meerson, p. 122.
[2] Andrei Platonov, 'Chevengur' [1926-28c], in *Works*, 8 vols, p. 281.
[3] Andrei Platonov, 'Duraki na pereferii' [Fools on the Periphery] [1928b] in *Works*, 8 vols, p. 46. All examples are taken from: Maria Dmitrovskaia, 'Iazyk i sozertsanie A. Platonova' [Language and Intuition of Andrei Platonov], p. 165.
[4] *The Foundation Pit* has three draft manuscripts and the original text had been published after the last typewritten editing of Platonov. The following passage is from the two draft manuscripts that Platonov did not include in the third and last version. All drafts have been published in Russian in a special academic edition of *The Foundation Pit*. The text in the square brackets indicates cases when the author did not decide whether material should be included or not. Italics mine.

- There is no thought. You remember a lived out *veshchestvo* and therefore thinking. But he cannot think, he lives unemployable and … does not feel *veshchestvo* …
- So, do you consider the meaning of life as well?
- How else? We make *veshchestvo of existence* after all.[1]

Voshchev has no 'mood of a body connected to a mind', but this is because he does not know a truth. The working-class crowd that talks to him pretends to know the answer, but for them the question of truth is formulated incorrectly. Viugin translates this dialogue as following: "You are not working, hence you don't remember a thought, i.e. the truth … therefore, the truth is remembering linked to work'.[2] It seems that truth here is a concrete product of labour: 'a thought is not idealism, but mighty hard *veshchestvo*'.[3] In his essay 'Proletarian Poetry' (1922) Platonov makes the following significant remark:

> Is the truth an abstract category? No. Huge masses of people want the truth now. My entire body wants truth. And that which a body wants cannot be immaterial, spiritual, abstract. Truth is a real thing. It is a perfect organization of matter in relation to human being.[4]

The difference between the young and the mature Platonov is reorientation towards the materialist ontology of poor life and labouring being. As we have shown, the question of thinking has been supplemented in the 1930s by the question of existing. In any case, this does not contradict his previous understanding of labour as experience of the organising and shaping of what he will call later 'the stuff of existence'.

It would not be surprising to see that *labour of life* and *poor life* represent the same conflict as the one between thinking and existing. Magun correctly notices that such a doubling is articulated through an ironical critique of Descartes in *The Foundation Pit* by the main character Voshchev:

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[1] Andrei Platonov, *Kotlovan. Text, materialy tvorcheskoi istorii* [The Foundation Pit. Text, The Materials of Its Historical Origin] [1930a], ed. by V. U. V'iugin (Saint Petersburg: Nauka, 2000), p. 187–88.
[2] Valerii Iur'evich V'iugin, *Andrei Platonov: Poetika* Zagadki [Andrei Platonov. The Poetics of Enigma] (Saint Petersburg: RKhGI, 2004), p. 240.
[3] Andrei Platonov, 'Efirnyi trakt' [Ethereal Tract] [1927c], in *Works*, 8 vols, p. 68.
[4] Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'Proletarskaia poeziia' [Proletarian Poetry] [1922], in *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2004), vol. I (2), pp. 162–67 (p. 164).

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- Why are you walking and existing here?

- I don't exist here … I only think here.[1]

Reacting to this passage, Magun writes that Voshchev 'thinks not where he exists' and 'exists not where he thinks'. In other words 'the subject of thought is not identical to the subject of existence, not simultaneous to itself'.[2] Alienation of thought from existence and existence from thought is not simply a separation of 'spirit' and 'existence', but a temporal delay that remains doubject, who cannot think and act at the same time and for this reason collects and stores empirical protocols that have been grasped from reality in some secret place in the mind. As one of the 'others' from *Chevengur* says: 'Store it [a raised question – MC] in your mind … There's always left-overs lying about a mind, because the living stuff (*veshchestvo*) gets used up and there's not enough of it in the mind'.[3] Platonov could not leave Descartes alone. Another of his characters, a former physicist of cosmic space called Albert Lichtenberg,[4] beaten to exhaustion by fascists in a small German city, lies near a garbage can and argues:

'Great Adolf! You have forgotten Descartes: when he was forbidden to act, fright made him start to think, and he recognized in horror that he existed,[5] that is – once again – that he acted. I too think and exist. And if I live, that means you cannot be! You do not exist!'

'Descartes is a fool!' Lichtenberg said out aloud and himself began to listen to the sounds of his wandering thought. 'What thinks, cannot exist, my thought is a forbidden life, and soon I shall die … Hitler doesn't think

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[1] Andrei Platonov, *Kotlovan. Text, materialy tvorcheskoi istorii* [The Foundation Pit. Text, The Materials of Its Historical Origin] [1930a], p. 187.

[2] Artemy Magun, 'Otritsatel'naia revoliutsiia Andreia Platonova' [Negative Revolution of Andrei Platonov], p. 86.

[3] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by A. Olcott, p. 234.

[4] The protagonist's name derives from the blending of Albert Einstein's name and the surname of the XVIII century physicist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg. Platonov connects the origin of Hitler's power with the capitalist ideology of nineteenth-century science, namely rationalism, positivism and progress. At the same time, he parts with his own illusions that technologies are the source of an absolute benefit. What is more, the description of the fascist environment in Germany corresponds to what Platonov has seen during the rise of Stalin. Therefore, he somehow warns of what will follow in Germany, but undoubtedly distinguishes Stalinism and fascism. Although conservative in its politics, an informative historical comment to the *Rubbish Wind* could be found in: Elena Proskurina, 'Sotsializm kak fashizm: rasskaz A. Platonova "Musornyi Veter"' [Socialism as Fascism: Andrei Platonov's Short Story 'Rubbish Wind'], *Kritika i semiotica*, 1, 18 (2013), 186–99.

[5] It seems that the recognition of existence in horror corresponds here to the terrifying status of poor life.

– he arrests, Alfred Rosenberg thinks only what is meaningless, the Pope has never thought at all, but they exist all the same!'[1]

If the oppressed cannot exist, because it was decided that he or she should not exist, then the oppressor cannot think, but only exists, because it was decided that political power is a pure will to existence. This existence is a power to act through commands (oppress, arrest, kill). The oppressor cannot think, because it confuses thinking with commanding. Here we find ourselves going back to the same idea of 'the power of a higher mind' and to instructive culture. A paraphrase of this idea can be found in *Eternal Tract*. One of the protagonists, a scientist called Matissen, creates a device that can transmit simple commands over a distance. The machine translates electromagnetic waves generated in a brain into a command and passes this command to another machine, person or even to nature. Matissen calls his machine a thought-conveyor.[2] This machine allows Matissen to make more fundamental experiments. However, his tests result in environmental disaster and eventually, over the course of the experiment, his death.

To think but not exist is not better than to exist but not to think. Since Platonov's doubjects are hard workers and proletarians, as Magun correctly notices, the 'subject is produced here by a break in work, thus it does not coincide with its end'[3]. Where you have labour you merely have an existence, and when you have interruption in your work, you start thinking:

'Now just where is it that comrade Chiklin gets his representation of the world from? ... Or did he have a special kiss in infancy that he can set his sights on a gully better than an educated expert? How is it that you can think, comrade Chiklin, whereas me and comrade Prushevsky wander like pettiness between classes and I see no betterment for myself?'

Chiklin was too morose for cunning and so his reply was approximate: 'There's nowhere for life to go, so you think thoughts into your head!'[4]

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[1] Andrei Platonov, 'Rubbish Wind' [1933], in *The Return and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler, A. Livingstone, p. 77.

[2] Andrei Platonov, 'Efirnyi trakt' [Ethereal Tract] [1927c], in *Works*, 8 vols, p. 38.

[3] Artemy Magun, 'Otritsatel'naia revoliutsiia Andreia Platonova' [Negative Revolution of Andrei Platonov], p. 86.

[4] Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit* [1930c], trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler and O. Meerson, p. 26.

The interruption in everyday life that is constituted through the working process forms a blank space, a pause. It is literally the emptiness, a void, which is formed by the lack of labour. This emptiness produces a thought, whereas absolute fullness (preoccupation) with labour does not leave a space for a pause or a gap for thinking. Therefore, 'there's nowhere for life to go' means that there is a break and an interruption in the continuum of labouring and production.

In the labouring being there is no time to live, or, as the reservist Komyagin says: 'After all, I am not living. I have only been involved in life'.[1] It seems that many of Platonov's characters do not live, but are only 'involved in life', i.e. struggling with the state of poor life: 'People didn't live here, but chewed over life and found in it the same taste as everywhere. It is as simple as that: the term is given – spend it slowly, without rage and tension'.[2] The habit of living is a habit of existing, not of questioning why one is living and why everything exists as it is. The detachment of thinking from existing usually emerges in extreme conditions of exploitation, hunger and poverty. Thus, Lichtenberg from *Rubbish Wind* 'had difficulty in sensing his own existence … perhaps some surplus of suffering consciousness was switching off the life inside him so it should be preserved if only in its sad forgetfulness'.[3] The nomadic inhabitants of a desert, a small nation, the Dzhan, also live 'by habit', and, similarly to Lichtenberg, sometimes forget the 'habit of living'.[4]

Undoubtedly, this existential reorientation has roots in the historical context of the 1930s. It can be seen as part of the growing scepticism of many intellectuals in the 1930s with regards to the question of whether socialism in its historical form (Stalinism) corresponds to the status of truth (in the Marxian sense of objectivity) or is merely a historical error. This question is formulated by Platonov as early as 1931:

> The grief of a human living in a great time is that the proletariat won power
> (partially, chaotically, but acidly, bitterly) for an original, surprising formation

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[1] Andrei Platonov, *Happy Moscow*, trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler, A. Livingstone, N. Bourova and E. Naiman, p. 64.

[2] Andrei Platonov, 'Dikoe mesto' [A Wild Place] [1927b], in *Works*, 8 vols (Moscow: Vremia, 2011), vol. I, pp. 191–97 (p. 191).

[3] Andrei Platonov, 'Rubbish Wind' [1933], in *The Return and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler, A. Livingstone, p. 71.

[4] Andrei Platonov, 'Soul' [1936c], in *Soul and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler with K. Grigoruk, A. Livingstone, O. Meerson, and E. Naiman, p. 50, 85.

of bourgeois administrative-bureaucratic democracy. A human found in the revolution a pure light of the world that had been turned into insanity. And a human is in a state of insanity.[1]

From here can be raised more general questions. Does praxis lead to the truth? Does it correspond to the objective development of history? The significant difference is that the question of class and labour was reconfigured into the question of life-building under the conditions of the labouring being. The recognition of the habit of living first generates a feeling of deep enslavement in poor life; subsequently this feeling provokes the subject to act in various ways (to reflect, to do or not do something).

D) Struggle With the Void: Toská and Communism

> But why, Nikita, do the fields lie there so boringly? Can it be that *toská* is inside of the whole world – and there's a five-year plan only in ourselves?[2]

Platonov uses a specific Russian word, *toská*, to describe this existential state or feeling of enslavement within poor life. Robert Chandler thinks that *toská* has no equivalent in English and leaves it without translation.[3] *Toská* is close to the English terms 'melancholy' and 'longing', but it has no cause, object or direction. In this sense *toská* is closer to the German word *Sehnsucht*. In Old Russian *toská* means constraint, grief, sadness, anxiety and disturbance.[4] What makes it different from both melancholy and *Sehnsucht* is that *toská* expresses diverse chords of passive and active emotions.

In his book on melancholy, Flatley has a chapter dedicated to Platonov's *toská*.

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[1] Andrei Platonov, *Zapisnye Knizhki* [The Notebooks], p. 82.

[2] Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit* [1930c], trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler and O. Meerson, p. 33. Translation modified, italics mine.

[3] In order to explain his choice, Chandler quotes Nabokov: 'No single word in English renders all the shades of toska. At its deepest and most painful, it is a sensation of great spiritual anguish, often without any specific cause. At less morbid levels it is a dull ache of the soul, a longing with nothing to long for, a sick pining, a vague restlessness, mental throes, yearning. In particular cases it may be the desire for somebody or something specific, nostalgia, lovesickness. At the lowest level it grades into ennui, boredom …' Robert Chandler, 'This Translation', in *The Portable Platonov. For the Centenary of Andrei Platonov's Birth* (Moscow: Glas New Russian Writing, 1999), pp. 9-12 (p. 11).

[4] See: Max Vasmer, *Etimologicheskii slovar' russkogo iazyka* [Russian Dictionary of Word Etymology], trans. by O. N. Trubachev, 2nd edn., 4 vols (Moscow: Progress, 1987), vol. IV, p. 88.

For Flatley, *toská* is the unsolvable 'movement of grief',[1] and he suggests that Platonov proposes to the reader a variety of therapeutic practices and techniques of dealing with this. One of them is friendship: *toská* in some cases can 'stimulate' the development of the Benjaminian 'mimetic faculty', which in turn helps to establish the sensual similarities and equivalences between a human and an animal, the material world and the natural environment. According to our analytical framework, this may mean that *toská* recognises the ontological status of the labouring being (a human is similar to the labouring plants and animals for exactly this reason). However, Flatley follows Benjamin's 'mimetic faculty' to discover the emotional attachment to the other, Nancy's 'inoperative community' and Derrida's 'friendship'.[2] This unexpected manoeuvre, of placing Platonov's communism and comradeship into the philosophical discourse of the late 1980s and early 1990s, seems to miss the political point of *toská*.

Toská is not a state of hopelessness that provokes its subject to the invention of therapeutic technics. Timofeeva points to the active side of *toská*: 'quite often toska indicates the situation which subject finds absolutely unbearable. In this case, toska sounds as a call for whatever action, it refers to the urgency, to the immediate necessity for a total change'.[3] Such an unbearable situation, Timofeeva concludes, is the state of poor life.[4] Indeed, the sense of *toská* is equivalent to the recognition of poor life:

> The heat and boredom lay on the Aralo-Caspian steppe. Even the cows that went out to feed stood in despair in the face of nature's sad act; an unknown delirium was taking place in their mind. Vermo, who instantly turned external facts into internal feelings, thought that the world should be changed as soon as possible. Otherwise even the animals will be going insane.[5]

The most powerful, but at the same time most pessimistic, image of *toská*, which can illustrate the 'urgency' for 'whatever action', is depicted in *Chevengur*, in a famous parable about a fisherman from Lake Mutevo:[6]

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[1] Jonathan Flatley, 'Andrei Platonov's Revolutionary Melancholia: Friendship and Toska in Chevengur', p. 172.
[2] Ibid., p. 179–90.
[3] Oxana Timofeeva, *History of Animals: an Essay on Negativity, Immanence and Freedom*, p. 132.
[4] Ibid., p. 132–33.
[5] Andrei Platonov, 'Iuvinil'noe more' [The Sea of Youth] [1932], in *Works*, 8 vols, p. 371.
[6] Lake Mutevo can be translated as 'muddy lake'.

Zakhar Pavlovich had known one man, a fisherman from Lake Mutevo, who had always been asking people about death and whose curiosity had filled him with toska; this fisherman had loved fish not because they provided nourishment, but because they were special beings that most probably knew the secret of death. He would show the eyes of dead fish to Zakhar Pavlovich and say to him: 'Look – true wisdom! A fish stands between life and death, that's why it's mute and why it knows everything already'. Contemplating the lake for years on end, the fisherman had gone on thinking about one and the same thing: what is death like? Zakhar Pavlovich had tried to dissuade him: 'It's nothing special there – just somewhere a bit cramped'. A year after that, unable to bear it any longer, the fisherman had thrown himself into the lake from a boat, having tied his legs together with a rope so as not to start swimming inadvertently. Secretly he did not believe in death at all. What he really wanted was to have a look and see what was there: it might be a great deal more interesting than life in a village or on the shore of the lake; he saw death simply as another province, situated beneath the sky, as if at the bottom of cool water, and this province attracted him. A few villagers, whom the fisherman had told about his intention to live in death for a while and then come back again, had tried to dissuade him, but others had agreed with him: 'Well, Dmitry Ivanovich, nothing ventured, nothing gained. Give it a try, then you can tell us about it'. Dmitry Ivanovich had given death a try: three days later he had been dragged out of the lake and buried by the fence in the village churchyard.[1]

This famous episode provoked various interpretations. For Magun, the death of the fisherman is an example of negativity.[2] Timofeeva focuses on the failed effort of a

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[1] Andrei Platonov, 'Chevengur (Three Chapters from the Novel)' [1926–28d], in *The Portable Platonov. For the Centenary of Andrei Platonov's Birth*, trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler (Moscow: Glas New Russian Writing, 1999), pp. 26–27.

[2] This is somewhat close to the therapeutic understanding of *toská* in Flatley. See: Artemy Magun, 'Otritsatel'naia revoliutsiia Andreia Platonova' [Negative Revolution of Andrei Platonov], pp. 68–70.

'becoming-fish of a fisherman',[1] while Jameson found here a rejection of the 'former being': a pre-revolutionary organic life.[2] Flatley says something more interesting with regards to the question of poor life and the 'urgency to act', which Timofeeva neglects in this case. The fisherman escapes his labour – fish as the means of his life – and 'deinstrumentalises' it. This is similar to Zakhar Pavlovich, who fights with the unbearable state of *toská* by producing useless wooden objects.[3] Thus, labour and everyday work fills in a void, an empty place in the structure of the doubject.

The doubject understands that there is nothing outside of labour and production, only the habit of thinking that there is something. Zakhar Pavlovich repeats Platonov's own consideration: he 'was unable to overcome the thought that man had descended from the worm, and that a worm was a simple and terrible little tube with nothing inside it – just empty stinking darkness'.[4] Therefore, there is nothing outside but the void produced by the breaks in labour. What is this void? It is the disorganised molecular movement of psychophysical concatenations. In *Happy Moscow* the positivist Sambikin shows to Sartorius the 'common cause of life' – a void – during the autopsy:

'This emptiness in the intestines sucks all humanity into itself and moves world history. This is the soul – have a sniff!'

Sartorius had a sniff. 'It's nothing special!' he said. 'We shall fill that emptiness. Then some other thing will become the soul'.

'But what other things?' said Sambikin, smiling.

'I don't know', said Sartorius, feeling a pitiful humiliation. 'First people must be fed properly, so they won't be drawn into the emptiness of the intestines –'

'If you don't have a soul, it's impossible either to feed anyone or to have enough to eat yourself', Sambikin retorted with boredom. 'Nothing's possible'.

Sartorius bent down towards the corpse's innards, towards the place in the intestines where man's empty soul was located … 'This really is the very best, ordinary soul. There's no other soul anywhere'… He was saddened by the

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[1] Oxana Timofeeva, *History of Animals: an Essay on Negativity, Immanence and Freedom*, pp. 122–124; Jonathan Flatley, 'Andrei Platonov's Revolutionary Melancholia: Friendship and Toska in Chevengur', pp. 160–61.
[2] Fredric Jameson, 'Utopia, Modernism and Death', in *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 73–128 (p. 111).
[3] Jonathan Flatley, 'Andrei Platonov's Revolutionary Melancholia: Friendship and Toska in Chevengur', pp. 170–71.
[4] Andrei Platonov *Chevengur* [1926-28b], trans. by R. Chandler, p. 13.

sorrow and *poor life*, saddened that life is so helpless that it must almost uninterruptedly distract itself through illusion from an awareness of its own true situation. Even Sambikin was seeking illusions in his own thoughts and discoveries – he too was carried away by the complexity and great essence (*veshchestvo*) the world possessed in his imagination. But Sartorius could see that the world consisted primarily of destitute matter, which it was almost impossible to love but essential to understand.[1]

For Sambikin the cause of life is a void that is a great thing-in-itself, but for Sartorius the void is poor life. The void comes both from thinking that interrupts labour and from the elemental organisation of matter that produces everything and that for a human seems to be nothingness.[2] The void is confused with the logic of scattering and devastating, and of producing and reproducing.

Platonov seems to juxtapose the labouring being that has no breaks, on the one hand, and thinking as a pause that produces emptiness and a 'timeless' sense of *toská*, on the other. In her reading of *Chevengur*, Chrvyakova suggests that natural and human time in Platonov is desynchronised. While nature continues its cycle, human time remains static. In other words, desynchronised natural and human time brings with it a disturbing feeling of false eternity or the end of the history.[3] Kopyonkin writes of Dvanov from *Chevengur*: 'There are no events, some say it is because of science and history, but this is not known'.[4] Revolution abolishes the sense of history and nature's cycle:

[1] Andrei Platonov, *Happy Moscow* [1933-36], trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler, A. Livingstone, N. Bourova, E. Naiman, p. 63–64. Translation modified, italics mine.

[2] Ibid., p. 75.

[3] Larisa Cherviakova, *"Philosophiia Sushchestvovaniia" Andreia Platonova* [Andrei Platonov's 'Philosophy of Existence'] (Saratov: Saratovskii gosydarstvennyi universitet, 2010), pp. 36–42. This existential interpretation of the end of history in Platonov's writings seems to be more precise than the more popular 'eschatological' and 'religious' one. This phenomenology of boredom and stasis of time is examined in *Ethereal Tract* through the theory of relativity in physics: '…each physiological process in an organism of an electron proceeds with such terrifying slowness that it eliminates the possibility of a direct observation of this process, even with the most sensitive device. In the eyes of a human, this circumstance makes nature dead. This terrible variety of the times of life for various categories of beings is a cause of the tragedy of nature. One being feels a century as a whole era, another — as a blink. These "sets of times" – the thickest and indestructible wall of boundaries between the living beings which the heavy artillery of human science hardly starts destroying'. Andrei Platonov, 'Efirnyi trakt' [Ethereal Tract] [1927c], in *Works*, 8 vols, p. 20.

[4] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by A. Olcott, p. 168. Translation modified.

Dvanov felt toská for the time which had passed: it constantly distunes and disappears, while man stays in one place with his hopes for the future, and then Dvanov guessed why Chepurny and the Bolsheviks of Chevengur so wanted communism. Communism is the end of history and the end of time, for time runs only within nature, while within man there stands only toská.[1]

The end of time is the end of labouring being, and *toská* reveals the necessity of communism as the only means to overcome the endless time of reproduction.

The doubject is split between past and future, old and new. It is one who is here and there at the same time and who in the act of becoming is disseminated and scattered in space and time, 'as if everything living found itself somewhere in the middle of time and its own moment; its beginning had been forgotten by everyone, its end was unknown, and nothing remained but a direction to all sides'.[2] Living in the middle of time suggests that becoming is something like the future in the present. This is due to the fact that time and space are also understood here as a dialectical couple. In his early article Platonov refers to the formula $\sqrt{-1}$ second = 300 000 km (which he mistakenly attributes to the German mathematician Hermann Minkowski, famous for his concept of a unified four-dimensional space-time continuum) to justify the dialectical reciprocity of time and space. Platonov says that this formula gives an imaginary unit of time ($\sqrt{-1}$ second) that is equal to some unit of space (300 000 km). Therefore, time continuously produces space. Thus, time and space are identical quantities.[3] Further development of his conception of time-space dialectics can be found in his science fiction story *Ethereal Tract* (1927). Here he argues: 'That what will be is time. That what was is space. Alternately: space is the frozen past time; time is unborn space, chaos'.[4] The same characteristics applied to the notions of history and nature: 'Nature is the shadow of history, its waste and excrements. It is that which was once alive and moving, i.e. it was time, flight, future. And it is that which has now become past – space, matter, form, a

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[1] Ibid., p. 273. Translation modified.

[2] Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit* [1930c], trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler, O. Meerson, p. 65–66.

[3] Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'Slyshnye shagi (Revoliutsiia i matematika)' [Clear Steps. Revolution and Mathematics] [1921c], in *Works*, 3 vols, pp. 147–48. Minkowski does not advance this formula, but Platonov's formula may have been inspired by his geometry of special relativity. See the commentary to Platonov's article: Vitalii Troitskii, 'Posleslovie' [Afterword], *Znanie – Sila*, 9/10, (1999), 4–5.

[4] Andrei Platonov, 'Efirnyi trakt' [Ethereal Tract] [1927c], in *Works*, 8 vols, p. 42.

lonely rock at the abandoned road'.[1] The process of space formation in time is equal here to the process of becoming in the structure of the doubject. On the next page Platonov writes that humanity lives not in space-nature and not in time-history, but in some sort of interval between these two dimensions, where time has transformed into space and where history is remaking nature. The human is the third form that transmits time through itself and looks backward to see how the freedom of time is converted into limited space, nature and consciousness.[2]

This third dimension is the place where *others* and proletarians gather. And this place has a name. Peasant Dostoevsky says: 'I was wondering, why do I feel *toská*? It is because I was yearning for socialism'.[3] Once you can establish socialism, humanity could achieve communism. However, Chepurny was not able to wait: 'Communism tormented Chepurny the way the secret of posthumous life had tormented Dvanov's father, and Chepyrny could not bear the secret of time, so he cut short the length of history by the rapid construction of communism in Chevengur'.[4] Platonov's characters do not desire, but want and need communism:

> You say that communism will come around in the end anyhow … Probably at the short end, then, because wherever the end is nearer, it's always short. So that means the whole long side of life will go by without communism. Why then do you think we want communism with our whole bodies? Better to live a mistake, since it's so long, and the truth is short.[5]

The urgency of communism expresses itself as a state of bodily need. If being is a field of negative forces of matter – the circular production and reproduction of life – then the only way to abolish the negativity of life is to organize matter: 'proletariat – poor son of a bitch – lived alone, in this boring emptiness, obliged to think up everything for

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[1] Ibid., p. 44.
[2] Ibid., p. 45.
[3] Andrei Platonov, 'Chevengur (Three Chapters from the Novel)' [1926–28d], in *The Portable Platonov. For the Centenary of Andrei Platonov's Birth*, trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler (Moscow: Glas New Russian Writing, 1999), p. 124. In the original text *toská* is in the verb form *toskovát* and 'yearning for socialism" is '*toskovát* for socialism'.
[4] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by A. Olcott, p. 529. Translation modified.
[5] Ibid., p. 266. Translation corrected.

everyone and to make by hand the substance (*veshchestvo*) of long life'.[1] Poor life is a *pure* beginning and *zero* ground to begin communism. But begin from what? A recollection, re-composition and gathering to fight against the negative forces of entropy and the feeling of a void – a gathering, because the only link to the world and to others is through a corporeal proximity between people.

Platonov believes that abandoned and remote places have more potentiality for revolutionary change than places rich in industrial capital. Deserts, villages and steppes are already on a zero ground; they exist at the stage of a pure beginning. They have nothing but space, people, and a capitalist historical past. This is a perfect surface for drawing the new. In this sense Platonov's landscape is an avant-garde clean canvas, prepared for the composition of a new world that has never previously existed. Thus the poor village of Chevengur is the meeting point for *others* who have congregated from all over the world:

> Dvanov remembered various people who wandered among the fields and slept in the empty buildings at the front; maybe those people in fact had already bunched up in a gulley somewhere, out of the wind and the State and there they lived, content with their friendship. Dvanov agreed to look for communism in the initiative of the population.[2]

Karasev thinks that Platonov's communism is the struggle with the void. In order to establish communism there should first be an empty place; this empty place will be immediately filled up by proletarians and the corporeal mass of their bodies.[3] We would argue that the idea of filling in a space comes from the famous slogan from the Communist Manifesto: 'Proletarians of all countries, unite!' This slogan was translated into Russian literally as 'Proletarians of all countries, conjoin (with one another)'. Platonov takes this idea of the conjoining and reconnection of the proletariat as a means of filling the emptiness between workers. Chevengurian, self-proclaimed communism is condensed into the concreteness of bodies and the grammar of their relationship.

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[1] Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit* [1930c], trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler and O. Meerson, p. 22.
[2] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by A. Olcott, p. 63.
[3] Leonid Karasev, *Dvizhenie po sklonu v sochineniiakh A. Platonova* [Downhill Travel in Andrei Platonov's Work] (Moscow: RGGY, 2002), p. 48.

Kopyonkin senses Chevengur's 'quiet communism as warm comfort all over his body'.[1] It is placed in a body[2] and can come in and go out of a body.[3] Communism is 'not obvious on the surface', but 'hidden within people'.[4] Karasev argues that in Platonov social life is a means of density and accumulation of *veshchestvo*,[5] but it should not be understood as a vitalist celebration of bodily proximity. It is essential for Platonov that communism be based on comradeship and non-alienated relationships, which only liberated proletarians can establish.

The status of communism as a concrete thing and corporeality corresponds to Platonov's ontology of *veshchestvo* and *veshch*. In *Chevengur* communism is defined as an 'intermediary *veshchestvo* between the bodies of the proletariat'.[6] That is why Gopner and Dvanov are searching for communism as a lost object: 'Where has communism gone? I just saw it myself not long ago. We even cleared a special space for it'.[7] Communism has to be corporeal. The Chevengurian proletariat is a new social form that grasps its own materiality. Body and thinking can be integrated only in proletarian culture. That is to say, proletarian thinking is to be based on the integrative or synthetic knowledge of the two consciousnesses.

Chevengurian communism shows us a process of communisation, but not communism as such. Platonov draws a panorama of opinions and views about the Chevengurian experiment, from the doubt that communism has ever been established in Chevengur. Kopyonkin worries that there is no communism in Chevengur: 'Why can't I see it then? Or maybe it's just not filled out yet?' Dvanov replies: 'After the bourgeoisie is gone communism comes out of the communists and lives among them. Comrade Kopyonkin, where were you looking for it, when it's kept inside of you?'.[8] For Platonov the urgency of communism does not mean that one can immediately establish communism, but rather that there are communists and that the sense of communism already lives in their bodies. It has not yet become a social form, because the doubject goes ahead of reality and lives in the middle of time, in the future of the present. In his article 'Future October' (1920) Platonov writes that the October revolution and

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[1] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by A. Olcott, p. 241.
[2] Ibid., p. 283.
[3] Ibid., p. 169–70.
[4] Ibid., p. 259.
[5] Leonid Karasev, *Dvizhenie po sklonu v sochineniiakh A. Platonova* [Downhill Travel in Andrei Platonov's Work], p. 48–50.
[6] Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur* [1926-28a], trans. by A. Olcott, p. 278–79.
[7] Ibid., 250.
[8] Ibid., p. 277. Translation is corrected.

communism were only 'a wave in the ocean of historical eternity' and predicts that the revolution will be repeated due to the contradiction imposed by the socialist mode of production between highly skilled and semi-skilled workers.[1]

Platonov's characters constantly try to make the external world internal or, more precisely, they externalise themselves – became others, change their names and collectivise their consciousness. The becoming someone else is equal here to the process of scattering that takes place in nature as Platonov conceives it, and this is what *toská* reveals and wants to abolish. The drama of the doubject is the drama of the impossibility of becoming a subject, because the doubject by definition contradicts both the Cartesian subject, aware of itself in the act of thinking, and the political subject of the Bolsheviks – the conscious party vanguard. The drama of the doubject is the drama of communisation without communism. That is to say, one can only negate oneself in the duration of time; only thus is it possible to represent the future in the present. Finally, the dissolution of the self in common life is the condition in which the escape from a form (a class, a name, a social status, a norm or social routine) finds itself.

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The recovery of the encylopaedia of Platonov's concepts, to which this chapter has contributed, allows us to undertake a systematic exposition of the materialist ontology of poor life. The ontology is situated within a set of concepts dispersed throughout the texts and assumes various articulations in the earlier and the later period of his writing. In the earlier period, Platonov's philosophical literature develops in response to the historical conditions of the October revolution, which created the opportunity to reflect on both the proletariat as a sovereign subject and the development of society after the elimination of the bourgeoisie and capitalism. Although Platonov never considered the October revolution to constitute the complete abolition of capitalism, the very situation of revolution brought into view the ontological problem of what society should do after the end of capitalist history. Platonov gives an equivocal answer to this question. In his early writings he supposes that the proletariat becomes the form of a pure, collectivised

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[1] Andrei Platonovich Platonov, 'Budushchii Oktiabr'' [Future October] [1920b], in *Works*, 3 vols (Moscow, IMLI RAN, 2004), vol. I (2), pp. 107–9 (p. 108–9).

consciousness. In arguing this he departs from the vulgarised scheme of Bogdanov's proletarian culture and the Hegelian absolute spirit. The overcoming of poor life in the form of pure thinking corresponds to this logic. In some respects, similar conclusions about the results of the Soviet project are drawn by Boris Groys, who understands the doctrine of dialectical materialism as a movement towards a pure linguistic ontology.[1]

However, in the mid-1920s Platonov became disillusioned with the dialectical materialist approach both philosophically and politically. He criticises the possibility of technical progress and the overcoming of class contradictions by means of a pure form of consciousness, concluding instead that cyclical production and reproduction, organisation and disorganizstion is the ontological precondition of all social forms. The Bogdanovian understanding of experience allows him to criticise (and predict) the dictatorship of the State and party-form that in his view is based on the pure formalism of intellectual and speculative thinking. From this Platonov arrives at an understanding of thinking as a concrete and object-oriented activity related to labour.

Unlike Bogdanov's and the productivists' affirmative and constitutive life-building, Platonov focuses on the molecular, negative spontaneity of self-organising matter that in his view determines the social form of proletarian culture. This is due to the fact that the very category of the proletariat becomes a name for multinational conglomerations of the poor. Class identity as defined in relation to the place of production is questioned, while production and reproduction become ontological categories related to the organising force of the *veshchestvo* of life. The substratum of life, the *veshchestvo*, is a material for life-building. It is understood both as self-organisation of matter and in empiricist terms as the formation of perception, modes of vision, languages and things in the social labour process. Since the attributes of labour have been found in the workings of the body, social reproduction and natural life-cycles, the very process of social organisation depends on the elemental spontaneity of life. Therefore, life-building faces the entropy of disjunction and compartmentalisation and relates to the organisation of forms that take the shape of antagonistic assemblages of bodies, objects and things. In other words, Bogdanov's scheme of harmonious and non-contradictory universal organisation of social experience becomes a negative, antagonistic and contradictory process. Nature is both a social and ontological category. It is a monist plan of the environment with its own laws of organisation and

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[1] Boris Groys, *The Communist Postscript* (London: Verso, 2010).

disorganisation, and these laws are uncontrollable and could not be abolished in a technologically advanced society. Rather the environment has to be arranged in such a way as to take into account these laws of organisation, in order to be able to organise the social world not against, but in accordance with them. Social life depends on the spontaneity and negativity of natural cycles. Therefore the labouring being can only be negated, never fully abolished. This means that Platonov does not employ the idea of sublation (*Aufheben*).

The reconstruction of the Platonovian encylcopaedia allows us to conclude that his concepts function as reciprocal and mutually dependent. Platonov situates this logic of reciprocity on various levels of his philosophical problematisation: the doubject is equal to the labouring parts of the labouring being. The labouring being produces poor life and poor life relates to the *veshchestvo of existence*. Time and space exist in the same reciprocal relations: time produces space and space becomes time. This cyclical ontology of poor life, however, is constantly interrupted by the dialectical characteristics of each concept. Formation and becoming are the integral practical activity of thinking and living. Thinking and existing establish a concatenation of life and organisation; this amounts to physicality becoming thought and spontaneity reaching the degree of organisation. The proletariat, therefore, is understood as a form, as the negative unity of labouring psychophysical parts.

Poor life possesses an existential status that complicates the logic of immanence and dialectics. In other words these two logics – affirmative (production and reproduction) and dialectical (a moving contradiction between body and mind, act and thinking, time and space) – eventuate in the existential dimension of *toská* and the urgency of the act. The labouring being is a proletarian being. The forms of social mediation in the experience of other classes inhibit access to this being. The means of *toská* plays a constitutive role in the recognition of the exploitativeness of, and the planetary-scale catastrophe that results from, the capitalist organisation of society and nature. Communism is a gathering and recomposition of the conglomerations of the poor according to the principles of comradeship. In other words, it is the same process of self-organisation that takes place on the molecular spontaneous level. The social form of comradeship is in principle possessed of an autonomist, spontaneous character. Party and intellectuals cannot determine the logic of conglomerate accumulation and once they intervene, a violent and destructive disorganisation begins to shape the entire process. These are the traces of the doctrine of Proletkult, according to which the

proletariat has to develop its culture autonomously. Social spontaneity in Platonov is a laboratory process of communisation and represents a gradual and dialectical achievement of the collectivised shape of the agglomerated masses. This communisation without communism corresponds to the open-ended logic of organisation which can turn against itself at any particular moment of time.

Chapter IV

Mediating Poor Life: Vygotsky's Homo Duplex Versus Platonov's Doubject

Introduction: A Constellation of Platonov and Vygotsky

> Criticism is on the same level as what is being criticized; it proceeds fully within the given discipline; its goal is exclusively critical and not positive; it wishes to know only whether and to what extent some theory is correct; it evaluates and judges, but does not investigate … The research already belongs to general science, its tasks are not critical, but positive. It does not wish to evaluate some theory, but to learn something new about the facts themselves which are represented in the theory … Critique, in the final analysis, formulates an opinion about an opinion, albeit a very solid and well-founded opinion. A general research establishes, ultimately, objective laws and facts.[1]

Platonov's negative materialism is difficult to understand without taking into account the striking coexistence of empiricism, immanence and existentialism in his work. It could be compared with the logic that syntheses Hegel and Spinoza in Soviet Marxism. Thus, Plekhanov and his disciple Deborin created a fusion of the two systems on the basis of Engels's philosophy. They reconcile evolutionism and the mechanistic cosmology of the materialist philosophies of the eighteenth century.[2] Despite the fact that this reconciliation suffers from simplifications and exemplifies the notorious 'diamat', it nevertheless prepared the ground for intellectual discussions about the importance of both Spinoza and Hegel for materialism. This epistemological background and the logic of synthesis also characterises the works of Lev Vygotsky, who developed a theory of individuation to support an argument that thinking and speech should be understood as historically developed dialectical forms of activity. Accordingly, only the accomplished constitution of active thinking could form the

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology: A Methodological Investigation' [1927d], in *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, trans. by R. Van Der Veer, R. W. Rieber and J. Wollock, 6 vols (New York, London: Plenum Press, 1987-99), vol. III: *Problems of the Theory and History of Psychology* (1997), pp. 233-343 (p. 257). Translation modified.

[2] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, trans. by Progress Publishers, 5 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), vol. III; Abram Moiseevich Deborin, *Vvedenie v filosofiiu dialekticheskogo materializma* [Introduction to the Philosophy of Dialectical Materialism] [1922] (Moscow: URSS, 2012); Abram Moiseevich Deborin, *Filosofiia i marksizm* [Philosophy and Marxism] [1926] (Moscow: URSS, 2012); *Spinoza in Soviet Philosophy. A Series of Essays Selected And Translated, And With An Introduction*, ed. and trans. by George L. Kline (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD, 1952).

mechanisms for communist individuation. Vygotsky redirected the metaphysical dialectics of nature and the physiological understanding of thinking, proposed by diamat, towards a social ontology of mediations.

Despite the specified logic of differences, the moment of unity in a constellation of Platonov and Vygotsky could be found in a shared attentiveness to the constitutive logic of what we term communisation. Sociologically speaking, this communist perspective of Vygotsky's project departs from the very simple question that also tormented Platonov, namely, how in the given context of poverty and mass illiteracy can the new subject of communism be born, and who is this new subject? For Vygotsky, as much as for Platonov, the image of the future communist subject coincides with the weak and deprived subject of the present. This is immediately apparent in the research focus of Vygotsky's practical and field work – clinical research, elaboration of educational programmes for Soviet ethnic minorities, pioneering approach to deaf and blind education, disability studies and the pedagogical psychology of the adolescent, to name but a few.[1] We saw how important the question of thinking, speech and language is for Platonov's philosophical use of grammar and the theory of the 'doubject'. Likewise, it seems that the diversity of Soviet poverty, the 'diseases' of post-revolutionary languages and the peculiarity of cognitive expression are all issues that made an impression on Vygotsky. He dedicated his entire work to the analysis of the dialectical relationship between thinking and speech.[2] Vygotsky questions what constitutes the social forms of behaviour. What is the relationship between body and mind, the natural and the cultural, the biological and the social, the social and the individual? How is Marxist psychology to confront the idealist and bourgeois conceptions of thinking as an organ of spiritual life? Where does thinking come from? What is thinking in relation to the body?

Furthermore, such terms as *homo duplex* and *poverty of the material* appear in Vygotsky's writings and notebooks. These terms have never received any special attention and focus, primarily due to the fact that they do not present a constitutive

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[1] See: *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, trans. by M. J. Hall and R. W. Rieber, 6 vols (New York, London: Plenum Press, 1987–99), vol. V: *Child Psychology* (1998); *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, trans. by J. E. Knox, Carol B. Stevens, R. W. Rieber and A.S. Carton, 6 vols (New York: Plenum Press, 1987–99), vol. II: *The Fundamentals of Defectology* (Abnormal Psychology and Learning Disabilities) (1993); Alexander Romanovich Luria, *Cognitive Development. Its Cultural and Social Foundations*, trans. and ed. by M. Lopez-Morillas, L. Solotaroff and M. Cole (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

[2] Lev Vygotsky, 'Thinking and Speech' [1934b], in *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky,* trans. by N. Minick, R. W. Rieber and A. S. Carton, 6 vols (New York, London: Plenum Press, 1987-99), vol. I: *Problems of General Psychology* (1987), pp. 39–285.

conceptual core in Vygotsky's system. Nevertheless, it is possible to emphasise their importance and rethink a series of determinative philosophical problems in the light of these minor, contingently exposed and sketchily developed concepts. The word 'poor' relates to the condition of having insufficient wealth to meet the necessities of life. At the same time 'poor' refers to a deficiency of a specified resource or quality. The poor and poverty produce deficiencies of ability and means. These two aspects of poverty – lack and the social precondition of lack – are precisely what Vygotsky approaches. Our hypothesis is that the word 'poor' in Vygotsky appears under different names and signifies the biological and physiological foundation of a human organism. The social environment derives from this poor material, but it is designed in such a way that it mediates conditions within the biological realm. What nature lacks is language and dialectics. These are two means within the social realm that introduce mediatory mechanisms of diversification and complication to activity and behaviour. On the basis of this hypothesis, the present chapter aims to present the problematic of poverty in relation to, and against the grain of, Platonov's materialist ontology of poor life.

A) Vygotsky's Encyclopaedia: The Unwritten Das Kapital and The Status of Philosophy.

> It suffices to imagine Marx operating with the general principles and categories of dialectics, like quantity-quality, the triad, the universal connection, the knot [of contradictions], leap etc. – without the abstract and historical categories of value, class, commodity, capital, interest, production forces, basis, superstructure etc. – to see the whole monstrous absurdity of the assumption that it is possible to create any Marxist science while bypassing *Das Kapital*. Psychology is in need of its own *Das Kapital* – its own concepts of class, basis, value etc. – in which it might express, describe and study its object.[1]

At first, comparison of Marxist psychology with the new *Das Kapital* sounds obscure, almost paradoxical. One should not be surprised that it never found systematic elaboration in Vygotsky's work. Another great Soviet intellectual and a friend of

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology: A Methodological Investigation' [1927d], p. 330.

Vygotsky, Sergei Eisenstein,[1] also wanted to write his own *Capital*, but in the form of a film. The result, as is well known, was similar. Eisenstein's staging of Marx's masterwork never took place. In this respect, the unwritten *Capitals* might be taken as a symptom of 'the atmosphere of the 1920s' that 'was favorable for all sorts of general projects to be put ahead of concrete research'.[2] Such a prospect forced a number of researchers to conclude that the attitude of Vygotsky to Marx either points towards the methodological task of post-revolutionary science to build dialectical and materialist foundations for any given discipline, or demarcates his general interest in the Marxist tradition. Thus, analytical philosopher David Bakhurst remarks that Vygotsky aimed to develop a new epistemological approach to *Capital*, but the actual realisation of the programme found appropriate form only in the 1960s. In his view, Evald Ilienkov's reconstruction of the universal dialectical method in Marx follows and completes this line of thought.[3] Accordingly, content can be separated from a method without destroying the system of thought. This could be applied to Eisenstein as well. He stresses that his *Capital* should demonstrate Marxian method in the form of moving images: 'To show the method of dialectics. This would mean (roughly) five nonfigurative chapters … Dialectical analysis of historical events. Dialectics in scientific problems. Dialectics of class struggle (the last chapter)'[4].

The core of the problem is that Vygotsky uses someone else's terminology and fills it with authorial content. Although such terms as human behaviour and reflex refer directly to Pavlov's reflexology and American behaviorism, Vygotsky reinvestigates them in relation to consciousness and the unconscious, thinking and speaking, human and animal. All these couples interact with one another in a dialectical manner and receive new meanings. Andy Blunden attributes to Vygotsky 'the method of immanent critique'. Omitting reference to Adorno and the Frankfurt school, he emphasises in this

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[1] Vygotsky was an active participant in avant-garde art circles. Among his friends was also the poet Osip Mandelstam. In the beginning of the 1920s Vygotsky worked as theatre and literary critic for newspapers in Gomel, Byelorussian SSR. He moved to Moscow in 1924 and submitted his book *The Psychology of Art* as a dissertation in 1925. About his art activities see: Alex Kozulin, *Vygotsky's Psychology: A Biography of Ideas* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp. 20–49; and René Van Der Veer, *Lev Vygotsky* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 20–21.
[2] Alex Kozulin, *Vygotsky's Psychology: A Biography of Ideas*, p. 85.
[3] David Bakhurst, *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy From the Bolsheviks to Evald Ilyenkov* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 87–89; Evald Ilyenkov, *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital* [1960], trans. by S. Kuzyakov (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982).
[4] Sergei Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of "Capital"', trans. by M. Sliwowski, J. Leyda and A. Michelson, *October*, 2, Summer (1976), 3–26 (p. 10).

regard Marx's method of composition in *Capital*.[1] It is true that the cornerstone of Vygotsky's new Marxist discipline of 'general psychology', which will become famous under the name of cultural-historical psychology, is a critical re-examination of various trends in the social sciences – behaviorism, Gestalt psychology and psychoanalysis. Thus, we have to understand the usage of the old concepts in this particular, critical manner, rather than as an expression of sympathy with Ivan Pavlov, William James or American pragmatism.[2]

Another problem is to define Vygotsky's theoretical preferences. He relies on various sources, including linguistic theories affiliated with Soviet formalism. Even though structuralism was not formed as a school of thought at this time, Vygotsky predicts some important discussions and incorporates 'structuralist' analysis into his system.[3] Moreover, the philosophical ground of his project identifies itself with Marx, Hegel and Spinoza. It seems that there is no hypotheses regarding the unity of Spinoza, Hegel and Marx, on the one hand, and the 'structuralist' elements in his work on the other.

In fact, Vygotsky's *Capital* could be taken as just another example of encyclopedic thinking. The task of a thinker was to compose a new world. Thus the whole history of philosophy is treated as construction materials, regardless of whether a chosen discourse was considered hostile to Marxism in Western political and academic circles. This is similar to the logic of the Soviet avant-garde, which thought of itself as a pure beginning and posed the question of how to begin making art or writing a text under the new revolutionary conditions. The question of how to begin was immediately supplemented by the question of what art/literature/philosophy should begin asking. How will it serve the revolutionary project and how will it differ from bourgeois art/literature/philosophy? That is why in Soviet art and philosophy the only way to

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[1] Andy Blunden, *An Interdisciplinary Theory of Activity* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), p. 122.
[2] This of course confuses Anglo-American psychologists. They can understand that Vygotsky does not really fit into the 'philosophy of mind' or 'cognitive science', but cannot accept the fact that behaviorism in its classic conception is not the object of his concerns. See, for example: Anne Edwards, 'An Interesting Resemblance: Vygotsky, Mead and American Pragmatism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky*, ed. by H. Daniels, M. Cole and J. V. Wertsch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 77–100. For a comparison with James: James V. Wertsch, *Vygotsky and the Social Formation of Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 200.
[3] Wertsch examines the relationship of Vygotsky to Soviet semiotics, including the formalists and the Bakhtin Circle. See: James V. Wertsch, Op. Cit., pp. 77–128. The semiotic, but not structuralist, reading of Vygotsky is the most dominant in the Anglo-American context. See the critical account of this approach in: Fernando González Rey, 'The Path to Subjectivity. Understanding of Vygotsky and the Cultural Historical Legacy', in *Vygotsky in 21st Century Society: Advances in Cultural Historical Theory and Praxis with Non-Dominant Communities*, ed. by P. R. Portes, S. Salas (New York: Peter Lang, International Academic Publishers, 2011), pp. 32–49.

begin was to rely on old philosophical questions, which ought to find a new meaning. This logic is there in Platonov. His beginning is a simple composition: there is a space, there is a human body, and there is a grammar of relationships between the bodies. And his questions coincide with Vygotsky's. They are the same: simple, minimalistic and naive. 'What is matter?', 'what is body and mind?', 'what is labour?' and 'what is communism?' A similar tendency to phenomenological reduction can also be observed on a different level. Kogan lists typical questions addressed to the Marxist lecturers at the public disputes in the early post-revolutionary years. They range from abstract philosophical subjects, such as 'What is matter?', 'How is an atom constructed?', 'Which comes first, action or need?' or 'Are Marxism and Materialism equivalent categories? If not, could Marxism exist without materialism?' to politically charged but nonetheless remarkably general questions, such as 'Whether it is possible to be a communist, without being a Marxist, and vice versa?' and 'You worship to and preach the idea of communism. Whether this idea is not the same God?' Even the question 'Is it true that Engels was a factory owner?' could be seen as an attempt to broach political topics.[1]

It is necessary to emphasise that the status of philosophy as a discipline underwent radical transformations in the post-revolutionary years. Philosophy plays different roles in the works of the writer Platonov, in the theory of the psychologist Vygotsky and in the scientific project of the philosopher Bogdanov, who eventually arrived at a complete rejection of philosophy in favour of science. In each of these cases philosophy has a special role and function. For the psychologist Vygotsky, the question of what theory should do after capitalism was the question of how science might be reformulated in Marxist terms. The answer was that science has to question empirical facts by means of philosophy, while philosophy has to be placed in a historical context in order to overcome its metaphysical and idealist remnants. Vygotsky calls this double movement of philosophy towards facts and science towards philosophy 'experimental philosophy' and attributes this name to his own practice.[2] Thus, Marxist psychology for

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[1] See: Leonid Aleksandrovich Kogan, 'Na podstupakh k sovetskoi filosofii (pervye "sverdlovtsy", "sots. akademiki", "ikapisty")' [Approaches to Soviet Philosophy (The First Sverdlovskians, Socialist Academics, The Fellows of The Institute of Red Professors)], *Voprosy filosofii*, 5, (2002), 112–40 (p. 115).

[2] Lev Vygotsky, 'The Teaching about Emotions. Historical-Psychological Studies' [1931–33a], in *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, trans. by M. J. Hall, R. W. Rieber, 6 vols (New York, London: Plenum Press, 1987–99), vol. VI: *Scientific Legacy* (1999), pp. 71–235 (p. 103).

Vygotsky is the unity of method and practice.[1] The task of method is to emend understanding and to transform social practice.

Such an understanding of philosophy is not something specifically Soviet, but is rather linked to the currents in philosophy and science that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century. Referring to Bergson's study of memory and Cassirer's work on the psychology of speech, Vygotsky stresses a positive tendency to rely on experimental and clinical research in philosophy.[2] It should be noted that a similar attitude to science and philosophy characterises the early Bogdanov. This scientific research also informs Platonov's work. Nevertheless, Vygotsky's aim of legitimating philosophy for Marxism may seem to share common ground with the Plekhanovite canon. For Plekhanov, the content of Marxism was not separated from the millennia-long history of 'philosophical materialism', which dates back to Democritus and culminates in the writings of Marx and Engels. Socialism is not only about economics, it is also a 'universal doctrine', or, equivalently, it is a philosophy that rests on the monist principles of the dialectical unity of subject and object, method and fact, thinking and being (and so on).[3] In this respect, philosophy serves science as a method and a socialist 'world outlook'.[4] In fact, there is a triadic reciprocity between philosophy, socialism and science: the latter could arrive at the correct results, namely socialism, only if it followed the rules of the materialist method, because the materialist method was in itself grounded in socialist principles.

However, despite the great popularity of Plekhanov, many intellectuals questioned the name of philosophy in its relation to Marxism. Kautsky wrote: 'If you ask me … whether Plekhanov correctly teaches Marxist philosophy, I will have to answer that Marx did not proclaim any philosophy, but proclaimed the end of any philosophy'.[5] In 1920s Lenin and Lunacharsky thought that philosophy could be transformed into something else. It is remarkable that on the institutional level, in the Socialist Academy

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[1] About his understanding of method and psychology as a philosophically informed discipline see: Lev Vygotsky, 'The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology: A Methodological Investigation' [1927d], pp. 233–343 .

[2] Lev Vygotsky, 'The Teaching about Emotions. Historical-Psychological Studies' [1931–33a], p. 103.

[3] Georgi Plekhanov, 'Fundamental Problems of Marxism' [1907], in *Selected Philosophical Works*, trans. by Progress Publishers, 5 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), vol. III, pp. 117–83 (pp. 117; 129–34). About monism see: Georgi Plekhanov, 'The Development of the Monist Point of View of History' [1895], in *Selected Philosophical Works*, trans. by A. Rothstein, A. Fineberg and R. Dixon, 5 vols, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), vol. I, pp. 486–703.

[4] Georgi Plekhanov, 'Fundamental Problems of Marxism' [1907], p. 117. By 'world outlook' Plekhanov means *Weltanschauung*.

[5] Quoted in: Leonid Aleksandrovich Kogan, 'Na podstupakh k sovetskoi filosofii (pervye "sverdlovtsy", "sots. akademiki", "ikapisty")' [Approaches to Soviet Philosophy (The First Sverdlovskians, Socialist Academics, The Fellows of The Institute of Red Professors)], p. 138. See also discussion about the status of philosophy in Chapter I.

(the Communist Academy after 1924), as well as in the Communist University and the Institute of Red Professors, philosophy was expected to masquerade as this 'something else' – it was called the 'scientific worldview', or simply 'historical materialism' and 'dialectical materialism'. Moreover, in 1921 Lenin signed a document about the reorganisation of academia, excluding faculties of philosophy from universities. Philosophy gradually returned to the university departments only at the end of the 1920s. In this context, the 'poverty of philosophy' meant the inability to serve a new socialist society, because it was a product of the old situation – of what existed before socialism, namely, slavery, feudalism and capitalism. The notorious philosophers' ships, which expelled conservative religious thinkers to the capitalist West in 1922, signified, above all, a radical negation of philosophy due to its incurable reactionism.[1] Thus Vygotsky's experimental philosophy was another 'something else' in relation to philosophy, bringing together Plekhanov's philosophical materialism and the demand advanced by the radical left, that research should be concrete and that it should exist in the service of communist society.

The Diderot-proletarian Platonov and his project for an encyclopaedia related first of all to the proletarian or people's philosophy that is the *situation of philosophy*, an event of thinking, born in the moment of a break from the practical situation. More concretely, it could begin in a garbage can, where, after being beaten by fascists, Albert Lichtenberg discovers that the cogito is detached from existence.[2] This break, a pause, is the non-labour of the labouring being that is reviled by the doubjected structure of the exploited classes, while, vice versa, the non-labour of the labouring being articulates the content of the historically situated consciousness of the doubject. Thus, for Platonov, philosophy after philosophy is a practice of speaking through the empty intervals of the people's life. Merab Mamardashvili formulated a similar, but strictly phenomenological definition of philosophy several decades later, reacting to the transformation of philosophy into the course book of Marxism-Leninism. Consciousness for him is a 'suprasensual interval' or a 'rhythm' and philosophy is 'the record of that rhythm':[3]

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[1] This information is borrowed from Kogan's article, which refers to various sources, including archive documents, periodicals and newspapers: Leonid Aleksandrovich Kogan, 'Na podstupakh k sovetskoi filosofii (pervye "sverdlovtsy", "sots. akademiki", "ikapisty")' [Approaches to Soviet Philosophy (The First Sverdlovskians, Socialist Academics, The Fellows of The Institute of Red Professors)], p. 112–40.
[2] Andrei Platonov, 'Rubbish Wind' [1933], in *The Return and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler and E. Chandler, A. Livingstone (London: Harvill, 1999), pp. 71-87 (p. 77).
[3] Merab Mamardashvili, 'The Problem of Consciousness and the Philosopher's Calling' [1988], trans. by Ph. D. Stewart, *Russian Studies in Philosophy*, 49, 2, II Fall (2010), 6–26 (p. 24).

> The philosopher is walking consciousness that talks out loud. […]
> Consequently, the philosopher deals with something that cannot in
> principle be known in advance, that cannot be conjectured, imagined as
> possible, or introduced by a definition. But it is something that can
> happen as the path is traveled. And at a place where there will be a
> reason, for instance, to consider that an atomic disintegration took place
> in the observed space. Thought has been aligned with itself – and
> understands.[1]

Cartesian awareness-of-experience here becomes the generic name for philosophy. Philosophy is something that can happen; it is a possibility, not a guarantee. In this sense, anyone can be a philosopher, but only the articulation of that happening is philosophy. Platonov and Mamardashvili share the idea of the eventfulness of philosophising, but for the former, the awareness-of-experience represents the understanding of the negative drama involved in the compartmentalisation of the 'I': the mode of vision of the totality of labouring parts of human subjectivity and non-human nature. *The situation of philosophy* begins in the moment of *awareness-of-labour*. Thus, philosophy is a philosophising of the situation of labour. This initiating step, of speaking out of compartmentalisation, leads to a subverted Cartesianism: 'I think, therefore, I am not' or 'I think when I do not exist and I exist when I do not think', as Albert Lichtenberg puts it. I think within the situation of an empty place, where my existence is not identical to thinking, because there is no existence proper. What does exist is the observed, fragmented body of a communist without communism. Thinking is a temporal delay, indeed a rhythm, a belated articulation of the intervals of the lived life in the moment of alienation of life from itself.

Another question is how *the situation of philosophy* is to be presented. For Mamardashvili, who unlike Platonov was a professional philosopher, the perfect place for the happening of philosophy is the act of speech. Oral performance captures the process of thought, while writing presents a result of the thinking process and in this sense fabricates thought that has been thought through. Rejecting the written form of a text, Mamardashvili developed a unique method of philosophising in public lectures

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[1] Ibid., p. 25–26.

that he called 'dialogues' or 'thought performance'.[1] Similarly, Platonov's doubjects are constantly critiquing dead, bookish knowledge and prizing spontaneous oral speech and storytelling as a means of deconstructing the bourgeois mode of thought.

There is nothing new in the privileging of the Socratic type of philosophising over the dead knowledge of writing. As Derrida shows, in the metaphysical tradition writing always appears as an outsider of speaking consciousness, as its doubled externality that comes *post festum* in relation to the immediate experience of speaking. Writing is 'the carrier of death', the killer of memory and spontaneous expression of a soul.[2] However, unlike Mamardashvili, Platonov incorporated his philosophical reasoning into the project of avant-garde writing, or, better, the philosophical reasoning of his doubjects is the narrative of fiction. Indeed, Platonov is no promoter of illiteracy, epic culture or the authenticity of the speaking consciousness. Rather, his project problematises the place from which philosophising comes. Philosophy has a topological origin – it is an interval between labour and non-labour, it is a process of filling up a space by the doubjects ('Chevengur' is a meta name for the filled-up space) and the historical place of the post-revolutionary declassed subject. In Platonov, the tension between oral and written culture is in fact a tension between the proletarian unwritten experience and normative 'bourgeois' language, including normative philosophical concepts that must be 'reformulated in proletarian terms'.

It should be noted that in the course of the Stalinisation of Lenin's type of Enlightenment, the Soviet project overthrew logocentrism by introducing what Derrida would call the 'vulgar' concept of writing.[3] In Stalinist and post-Stalinist linguistics and the educational system, writing was greatly privileged over living speech. Speaking was considered imperfect and a deviant form of the exemplary literary language of 'Pushkin-Tolstoy-Chekhov'. This terror of the 'Great Russian literature' led to the gradual abolition of dialects and variation in speech by means of unified and universal mass education, focused on correct pronunciation and literary forms of public speech.[4]

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[1] Mamardashvili shifted from a rigorous epistemological reading of Marx and Hegel in the 1950s to the phenomenological study of consciousness in the 1970s. The main part of his legacy comprises recorded lectures. See: Marina Bykova, 'The Georgian Socrates', *Russian Studies in Philosophy*, 49, 2, I Fall (2010), pp. 3–6.

[2] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by G. Ch. Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 17

[3] That is, reversed relations between speaking and writing, where writing is privileged over speaking without the work of deconstruction: Ibid., pp. 59–60.

[4] About the primacy of literary language and the discourse of 'speech culture' in Soviet linguistics see: Michael S. Gorham, 'Language Ideology and the Evolution of Kultura iazyka ("Speech Culture") in

In this sense, Mamardashvili's oral authenticity and philosophical expression of truth through speaking represents a conservative longing for metaphysics in its classic logocentric form against the Soviet command of writing. Mikhail Ryklin admits: 'Mamardashvili was virtually the first person to make metaphysics speak Russian'.[1] But this conservative move, according to Ryklin, coincides with the death of metaphysics elsewhere: 'The introduction of the metaphysical theme in the Russian-speaking region coincided with the "death of philosophy in the West".[2] Ryklin repeated similar arguments in his conversation with Derrida that took place in Moscow in 1990. He claims that logocentrism should not be criticised in the Soviet Union, since metaphysics was always under threat and had never been fully realised in the Russian-speaking region. Moreover, the Soviet Marxist tradition criticised logocentrism by its own means, attacking 'bourgeois idealistic science'. Therefore, the restoration of metaphysics on the one hand, and the critique of the Russian literary tradition that occupied the place of philosophy in the USSR, on the other, appears in this conversation as the only possible alternative. Derrida's response was predictable: 'I could show that Stalin was "logocentriste", but it would demand a long development'.[3] It is remarkable that many years later Boris Groys would demonstrate the logocentric and metaphysical logic of Soviet communism in his 'Post-Communist Postscript', by arguing that Stalinism was the only complete historical realisation of the Western metaphysics of language or logos.[4] In this light, Platonov's constitution of written proletarian thought, or writing as such, can be seen as a failed prolekultist alternative to the Soviet logos and normalisation of language.

Soviet Enlightenment as a project, and Vygotsky as part of this project, was supposed to culminate in the realm of conceptual thinking and self-comprehension. Vygotsky expounds this logic in his analysis of thinking and speech. In his book with the same title, the mental functions pass through various planes of development, from the stage of generation to that of culmination in verbal thinking, and on the level of consciousness, the subject moves from sense-certainty to self-understanding. Thus,

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Soviet Russia', in *Politics and the Theory of Language in the USSR 1917–1938. The Birth of Sociological Linguistics*, ed. by C. Brandist and K. Chown (London, New York: Anthem Press, 2011), pp. 137–49.

[1] Mikhail Ryklin, 2010. 'Consiousness as a Domain of Freedom. The Metaphysical Theme in Merab Mamardashvili', *Russian Studies in Philosophy*, 49, 2, II Fall (2010), 28–50 (p. 29)

[2] Ibid., p. 48.

[3] See Derrida's conversation with Moscow philosophers in: Jacques Derrida, Natalia Avtonomova Valery Podoroga and Mikhail Ryklin, 'Philosophie et literature. Entrerien avec Jacques Derrida', in *Moscou aller-retour* (La Tour-d'Aigues: Editions de l'Aube, 1995), p. 103–55 (p. 131).

[4] Boris Groys, *The Communist Postscript* (London: Verso, 2010).

verbal thinking corresponds to being-for-itself and indicates the highest stage of consciousness. It is necessary to point out that 'speech' in Russian means not just a vocalised form of communication. The word *rech'* (*la parole*) is analogous to the Greek dianoia (διάνοια) – the faculty of discursive thinking – and to the Polish *rzecz*, which derives from the Latin *res*, a thing. It also means variation in or style of language.[1] Vygotsky's 'Thinking and Speech' (*Mishlenie i Rech'*) could also be translated as 'Thinking and The Discursive Modes of Speech'. This might be why, in Vygotsky, writing is a function of *rech'* and at the same time, in a manner similar to Soviet 'writing-centrism', represents the highest form of expression of thought (or the highest form of mental function):

> The rapid tempo of oral speech is not conductive to the development of speech (*rechevoi* – MC) activity as a complex volitional action, that is, as an action characterised by reflection, the conflict of motives, and selection. The rapid tempo of oral speech presupposes a simple volitional action, one with significant elements of habit … It is a chain of reactions. In contrast, written speech is connected with consciousness and intentionality from the outset.[2]

Andy Blunden claims that a long passage on the transition from the affective to the verbal form of thinking almost repeats an exposition in Hegel's *Logic*. In 'Thinking and Speech' Vygotsky starts from the syncretic unity of subject and object – non-verbal thinking and non-intellectual speech – that is then divided into speech and language, while speech and language will be divided into the inner and the outer, only to be finally reunited again as intellectual speech.[3] Nevertheless, this would be a purely Hegelian reading of Vygotsky's account of writing and thinking. Blunden's scheme will perhaps appear as an oversimplification if we explore and push forward Vygotsky's understanding of the totality of mental forms as 'spatial temporality'.

Although writing is the finest social technique of cognitive expression, it is not a final developmental stage of thinking, because it neither abolishes oral speech nor

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[1] Max Vasmer, *Etimologicheskii slovar' russkogo iazyka* [Russian Dictionary of Word Etymology], trans. by O. N. Trubachev, 2nd edn., 4 vols (Moscow: Progress, 1987), vol. III, p. 478.
[2] Lev Vygotsky, 'Thinking and Speech' [1934b], p. 272.
[3] Andy Blunden, 'Vygotsky and the Dialectical Method', *Marxists Internet Archive* (2007) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/works/comment/vygotsk1.htm> [accessed 1 May 2016].

precedes it, but diversifies modes of cultural behaviour. Writing and speaking are preceded by concrete historical conditions and represent two different socially developed dimensions of cognitive expression – the former is generated out of graphic symbolisation of a sign and the latter out of the phonetic symbolisation of a sign.[1] Both have 'use value' only in a particular context of development. Vygotsky explains:

> For the deaf-mute child, the basic type of speech (*rech'* – MC), symbolism of the first order, must be written language. He must learn to read and write the way a child learns to speak, and oral speech must be developed in the deaf-mute as a reading of what is written. Then the written language will become the basic means for verbal development of the deaf-mute child. If we teach the deaf-mute child written language and not just calligraphy, then we will be able to bring him to a higher degree of development, a degree which he will not reach by social interaction with other people, but may reach only through reading books.[2]

Vygotsky claims that thinking differs not by laws, but by the role it plays in each concrete case. Writing did not develop out of speaking, because the development has no lineal logic, rather it has a variously directed, dialectical temporality, which tends to *individuation*. Phonic and graphic forms of speech develop in two opposite directions: while the practice of speaking arises out of dialogic communication with the other and has an outer direction, writing is an inner appropriation of the anonymous *rech'* of the other or an individuation of a particular social context. Speaking is the social unconscious of a person and written speech is the becoming monologue of the internalised social dialogue.[3] Writing is the finest form of thought expression only in the sense that it is an individuated form of expression. Unlike typical logocentrists, criticised by Derrida for the naturalisation of speaking, Vygotsky claims that the more *rech'* is mediated, the more individualised it becomes. In this respect, it is possible to

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[1] See the chapter 'Prehistory of the Development of Written Speech', in: Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], in *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, trans. and ed. by M. J. Hall and R. W. Rieber, 6 vols (New York, London: Plenum Press, 1987-99), vol. IV: *The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions* (1997), pp. 131–48. See also the chapter *Thought and Word*: Lev Vygotsky, 'Thinking and Speech' [1934b], pp. 243–85.
[2] Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], p. 148.
[3] About dialogue and monologue in speech see: Lev Vygotsky, 'Thinking and Speech' [1934b], p. 272.

argue that Platonov's language represents the highest possible level of individuation in writing, approximating to the actual meaning of conceptual thinking in Vygotsky.

B) Poor Life: Poverty, Disability and Diversification of the Modes of Cultural Behaviour.

Although the new *Das Kapital* of Vygotsky did not appear in the form of a book, we may try to identify its method and main subject. Let us begin with method. Vygotsky insists that general psychology could be established as a Marxist discipline if research were to consider philosophy as the content of science. What is immanent to knowledge production is philosophy, because the content of any theory is a philosophical idea that is hidden or manifest in the converted form[1] of presupposed empirical objectivity.[2] Epistemological models of science abstract and substantiate a form from their philosophical content. However, the operation of revealing a hidden content is not the recovery of truth, but rather the recovery of the discursive context and conceptual shape of a particular scientific fact. Vygotsky does not articulate this methodological point directly, but it is evident from his study of psychological theories of emotions, which in some respects is similar to genealogical analysis. He traces all biological and empiricist theories of emotions back to Descartes in order to demonstrate the discursive proximity of 'bourgeois science' to Cartesian dualism and mechanistic thinking. In this way, he shows a radical break between Descartes and Spinoza that signifies a 'millennia-long struggle of idealism with materialism'. In his view, Spinoza offers a radical materialist and monist solution to the understanding of emotions.[3] The third term between converted form and recovered discursive environment is a materialist transformation of definition. Adequate definition is the successful result of a critical operation.

We have to point out that such a method of critique is not a pure epistemological operation. In his *Historical Meaning of Psychological Crisis* Vygotsky stresses that Kantian critical reason, which posits a priori and by means of formal logic, filters out the materials of special sciences, separates reality and knowledge, and substitutes the

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[1] I mean here the Marxian *verwandelte Form*. We will return to *verwandelte Form* in due course.
[2] He paraphrases this idea in two different texts. See: Ibid., pp. 55–56; 79–80. Lev Vygotsky, 'The Teaching about Emotions. Historical-Psychological Studies' [1931–33a], pp. 103–4.
[3] Lev Vygotsky, 'The Teaching about Emotions. Historical-Psychological Studies' [1931–33a], pp. 71–235.

historical development of a concept with idealist epistemological suppositions.[1] Such critique forms 'an opinion about an opinion' that has no relation to reality and therefore to objective knowledge.[2] Here Vygotsky agrees with Spinoza's definition of method. In *Historical Meaning of Psychological Crisis* he quotes a long passage from *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione*[3] that tackles the question of objective knowledge. In this passage Spinoza compares the production of knowledge with the tools of labour:

> Matters here stand as they do with corporeal tools, where someone might argue in the same way. For to forge iron a hammer is needed; and to have a hammer, it must be made; for this another hammer, and other tools are needed; and to have these tools too, other tools will be needed, and so on to infinity; in this way someone might try, in vain, to prove that men have no power of forging iron.
>
> But just as men, in the beginning, were able to make the easiest things with the tools they were born with (however laboriously and imperfectly), and once these had been made, made other, more difficult things with less labor and more perfectly, and so, proceeding gradually from the simplest works to tools, and from tools to other works and tools, reached the point where they accomplished so many and so difficult things with little labor, in the same way the intellect, by its inborn power (via sua native), makes intellectual tools for itself, by which it acquires other powers for other intellectual works, and from these works still other tools, or the power of searching further, and so proceeds by stages, until it reaches the pinnacle of wisdom.[4]

According to Vygotsky, Spinoza's understanding of method is similar to the materialist idea of production. Spinoza is writing about the 'production of means of production'. In science, Vygotsky claims, as well as in industry, the production of means of production does not presuppose any origin of production or any a priori. Science is by itself a part of

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[1] He criticises the Kantian position of Ludwig Binswanger: Lev Vygotsky, 'The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology: A Methodological Investigation' [1927d], pp. 247–56.
[2] Ibid., p. 257.
[3] Benedictus de Spinoza, 'Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect', in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, trans. by E. Curley, 2 vols (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985 [1677]), vol. I, pp. 7–45.
[4] Ibid., p. 16.

the general process of production and it depends on the same modes and means of production as general production.[1] What is required is the methodological unity of theory and practice. Theory has to produce its own tools by labouring on them. The point of view of critique has to be changed to the point of view of research.[2] The invasion of Hegel and Marx by Spinoza starts here, at the moment where critique grows into research. This makes Spinoza almost a comrade of historical materialism. And that is why an epistemological reading of Vygotsky's method is wrong. For Vygotsky, a materialist understanding of a concept is objective knowledge production, and it corresponds to the task of the revaluation of science from the heights of the communist perspective. Let us now move to the core of this communist perspective.

At first glance, it may seems that Vygotsky's viewpoint on communism coincides with the typical discussions about the new Soviet man as a new socialist subject who should emerge, out of the process of building socialism, as a perfect rational being. Vygotsky's article 'The Socialist Alteration of Man' seems to confirm this interpretation.[3] Furthermore, it could be assumed that the imaginary constructivist projection forced Vygotsky to identify trends towards this new subject in the history of consciousness, or better, in the history of cultural behaviour. We will demonstrate later why consciousness is a synonym for behaviour for Vygotsky. But for now let us approach the issue from the perspective of radical social constructivism. Such constructivism usually departs from a question about how consciousness is shaped. Vygotsky does not agree with the traditional Soviet view on consciousness as a simple product of social relations and rejects a sociological approach to social class as archetypal character, formed by environment. If consciousness is only a projection of social relations in the mind, there should be just a few human types, with predictable behaviour, similar to the socialist realist 'typical man in a typical situation':[4]

> We wish to compare the worker and the bourgeois. The point is not, as
> was thought by Sombart … that for the bourgeois the main thing is

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology: A Methodological Investigation' [1927d], p. 253–54.
[2] Ibid., p. 257.
[3] See: Lev Vygotsky, 'The Socialist Alteration of Man' [1930c], in *Vygotsky Reader*, trans. and ed. by R. Van Der Veer, J. Valsiner and T. Prout (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 175–84.
[4] I mean the Engelsian 'typischer Charaktere unter typischen Umständen' attributed to realism and taken as an axiom for Socialist realist art in the Soviet Union. See: Friedrich Engels, 'Engels an Margaret Harkness. London, Anfang April, 1888', in *MEW*, 43 vols (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1956–90), XXXVII (1967), pp. 42–44, (p. 42).

greediness, that a biological selection of greedy people takes place for whom miserliness and accumulation are most important. I assume that many workers are more stingy than a bourgeois. Essential is not that the social role can be deduced from the character, but that the social role creates a number of characterological connections. The social and social class type of the person are formed from the systems that are brought into the person from the outside. They are systems of social relationships between people, transferred into the personality.[1]

This means that the social transforms itself into the psychical, and that the social is *immediately* given in human experience, while the psychical is the result of the complex *mediation* of the social: 'Changing the well-known thesis of Marx, we could say that the mental nature of man represents the totality of social relations internalized and made into functions of the individual and forms of his structure'.[2]

What interests Vygotsky is this 'geological' development of consciousness – the conversion of the social into the psychical. This conversion is observed on the level of the formation of perception, thinking, speaking, volition and affects. He attributes them a functional and structural nature and calls the structural unity of these functions 'higher mental functions' as opposed to the natural 'lower mental functions' such as reflex and instinct. The terminology of 'higher' and 'lower' has metaphysical traces of the scientific mentality of the nineteenth century. It demarcates the difference between animal and human, biological and cultural. We will see what kind of problems this controversial terminology brings into Vygotsky's system, but we will also demonstrate his efforts to overcome them. For instance, Vygotsky remarks:

From the aspect of phylogenesis, being a product not of biological evolution of behavior but of historical development of the human personality, and from the aspect of ontogenesis, these functions also have their own special developmental history closely connected with the biological formation, but not coinciding with it or with the second line of mental development of the child that is formed together with it. We call

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'On Psychological Systems' [1930b], in *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, trans. by R. Van Der Veer, R. W. Rieber and J. Wollock, 6 vols (New York, London: Plenum Press, 1987-99), vol. III: *Problems of the Theory and History of Psychology* (1997), pp. 91–107 (p. 106).
[2] Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], p. 106.

these functions higher, having in mind primarily their place in development, but we are inclined to call the history of their formation sociogenesis of higher mental functions, in contrast to biogenesis of lower functions, having in mind in the first place the social nature of their origin.[1]

Vygotsky stresses that the 'lower' and the 'higher' point out not the vertical temporality of phylogenetic development, but rather a spatial dimension, the 'place in development' that, as we shall see subsequently, has a radically different temporal structure. I would like to question the Hegelian finalism of Vygotsky by bringing back a Spinozist understanding of activity as a spatial and structural diversification of behaviour that tends to 'adequate form', but has no peak point.

Since we are now familiar with Vygotsky's method and terminology, we may pursue further his idea of a *Capital* for Marxist psychology and identify its object of study with the complex unity of the 'higher psychological functions', and the subject of his critique as the various bourgeois theories of consciousness.[2] As it already follows from his articulation of method, a Marxist understanding of consciousness has empirical and philosophical grounds. The study of cultural behaviour departs from the separation of biological and what Vygotsky calls historical lines of human development. For Vygotsky, this separation is fundamental, because it articulates a split between Soviet diamat, empiricism and Pavlovian reflexology, and Marxian historical materialism.[3] The meaning of the word 'history' and the meaning of the term 'historical psychology' refer to the dialectical approach to things. Thinking, speaking, memory, volition and other forms of cultural behaviour are dynamic structural entities. Each has a unique genesis and development, and each is the result of a series of mutual negative and affirmative determinations. In other words, each of them has history. It does not follow from this that the biological must be rejected completely. On the contrary, Vygotsky believes that

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'Tool and Sign in the Development of Child' [1930d], in *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, trans. by M. J. Hall and R. W. Rieber, 6 vols (New York, London: Plenum Press, 1987–99), vol. VI: *Scientific Legacy* (1999), pp. 3–68 (p. 33–34).

[2] Mohamed Elhammoumi thinks that Vygotsky has a set of his own definitions for the *Capital* project. They are psychological means of production, psychological forces of production, social relations of production, power, ideology, labour, consciousness, activity and subjectivity: Mohamed Elhammoumi, 'To Create Psychology's Own Capital', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 32, (2002), 89–104.

[3] Lev Vygotsky, 'The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology: A Methodological Investigation' [1927d], pp. 331–32.

the human psyche is that which actually connects 'natural history' (evolution) and 'history of society' (history as such).[1]

Culture and history are not *causa sui*. Although natural material is non-human, the lower mental functions originate out of this material. 'Culture creates nothing, it only modifies natural data to conform to the goals of man' and it is out of a 'poverty of the material' that the human content is made.[2] This is the *poor life* of Platonov that generates all the great properties of human society. However, what Vygotsky specifies is that the social modifies and, in a manner of speaking, tricks this poverty of life. The difference between the biological and the social lies in the very fact of that point at which 'further organic development is impossible, [and] an immense path of cultural development opens'.[3] For instance, disability can be mediated by social and cultural means; a tactile writing system or prosthesis could be just one example of such mediation: 'Only a great cultural experiment which showed that it is possible to read with the fingers and speak with the hand discloses the whole conventionality and mobility of cultural forms of behaviour'.[4] This simple principle of mobility in fact questioned the hierarchical system of 'norms' and 'deviations'. Vygotsky treats the alternative, by contrast with the conventional, system of cultural forms in terms of social capacity to expand the radius of social activity. Social mediation is a mechanism of diversification, which allows one to adopt and reconfigure a mental function or a set of mental functions to the concrete and specific preconditions of the biological material. The principle of mediation was foundational for the Soviet education of deaf and blind children. One graduate of a boarding school for deaf and blind children, Alexander Suvorov, by this time a student of the prominent Soviet philosopher Evald Ilyenkov, when asked in the late 1970s about how it was possible to study and comprehend intellectual subjects in his condition, resumed this theory of mediation in a very precise way: 'And who told you that we see and hear nothing? We see and hear through the eyes and ears of all our friends, all people, all humankind'.[5] The question is how to *mediate* a given material in order to bring it into social form. An ear and an eye do not possess the property of seeing and

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'Concrete Human Psychology. An unpublished Manuscript by Vygotsky' [1929a], trans. by A. A. Puzyrei, *Soviet Psychology*, 27, 2, (1989), 53–77 (p. 55).
[2] Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], p. 107.
[3] Ibid., p. 229.
[4] Ibid., p. 228.
[5] Evald Ilyenkov, 'Stanovlenie lichnosti. K itogam nauchnogo experimenta' [The Formation of Personality. About Outcomes of a Scientific Experiment], *Kommunist*, 2 (1977), pp. 68–79 <http://caute.ru/ilyenkov/texts/genpers.html> [accessed 1 May 2016]

hearing in the empirical sense, but a socially mediated mode of hearing and vision. Human content represents the conversion of the natural into the historical through a radical change in the type of development, from evolutionary to dialectical.[1] In this respect, for Vygotsky, the study of human behaviour begins where biological study ends.

As we can see, at the centre of Vygotsky's politics is the agenda of 'repairing' and 'recomposing' post-revolutionary subjects, i.e., any traumas or disabilities that may function in a constructive way. In this sense, cultural behaviour means multiplication and diversification of the modes of human behaviour. Vygotsky believed that the Marxist understanding of consciousness might bring to an end the 'unsuitable, one-sided' capitalist 'development' of the 'human type'.[2] The question of human behavior is the question of capacities to do and act, to 'master [...] the self', and 'there is a profound difference between controlling another's behavior and fostering the subject's ability to control their own behaviour'.[3] Vygotsky's image of communism is much closer to the 60s views of Ilyenkov. The latter understood communism as a society of total giftedness.[4]

Let us return now to the proximity between Platonov and Vygotsky. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Platonov and Vygotsky share an interest in language and the expression of language in thinking for one and the same reason. This reason is the social context of a post-revolutionary, geological stratum of poverty, characterised by a diversity of city jargons and provincial dialects. Vygotsky's attention to disability may point to the idea of a radical critique of the image of a strong masculinity. The central problem in Vygotsky, just as much as in Platonov, is the 'really existing' post-revolutionary proletarians, peasants, ethnic minorities, women and children, i.e. the declassed and mosaic-like cacophony of the old and new, the progressive and the reactionary. And this is the perspective from which we would like to read the empirical study of Soviet ethnic minorities conducted in Central Asia in 1931–32 by Vygotsky's laboratory. Vygotsky did not participate in the expedition; instead, Alexander Luria

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], p. 226.
[2] Lev Vygotsky, 'The Socialist Alteration of Man' [1930c], p. 176.
[3] Andy Blunden, *An Interdisciplinary Theory of Activity*, p. 137.
[4] Vygotsky was going to write a chapter about giftedness in his work *The History of Higher Mental Functions*. He wanted to show that culture negates differences in talents: 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], p. 229. It is remarkable that Ilyenkov developed this understanding of talent in the 1970s, while working with deaf and blind students: Evald Ilyenkov, *Filosofiia i kul'tura* [Philosophy and Culture] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1991), pp. 369–414.

made the fieldwork under his supervision.[1] The expedition also included international members. A founder of the Gestalt psychology, Kurt Koffka, was among them. Luria published the results of this research only in the 1970s, because the expedition caused a public debate whose heatedness extended to the accusation that Luria and Vygotsky were fascists.[2] What is remarkable about this study is not only the fact that Platonov made his trip to Central Asia in approximately the same period, but also the interest that it evinces in the forms and modes of thinking of the rural Asian population. Luria worked in the remote villages of Uzbekistan and in mountainous regions of Kirgizia. The subjects of investigation were representatives of several groups: Muslim women, who lived in isolation from any social activity and had no education; illiterate peasants; women who attended short-term courses; active kolkhoz members, who also took short courses; and women students. [3]

The study showed that a subject, shaped by the experience of everyday activities and practices, such as manual, domestic and agricultural labour, has a different perception of color and geometrical forms, because the thinking of such a subject is attached to the 'concrete', 'graphic-functional' and physical manipulation of objects. The naming of geometrical figures by uneducated women, for example, was always attached to a particular object. Thus, a circle was called a plate or moon.[4] Other participants did not select similar objects as they were asked, but 'objects suitable for a specific purpose'.[5] The logic that determined the choice of classification of the sets of objects is similar to the doubject's reasoning about scientific categories:

> Subject: Sher., age sixty, illiterate peasant from the village of Yardan …
> subject shown pictures of the following: hammer-saw-log-hatchet.
> 'They all fit here! The saw has to saw the log, the hammer has to hammer
> it, and the hatchet has to chop it. And if you want to chop log up really

[1] It should be noted that the empirical and clinical research was always conducted collectively. Vygotsky's collaborators were Alexander Luria, Alexei Leontiev, Alexander Zaporozhets, Bluma Zeigarnik, Lydia Bozhovich, Liya Slavina and other famous Soviet psychologists. Some works attributed to Vygotsky in fact were written collectively or by a member of the circle. It is also remarkable that the female part of the Vygotsky circle is less known in the international context. About the Vygotsky circle and the status of his writings see: *Revisionist Revolution in Vygotsky Studies*, ed. by A. Yasnitsky and R. van der Veer (London, New York: Routledge, 2016).
[2] About the expedition and its controversies, including the political and economical context of collectivisation in Central Asia see: Rene Van Der Veer, Jaan Valsiner, *Understanding Vygotsky: A Quest for Synthesis* (Cambridge, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 242–55.
[3] Alexander Romanovich Luria, *Cognitive Development. Its Cultural and Social Foundations*, p. 15.
[4] Ibid., pp. 31–33
[5] Ibid., p. 54

good, you need the hammer. You can' t take any of these things away.
There isn't any you don't need!' […]

But one fellow told me the log didn't belong here.

'Why'd he say that? If we say the log isn't like the other things and put it
off to one side, we'd be making a mistake. All things are needed for the
log'.[1]

The 'use value' of the objects was more important for the respondent and that is why he
grouped it according to its utility and function in a practical situation, rather than by
differentia specifica. For Luria the result of this research provided another confirmation
of a historical materialist understanding of consciousness, because it showed that
nothing exists prior to practice – that even colours and forms are absolute products of
social life.

Without a doubt, there is a crucial ethical difference between Platonov's attitude
towards his doubjects and that of Luria and Vygotsky. Apparently, for the last,
situational concrete thinking is hierarchically lower than conceptual thinking. This
hierarchy makes no sense for Platonov. Van der Veer and Valsiner ironically comment
that: 'Whilst having identical brains and identical lower psychological processes, people
from different cultural backgrounds might show deeply different higher psychological
… processes'.[2] As a result, thinking is determined by modes of production, so that the
first changes together with the transformation of the last. Moreover, Koffka denied the
conclusion that perception depends on practical experience and develops culturally. He
mentions that optical illusions, for example, tend to decrease after the experimenter has
begun to realise that he or she is participating in a scientific experiment, and to increase
when participants of the experiment believe that they are having a friendly conversation
and are not being subjected to a test. In other words, the result depends on the 'subject's
attitude towards the experimenter.'[3]

At first, Luria and Vygotsky seem to propose a very simple scheme of
determinism that leaves aside the question of the character of this change, especially if

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[1] Ibid., p. 58.
[2] Rene Van Der Veer, Jaan Valsiner, *Understanding Vygotsky: A Quest for Synthesis*, pp. 221–22.
[3] Ibid., p. 250.

we take into account the forced and violent nature of Sovietisation not only in Central Asia, but also in the metropolis in the 1930s. Nor does this show how the old and new will interact on the levels of the social and thinking. However, it looks as if Vygotsky and Luria had this problem in mind, because the results of the experiment clearly show that kolkhoz members did not reach 'high rationality' in their thinking. Prior to the expedition Vygotsky wrote an article in which he criticised the 'negative' approach to minority studies that usually begins by asking what the minority subject lacks in comparison to a 'civilised' subject. He calls this perspective traditional and notes that it expresses a colonial idea of primitive man.[1] Vygotsky thought that modes of production first change social relations, while social relations are changing the structure of consciousness. He never believed that this process is simple and immediate. Moreover, it seems that conceptual thinking as the highest stage of development corresponds to the communist mode of production, but not to Western civilisation.

What in that case brings together Platonov and Vygotsky, if we take into consideration the above? At first glance there is nothing in common between the 'mistakable doubjects' of the former and the cultural behaviour of the latter. However, a sociological curiosity about Soviet modes of thinking is definitely not the only aspect of their proximity. While never abandoning the Hegelian idea of the Concept as the highest stage of development, Vygotsky still has something Spinozist in mind when he talks about multiplication and diversification of the modes of cultural behaviour. This diversification does not negate the primacy of abstract thinking, but rearticulates what abstract thinking is. For Vygotsky, thinking is an attribute of human behaviour and speech (*rech'*) is a mode of expression of that attribute. Speech (*rech'*) could be manifested in a gesture, an affect, oral communication or graphically issued speech organised on the basis of alphabetic or hieroglyphic images. In other words, all forms of speech express the same thing – a thought, but each in a different way.

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'K voprosu o plane nauchno-issledovatel'skoi raboty po pedologii natsional'nykh men'shinstv' [Regarding the Question of a Scientific and Research Plan of Work For the Pedagogical Psychology of Ethnic Minorities], *Pedologiia*, 3, (1929), 367–76.

Vygotsky's spatial ontology of social mediation is based on the resolution of the body/mind problem. He claims that a materialist approach to human consciousness should be monist. It neither privileges the physical determination of the psychical nor should it treat the physical organisation of the human organism as an effect of the psychical domain. Both causal explanation of the mind and body relationship and parallelism fall into a mechanistic understanding of mental life and define the body or mind as *causa efficiens* of mental life. However, there is no privileged place where mental life resides:

> Dialectical psychology proceeds first of all from the unity of mental and physiological processes. Because for dialectical psychology mind is not, in the words of Spinoza … something that is situated outside nature or as a kingdom within a kingdom, it is a part of nature itself, directly linked to the functions of the higher organized matter of our brain. As with all other nature, it was not created but evolved in a process of development.[1]

Here Vygotsky translates into his own language Spinoza's understanding of man as a partial or inadequate cause that lacks autonomy and absolute power.[2] The third part of Spinoza's *Ethics*, from which Vygotsky borrows the comparison of man with the kingdom within a kingdom, begins with the assumption that human beings should not be understood as exceptional or anomalous things, but rather as things that obey and depend on natural laws:

> Most of those who have written about the affects, and men's way of living, seem to treat, not of natural things, which follow the common laws of Nature, but of things which are outside Nature. Indeed they seem to conceive man in Nature as a dominion within a dominion. For they

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'Mind, Consciousness, the Unconscious' [1927b], in *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, trans. by R. Van Der Veer, R. W. Rieber, J. Wollock, 6 vols (New York, London: Plenum Press, 1987–1999), vol. III: *Problems of the Theory and History of Psychology* (1997), pp. 109–21 (p. 112).

[2] Benedict de Spinoza 'Ethics' [1677], in *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, trans. by E. Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), III, D1, p. 153.

believe that man disturbs, rather than follows, the order of Nature, that he has absolute power over his actions, and that he is determined only by himself.[1]

From the simple fact of that dependency on natural laws follows the unity of the physical and the psychical. This resolution of dualism again bears the traces of Plekhanov's thinking, at least with respect to the appeal to laws of nature that is a foundational principle of Engelsian dialectical materialism,[2] but let us proceed further and see what would make Vygotsky's position different. The unity of the physical and the psychical, argues Vygotsky, is not an absolute identity as it occurs in Mach and the mechanistic materialism of the eighteenth century. Both Mach and the mechanists confuse 'pre-mental forms of adaptation to the environment' with the psyche. According to Vygotsky, historically, the psychical plane emerges much later and does not correspond to instinctive behavior.[3] In order to avoid the traps of dualism on the one hand, and the solipsistic uniformity of both sides on the other, psychology has to redefine its object:

> Dialectical psychology's whole uniqueness precisely resides in the attempt to define the subject matter of its study in a completely novel way. This subject matter is the integral process of behaviour, which is characterized by the fact that it has its physical and its physiological side. [Dialectical] psychology studies it as a unitary and integral process and only in this way tries to find a way out of the blind alley that was created.[4]

In other words, Vygotsky introduces a third term – a process – which allows him to avoid the mechanistic causality of dualism and the absolute identity of the psychical and the physical in empiricism and positivism.

Process is the real unity of the two opposites, a third term that mediates two sides. Psychical and physical are taken here not as two isolated organs of human life,

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[1] Ibid., III, Preface, p. 152.
[2] See: Georgi Plekhanov, 'The Development of the Monist Point of View of History' [1895], pp. 486–703.
[3] Lev Vygotsky, 'Mind, Consciousness, the Unconscious', p. 112–13.
[4] Ibid., p. 114. Translation modified.

but as one process of that life. Only in this way, when we treat them as process, is it possible to explain what they do:

> It is absurd to first isolate a certain quality from the integral process and then raise the question of the function of this quality as if it existed in itself, fully independently of that integral process of which it forms a quality. It is absurd, for example, to separate the heat from the sun, to ascribe it independent meaning and to ask what meaning this heat may have and what action it can perform … It is absurd to ask whether a given quality can act upon the object of which it forms a quality.[1]

The level of the process is the level of performance and on the level of performance it is hard to separate each side. Process is a monistic plane of the psychical and physical. It is remarkable that in his essay on Spinoza, Ilyenkov explains the unity of body and mind in a similar way, almost repeating Vygotsky's argument:

> One does not ask how legs capable of walking are constructed, but in what walking consists. What is thinking as the action of, albeit inseparable from, the material mechanisms by which it is effected, yet not in any way identical with mechanisms themselves? In the one case the question is about the structure of an organ, in the other about the function the organ performs. The structures, of course, must be such that it can carry out the appropriate function; legs are built so that they can walk and not so that they can think. The fullest description of *the structure of an organ*, i.e. a description of it in an inactive state, however, has no right to present itself as a description, however approximate, of the function that the organ performs, as a description of the *real thing* that it does.[2]

The structure of an organ is not that of human consciousness, since the organ is not consciousness. Vygotsky criticises Freud and Piaget precisely for their inability to take

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[1] Ibid., p. 114.

[2] Evald Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic. Essays on its History and Theory*, trans. by H. C. Creighton (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 45.

a monist point of view on human consciousness. The former substantiates libido and reduces the explanation of the psychical life to instinctive behavior, while the latter does the same in relation to egocentric speech.[1] Ilyenkov perfectly summarises this tendency by saying that the study of the 'structure of language' (perhaps he is alluding to structuralism here) or the structure of the brain is only one of the many presuppositions of thinking that has nothing to deal with the process of thinking and thinking as such.[2]

I understand the concept of mental process as expressing the idea that the problem of behaviour is the problem of activity. The question is not how an organ functions, but how humans behave, what they do and how they act. That means that behaviour as the unity of body and mind is a processual structure of activity. What humans can do derives from their social nature, and in this sense, what animals cannot do (speak, for example) is linked to the biological form of behaviour. So the general programme of Vygotsky is to analyse 'human' or 'cultural' forms of behaviour. Human behaviour differs qualitatively from the behaviour of an animal. This qualitative difference is not the simple sum of accumulated conditioned responses to stimuli that Pavlov and reflexology propose as an explanatory scheme for the transition from the biological to the social. The realm of the social is better compared with a dialectical leap that removes human behaviour from the stimuli-responsive scheme.[3] This dialectical leap is either a transition from quantity to quality, through which diamat explains various phenomena from water boiling to the formation of a mass movement,[4] nor the gradual complication of behaviour throughout the course of development of an organism. This point of view is based on the vitalist idea of growth and presupposes the same primitive relations between organism and environment as in Pavlovian reflexology. Vygotsky does not reject the material precondition of social life, but explains that the lower biological processes are sublated (*aufgehoben*) by the historical higher processes. He points to the dual meaning of Hegelian *Aufhebung*, namely

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[1] See: Lev Vygotsky, 'Mind, Consciousness, the Unconscious' [1927b], p. 112; Lev Vygotsky, 'Thinking and Speech' [1934b], pp. 53–91.

[2] This passage is omitted from the English version of the text. See the Russian original: Evald Ilyenkov, *Dialekticheskaia logika: Ocherki istorii i teorii* [Dialectical Logic. Essays on its History and Theory], 2nd edn (Moscow: Politizdat, 1984), pp. 37–38.

[3] Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], p. 38–39.

[4] Engels illustrated his law of the transformation of quantity into quality by the Hegelian example of heated and cooled water. Vygotsky does not refer to this example, but it is invoked here because in the Soviet Union it was known as the law of 'the boiling teakettle' and was synonymous with diamat. See: Friedrich Engels, 'Dialectics of Nature' [1883], in *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels. Collected Works*, trans. by R. Dixon and others, 50 vols (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975-2004), vol. XXV (1987), pp. 356–61; Evald Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic. Essays on its History and Theory*, p. 74.

'removal', 'rejection', but also 'preservation' and 'saving'. This dual meaning 'is usually translated well into Russian by the word skhoronit' [to bury], which also has a positive and a negative sense – destruction and preservation'. Therefore, the lower processes 'are buried in the higher form of behavior'.[1] This important remark should be taken into consideration. Precisely this logic of 'buried processes' changes our whole perspective on the Vygotskian conception of development, which is as much dialectical as it is 'geological':

> All cultural behavior […] involves conflict; the old form is forced out, is sometimes completely disrupted, and sometimes there is a 'geological' superimposition of various genetic epochs that make the behavior of a cultured person resemble the earth's crust. We note that our brain is constructed with such 'geological superimposition' […] in place of the stereotypic, established development of natural forms that resembled the automatic replacement of forms characteristic for the child in the womb, a living process of formation and development occurs that goes forward in a continuous contradiction between primitive and cultural forms.[2]

What makes human and animal behaviour so distinct is their relation to the environment. Earlier Vygotsky claims that mental processes complicate the response of an organism to stimuli: they are a reflection of the reflection of stimuli. Human consciousness is a complex system of feedbacks or a 'reflex of reflexes'.[3] What Vygotsky refers to here is the double work of reflection: at first, the object affects the subject, next affect affects a body of the subject, and finally the subject reflects the state of affection. Therefore, consciousness is a 'correlative activity of the human body with itself'.[4] He notes that a human differs from an animal by the very fact that, in the case described here, a body sets going a chain of reactions reacting to the affections of the body: 'Only I and I alone can observe and perceive my own secondary reactions, because only for me do my reflexes serve as new stimuli for the proprioceptive field. This being so, one can easily

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], p. 81.
[2] Ibid., pp. 221–22.
[3] Lev Vygotsky, 'The Methods of Reflexological and Psychological Investigation' [1924b], in *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, trans. by R. Van Der Veer, R. W. Rieber, J. Wollock, 6 vols (New York, London: Plenum Press, 1987–99), vol. III: *Problems of the Theory and History of Psychology* (1997 [1924]), pp. 35–49.
[4] Lev Vygotsky, 'Mind, Consciousness, the Unconscious' [1927b], p. 46.

explain the split nature of experience: the mental is unlike anything else precisely because it is dealing with stimuli *sui generis* which are met *nowhere else but in my own body*'.[1] Consciousness is the set of capacities that derive from the ability of a body to affect its own self.

Consciousness reacts upon reactions and by reacting upon the reactions it also selects what to accept and what to ignore. Vygotsky compares simple – we may add a Leninist type of – reflection with *causa effectum*, where cause A is equal to an affect B, and the affect B that causes a new affect C is equal to B: 'A pond reflects everything; a stone reacts in principle to everything. But these reactions equal the stimulation: *causa aequat effectum*'.[2] We may suggest that this symmetrical chain of identities is the realm of immediacy, while the causal chain on the side of human consciousness is some kind of *causa intentionalis*. This ability to relate reactions to oneself (autostimulation) is the ability to appropriate affections:

> […] every new form of cultural experience is not simply external, regardless of the state of the organism at a given moment of development, but the organism, assimilating external influences, assimilates a whole series of forms of behaviour, and assimilates them depending on the degree of his mental development. Something occurs that resembles what is called nourishment with respect to body growth, that is, assimilation of certain external substances, external material, that is processed and assimilated into the organism itself.[3]

The concept of autostimulation understood as mental directedness may appear to be a behaviourist, or perhaps to some extent phenomenological, concept. However, Vygotsky challenges his own theory when he introduces another level of the environmental field, namely the social and the historical instances of autostimulation. He explains that autostimulation develops only thanks to social activity. It is not the realm of nature that

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'Consciousness As a Problem for the Psychology of Behaviour' [1925a], in *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, trans. by R. Van Der Veer, R. W. Rieber and J. Wollock, 6 vols (New York, London: Plenum Press, 1987–99), vol. III: *Problems of the Theory and History of Psychology* (1997), pp. 63–79 (p. 73).
[2] Lev Vygotsky, 'The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology: A Methodological Investigation' [1927d], pp. 274–75.
[3] Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], p. 109.

enables humans to reaffirm their reactions, but the realm of social life. Vygotsky explains:

> From the whole mass of stimuli one group clearly stands out for me, the group of social stimuli coming from people. It stands out because I myself can reconstruct these stimuli, because they very soon become reversible for me and thus determine my behavior in another way from all others. They make me comparable, identical with myself. The source of social behavior and consciousness also lies in speech (*rech'* – MC) in the broad sense of the word. Speech (*rech'* – MC) is, on the one hand, a system of reflexes of social contact and, on the other hand, primarily a system of reflexes of consciousness, i.e., for the reflection of the influence of other systems.[1]

In other words, social contact and the presence of the other cause the reversibility of the ego. The social realm expands the borders of natural habitat to the extent that people can share experiences which they have never accessed directly. They can imagine places they have never visited and can know about things they have never encountered.[2] The monist plane of the individual and the social is similar to a Freudian splitting of the ego[3] in the individual consciousness, but for Vygotsky, *id* is the realm of immediacy, the habitat of an 'I' that surpasses it in power and force.

The social, as the realm of immediacy, is the stage of sense-certainty, where the first split between the unconscious (social) and the subject of this unconscious takes place. It is from this type of *immediacy* that consciousness begins to *mediate* itself. Vygotsky illustrates the means of mediation by the philosophical anecdote about Buridan's ass that starves to death, not being able to choose between two similar kinds of food. This is due to the fact that in such a hypothetical situation both an animal and a man would be situated in a stimuli-response model, which makes them incapable of choosing between two identical motives. What interests Vygotsky is the absolute fiction of 'the mechanical immobility' of man and animal. In fact, in such a situation animal and man would show frustration, which could potentially lead to neurosis. This would

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'Consciousness As a Problem for the Psychology of Behaviour' [1925a], p. 42.
[2] Ibid., p. 68.
[3] See the comparison of Freudian *Id* with the realm of the social in: Ibid., pp. 77–78.

correspond to the passive response to the situation. However, fluctuation between two motives could be resolved in an active way by introducing a third term into the situation – the artificial stimuli or auxiliary motives. Vygotsky illustrates such a resolution by an episode from Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Pierre Bezukhov cannot decide whether he should join the army or stay in Moscow. In order to resolve it, he plays solitaire so that chance could determine his choice. After all, Pierre has been found in the same state of anxiety and still cannot choose, but the fundamental lesson of Tolstoy, according to Vygotsky, is the solution of *mediation* that helps to avoid the trap of the two motives.[1] The introduction of the third term 'in the form of a general situation of an operation with thrown dice' shows 'a new and unique structure […] in comparison with the Buridan ass'. The novelty of the situation 'consists of the fact that man himself creates stimuli that determine his response and uses these stimuli as devices for mastering processes of his own behaviour. Man himself determines his behaviour with the help of artificially created stimuli-devices'.[2] Citing Spinoza, Vygotsky underlines that Bezukhov's fluctuation between choices demarcates the impossibility of 'free choice' and 'free will', but exemplifies the human capacity to recognise necessity:

> The experiment tells us that freedom of will is not freedom from motives; it consists in that the child recognizes a situation, recognizes the need to make a choice based on motive and, as the philosophical definition states, in the given case, his freedom is the recognition of necessity […] As we know, we are subject to nature, comply with its laws. Our behavior is one of the natural processes, the basic law of which is also the law of stimulus-response, and for this reason the basic law of mastering natural processes is mastering them through stimuli.[3]

From here it follows that the formation of the higher mental functions – perception, memory, thinking and speaking – corresponds to the basic scheme of mediation. The connection between stimulus A and reaction B will always be established by means of stimulus X, which will affect B and transform the reaction. Introduction of the artificial

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], pp. 44–46.
[2] Ibid., pp. 4 –51.
[3] Ibid., p. 210.

stimuli-means characterises the development of memory, when a man is tying a knot to remember something or when a child counts on its fingers.[1]
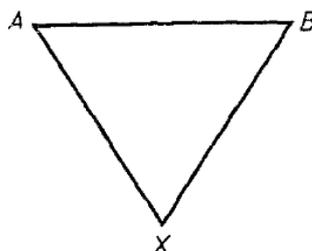
Figure 1: The formation of reaction. Autostimulation or the Use of Artificial Stimuli-Devices.[2]

In both cases stimuli function as a tool so that the appropriation of the social environment emancipates human behaviour from the immediacy of perception. We could say that a psychological tool is the means of production of cultural behaviour.

The production of cultural behaviour is the process of differentiation and stratification of the biological structure by means of intervention of a new intermediate member into the operational relation between stimuli and reaction.[3] The poor life (biological plane), as a basis for the production of human behaviour, remains the same, but artificial organs (tools) transform its functional-operational logic within the environment and introduce a new historical and cultural plane of development – mediated social activity (*deiatel'nost'*).[4] The differentiation of the biological structure, out of which the new *homo historicus* emerges, is not the process of evolutional transformation of bodily organs, but transformation of behaviour through and by means of artificial external organs.[5]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 50–52.
[2] The figure can be found in: Ibid., p. 79. A title to the figure is mine.
[3] Ibid., p. 84
[4] We have to stress that the Russian word *deiatel'nost'* – activity – is closer to the German *Tätigkeit* than it is to the English equivalent. *Deiatel'nost'* derives from the verb *delat'* (to do) and noun *delo* (deed). While activity (*aktivnost'*) expresses the highest degree of generality, both *deiatel'nost'* and *Tätigkeit* refer specifically to social activity and work.
[5] Ibid., pp. 15–18.

A similar argument about modification of the biological structure by means of tool production can be found in Bergson's *Creative Evolution.* He claims that in the biological realm of life an 'instrument forms a part of the body that uses it […] there is an instinct that knows how to use it', because an instrument is inscribed into the 'organizing work of the living matter'.[1] Modification of the 'organized structure involves modification of the species' or introduction of the logic of intelligence as opposed to the logic of the instinct. The logic of the intelligence is 'the faculty of manufacturing artificial objects […] tools to make tools'.[2] An artificial tool is unorganised matter. It extends the organic body and creates an unlimited outer field for an action that overcomes the closed and cyclical structure of the animal habitat.[3] Compare it with Vygotsky:

> Man also has his system of activity that keeps his methods of behavior within limits. In his system, for example, flying is impossible. But man surpasses all animals because he can extend the radius of his activity limitlessly by using tools. His brain and hand made his system of activity, that is, the sphere of available and possible forms of behavior, infinitely broad.[4]

It is not too difficult to see that the understanding of human action as modification of the raw matter further refers to the Aristotelian definition of the hand as the tool of the tool and mind as the form of the forms. This sort of Aristotelianism was popular in the German philosophy of *Technik* that heavily influenced Bogdanov, but was critically received by Vygotsky. For instance, Ludwig Noiré builds his theory of the *Werkzeug* on the basis of Aristotle's philosophy.[5] Vygotsky was aware of discussions about *Werkzeug* and *Technik*. He might have been familiar with the philosophy of *Technik* through the collection of essays published by members of the Bogdanov circle, *The Role of the Tool in the Development of Man*, which includes extracts from the works of Noiré, Ernst

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[1] H. Bergson, *Creative Evolution* [1911], trans. by A. Mitchell (New York: The Modern Library, 1944), p. 154.
[2] Ibid., pp. 153–54.
[3] Ibid., pp. 155–56.
[4] Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], p. 20
[5] See his treatment of Aristotle in English: Ludwig Noiré, *A Sketch of the Development of Philosophic Thought from Thales to Kant* (London, New York: Macmillan, 1900), pp. 62–64.

Kapp and others.[1] Vygotsky criticises John Dewey's and Ernst Kapp's theory of the tool in *The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions*.[2] Moreover, Vygotsky was a reader of *Creative Evolution*, and he refers to the above quoted passages in his notebooks. For him, Bergson misses a crucial point, namely, the internalisation of a tool and its transformation into the intellectual function. When the tool becomes an internal organ, a new inner construction changes not only the structure of habitat, but also brain functions: 'Tools out of oneself, organs in-itself'.[3] Let us explain this logic of internalisation further.

Vygotsky stresses the similarity between auxiliary means, which help to solve psychological situations such as remembering, comparing or reporting something, and labour tools.[4] Both auxiliary means and labour tools are the instruments of reason. However, if a tool as means of labour helps to appropriate natural materials that lie outside of the human body, auxiliary means are the structure of signification that derives from the means of social communication. Auxiliary means help to make sense of an action. This structure of making sense is the structure of mediation, which unites tool and sign. Thus, to mediate is to make sense of something and to make sense of something is to relate it to oneself. In this respect, psychological functions are 'not natural structures, but constructions', the 'modes of action from the outside' that seize internal processes.[5]

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[1] The collection of essays includes translation of chapters from: Ernst Kapp, *Grundlinien einer Philosophie der Technik. Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Cultur aus neuen Gesichtspunkten* (Brunswick: George Westermann, 1877); and Ludwig Noiré, *Das Werkzeug und seine Bedeutung für die Entwicklungsgeschichte der Menschheit* (Mainz: Diemer, 1880). See Russian edition: Ernst Kapp, Heinrich Cunow, Ludwig Noiré, Alfred Victor Espinas, *Rol' orydiia v razvitii cheloveka* [The Role of Tool in the Development of Man] (Leningrad: Priboi, 1925).

[2] Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], pp. 60–61.

[3] In English this formulation appears as "Tools are outside the person; organs are within the person': Lev Vygotsky, 'Concrete Human Psychology. An unpublished Manuscript by Vygotsky' [1929a], p. 55. Compare with: Lev Vygotsky, 'Konkretnaia psikhologiia cheloveka' [Concrete Human Psychology] [1929b], *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta,* 14, Psychologiia, 1, (1986), 52–65 (p. 52).

[4] Labour tool corresponds to the Russian *orudie* and the German *Werkzeug*.

[5] We have translated quotations directly from the Russian original, due to numerous linguistic problems in the English publication mentioned above: Lev Vygotsky, 'Konkretnaia psikhologiia cheloveka' [Concrete Human Psychology] [1929b], p. 55.

Figure 2: Scheme 1: Instrumentum (Subject, Object and Labour Tool). Scheme 2: Sign (Subject 1, Subject 2 and Sign). Scheme 3: Autostimulation (Subject 1, Brain and Sign). [1]

Thus, what unites tool and sign is the logic of mediation. Therefore, tool and sign logically operate in the same way, but they differ structurally. A tool affects an object of activity and transforms it, while a sign changes nothing in the object, but affects the behaviour of the subject. Thus, tool and sign have different directions, the outer and the inner. In spite of that difference, they are mutually dependent and represent a dialectical unity of opposites. The notion of mediation corresponds to the transformative essence of labour in Marx:

> With full justification, Hegel used the concept of mediation in its most general meaning, seeing in it the most characteristic property of the mind. He said that the mind is as resourceful as it is powerful. In general, resourcefulness consists in mediating activity that, while it lets objects act on each other according to their nature and exhaust themselves in that activity, does not at the same time intervene in the process, but fulfills only its own proper role. Marx refers to this definition when he speaks of the tools of work[2] and indicates that man 'makes use of mechanical, physical, chemical properties of things in order to change them into tools to act on other things according to his purpose'.[3]

However, according to Vygotsky's determination, the transformative function of labour in fact lies outside of labour. *Werkzeug* is a stimuli-object and unless stimuli-means are

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[1] Figure can be found in: Ibid, p. 56. The titles to the schemes translate them.
[2] 'Tools of work' refers to Russian *orudie* (*Werkzeug*).
[3] Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], p. 61–62.

introduced into the structure, the natural line of development will remain in place.[1] Vygotsky deviates from Marx when he introduces the principal role of sign and signification in human behavior. Marx's philosophical conception of labour and means of labor (tools) is not so different from Aristotelianism, mentioned above.[2] However, Vygotsky clings to a passage from *Capital* about a bad architect and a good bee in order to make Marx an ally of the signification theory. Marx says that even the best of the bees build the cell instinctively, while the result of labour already occurs ahead of the act even in the worst architectural model: ' … the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally'.[3] For Vygotsky, the worst of the architects represent the distinctive characteristic of the human behavior that is 'the doubling of experience' – the imagining of the ideal form ahead of a labour act.[4] In other words, for Vygotsky, a creation of a concrete object on the basis of the ideal image of that object relates to signification.

Signification problematises a passage from the labour process to object, or discusses inversion of the activity into the form of object. It explains how the idea of the architectural model even came to mind and what causes the formation of this model. Apparently, the reason for the creation of the architectural model, let us say of a house, is the practical necessity of adapting to the climate and social conditions of a particular place. Thus the shape of the house corresponds to that practical necessity. In Marx, the imagining of the ideal form in advance of the act of labour results in a particular forms of *Vergegenständlichung* or in the historical forms of a concrete objectivity. This is not strictly speaking objectification, but rather the formation of 'objecthood'.[5] This positive sense of concrete objectivity is important for the context of Vygotsky's theory. In his later writings Vygotsky shows that the capacity of being ahead of an act develops dialectically; it cannot exist 'in advance' as a metaphysical attribute of the human. At the beginning of the development, action is affective and it precedes reflection. Once speech is introduced into the structure of behaviour, it accompanies activity, and only by

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[1] Ibid., p. 84.
[2] Karl Marx, *Capital: Critique of Political Economy. Volume One* [1867], trans. by B. Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1982), pp. 283–86.
[3] Ibid., p. 284.
[4] Lev Vygotsky, 'Consciousness as a Problem for the Psychology of Behavior' [1925a], p. 68
[5] About the problem of the ideal in Marx see: Evald Ilyenkov, 'Dialectics of the Ideal', in *Dialectics of the Ideal. Evald Ilyenkov and Creative Soviet Marxism*, trans. and ed. by A. Levant and V. Oittinen (Leiden, Bostnon: Brill, 2014), pp. 25–78.

passing through several dialectical steps, which correspond to the process of mastering speaking capacities, does thinking come to anticipate and explain action that is not yet realised.[1] Critiquing the logocentric Christian formula 'in the beginning was the word', Vygotsky admits that '[practical] intellect is genetically older than the verbal; action precedes the word, and even wise action precedes the wise word',[2] but action is only the beginning, 'the initial point of movement'. '[If] the act [*delo* – MC], independent of the word, stands at the beginning of development, then at its end stands the word becoming the act [*delom* – MC]'.[3] It could be argued that labour is a special case of activity (*Tätigkeit*), while activity without signification is a special case of behaviour. Signification begins to transform the activity of labour or any other type of activity with the objects and materials from passive interaction with the environment to autostimulation.

D) Vygotsky's Theory of Individuation as Disjunctive Unity of Internal Functions.

For Vygotsky, a sign is any kind of conditioned stimulus created artificially by man for man. At first, a sign is only a tool of communication with the external environment. It is a 'gesture in itself' that indicates an intentional act. Thus the child's development begins with unsuccessful attempts to grasp an object, which can be recognised as 'pointing gestures' only by a mother; in other words, the meaning of the whole situation – the pointing gesture – is introduced by the other, when a mother begins to communicate the unsuccessful grasping movement to the child. The child will recognise the 'gesture for others' only by connecting the idea of grasping with the objective situation that includes a wanted object and a person who may bring that object. At this point the 'gesture for others' becomes a 'gesture for itself'[4] or structure of understanding, based on generation of a meaningful discourse.

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'Tool and Sign in the Development of Child' [1930d], pp. 24–26.
[2] Ibid., p. 65. Translation is modified.
[3] Ibid., p. 68.
[4] Translation modified. Although in the passage about the pointing gesture Vygotsky directly refers to Hegel, the English translation masks his Hegelian terminology: gesture in-itself (*zhest v sebe*) translates simply as 'pointing gesture': Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], pp. 104–5. See Russian edition: Lev Vygotsky, 'Istoriia razvitiia visshykh psikhicheskikh funktsii' [1931a], in *Sobranie sochinenii v 6 tomakh* (Moscow: Pedagogika, 1983), vol. III, pp. 5–328 (pp. 143–44).

Thus we might say that through others we become ourselves, and this rule refers not only to the individual as a whole, but also to the history of each separate function. This also comprises the essence of the process of cultural development expressed in a purely logical form. The individual becomes for himself what he is in himself through what he manifests for others. This is also the process of forming the individual.[1]

Individualisation is represented here as a Hegelian movement from being in itself to being for itself, but for the Hegelian-Spinozism of Vygotsky it means the movement from an abstract universal (the social unconscious) to the concrete singular.[2]

What is also important is that this triadic dialectical logic is complicated by the fact of *double mediation*. In his notebook Vygotsky writes that man is *homo duplex*,[3] because all higher functions presuppose a particular model of social relations. In the new structure of cultural behaviour, the sign appears not between subject and object, but between two subjects (Subject 1 and Subject 2) through the Object, where the Object begins to signify something only thanks to the communication between Subjects. Subject 2 invents meaning for the situation of 'Subject 1 – Object' (gesture-for-other). The social relation of 'Subject 1 – Subject 2' forms an *external signification*, where the sign appears as an 'inter-mental function'. However, at the same time Subject 1 forms

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], p. 105. It would be interesting to compare Vygotsky's scheme of the development of the symbolic order out of gesture with similar twentieth-century theories of the origin of the self, for example, with the Lacanian mirror stage. Here, the other carries out the function of the attainment of an imagined corporeal integrity, and consequently, a subject enters in contradiction with the experience of the fragmented body. See: Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', in *Écrits*, trans. by B. Fink, H. Fink and R. Grigg (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), pp. 75–81. In this sense, Platonov's doubjects remain in a state of psychosis, because the symbolic order is not capable of protecting them from the terror of the labouring parts. Lacan's theory could mean that the deaf-blind children, similarly to Platonov's doubjects, are also conditioned by psychosis, because, due to the lack of hearing and sight, the imaginary integrity could be constituted only through a series of complex mediations. See the critique of the mirror stage in relation to the deaf and blind in: Françoise Dolto, *L'image inconsciente du corps* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984).

[2] This may appear as a total misunderstanding of Hegel. However, Vygotsky's attempt to specify via Hegel and Spinoza his theory of what from here on in I will call individuation, does have its adherents. It could be compared with a recent comparative analysis of individuation and desire in Hegel and Spinoza. See: Jason Read, 'Desire is Man's Very Essence: Spinoza and Hegel as Philosophers of Transindividuality', in *Between Hegel and Spinoza. A Volume of Critical Essays*, ed. by H. Sharp and J. E. Smith (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 42–60. I will discuss individuation in due course.

[3] Lev Vygotsky, 'Concrete Human Psychology. An unpublished Manuscript by Vygotsky' [1929a], p. 58. It seems that the term *homo duplex* comes from Durkheim's elaboration of double human nature in: Émile Durkheim, *Suicide. A Study in Sociology* [1897], trans. by J. A. Spauling and G. Simpson (London: Routledge Classics, 2005). Vygotsky refers to Durkheim in the above quoted notebook.

internal signification, which 'transfers the social relation […] inward into his personality'. In other words, '[the] history of higher mental functions is disclosed here as the history of converting means of social behaviour into means of individual-psychological organization'.[1] This means that Subject 1 internalises not the Object as such, but the relation, established through the Object or situation of 'Subject 1 – Subject 2 – Object – Sign'.

Although Vygotsky claims that the formation of the higher mental functions is a social process, the internalisation of the sign in fact changes the structure of the brain, because the brain 'sustains an operation aimed at the object. But the object is operation as such, a neural processing'.[2] Elements of the social environment 'begin to be used as active agents that control the mental process from outside'.[3] Signification involves the mastering of the other's or one's own behaviour by means of the creation of 'connections in the brain from outside'. It allows man to control 'the brain and through it, his own body'.[4]
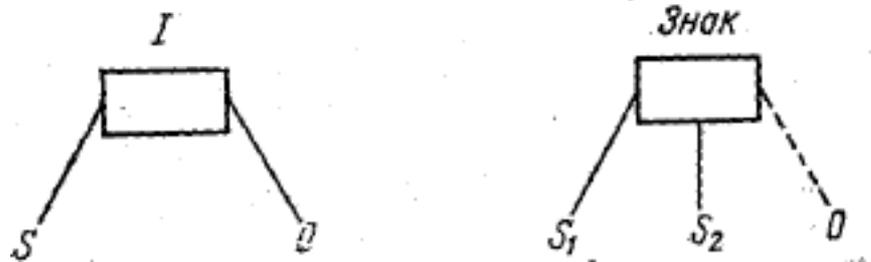
Figure 3: Scheme 1: Werkzeugdenken (Subject – Instrument – Object). Scheme 2: Double Mediation (Subject 1 - Subject 2 – Object - Sign).[5]

The use of signs restructures mental functions. If one may put it this way, socialisation of the brain and the individuation of behaviour are just another demonstration of *double mediation*, that is, of the simultaneity of external and internal movement in the process

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'Tool and Sign in the Development of Child' [1930d], p. 41.
[2] Lev Vygotsky, 'Concrete Human Psychology. An unpublished Manuscript by Vygotsky' [1929a], p. 63.
[3] Lev Vygotsky, 'Tool and Sign in the Development of Child' [1930d], p. 46.
[4] Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], pp. 54–55.
[5] Figure can be found in: Lev Vygotsky, 'Konkretnaia psikhologiia cheloveka' [Concrete Human Psychology] [1929b], p. 56. The titles to the schemes translate theirs discription in the original text. The term 'double mediation' is mine.

of development. Every mental function 'appears on the stage twice, in two planes',[1] as a social relation that becomes 'inter-mental' (function for other) and as an individual 'intra-mental' (function for itself). In fact, all mental functions show similar structural divergence. Each function only appears as a univocal thing.

Vygotsky thinks that in order to reveal this dialectical structure, each thing – thinking, speaking, memory and volition – should be transformed into a process. As I have pointed out earlier, the process constitutes a monist plan of activity:

> If we replace analysis of things with analysis of process, then the basic problem for consideration naturally becomes the genetic restoration of all the instances of development of the given process. Here, the principal task of analysis is restoring the process to its initial stage or, in other words, converting a thing into a process. This kind of experiment attempts to dissolve every congealed and petrified psychological form and to convert it into a moving, flowing flood of separate instances that replace one another. In short, the problem of such an analysis can be reduced to taking each higher form of behavior not as a thing, but as a process and putting it in motion so as to proceed not from a thing and its parts, but from a process to its separate instances.[2]

The understanding of the process shows that the appearance of a thing has nothing to do with the hidden structure that lies behind it. This does not mean that appearance is a false manifestation of essence. It rather demonstrates a contradiction between how a process appears and how it is structured. This is very close to Marx's analysis of the converted form – *verwandelte Form* – that describes the inversion of relations internal to the capitalist system, which takes place when a complex process is replaced by an indirect expression of the same thing. For instance, in the phenomena of the value form, the property of social relations is attributed to the things without any connection to human activity. It seems that Vygotsky applies *verwandelte Form* to the analysis of the internalisation of social relations in order to reveal the complex structural character of consciousness and behaviour. Here we rely on the article by Merab Mamardashvili dedicated to the concept of converted form in Marx. Mamardashvili claims that the

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], p. 106.
[2] Ibid., p. 68.

concept may function as an epistemological tool for analysing 'complex empirical systems' with the aim of 'disobjectivation' of the converted forms and 'sublation' of the unity of object and knowledge. Mamardashvili argues that *verwandelte Form*, once understood in this way, could inaugurate a new post-Cartesian possibility for philosophy as such. The idea of *verwandelte Form* allows one to criticise phenomenological reductionism and structuralist formalism by revealing a complex causal unity of object and subject in social forms.[1] Bakhurst also argues that Vygotsky borrowed his methodological approach to thinking and speech from the Marxian analysis of the commodity form. However, he does not explain how exactly the 'commodity form' appears in the Vygotskyian system.[2] I think that *verwandelte Form* may well explain the logic of the thinking and speech conversion.

Thus, thinking and speaking are not identical to each other, but appear as identical only when they are presented as a thing. However, when thinking and speaking has been transformed into a dynamic structure, it is evident that they are two independent functions that may agree or form a disjunctive unity. As mentioned above, speech could represent emotional states or the mechanical reproduction of communicational means, while thinking could be expressed in gestures, images or affects. Allocating non-verbal (*dorechevoe*) and verbal (*rechevoe*) thinking, Vygotsky tries to show the independent and nonhierarchical character of the relation between thinking and speech. Thinking and speech may contradict one another and can function together only thanks to the mediatory role of the sign. The external logic of speech derives from shared social activity and from dialogue with others; and this is revealed in the phenomena of talking out loud or in the egocentric speech of a child. The latter phenomenon is interpreted by Vygotsky not as autistic or asocial, but rather as an incipiently social form of speech. If Piaget sees the social as a violent intervention into the autistic world of a child, Vygotsky shows that egocentric speech is an intermediary form between outer (dialogic) and inner (monologist) speech[3] or a transitory point between transindividual and individual forms of subjectivity.

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[1] See: Merab Mamardashvili, 'Prevrashchennye formy. O neobkhodimosti irratsional'nykh vyrazhenii [Converted Forms. On the Need for Irrational Expressions], in *Kak ia ponimaiu filosofiiu* (Moscow: Progress, 1990), pp. 374–91.

[2] See: David Bakhurst, 'Vygotsky's Demons', in *The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky*, ed. by H. Daniels, M. Cole and J. V. Wersch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 50–76 (p. 59).

[3] See the chapter on *Egocentric Speech*: Lev Vygotsky, 'Thinking and Speech' [1934b], pp. 53–91.

The dialectical unity of the separated functions of thinking and speech appears only in meaning, mediated by the word.[1] A word is a generalisation, already a concept, and on the other hand it is a speech phenomenon. Here we have to point to the peculiarity of the Russian meaning of *slovo* (word). *Slovo* in Old Russian is not just the smallest unit of speech, but also a statement, a signifier and a specific form of telling.[2] One could say that *slovo* refers to a discourse and in this sense to logos.[3] Vygotsky's own explanation of what *slovo* means supports such an interpretation. He writes: 'When a person says 'mammal' […] [it] means that the person can develop an idea and in the final analysis that he has a world view, for to determine the place of a mammal in the animal world and the place of the animal world in nature means to have an integral world view'.[4] Elsewhere he makes a similar point: 'Any word is a theory. To name an object is to apply a concept to it'.[5] Intellectual speech (*rech'*) for Vygotsky is meaningful speech (*rech'*).

Thinking and speech thus represent a 'difficult unity',[6] or, in our terminology, a disjunctive unity. Thus the semantic plane of speech (*rech'*) develops in early life from the sentence to the word, while the phonic plane of speech develops from the word to the sentence. The word 'mama', for instance, means in infant speech the entire complex that includes adult, desired object and a particular situation, where adult and object appear as a structure. Simultaneously, a word uttered in spontaneous speech has yet to become a word in our more ordinary sense, and the child has to understand its singularity in order to build a sentence:[7] 'Speaking requires a transition from the internal to the external plane. Understanding presupposes movement in the reverse direction, from the external plane of speech to the internal'.[8] Vygotsky tries to show the relationality of thinking and speech as a process of the dialectical becoming of verbal thinking. From the point of

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[1] Ibid., p. 244–45.

[2] Max Vasmer, *Etimologicheskii slovar' russkogo iazyka* [Russian Dictionary of Word Etymology], trans. by O. N. Trubachev, 2nd edn., 4 vols (Moscow: Progress, 1987), vol. III, p. 673.

[3] We can encounter this unusual translation of *slovo* in Voloshinov's English publications: Valentin Voloshinov, 'Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art (Concerning Sociological Poetics)', in *Freudianism. A Marxist Critique*, trans. by I. R. Titunik (New York: Academic Press, 1976), pp. 93–116. See the original: Valentin Voloshinov, 'Slovo v zhizni i slovo v poezii: (K voprosam sotsiologicheskoi poetiki)' [Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art (Concerning Sociological Poetics)], *Zvezda*, 6, (1926), 244–67.

[4] Lev Vygotsky, 'On Psychological Systems' [1930b], p. 100.

[5] Lev Vygotsky, 'The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology: A Methodological Investigation' [1927d], p. 251.

[6] The expression 'difficult unity' is paraphrased in English translation: Lev Vygotsky, 'Thinking and Speech' [1934b], p. 250. See Russian Edition: Lev Vygotsky, 'Myshlenie i Rech'' [1934a], in *Sobranie sochinenii v 6 tomakh* (Moscow: Pedagogika, 1982 [1934]), vol. II, 5–294 (p. 306).

[7] Lev Vygotsky, 'Thinking and Speech' [1934b], pp. 250–55

[8] Ibid., p. 255.

view of becoming, the meaning of the word cannot be fixed and pre-given, but its dynamism and 'rootedness' depends on the functional role it plays in the act of thinking.[1]

In other words, there is a process of making thought, and the success of thought articulation is conditioned by the ability to mediate the internal motivations of a speaking person by producing new external effects – a discourse or purposeful behaviour grounded by speaking (*rechevoi*) activity. 'Development stands not for socialisation, but for individualisation of social functions (conversion of social relations to psychical functions)',[2] writes Vygotsky. Transition from outside inward or the 'ingrowing' (*vrashchivanie*) of a sign to the internal function of a psyche[3] represents *individuation*, or a complex psychological structure of double mediation that constantly modifies cultural behaviour.

The external-auxiliary means, such as fingers to count, a knot for remembering, a dice to decide or egocentric speech to think, gradually *ingrow* into the inner psychical structure. The outer mediation is inverted into the inner mediation, when auxiliary means are transformed into the complex psychological systems of inner signification. Auxiliary means begin to play the role of functions – such as voluntary memory (counting without fingers, remembering without a knot), volition (deciding without dice) verbal thinking (thinking to oneself or monologic *rech'*) – only after the procedure of *ingrowing*. Individualisation is an ongoing process of functional transformation and it seems that in contemporary terms it means *individuation* of *transindividual* relations. Thus we may conclude that individuation is a totality of inverted transindividual relations, or a disjunctive unity of modes of action.[4] Let me explain now what 'individuation' and 'transindividual' mean in contemporary terms.

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[1] Ibid., p. 249.

[2] I translated directly from the Russian original, due to linguistic problems in the English publication: Lev Vygotsky, 'Konkretnaia psikhologiia cheloveka' [Concrete Human Psychology] [1929b], p. 56. Compare: Lev Vygotsky, 'Concrete Human Psychology. An unpublished Manuscript by Vygotsky' [1929a], p. 61.

[3] *Vrashchivanie* sounds as unusual in Russian as *ingrowing* does in English: Vygotsky was the first to use it. In the collected works, *vrashchivanie* is translated differently from volume to volume. For unknown reasons, in the translation of *History of Higher Mental Function* it appears as 'revolution', and this 'revolution' is described as 'growing inward' or as the 'transition from external to internal'. See: Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], pp. 117–18. In the third volume, *vrashchivanie* is translated as 'ingrowing'; this seems to be the only appropriate translation: *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, trans. by R. Van Der Veer, R. W. Rieber and J. Wollock, 6 vols (New York, London: Plenum Press, 1987–99), vol. III: *Problems of the Theory and History of Psychology* (1997).

[4] In his notebook Vygotsky says that function is a mode of action: Lev Vygotsky, 'Concrete Human Psychology. An unpublished Manuscript by Vygotsky' [1929a], p. 58.

A field of the social unconscious or a pre-individual environment sets going a process of transfer: a inward transmission of a social relation taking place by means of an object. Paolo Virno analyses the relationality of the pre-individual means of individuation in a similar way. In this analysis Virno relies on Simondon, but he does not mention Vygotsky.[1] What Vygotsky names internalisation appears in Virno as a positive reification. Reification is 'incarnated in the objects of the relation, while fetishism is "a relation among objects"'[2]. In Virno's terminology, the Vygotskian objects that stand among the relations are transindividual objects. They reify relations between subjects. In Gilbert Simondon's vocabulary, Virno notes, 'among' is the pre-individual, the 'no-man's land'.[3] The concept of transindividual, which originally was coined by Simondon, also plays an important role in Étienne Balibar's study of Spinoza's ontology of social relations.[4] For Balibar, transindividuality, understood in Spinozist terms, is the order of connection of things and ideas that produces and reproduces, individuates and individualises individuals. In other words, it is a generative causality where the whole and the parts function as interconnected productive processes.[5] The transindividual not only inverts the idea of a separated and isolated individual 'I', according to which the 'I' is simply considered as the aftermath of social relations. Transindividual questions the logic of 'before' and 'after'. Pre-individual causality is not transcended in the individualised individual at a particular point of time and space, but constantly destabilises the autonomy of the individual: 'a given individual (let's call it "I") continuously abandons some part(s) of itself, while at the same time continuously incorporating some part(s) of others (let's call them "they"), provided this substitution leaves a certain "proportion" (or essence) invariant'.[6] The pre-individual spreads across the *pre-* and *after* to manifest *trans-*. In other words, the transindividual is distributed among individuals. Balibar's reading of Spinoza and Simondon is quite close to Vygotsky's own understanding of the social unconscious. Instead of the Freudian understanding of the unconscious, Vygotsky takes Høffding's theory of the unconscious, which 'corresponds with potential energy in physics'.[7] The social unconscious is the

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[1] Paolo Virno, *When Word Becomes Flesh. Language and Nature*, trans. by G. Mecchia (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2015), pp. 135–68.

[2] Ibid., p. 143.

[3] Ibid., pp. 143–44.

[4] Étienne Balibar, *Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality* (Delft: Eburon, 1997); Gilbert Simondon, *L'Individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information* (Grenoble: Millon, 2005).

[5] Étienne Balibar, *Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality*, p. 9.

[6] Ibid., p. 18.

[7] Lev Vygotsky, 'Mind, Consciousness, the Unconscious' [1927b], p. 116.

virtual, and it can reinforce itself through the dialectical chain of mediations that determines individuation. However, what seems to separate Simondon and Vygotsky is the insistence of the former on biological and physical analogies of individuation.[1] In other words, the Soviet fusion of Hegel and Spinoza introduces a historical and dialectical dimension that nature lacks. Nature is *causa effectum*, according to Vygotsky. There is no mediation and dialectics in nature, and when there is no mediation, there is no social life, and consequently, no individuation. Individuation is a social category.

In 1931 a student and collaborator of Vygotsky, Alexei Leontiev, managed to conduct an experimental investigation of memory that scientifically proved Vygotsky's philosophical hypothesis of mediated behaviour. A group of pre-school, school children and adults were asked to memorise words by two different means: with the help of the external aids and without auxiliary means. The experiment showed that mediation improves memorisation at the preschool age, but that mediated memory slows down at the school age, as the capacity of voluntary memorisation increases. Thus, two modes of behaviour – immediate and mediated – 'come together at the lower and upper limits, and form a figure whose shape is approximately that of a not quite regular parallelogram with two truncated angles'.[2] The so-called parallelogram of memory demonstrates that mediated and immediate memory develop independently from each other to form a contradiction that potentially and hypothetically could be seen as the dialectical unity of opposites – a unity in which externally mediated memory sublates mechanical unmediated memory and forms logical memory by means of the inner type of mediation.[3]

For Vygotsky, the parallelogram of memory shows the process of development of all functions that shape the psychological structure [4] of the individuated transindividual. This scheme represents a fairly simple dialectical logic of development. One may conclude that individuation ultimately looks like a smoothly working assemblage of automatisms made out of sublated external relations. The hypothetical parallelogram of development does indeed display a supra-conscious individual, who is able to mentally solve a differential equation, speak ten languages and offer decisions in response to even the most complicated ethical dilemma in two minutes. The supra-

[1] Gilbert Simondon, 'The Genesis of the Individual', in *Incorporations*, trans. by J. Crary, S. Kwinter and M. Cohen, (New York: Zone Books, 1992), pp. 297–319.
[2] Alexei Leontiev, 'The Development of Higher Forms of Memory', in *Selected Works of Alexei Nikolaevich Leontiev* (Ashland: Marxist Archives, Bookmasters, 2009), pp. 295-329 (p. 320).
[3] Ibid., pp. 323-327.
[4] Lev Vygotsky, 'Tool and Sign in the Development of Child' [1930d], p. 54.

conscious consciousness can transform the social unconscious into self-awareness. As we pointed out earlier, the unconscious for Vygotsky is the effect of the social relations, 'the unconscious is the potentially conscious'.[1]
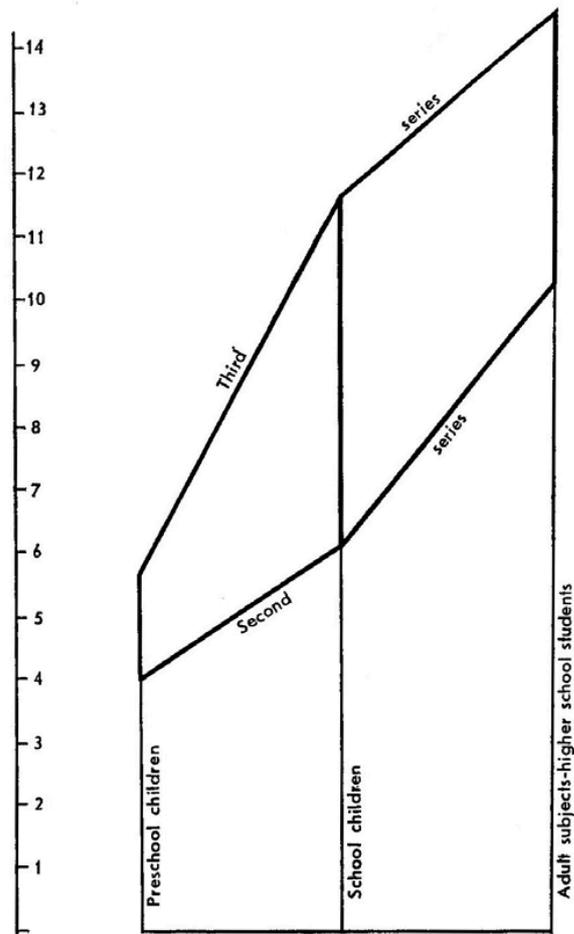
Figure 4: Theoretical or Hypothetical Parallelogram of Development.[2]

This is not Hegelian logic, but a 'harmonious' rationalism of the type of Bogdanov's total organisation, and one that most certainly would not apply to Pierre Bezykhov, who cannot arrive at a decision even after mediating his motives by playing solitaire and endlessly discussing the situation with different people. It represents a new human type,

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[1] Lev Vygotsky, 'Mind, Consciousness, the Unconscious' [1927b], p. 119.
[2] This figure can be found in: Alexei Leontiev, 'The Development of Higher Forms of Memory', p. 321. The title of the figure is mine.

capable of being ahead of an action or capable of mentally modelling any action in any situation, a kind of perfect mathematical and logical machine. This new human type is also *alio esse* of the external otherness; but the slavery of externality is restructured here through the generative accumulation of individual feedback.

At the same time, the production of ways and means for thought to master action – mastery over self[1] in Vygotsky's terms – is close to the Spinozist capacity to transform affects into purposeful and meaningful actions. In Vygotsky's own words, Spinoza 'claimed that man has power over his affects, that the intellect may change the order and connections of the passions and bring them into accord with the order and connections that are given in the intellect', and further:

> Spinoza […] correctly said, the knowledge of our affect changes it and modifies it from a passive state to an active one […] our affects act in a complex system with our concepts and he who does not know that the jealousy of a man who is bound up by the Islamic concepts about women's fidelity and of a man who is bound up by a system of opposite conceptions about women's fidelity is different, does not understand that this feeling is historical, that it changes its essence in different ideological and psychological environments.[2]

Vygotsky's dialectical psychology is affirmative. The mastery over self is the capacity of a thinking thing to reach the highest possible intensity; but perhaps this capacity could be revealed only under the rule of communism. It may well be that communism, taken from the subjective side, may appear here as Spinoza's ethical and political programme:

> In Spinoza you will find a theory (I am changing it somewhat) which says that the soul can achieve that all manifestations, all conditions relate to a single goal. A system with a single center may develop with a maximal integrity of human behavior. For Spinoza this single idea is the idea of god or nature. Psychologically this is not at all necessary. But a

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[1] The 'mastery over self' is translated as 'self-control', but there is a huge difference between *kontrol'* (control) and *gospodstvo* (mastery). In our view, it is better to keep the word 'mastery' here, also for the sake of the pseudo-Hegelian pathos of this concept. About mastery over self see: Lev Vygotsky, 'The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions' [1931b], pp. 207–20.
[2] Lev Vygotsky, 'On Psychological Systems' [1930b], p. 103.

person can indeed not only bring separate functions into a system, but also create a single center for the whole system. Spinoza demonstrated this system in the philosophical plane. There are people whose life is a model of the subordination to a single goal and who proved in practice that this is possible. Psychology has the task of demonstrating that the development of such a unified system is scientifically possible.[1]

In any case, the simplicity of the parallelogram shows that the dialectics of sublation and reaffirmation of social relations does not correspond to the complexity of individuation, to the drama of development. In reality, Pierre Bezykhov never acts reasonably and communism looks like Chevengur. Being ahead of its actual realisation also corresponds to Platonov's structure of post-revolutionary doubjects, but ironically, what 'existed ideally', or as the idea of communism in the *Tätigkeit* of the doubjects, is realised as the worst architectural model of communism. In commiserating with the builders of communism in Chevengur, one can say that they were better than the best of the bees, but the fact remains that the bad architect remains a bad architect, not a supra-conscious consciousness. The doubjected structure shows the actual drama of disorder between acting, doing and thinking, which does not necessarily end with the rational unity of word and act, because what has been done sometimes could not find its name, and what is to be done finds no model or practical context amid existing social relations.

Zavershneva also stresses the simplicity of the operational logic of mediation that in our analysis corresponds to the parallelogram of development. Referring to the new materials from Vygotsky's archive, she demonstrates that in period of 1930–34 he began to develop a semantic understanding of consciousness.[2] However, this does not challenge her to rethink the idea of subjective development. In spite of the great number of topological analogies in the analysis, Zavershneva repeats a familiar idea about vertical developmental levels that is dangerously close to diamat's 'Hegelian triad' of transition from nature (thesis) to culture (antithesis) and sublation of the latter in

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[1] Ibid., p. 107.
[2] See: Ekaterina Zavershneva, 'The Problem of Consciousness in Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Psychology', in *The Cambridge Handbook of Cultural-historical Psychology*, ed. by A. Yasnitsky, R. van der Veer and M. Ferrari, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 63–100; Ekaterina Zavershneva, 'Predstavlenie o smyslovom pole v teorii dinamicheskikh smyslovykh sistem L. S. Vygotskogo' [A Concept of Semantic Field in the Theory of Dynamic Conceptual Systems of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky], *Voprosy Psikhologii*, 4 (2015), 119–35.

freedom (synthesis)[1]. The late Vygotsky claims that the dynamics of subjectivity is a drama and that psychology could not present itself in terms of processes, but only in terms of drama.[2] This induces him to approach the actual drama of disorder. Moreover, the programme of relating all conditions to a single goal should not be confused with the successive mastering of mental functions that represents the passage from non-verbal to verbal thinking, because, as it was pointed out earlier, thought has a modal structure. Accordingly, we may try to radicalise the dialectical scheme of the parallelogram by pointing to the dramaturgy of the development.[3] Sublation, understood as *skhoronenie* (burying), indicates a spatial logic of the preservation of conflicting patterns of development, a history of the 'various genetic epochs'. In other words, a history of individuation holds within itself a landscape of the multifarious and overlapping times that take form of geological superimposition. Individuation resembles the earth's crust. The spatial landscape of all conflicts, the directions and traces of development, shapes the structural place of subjectivity within the social unconscious and within the individualising transindividual.

Vygotsky summarises the complex structure of individuation in his earlier work 'The Psychology of Art'. At first view, the book does not correspond to what Vygotsky did afterwards. However, if we look closely at the methodological instruments he uses, it is possible to conclude with complete confidence that his analysis of concrete works of art in many ways repeats his theory of individuation, which in this case is understood as the transformation of material – the everyday relations, stories, cases, situations, characters – into the *construction* of art. Art-form is the active force of transformation and conversion of the material.[4] This again bridges Vygotsky with organisational ontology and life-building.

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[1] Ekaterina Zavershneva, 'Problema svobody kak otlichitel'naia kharakteristika cheloveka v rabotakh L. S. Vygotskogo' [The Problem of Freedom as a Distinctive Characteristic of Man in Lev Semenovich Vygotsky], *Voprosy Psikhologii*, 5 (2015), 89–106 (pp. 103–5).

[2] Lev Vygotsky, 'Concrete Human Psychology. An unpublished Manuscript by Vygotsky' [1929a], pp. 67–72.

[3] The dramaturgy of development in Vygotsky has received some attention only recently. See: Manolis Dafermos, 'Reflection on the Relationship between Cultural-Historical Theory and Dialectics', *Psychological Science & Education*, 20, 3 (2015), pp. 16–24. Nikolai Veresov 'Forgotten Methodology. Vygotsky's Case', in *Methodological Thinking in Psychology: 60 Years Gone Astray?*, ed. by A. Toomela and J. Valsiner (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2010), pp. 267–95; *Dramatic Interactions in Education. Vygotskian and Sociocultural Approaches to Drama, Education and Research*, ed. by S. Davis, H. Grainger Clemson, B. Ferholt, S-M. Jasson and A. Marjanovic-Shane (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). However, these studies do not have the ambition of arriving at broader philosophical conclusions.

[4] Lev Vygotsky, *The Psychology of Art* [1925d], trans. by Scripta Technica, Inc. (Cambridge and London: The M.I.T. Press, 1971), pp. 145–49.

Analysing Bunin's short story *Gentle Breath*, Vygotsky sketches the scheme of the individuation of a material in the art form. *Construction* of the short story is represented as the curve of the art form and the material of the work as a straight line.[1] Stylistic functions that form a curved line make up the 'purposeful teleology' of the *Gentle Breath*. Here we can see how familiar Vygotskian terminology intervenes in the art field. The material is the story of a provincial middle-class girl who has a sexual relationship with a married man and then with a military officer, whom she betrays, and who shoots her dead at a railway station.[2] Bunin, Vygotsky argues, made out of the banality of the material – out of an insignificant and sad life – 'the gentle breath' of life,[3] by recomposing the elements of the narrative in such a way that the typical provincial story begins to signify the lightness and movement of life. Exactly this contradiction between content and form creates a strong aesthetical reaction. And this contradiction represents the violation of causality by means of dialectical leaps, whose basis is the accentuation of one element of the story and the suppression of another, or a jump from the end of the story to the beginning.[4] The 'dialectical struggle' between what is given as a material and how this material is recomposed or rather reaffirmed in the 'curve of the art form' is the same capacity to relate the external to one self.

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[1] The idea of the curve of the art form came from Shklovsky's analysis of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. See: Ibid., pp. 147–48.
[2] Ibid., p. 150
[3] Ibid., p. 155.
[4] Ibid., p. 160.
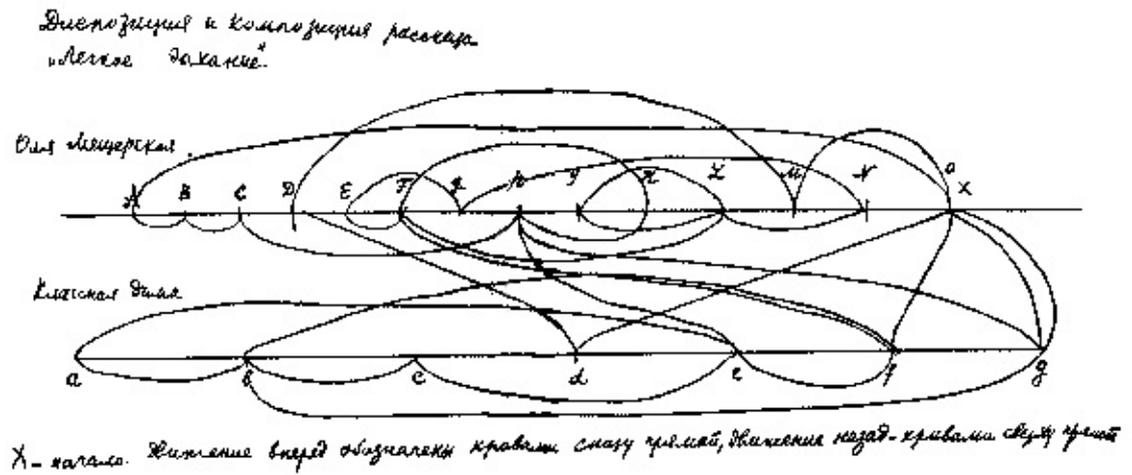
Figure 5: Disposition and Composition of the Short Story Gentle Breath.[1]

What the figure shows is the 'melody' or the curve of individuation. It is similar to the parallelogram's dialectical logic, but structurally it has a topological origin. Only the detective's eye of the analyst could map it. Indeed, such mapping would demand a work of anatomy (and this is precisely what Vygotsky calls it), in which the appearance and functioning of each element of the story is analysed in accordance with the material of a concrete life narration. The difference between the *parallelogram of development* and the *composition of development* lies in the logic of the disposition of a disjunctive unity of behaviour. The parallelogram shows a simplified ideal form that brings to the agreement conflicting functions, creating, at the very end, a picture of the self-aware subject; whereas the composition demonstrates the narrative of the conflict topologically, breaking with the linear logic of movement towards Understanding and Concept. It presents the geology and geography of the dialectical structure of internalised externality. Dialectics here is drawing, while psyche is an artwork.

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[1] This scheme can be found in the Russian edition: Lev Semenovish Vygotsky, *Psichologiia Iskusstva* [The Psychology of Art] [1925b] (Saint Petersburg: Azbyka, 2000), p. 209.

The systematic reading of Vygotsky's work rests on the reconstruction of his project for a *Das Kapital* for psychology. I suggest that Vygotsky's project is a critique of the 'political economy' of the bourgeois individual. Vygotsky uses *Capital* as an epistemological tool for the construction and elaboration of the theory of individuation. The principal core of this Soviet *Capital* is an immanent critique of past theories and systems that does not constitute a final destination, but rather a passage to a post-critical positive system of knowledge. This post-critical system appears under different names, such as experimental philosophy, dialectical psychology and general science. It rests on the idea of research – clinical, practical, empirical, pedagogical, experimental – and the synthesis of philosophy and science. The synthetic logic of this research also constitutes the unity of the elements of Spinoza's and Hegel's systems. It does not mean that Vygotsky follows Hegel and Spinoza in a strict and rigorous manner. Since *Capital* acts as a medium for such unity, only particular conceptual elements of both systems become part of the argument. The unity of Spinoza and Hegel through Marx allows Vygotsky to demonstrate the spatial causality of social mediation and to elaborate the dialectical and temporal dimension of the constant affirmation and reaffirmation of the human content. For instance, the phenomenological account of self-alienation and self-understanding in his work, as much as the conceptualisation of the external and the internal, comes from Hegel. At the same time, Spinoza helps him to conceptualise the concatenation of the biological and the social in terms of a monist plan of activity. The unity of body and mind, nature and culture, is seen from the perspective of process, performance and behaviour.

However, the conflict between Hegel and Spinoza expresses itself on the level of a clash between the concept of consciousness and the concept of individuation, the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of historical development. I contrast the two schemes of mediation – the parallelogram and the composition of development – in order to stress this conflict. The parallelogram of development points to the problem of the 'subordination to a single goal' of all the multi-directed times and spaces of the individuating social mechanisms. My reading tries to resolve this dilemma by stressing the importance of the place of development in the concept of temporality in Vygotsky's system. The elements of Hegelianism and Spinozism articulate a geological tempo-spatial environment of social mediation. The environment unfolds delays and leaps in

the ongoing process of formation of the mental functions. The asymmetrical and inverted logic of the exchange between the two elements of the environment, i.e. the social unconscious and the individuating consciousness, creates polyphonic layers of mediatory functions in the cultural logic of behaviour. Although individuation is formulated as a process of conversion of the social unconscious, and is meticulously studied from the side of the psyche, we may suggest that the scheme of composition proposes not only a theory of the subject, but also a materialist ontology that rests on a geographic geology of mediation of the kind we have just described. This, according to our analysis, corresponds to communist individuation.

The logic of mediation derives from the poverty of biological material. For Platonov, poor life is immediately given in the experience of social poverty. This is due to the fact that the poor life has to sustain life. The question of immediacy of poverty drives Vygotsky's distinction between the evolutionary logic of nature and the dialectical logic of culture. For Vygotsky thinking and speech are social means of mediating the poverty of the material. Accordingly, all mental functions have various modes of expression and particular instances of articulation. The internalisation of the totality of social relations constitutes a multifarious temporality of individuation and drives the ongoing logic of composition and recomposition of the individuating transindividual. The assembly of functions develops historically in relation to particular social forms. Functions are not pre-existing entities, but dynamic modes of action. There is no evidence that Vygotsky encountered Platonov, but no one grasps better the temporal delay between thinking and being that takes place in Platonov's world of doubjects. In fact, all the higher functions form disjunctive unities similar to the functioning of compartmentalisation in Platonov. Vygotsky shows that the separation of the 'I' from the will, or thinking from speech, is a socially determined dialectical split that characterises the processual structure of individuation. He investigates not the birth of *rational subjectivity*, as many would think, but the fragmentation and dialectical terror of *doubjectivity*. The history of the doubject unfolds Vygotsky's dialectics of social mediation and his monist ontology of activity. Similarly, Vygotsky's theory tells us what it means to be communist without communism. Individuation as communisation tends to the 'adequate form' or reaches its highest possible intensity and mastery in relation to self. The psyche as an artwork is a communist psyche. Or, in other words, in the post-revolutionary pre-communist society there is a tendency to communisation.

Conclusion

This thesis provided a transdisciplinary perspective on early Soviet epistemologies and constructed a set of interrelated concepts which led the argument to an articulation of the materialist ontology of poor life. A principal determination of the thesis' general construction was the establishment of a triangular constellation of Alexander Bogdanov, Andrei Platonov and Lev Vygotsky out of the post-revolutionary epistemological milieu of Marxist theory. This constellation arranged the following concepts – life-building and construction, labouring being and montage, doubject and homo duplex, negative immediacy of poverty and social mediation of the 'poor material' – into the mutually dependent constitutive elements of the materialist ontology of poor life.

The argument unfolded chapter by chapter, but simultaneously disclosed the core components of the Soviet epistemologies – the concept of system and method – across the chapters. The synchronisation of the lineal and horizontal directions of the argument brought to light the mediating role of Andrei Platonov's system in relation to Alexander Bogdanov and Lev Vygotsky. This corresponded to the exposition of the problematic of poverty. The entry point to the constellation unfolded in the middle of the thesis through the literary and theoretical writings of Platonov. The concept of poor life, thus, did not appear until the third chapter or until we were familiar with the logic of organisational ontology and the form of the proletarian encyclopaedia. Bogdanov's theory of labour and organisation explicated the philosophical background of Platonov's concepts and provided the approach to method and form in his work. In its turn, Vygotsky's work proposed to articulate poor life as a material for social mediation. Consequently, the materialist ontology of poor life can be articulated post factum, when the three systems were reconstructed and observed from different epistemological and conceptual angles.

This brought us to the central proposition of the thesis. Poor life is a building material for object and subject, the physical and the psychical composition of bodies, relations and serial complexes of activities. It expresses degrees and logics of organisation and structuring on the molecular, biological and social levels. The constitutive unit of poor life has different names in the corresponding systems of thought. It is an element of experience in Bogdanov's philosophy, a *veshchestvo* (stuff or German *Stoff*) of negative organizational spontaneity in Andrei Platonov, a compositional and dialectical structure of process and activity in Lev Vygotsky. Taken

together, these three systems introduced the principal role of the organising force of being that shapes life-building, constitutes negativity of compartmentalisation and diversifies the 'poor material' of the organic life in the social realm of mediated activity.

The proposed constellation showed concatenations, interruptions and mediations between the corresponding members. Platonov shares with Bogdanov a conception of the proletarian encyclopaedia and the idea of post-revolutionary knowledge production from the standpoint of the proletariat. Accordingly, the monist unity of subject and object in the practical and operational logic of division and composition is understood both as a property of self-organising matter and as a composition of senses and impressions into the historically and socially determined montage of sensibility and perception. Montage constitutes mode of vision and proletarian thinking. Platonov deviates considerably from Bogdanov when he deconstructs the concept of the proletariat and emphasises the problem of declassification. Hence social life-building encounters the negative elemental spontaneity of disjunction and compartmentalisation that shapes antagonistic conglomerations of subject and object. Consequently, Bogdanov's rationalism of universal organisation turns out as a negative materialist ontology of poor life.

Vygotsky's *Das Kapital* for psychology explicates another instance of the encyclopaedic systematicity. The unity of scientific research and philosophical method constitutes a project of critique of the 'political economy' of the bourgeois individual and a post-critical research perspective on a communist individuation. Vygotsky and Platonov come to agreement when they are considered from the point of view of compartmentalisation and temporal delay. Vygotsky's structural dialectics of individuation is very close to the logic of doubling, splitting and becoming that takes place in Platonov's encyclopaedia of doubjects, torn apart by the contradictory temporality of being ahead of time and living in the present. I claimed that Platonov's exposition of poor life through the concept of labour, as much as his dialectics of space and time, thinking and speech, thought and act finds further articulation in the Vygotsky's concept of 'place of development'. Similarly to Platonov, Vygotsky 'dialectisized' the relationship between thinking and extension arriving as a result to the geological and geographical structure of individuation. However, unlike Platonov, Vygotsky stresses that the given 'poor material' is a starting point for the social mediation that intensifies a structural disjunctive unity of individualising processes.

There was no point of immediate contact between Bogdanov and Vygotsky, but they met each other through Platonov. First of all, Bogdanov provided access to Platonov's system through the concept of 'life-building'. Platonov enabled to reformulate Bogdanov's organizational ontology in terms of negativity of poor life. Finally, Vygotsky reaffirmed this negativity in the light of the ontology of mediation. This dialectical communication excluded a successive ascension of one or another member of the constellation. Instead, it stressed differences and conflicts between them. Lastly, each system assumes communisation of poverty by means of the organisation of the rational totality in Bogdanov, accumulative conglomeration of the poor classes in Platonov and mediation of the given material of poverty through social relations in Vygotsky.

Three intermediary steps corresponded to the articulation of our central proposition. Firstly, I proposed the strategy of a counter-narrative for Soviet Marxism that shifted the perspective form the analysis of the deviating dissident, liberal or anti-communist outside of the official doctrine to the articulation of the post-revolutionary situation as constitutive of the epistemic conditions of Soviet Marxism. The thesis started with a set of claims addressed to the historically formed division between 'Eastern' and 'Western' Marxism and critically examined the consequences of this division for the study of the early Soviet philosophy and theory. In the post-1991 geopolitical context this division mutates and reappears on various levels of knowledge production, affecting the understanding, interpretation and conceptualisation of Vygotsky, Bogdanov and Platonov. I examined various approaches and positions, bringing together the post-Soviet and Western-European accounts of the problem. This critical review functioned as a formulation of the research problem and introduction of Russian publications into the international context.

Secondly, I stated that the logic of the synthesis of previous knowledge on the basis of Marx's critique governs encyclopaedic forms of thinking in Soviet Marxism. I claimed that the examined post-revolutionary epistemological constructions demonstrate a post-critical thought for the post-revolutionary society. Instead of asking 'how' (to criticise, to approach, to understand) they return to the old pre-critical question of 'what is' (matter, language, body, thinking) and reformulate this question in Marxist post-critical terms.

Let us take Platonov as an example of such thinking. In Platonov, labour is the substance of poor life and poor life is the planetary state of poverty, historically

conditioned by the capitalist mode of production. Therefore, a labouring human is a mode of labouring nature. Thinking negatively emerges as an interruption of labour, as alienation from the 'labouring parts' of the poor life. We see how far from Marx such speculations are. However, they are framed in a Marxist manner, because Platonov assumes the question of labour and exploitation to be central. There is a logical affinity here with Bogdanov's project. Bogdanov holds that empiricism advances the conception of materialism, but it suffers from a lack of understanding of social reality. This is why he applies the concepts of labour, use value and practice to the scientific methodologies of Mach and Avenarius.

The 'epistemological break' of the post-revolutionary situation consists in the fact that it is a theory for the post-revolutionary situation. It targets the question of system and proposes a new form of Soviet encyclopaedia. What distinguishes Hegel's encyclopaedia of philosophical sciences or the nineteenth century synthetic philosophies and systems from its Soviet variant are the principle, purpose and form of systematisation. The Soviet encyclopaedia rests on the principle of socialisation of science and knowledge. It assumes a collective mode of production and corresponds to Bogdanov's Proletkult, Platonov's factory of literature and Vygotsky's laboratory. The purpose of this encyclopaedia is not merely clarification of knowledge through guiding method or discipline, but rather reformulation of knowledge in Marxist terms: 'the communist deciphering of world relations'[1] and formation of the proletarian point of view. This distinguishes the encyclopaedia also from the orthodox Soviet Marxism, which takes Marx's system as a point of departure for scholastic exercises and endless formulation and reformulation of tenets. The encyclopaedic work of deciphering proposes experimental models of writing and conceptualising, which blur the threshold where philosophy begins and literature ends or where politics starts and philosophy stops. Although not without dogmatism of the 'withering away' and 'bringing to the final end' of all the logics and social forms of the past, organisational ontology expresses a productive historical moment of a post-critique by its very claim to build and construct.

Thirdly, I distinguished two instances of the examined epistemological constructions: Empirio-Marxism of Bogdanov and structural dialectics of Vygotsky based on a Spinozist-Hegelianism. In Bogdanov, the serial chain of sensation,

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[1] Dziga Vertov, Kino-Eye [1922], in *The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, trans. by K. O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 60-79 (p. 66). Translation is corrected.

perception and act produces a monism of practice or labour causality where object and subject appear as the concatenation of organisational and disorganisational processes. What remains of Marx is a practical account of social activity and self-organisation, while the empiricist problematic reformulates an understanding of materialism in terms of a productive process of life-building. The Marxist background of his philosophy also affects an understanding of sensibility as a historically formed dynamic composition of life complexes. The organisation of senses is simultaneous with the organisation of things and orders of relations. The logic of organisation applies, therefore, to any kind of social activity, including art production and scientific research.

This thesis provoked a radical rethinking of previous interpretations of the Soviet avant-garde and gave an account of the principle role of organisational ontology for an understanding of Constructivism and Productivism. I claimed that these theories rest on the philosophical background of Empirio-Marxism. Accordingly, construction and production of things is not a creation of art objects but organisation of 'material culture', while selection of colour, material and word assumes not an aesthetic, but a philosophical and political approach to the problem of art. Empirio-Marxism establishes theoretical relationships between Platonov and the Soviet avant-garde. Platonov contributes to the debates on facts and means of production of facts, develops the problem of observation and the observed, and elaborates a proletarian mode of vision.

Vygotsky develops an epistemological approach to Marx's *Capital.* This allows him to bring together a Spinozist account of activity and a Hegelian phenomenology of self-alienation. Vygotsky departs from similar to Bogdanov resolution of dualism, but the unity of object and subject in his system assumes different logic. Sensation, perception and act form the dialectical process of interiorisation and evoke reversibility of ego. A simple chain of stimuli-reaction or sensual-perceptive reflection breaks up by means of social contact when the artificial social stimuli or auxiliary tool intervenes and changes reaction from passive perception to active reaffirmation. A socially constructed response to stimuli diversifies and expands modes of behaviour, changing development from evolutionary to dialectical. The internalisation sets out a multi-directional restructuring of organic materiality to form a new dialectical structure of cultural behaviour. The social structure is a field for exchange and transformation of the given set of relations into active individualising processes and functions. Internalisation, conversion and reaffirmation of social relations into the modes of action reformulates a

dialectical process of becoming in terms of transformative reciprocity between preindividual social means and mediated functions of the individuation.

This reading of Vygotsky questioned linear and successive understanding of psychological development and shifted perspective from the concept of consciousness to the problem of individuation. The principle foundation of such reading was the establishment of the connections between the early and late Vygotsky, and problematisation of the difficult unity of Hegel and Spinoza in his system. Taken together with Platonov's concept of doubject, structural dialectics of multi-directional development of mental functions – the outer logic of appropriation and the inner movement of reaffirmation – explained the disjunctive unity of functions and, in Platonov's terminology, the logic of 'labouring parts'. Compartmentalisation of mental functions and duplicity of the social and the individual characterise the temporal and spatial dynamics of the individualising structure. The complexity of interiorisation unfolded as a dramaturgy of development with unknown destination and unpredictable negotiation between temporal delays and spatial localisations of mental functions.

The present thesis delivered a materialist understanding of social poverty. The mechanisms of declassification in the post-revolutionary context become a matter of organizational perspective. The materialist ontology of poor life is a special case of Soviet organisational ontology. Thus, the problem of poverty links social and ontological instances of organisation. Empirio-Marxism and structural dialectics ground two principals of organizational ontology: constructivist and productivist life-building and the disjunctive negativity of individuation. The immediate relationship between the organic materiality of being and social poverty brings about the logic of mediation. The compositional and structural understanding of psychical and mental processes assumes modification of the poor material and communisation of poverty. Poor life generates properties of the social and the social modifies all properties of poor life.

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