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## **Introduction: Antiquity and Modernity of Soviet Marxism**

Fredric Jameson once pointed out that the Marxist tradition is already our Antiquity due to its significance and historical distance. This distance allows us to view it from the outside, and to reinvent Marxism for our own time. The same could be said about the most paradoxical version of this tradition—Soviet Marxism. However, there are particular qualities that single it out from the “classical antiquity” of Marxist tradition. Even internationally known Soviet works (by Vygotsky, Bakhtin, amongst others) are not perceived as belonging to a unitary theoretical tradition, and are even less associated with Marxism and the heritage of 1917. It may therefore seem that the October Revolution of 1917, although being recognized as the key event of the “short twentieth century,” has not created a universally recognizable and consolidated body of thought. It is, therefore, a difficult task to outline this field, and this is why the current lens of historical distance might be helpful in attempting to grasp both this unity and the richness of its internal differentiations.

While in the 1920s and 1930s there were fruitful international engagements of leading “Western” Marxists such as Georg Lukács and Walter Benjamin with the post-revolutionary intellectual conjuncture, after the Second World War—under the conditions created by the Cold War—the philosophy in the USSR was mostly known only as an exotic object labelled as “Eastern,” or “Soviet” Marxism. In the presupposed dichotomy, “Western” Marxism was typically attributed an unconditional innovative value, whereas Soviet Marxism was seen under the vast umbrella of dogmatism or Stalinist diamat. It was mostly scholars from “Sovietology” or Slavic Studies who engaged with Soviet philosophy from an international perspective. However, the optics of this research, at times colonial and exoticizing, squeezed it into the narrowed framework of intellectual history in the best case, and, in the worst, subjected it to purely ideological use, making it completely de-linked from current philosophical debates. Finally, any achievement of Soviet thought seemed to disappear in the

aggressive anticommunist discourses that were coined by dissident milieus in the USSR and Eastern Europe before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. There have been some exceptions. For example, with respect to some key figures of Soviet thought, such as Evald Ilyenkov, over the past decades there has been a revival of reception of his work both in the former USSR and internationally, by Marxist scholars, philosophers, and intellectual historians. Yet most of this work still remains in the realm of specialized interest, and this field still lacks new endeavors that would make it more appealing for the broad contemporary readership interested in radical philosophy and the intellectual legacy of the “Soviet experiment.”

The best works of Soviet thought, born during the “big bang” of the October Revolution, were no less radical, experimental, and heuristic than, say, *Negative Dialectics* or *Anti-Oedipus* in their historical times, and perhaps, with their critical attitude to Western Marxism, they anticipated the conjuncture of today, where “post-68” thought seems to have been exhausted and assimilated by the culture of late capitalism, and the post-Frankfurt School of thought seems to be too melancholic and etiolated to address upcoming political and intellectual agendas. The global situation of today—the continuing economic and political crisis, as well as the crisis of ideas within the formerly “Western” Marxist and radical thought now put under pressure of new “speculative” and apolitical philosophies—determines the urgent task to highlight and productively rethink Soviet theory.

A contemporary reading of Soviet philosophical problems constitutes the core of the contributions to this issue of *Stasis*. It motivates Pascal Sévérac’s substantial parallel reading of Spinoza and Vygotsky, which produces a fruitful intervention into the debates on consciousness, relationality, and affect; and Artemy Magun’s analysis of Boris Porshnev’s theory of anthropogenesis, based on the concepts of suggestion and “counter-suggestion,” established an original contribution to the philosophical theory of negativity. The renowned Italian philosopher Antonio Negri’s has authored the foundational text on Evgeny Pashukanis, the most important Soviet legal theorist of the 1920s to 1930s. With a new Postface, written especially for this issue of *Stasis*, the text provides an insight into Negri’s own political philosophy, which, along with its other dimensions, seeks to analyze institutional-juridical frames of the global “Empire.” A similar direction is taken in the dialogue with significant post-Soviet philosopher Valery Podoroga, staged by Alexei Penzin and Keti Chukhrov. The conversation addresses the questions of political and intellectual contexts of late Soviet thought, and attempts to classify its main discourses, arguing for richness and diversity of their contents while projecting the main lines of them into today’s debates.

The core of Soviet theory was mostly variations on Hegelian Marxism but with an original reconsideration of existing ideas and new theories,

which emerged in the atmosphere of great social experimentation. In the 1920s, it had already begun to formulate the dilemmas that would only much later become a focus of “Western” Marxist philosophy—questions such as “Hegel or Spinoza?” or “Dialectic or immanent thought?” were only debated in the West from the 1960s onwards. Yet as Andrey Maidansky, Alex Levant, and Maria Chehonadskih show in their contributions, the Soviet thinkers resolved these dilemmas in an innovative way, with attempts to produce a theory that would avoid the traps of this alternative, in a Marxist anthropology of labor and activity theory, as well as in producing a new materialist ontology. An exemplary case of this Soviet mode of conflating Spinoza and Hegel is the text by Evald Ilyenkov entitled “Cosmology of the Spirit” (written in the early 1950s), published with an erudite commentary by Giuliano Vivaldi. In a stunning and experimental *tour de force* of his argument, the author finds dialectical and materialist justifications for the Spinozist proposition that thought is a necessary attribute of matter. Ilyenkov asks ambitious and speculative questions, such as what will be the role of thought (or a human/nonhuman collective intelligence) after the achievement of communism, and what is the function of thought in the whole ontological machine of the universe. A parallel development of philosophical problems is not exhausted by the debates on Spinoza and Hegel. Thus, the application of structuralist and psychoanalytic epistemologies to Marx in “Converted Forms,” the rich and dense text by Merab Mamardashvili, bridges it with similar philosophical strategies from French Althusserianism. These two different manifestos of Soviet materialism—Ilyenkov’s and Mamardashvili’s—are for the first time available in English for international readership.

In the field of aesthetics, Soviet theory was also able to produce daring and ambitious propositions, undertaking a radical critique of modernist culture—most prominently, in the works by another giant of the Soviet thought, Mikhail Lifshitz, life-long friend of Georg Lukács, whose work is reflected in the conversation “Marx vs. Marxism, Marxism vs. Marx.” Both Ilyenkov and Lifshitz can be called faithful Leninists in their philosophy—given their militant interventionism, uncompromising polemics with the ideologies of positivism and the sophisticated lures of the capitalist modernisms of their time, which are still challenging and relevant for today’s debates. It is important to note that the formation of the Soviet Marxism in the fifties and sixties is difficult to understand without the context of intellectual debates about materialism and monism before and after the October Revolution. Evgeni Pavlov discusses a provocative fusion of empiricism and Marxism in Alexander Bogdanov through his political and theoretical debates with Lenin.

Unlike “Western” Marxism, Soviet philosophy was not grounded on the post-Kantian idea of critique (in that case, of bourgeois culture and society). Its affirmative and speculative character emerged on the basis of the revolutionary rupture of 1917 with the old society of the Tsarist Em-

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pire and the rest of the capitalist world. Yet, the philosophical design of a new world rests on the international legacy of the classics of materialist thought. In the same fashion, the editors and contributors of this issue strived to propose a rupture with persisting Cold War narratives by restoring the dialectics of the old and the new and linking Soviet “antiquity” to modernity and its political and theoretical struggles, which remain acute until the present day.

The co-editors and the authors of the issue are particularly pleased to publish their work to coincide with the hundredth anniversary of the Great October Revolution.