

The Comrades of the Past: The Soviet Enlightenment Between Negation and Affirmation

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Abstract: The paper constructs a concept of Soviet Enlightenment through the debate between Lenin and Bogdanov on the question of what is proletarian culture and what is the relationship of the proletariat to the bourgeois knowledge. The paper starts with the overview of Bolshevik's political theory of spontaneity and organization. By referring to Adorno, Lukács and Lifshitz I show that this philosophical binary points to the dark rationalist side of the Soviet Enlightenment, but at the same time demonstrate that this couple produces a critical reinvestigation of what is the now and what is the past. From here I try to elaborate two models of the Soviet Enlightenment encyclopedic knowledge production that equally calls to reformulate the past systems in the proletarian terms, but differs in the understanding of the type of relationality that bridges the past and the proletarian present. Lenin's model rests on the "use value" of the historical past and proposes to appropriate it for the Socialist use, while Bogdanov's model treats past in terms of continuous comradeship between the labour of generations. I conclude by elaborating the idea of the comradeship in its relation to history, communism and knowledge production.

Keywords: Soviet Enlightenment, Lenin and Bogdanov, proletarian culture, comradeship, encyclopaedia, dialectics of the old and the new.

'It is not without reason that the proletarian avant-garde, irreconcilable in relation to the "cooperation of classes" is so willingly, where it depends on him, puts monuments to the great creators and workers of the past, who were not proletarians at all. He becomes conscious of himself in the succession of their work. They are comrades in the great task of humanity'¹.

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¹ Bogdanov 1920, p. 49.

Prelude: A Communist Palace of the Soviet Enlightenment:

A small 1922 pamphlet of the Ukrainian author Fedor Dunaevsky 'The Tasks of Enlightenment' subsists in the Public Historical Library of Russia (Moscow) only in the microcopy version. It is a curious document of the early Soviet imaginary about the communist future that enables us to understand why the word "enlightenment" bears a specific meaning in the Soviet context. The pamphlet opens with a description of an enormous palace, where children learn and study through a spontaneous play with each other. They wander about and pay attention to what interests them most. The evolution of species, the labour tools, the ancient art and history, and even the philosophy of Socrates may catch their attention. A child meets the workers of the palace at each step of mining knowledge. They help to comprehend information that has been extracted completely independently and in a way and order that suits the child. Through practice, laboratory experiments and group readings, the youngsters obtain not a degree, but the opportunity to move to the upper floors, where knowledge deepens and intellectual demands rise. However, it is up to a concrete individual to decide on which floor to remain and how long, if not forever, to stay in the palace². For some, the best floor to be in is where the public debates take place. Here, one can create a group and propose any kind of social project³. Others may join the 'enlightenment army' or the Department of Enlightenment and help remote villages and regions with pretty much everything from building roads to creating libraries and schools. Remarkably, propaganda has no role in these activities⁴. Finally, some may prefer to escape in 'the staff of stoicism', museum of art or in the library, which leads to the cubicle with an open high ceiling designed to watch stars⁵. It seems that the palace embraces not only the entire life of the communist humanity, but also somehow concludes the historical development of life on earth.

Unlike in many other utopias of the early 1920s, Dunaevskii's communist humanity is not colonizing space, educating and communizing the outside world. It neither strives to invent the best economic model for social reproduction. The palace is the model, but Dunaevskii does not explain the economic basis of its existence. His humanity or maybe we can even say post-humanity locks itself in the closed structure of a museum, where mastery of reason serves not to a progress, but to a useless enjoyment of knowledge that has been accumulated throughout

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² See: Dunaevskii 1922, p. 8-25.

³ Ibid, p. 30-31.

⁴ Ibid, p. 36.

⁵ Ibid, p. 40.

history. It is a vacation from capitalism: people only read books, enjoy art and produce things to sustain this state of the post-historical happiness. Their polytechnic, in Marxian sense, model of education knows only a spiral comprehension of the holistic totality or the world spirit. They are Hegelians and Spinozists at the same time. Thus, the main problem that preoccupies the philosophers of the palace is the common grounds of the 'epistemological constructions of the Upanishads, Plato's 'Phaedrus' and Spinozian 'Ethics'.⁶ Here, the communist humanity functions as both a museum object of itself and as a subject, a research institute that reaches a post-historical self-understanding.

The image of Dunaevskii's enlightenment may seem to contradict to the progressist, rationalist and teleological pathos of the socialist 'cultural building' – the term, which one Soviet author uses to identify the differences between the bourgeois and communist enlightenments⁷ – that negates past in a futurist manner – throws off Gogol, Pushkin and Tolstoy from the steamboat of modernity, proposes death of the old social forms, abolishes classes, celebrates new technologies and productive force determinism. All of these to arrive to the purified proletarian future as soon as possible. And all of these is a part of the programme of the Soviet Enlightenment with its agitprop, liquidation of illiteracy, scientific organization of labour and industrialization that aimed to liberate proletariat from the prejudices of the capitalist past and reshape social relations accordingly. I would like to focus on this contradiction and try to answer why the Soviet Enlightenment rejects the past and tends to progress from the now, but at the same time looks back and places this back in front.

Two Models of Enlightenment:

A Conscious Worker and the Proletarian Culture.

The typical expression of the cultural building based on the rejection of the old social forms would be a Leninist political theory of a conscious worker and Alexander Bogdanov's concept of proletarian culture. Both theories propose to fight illiteracy and 'backwardness' of the peasants and workers or philosophically speaking spontaneity (*stikhiinost'*), by means of rationalisation and organisation of the entire class into the party form in case of the earlier, and into the autonomist proletarian movement (Proletkul't)⁸ in case of the latter.

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⁶ Dunaevskii 1922, p. 64.

⁷ Povzner 1919, p. 93.

⁸ Bogdanov was born in 1873 in Grodno province (now Poland). He was expelled from Moscow University

The Russian word *stikhiinost'* means not only spontaneity, but also elements of nature – *stikhiia*, the chaos. 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.⁹ If Lenin employs *stikhiinost'* for the conceptualisation of the disorganised masses as opposed to the discipline of the proletarian party, Bogdanov, a philosopher of the Proletkult movement uses it to discuss the lowest level of organisation in physical and social life. 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.

after his arrest for activist-related activities and was exiled first to Tula (Central Russia) in 1894 and then to Vologda (Northwest Russia) in 1899. In Tula, Bogdanov led a Marxist reading group for the local factory workers. He joined the Bolsheviks in 1903 and was expelled in 1910 from the central committee of the party for his ultra-left positions. 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. In 1917 he established Proletkul't (Proletarian Cultural-Enlightenment Organisations) that existed from 1917 to 1932 and had, with its half a million members by 1919, art, literary, theatre and scientific studios in many cities and regional centres. In 1920 Bogdanov was pushed out of the Proletkul't's Central Committee. He left the organisation in 1921, because it became subordinate to the party's cultural politics. The end of Proletkul't's autonomy marks continuation of the political struggle of Lenin against Bogdanov. By the end of the 1920s, the new Proletkul't had become supporter of traditional art and Stalin's politics. Bogdanov died after an unsuccessful blood-transfusion experiment in 1928. See Bogdanov's biography in: Haupt and Jean-Jaques Marie 1974, pp. 286–92. About early Proletkul't see: Fitzpatrick 1970, pp. 89–100.

9 See: Lenin 1902.

Then, once again, we would obtain physical experience, with its objective – i.e. socially worked-out and socially useful – regularity.¹⁰

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. Thus, the party form becomes an ontology of self-organising matter and labour. Bogdanov sees a task of the post-revolutionary society in the construction of a new communist totality through universalization of human and non-human experience. As we can see, despite the controversy between Bogdanov and Lenin¹¹, both remain Bolsheviks, but with a peculiar difference in that the dissident Bolshevism of Bogdanov has ambition to change the universe, while Lenin's pragmatism modestly relies on a capacity of the party to organize socialism in the context of the pre- and post-revolutionary social chaos.

However, at a deeper level of his philosophy and politics, Bogdanov's dissidence shines with nuances and significantly deviates from classical Bolshevism. In his theory, the transition from capitalism to communism assumes the transformation of social relations from hierarchical, dualist 'authoritarianism' to a state of 'monist' 'comradely cooperation', where the division of labour and subordination are abolished. 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 bourgeois authoritarian social relations, the dualism or the split between organising and executing function in production. The new form of labour relations, a 'comradely cooperation', 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 Proletkul't 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.¹²

Bogdanov stresses that each class produces its own culture and point of view. If the intellectuals by definition reproduce authoritarian relations in their party structures and everyday behaviour, industrial

10 Bogdanov 2016, p. 219.

11 About political conflict between Lenin and Bogdanov see: Sochor, 1988.

12 Bogdanov 1920.

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 operations.¹³ The final abolition of authoritarianism 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'¹⁴. The 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 social life. Therefore, for Bogdanov, the elimination of spontaneity, affects and contradictions is communism.

Bogdanov thinks that such homogeneous proletarian culture or universal organisation requires one understandable language that could resolve all complexities of knowledge into simple schemes and structures. Bogdanov, as well as Lenin and Lunacharsky, supported the Romanisation of the Russian language. He 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).¹⁵

As it was pointed out earlier, Bogdanov's Proletkul't ontologises Lenin's conscious worker, a political concept closely linked to the idea of the party avant-garde. Proletkul't can be compared with an institution that cultivated worker's aristocracy. For instance, the theorist of productivist art, Boris Arvatov, worked as a secretary of the Moscow Proletkul't, while an artist Alexander Rodchenko, a poet and writer Segei Tretyakov, and a filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, among others, collaborated with Proletkul't studios and lectured Proletkultist workers¹⁶. This has been acknowledged only in Soviet publications, where artistic avant-gardism is associated exclusively with Bogdanov's ideas and political

13 Ibid, pp. 33–42.

14 Ibid, pp. 37–39.

15 See: Bogdanov 1925, pp. 328–32.

16 An informative overview of Bogdanov's and Proletkul't's art theory in relation to productivist art can be found in: Zalambani 1998. See also a case study of Eisenstein's and Tretyakov's involvement in the Proletkul't theatre: Raunig 2007, pp. 149–162.

views.¹⁷ It is not surprising then that Lunacharsky, the first commissar of Narkompros¹⁸, compares the party avant-garde with enlightened absolutism:

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.¹⁹

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. In this sense, Lunacharsky's 'enlightened absolutism' could be understood as a compromise between the statism of Lenin and the autonomism of Bogdanov. Nevertheless, take as a whole, the project of the Soviet Enlightenment was supposed to culminate in the realm of rational thinking.

For Lukács and Adorno with Horkheimer, precisely these aspects of Enlightenment, i.e. cultivation of reason and awareness, elimination of the irrational and instinctual, promotion of the utilitarianism and rationalism epitomise mystification of nature, which overturns as meaningless chaos that lies outside of the alienated scientific reason. The irrational nature becomes objectivity to be classified, conquer and mastered.²⁰ Utilitarianism, calculability and plannability are derivatives of the struggle with spontaneity. Similarly, history appears as what was before the revolution – the irrational capitalist system, immature form of society,

17 See, for example, a militant Leninist critique of Bogdanovist productivism in: Mazaev, 1975.

18 Narkompros is a shorten form of People's Commissariat of Enlightenment. About the activity of Lunacharsky in Narkompros see: Fitzpatrick, 1970. Narkompros 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.

19 Lunacharsky, [1918] 1981, p. 16.

20 Adorno and Horkheimer 1997, p. 11; Lukács 1971, pp. 114–120.

meaningless exploitation and violence, war of all against all – nature; and what is to come – the abolition of nature in a pure and supreme consciousness of a worker or in a German national spirit if to follow Adorno’s analysis – culture. Mikhail Lifshitz, a Moscow friend of Georg Lukács, terms it the coincidence of the dialectical opposites²¹ and also attributes to the Soviet nihilist negation of the past an Adornian label of the authoritarian personality. In the 1920s the authoritarian personality had left orientation and only in the 1930s drifted to the right²².

Reaffirmation of the Negated Past: Reformulation of Knowledge in the Proletarian Terms.

The dark side of the Soviet Enlightenment is very well known, but this picture would be incomplete if we ignore Dunaevskii’s image of enlightenment. A good Leninist Mikhail Lifshitz knows that his theory had one peculiar characteristics: Lenin admired classical art and achievements of the “Western” culture²³. It would not contradict to the concept of a conscious worker if to look at this problem from the critical anti-colonial perspective. Nevertheless, Lifshitz tries to clarify Leninist project of Enlightenment from the perspective of the communization of the past. Departing from Lenin’s last article ‘Better Fewer, But Better’ (1923), Lifshitz admits that here the author ‘criticises the abstract juxtaposition of the new to the old’²⁴. In the old Marxism of the Second International and in the circles of the post-revolutionary left artists and intellectuals, ‘was invisibly laid the abstract repulsion from the old values or their transformation into an equally abstract formal skill’. This led to the pathetic affirmation of the ‘abstract new’²⁵. The most dangerous tendency of the abstract new, according to Lifshitz was LEF (Left Front of the Arts) movement, which wanted to ‘create here something like a proletarian America’, promoting ‘abstract rationalism and utilitarianism in art’²⁶. The direct influence of this sociological formalism and positivism, was also a Proletkultist classism. Here and there Lifshitz accuses

.....
21 Lifshitz 2004, p. 45

22 Lifshitz and Sziklai 2012, p. 28.

23 Lifshitz, Sziklai 2012, pp. 18-236.

24 Ibid, p. 32.

25 Ibid, p. 26. In Lenin’s own words: the ‘great revolutions grow out of the contradictions between the old, between what is directed towards developing the old, and the very abstract striving for the new, which must be so new as not to contain the tiniest particle of the old’. See: Lenin 1923, p. 497.

26 Lifshitz, Sziklai 2012, p. 34.

Bogdanov for the vulgar determinism of productive forces, which leads the philosopher of the Proletkult to the same abolition of the past as LEF²⁷.

The concept of productive force determinism is rather foreign to Bogdanov’s system. A productive organising capacity of labour on a minimal level corresponds to the elemental physical spontaneity of the elements of nature. In this system, labour is not subject, but force that has different degrees and intensities on biological, physical and social levels. This presupposes the structure-oriented materialism of physics rather than sociological determinism. Moreover, Bogdanov’s vision of art was strictly speaking, the opposite of utilitarianism. He even disassociated proletarian culture from Taylorism and Alexei Gastev’s NOT (Scientific Organisation of Labour). Although under the conditions of 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.²⁸ Taylorism does indeed contradict comradely cooperation between workers and furthers authoritarian social relations, but, like many other Bolsheviks, Bogdanov nevertheless ‘critically supports’ Taylorism as a provisional measure for increasing the productivity of labour.²⁹ 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 artists even tried to implement Gastev’s approach to intellectual labour.³⁰ Bogdanov, however, openly criticised Gastev’s ‘biomechanical’ system of scientific management and metrics as a one-sided and reductionist technicism.³¹ Needless to say that the avant-gardist art experiments with Taylorism were foreign to Bogdanov.

The task of Lifshitz is to single out Lenin and free his theory from the likes of his old party fellow by any means. The good Bolshevism of Lenin and the bad Bolshevism of Bogdanov must once again reaffirm a

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27 Ibid, pp. 347-351.

28 Bogdanov 1918, pp. 9–15.

29 Ibid.

30 See: Penzin 2012, pp. 47–90.

31 See a polemical exchange between Bogdanov and Gastev in the journal ‘Proletarian Culture’: Alexei Gastev 1919, pp. 35–45; Bogdanov, 1919b, pp. 46–52.

Leninist legend about an absolute incomparability of the ex-allies. Thus, for Lifshitz

[the task] was to liberate concrete Marxism from this partly scientific, partly vulgar abstraction, to return it from the abstract to the concrete. Since the revolution itself at the beginning of its cycle bears an abstract negation of the past (it cannot be otherwise), it must again acquire the fullness of concreteness at the next stage³².

Moreover, the concept of proletarian culture in its rejection of the old neglects a 'truthful' class consciousness that develops 'only from the observation of the all classes of the society'. The proletarian ideology is a 'conclusion of the entire practice of the humankind, the conclusion of the development of philosophy, political economy, socialism'.³³

This is indeed echoes Lenin's critique of proletarian culture as a subcultural particularisation of the proletariat. Instead of creating its own subculture, proletariat has to strive for the appropriation of the great bourgeois art to be able to reformulate it in the Marxist terms. It is not a proletarian experience and its modes of self-organization that produce a new culture, but Marxist point of view on history. Only Marxism allows to develop a new universalist perspective on the entire human history from the correct communist standpoint:

Marxism has won its historic significance as the ideology of the revolutionary proletariat because, far from rejecting the most valuable achievements of the bourgeois epoch, it has, on the contrary, assimilated and refashioned everything of value in the more than two thousand years of the development of human thought and culture. Only further work on this basis and in this direction... can be recognised as the development of a genuine proletarian culture.³⁴

Proletarian culture must logically proceed from all accumulated knowledge without segregating it on capitalist or feudal³⁵. The fear of Lenin that proletarian culture will become a subculture is understandable,

32 Lifshitz, Sziklai 2012, p. 42.

33 Ibid, p. 318.

34 Lenin 1920a, p. 317.

35 Lenin 1920b, p. 287.

but it is also understandable that the Marxist point of view as a guiding principle of a great crusade on the reactionary past may end up at the same narrow road of Leninist ideology, which, as Bukharin reasonably argued, aims together with the 'conquer' of the entire bourgeois culture "'conquering" the bourgeois state', old theatres and traditional art³⁶.

This returns us to the anti-colonial perspective on Lenin's appreciation of the past. From this perspective, the concept of proletarian culture may appear, despite what Lifshitz says about it, as a 'subaltern' resistance to Westernisation. Indeed, according to Bogdanov the Soviet proletariat does not have to wait until it masters the great achievements of the capitalist civilization. Does it mean that Bogdanov rejects the past?

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 encyclopaedists had done for the French bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century.³⁷

Bogdanov writes about the necessity of a proletarian encyclopaedia and a new programme of proletarian Enlightenment elsewhere³⁸. 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 form³⁹.

The new proletarian encyclopaedia demands the *socialisation of science*, after which knowledge production would be a tool for collective cultural building.⁴⁰ A member of the Proletkult specifies this formulation and calls for the 'proletarianisation of science': similar to Marx, who

36 Quoted in Biggart 1987, p. 234.

37 Fitzpatrick summarises the speech in: Fitzpatrick 1970, pp. 95–96.

38 See, for example, his pre-revolutionary work: Bogdanov 1911.

39 Bogdanov 1910, pp. 25–28.

40 Bogdanov 1919a, p. 15.

'proletarianized the economy, ideologists of the proletarian culture must proletarianise the natural and social sciences'.⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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.⁴³

Bogdanov argues that when a person masters collective experience, authority and power automatically give way to competency and expertise. Such a view aims to solve the dilemma of dictatorship. The 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.⁴⁴ 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. It is the 'cooperation of generations', which proletarian culture should cultivate and build.⁴⁵

The comradeship with the past of Bogdanov corresponds to the reformulation of knowledge in the proletarian terms of Lenin. For instance, the following proposition of Bogdanov almost coincides with Lenin's 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'.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ Art is a collectivist practice, but this only means that the collective provides the materials, instruments, theories,

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41 Smitt 1919, p. 31.

42 Bogdanov 1919a, p. 16.

43 Lebedev-Polianskii 1921, pp. 9-11.

44 Bogdanov 1920, pp. 55-56.

45 Ibid, pp. 48-49.

46 Bogdanov 1923, p. 292

47 Bogdanov 1920, p. 14.

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 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 *stikhiinosť*, or in other words, in 'unconscious' form.⁴⁸

Put differently, the heritage of the old culture must become conscious of itself in the new proletarian point of view. The motto of this ethics formulates Lifshitz:

Thanks to the destruction of private property and exploitation of men by men, all the great in the old literature has not died, but on the contrary, was liberated from a limited and narrow shell, received new serious and deep life in the hearts of millions. Pushkin has not died, he only begins to live for real⁴⁹.

The commemoration of past struggles in the present reminds one of Benjamin's attitude to history, but this is a specifically proletarian attitude, as Bogdanov puts it, 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 members of one, continuous labouring whole'.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹

Yet the difference between Lenin and Bogdanov's project of Enlightenment can be formulated as a difference between Westernisation and proletarianisation. Despite similar conception of the reformulation of knowledge in the proletarian terms, in the view of Lenin proletariat has to pragmatically expropriate of all the "use value" of the bourgeois past, including Taylorism and management, cultural and state institutions, classical art and education⁵². The ideology of catching up with the West in economic and cultural development assumed the appropriation of bourgeois culture for socialist needs. This difference can be also

.....
48 Ibid., pp. 86-90.

49 Lifshitz, Sziklai 2012, p. 340.

50 Bogdanov 1920, p. 49.

51 Ibid., p. 85.

52 Lenin 1920a.

formulated as a difference between the socialist realist cinema of Ivan Pyr'ev, which copies Hollywood and the cinema of Alexander Medvedkin, who uses in his films peasant's folklore, oral storytelling and other historical forms of the oppressed knowledges. The classism of Proletkult resisted the influences of Westernisation, which it treated as a means to restore capitalism in the post-revolutionary society.⁵³ In his conception of the comradeship Bogdanov goes further than Lenin. It is not enough to simply assimilate bourgeois culture, the proletariat must expropriate the expropriators, in other words, it must liberate the past from the bourgeois exploitation. The only way to do this is to produce a proletarian encyclopaedia of knowledge. 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', as Vertov puts it⁵⁴. This would mean a construction of a new epistemology. The grandiose task that corresponds to the Bogdanov's metaphysics of universal organisation.

The project of the proletarian encyclopaedia was not able to develop on the institutional and official level. 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'.⁵⁵ The dictatorship of the proletariat was an official ideology, but class science and art were seen as a philosophical extravagance.⁵⁶

Instead of a Conclusion.

Our analysis shows that the fight against spontaneity brings Soviet Enlightenment to the question of how to organise knowledge, historical and pre-revolutionary experience in the post-revolutionary form. The answer to this question assumes two different types of relationality with the past. The first model (let's call it Leninist), utilises the capitalist knowledge for the socialist purposes, while the second model (let's call it Bogdanovian) excavates the traces of communism from the immanence of the resisting labour, subaltern knowledges and practices of the past.

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53 See the critique of capitalist modernisation in: Zander 1923, pp. 67–86.

54 Vertov 1984, p. 66. Translation is corrected.

55 Pis'mo C.K.R.K.P [Letter from the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), 1920, p. 67.

56 See the summary of the discussions and the defense of proletarian science in: Sizov 1923, pp. 89–102.

A less binary outlook of the two enlightenments could be a retrospective one. From the window of our historical distance, the Lenin's project appears as a stage, where proletarians play Shakespeare's or Tolstoy's aristocracy in the theatre and cinema, while their children attend ballet and music schools after their primary education. The exemplary of this image is Sergei Bondarchuk's seven hours film 'War and Peace' released in 1967. It pretends to construct a realist image of the aristocratic past in the best Stanislavsky's fashion, but in fact, subverts the attitudes, behaviours and social roles of Tolstoy's characters. The film is a carnivalesque show, where the Soviet men and women awkwardly act in the historical decorations of a high society. Bondarchuk's epic confuses by its very desire to show an aristocracy in the proletarian body, but for the Westerniser Lenin, the past is a training range for the exercise of the proletariat in their abilities to overplay class enemies. It is understandable then why romantic and rebellious youth of Pierre Bezukhov, and Bondarchuk plays Bezukhov himself, has a physique of a hefty mature man with a tired face. It is because Bezukhov is not a representative of the Russian nineteenth century 68', but his working class Soviet contemporary, who commemorates Bezukhov in his own body and in this way fights with the petty bourgeois tendencies of the Prague spring. Accordingly, what is left to do is to stage a total re-enactment of the classical and modern age. Reformulation of world culture in proletarian terms is a performance in the wig of Mozart and Pushkin.

When the Soviet enlightenment turns by its Proletkultist side, it appears as a proletarian encyclopaedia of knowledge. It explains the necessity to publish classics of philosophy, such as Spinoza's and Hegel's works in millions of copies, and endless Soviet criticism of bourgeois art, philosophy and science from the socialist perspective. In this fashion, we can read attempts of Evald Ilyenkov in 1960s to excavate epistemology from *Das Kapital* in order to formulate a method that will be applicable, according to the author, to all other sciences⁵⁷. In both cases, what matters is a liberation of the past from itself, a construction of the post-historical universalism, which fruitfully concludes everything through the Soviet present. When the Soviet enlightenment turns by its Leninist side, it also appears as Lifshitzian philosophizing of classics and trinity of goodness, beauty and truth⁵⁸. And it is does not matter that these trinity may look like an amateur theatre of Bondarchuk's 'War and Peace'.

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57 Ilyenkov 1982.

58 Lifshitz 2004.

Indeed, what is universal if not a historical experience of the humanity? We are comrades of those who appeared at the stage of history, we are their predecessors. The past is our contemporaneous contemporary. Depending on political preferences, we still mirror it in the wigs of Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg, Benjamin etc. To play the past is to reaffirm ourselves in the future. In Andrei Platonov's novel 'Chevengur', a lame peasant, head of the revolutionary committee, 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. 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'.⁵⁹ The split between past and future, the old and the new produces the dialectics of reaffirmation. The post-revolutionary humanity transmits time through itself and looks backward to see how time is converted into the post-revolutionary space.⁶⁰

The Soviet concept of Enlightenment is not only finalises utopias of the rational organization of society, but presents an ambitious attempt to reformulate knowledge in the proletarian terms. What the past is from the perspective of the present and who are we when the past flashes its light on us? Any elements of the past can be liberated from violence and capitalist barbarity if they are lately to be resurrected in the Socialist present as our communist comrade. Lunacharsky writes:

If we directly pose a question whether Spinoza was an ideologist of bourgeoisie, then we have to fully comply with the answer 'yes'.

But if after that we are asked: does this mean that we give in Spinoza to the ideologists of bourgeoisie, that we will be indifferent spectators of its trickery with the great philosopher; that with a smile on a face we will wash hands while looking at the distortion, negation, malicious denigration of Spinoza, by which the bourgeoisie surrounded his name for centuries, and that with the same smile we will look at those kisses of Judas, by mean of which the bourgeoisie for time to time (in particularly, now) tries to blot the image of the sage in order to proclaim him their fellow, – then we have to fully comply with the answer 'no'⁶¹.

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59 Platonov 1978, p. 94.

60 Here I reformulate proposition of Platonov from: Platonov 2011, p. 45.

61 Lunacharsky 1933, p. 2.

The Soviet Enlightenment is the project of salvation of the past from the capitalist modernity. The communist encyclopaedia of knowledge, therefore, is not a totalitarian systematization and calculation of everything that existed, but a comradeship with the past.

This attitude to the past points to the fact that in a context where revolution was a voluntarist rapture made by the proletarianised peasants, who were themselves a social form from the feudal past, the relation to what is old and what is new establishes itself in a form of a complex dialectical structure. Here, quite paradoxically, the past is neither rejected, nor mastered, but appears in its totality at the back and in front at the same time. It surrounds the present. If to use analogies from the English grammar, the now becomes present perfect or a continuous reflective retrospection of what has been done. The past sends a feedback and actively participates in the now. The past is a comrade, who teaches, educates and continues to live side by side with the now. Thus, to commemorate one hundred years of October revolution would mean to restore our capacity to be comrades of the past, to learn how not to give in history, philosophy, education, science and art to the ideologists of bourgeoisie. That would also mean to restore a link between us and the proletarian encyclopaedia of the Soviet Enlightenment.

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