



Vladimir Iurinetz—A Forgotten Marxist Critic of Husserl¹

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In this paper, I will shortly present a hitherto quite forgotten Soviet Marxist critic of the 1920s, Vladimir Iurinetz (Юринец, in Ukrainian Юринець, 1891–1936/37). Of Ukrainian origin, he subsequently became one of the numerous victims of Stalinism and of his production only some articles remain. Although my presentation of him is only a first approach, his work and especially his evaluation of the problematic points of Husserl's philosophy are today still worth of attention.

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The dialogue between phenomenology and Marxism has always been tense, despite the fact that there are many points of shared understanding between these philosophical currents. To mention only one example, the four-volume-anthology *Phänomenologie und Marxismus*, edited by Bernhard Waldenfels et al. and published in the 1970s managed to show that there are possibilities for a prolific dialogue especially in the fields of social theory and moral philosophy. Nevertheless, the tension remains. Its source can be located in two focal points: doctrine of human subjectivity and theory of cognition. Here the approaches of Marxism and phenomenology are diametrically opposed. For Marxists, Husserl's construction of human subjectivity by means of a phenomenological reduction seems to be nothing else but a return to the abstraction of a single individual which Marx criticized already in his sixth thesis on

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Feuerbach.² One could say that Marxism starts at the outset from a view on human essence as a product of intersubjectivity, whereas phenomenology focuses on the human mind in the Cartesian sense, that is, as an *Egoität*.³

Marxist critiques have followed Husserl from very early on, almost at the same pace with the development of Husserl's own thought. Especially Georg Lukács' connections with Husserl's ideas have been discussed rather extensively. It should, however, be noted that the young Lukács of *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (1923) was yet at this stage heavily influenced by Neo-Kantianism (maybe more than by Hegel), and his position was thus already from its starting point close to phenomenology. The state of affairs was different in the Soviet Union of the 1920s, where Husserl's ideas were examined in the light of a much more strictly materialist world outlook than that of the young Lukács. Two Marxist critics of Husserl during this period are worth of mention. The first is Grigori Bammel, who analysed Husserl's views on logic in a review published in 1923, the other is Vladimir Iurinetz. His article 'Edmund Gusserl' was published in two parts in the main philosophical journal of the Bolshevik party, *Pod znamenem marksizma* in 1922 and 1923. We could yet mention Valentin Asmus, later a well-known philosopher and logician, who published a short encyclopedia entry on Husserl in 1930.⁴

2. In Thesis 6 Marx criticises Feuerbach thus: "Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the essence of man [*menschliche Wesen*]. But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations [...] The essence therefore can by him only be regarded as 'species,' as an inner 'dumb' generality which unites many individuals only in a natural way."

3. Husserl's later attempts to add an intersubjective dimension to his theory remind, in fact, of Feuerbach's similar moves in his "Philosophy of the Future" of the 1840s, to add an intersubjective aspect to his theory. Feuerbach stressed that the real subject is a result of a dialogue, an "I–Thou-relation." This led him to a peculiar "dialogical" theory, in which the human essence was constituted in a continuous dialogue between individuals, a dialogue founded on mutual love. I will here not discuss the question, whether Marx in his 6th Thesis thus described Feuerbach's point somewhat inadequately as merely a doctrine based on an "abstract—isolated—human individuality." This verdict hits well Feuerbach's previous philosophy, but Marx does not seem to take in account Feuerbach's efforts to break out from the Robinson-like individualism of his previous views. In every case, Feuerbach's attempt has much in common with the aspirations of Husserl over a half century later towards founding the intersubjectivity—by the way, a similarity to which the Husserl scholars seem not to have yet paid the attention it to my mind deserves. Marx' critique remains, however, valid in that for Feuerbach, the constituents of the I–Thou relation remain yet abstract in their generality. The same applies to Husserl.

4. All the articles mentioned (of Bammel, Iurinetz, Asmus) have been republished in the anthology of Chubarov (2000).

These Marxist critics formed only a small strain in the Russian reception of Husserl's ideas during the two, three first decades of the 20th century. Husserl was discussed among the representants of Russian religious idealism (Nikolai Lossky, Aleksei Losev, B. V. Jakovenko), but as they soon were forced to emigration, their influence in the Soviet Union remained minimal. The most important representant of early Russian phenomenology is Gustav Shpet (1879–1937); his book *Javlenie i smysl'* (1914; English translation *Appearance and Sense*, Dordrecht 1991) was the first major work in which Husserl's ideas were presented to the Russian public. Shpet was, however, an independent thinker and in his later production he took distance from several points of Husserl's phenomenology, trying to solve the problem of intersubjectivity in his own way.

Shpet's philosophical evolution has recently been analysed by Liisa Bourgeot in her PhD thesis (2021), and I do not dwell here more upon it. There is, however, an interesting trait—or, if you like, an enigma—in Shpet's career. He did not emigrate, but chose to stay in the Soviet Union, despite the fact that he was not a Marxist. Indeed, in his works published in the USSR during the 20s and 30s he never refers explicitly to Marxism or to Marxist philosophy. Why did he then choose not to emigrate? Liisa Bourgeot explains this in her dissertation with the very probable hypothesis that Shpet, who in his aesthetic theory was very critical of the Proletkult and the Formalists, solidarised with the cultural politics of the Bolsheviks which tried to diminish the influence of avantgardist currents in favour of a more “traditional” cultural politics and education for the masses. It seems that the People's Commissar of Culture Anatoli Lunacharsky played a crucial role in persuading Shpet to remain in the Soviet Union and work for the cultural politics of the Bolshevik party.

Unlike Shpet, who remained an “academic” and non-marxist philosopher, and the ever-cautious Asmus, both Bammel and Iurinetz criticised phenomenology explicitly from Marxist positions. Their views bore the marks of the epoch in that their critique had some reductionistic tones. This class reductionism did not, however, prevent them to deliver a critique of Husserl which has relevance yet for today's discussions. For example, Bammel, one of the most prominent representants of the Debordin school,⁵ wrote that the general trait of the recent attempts at a reform of logic then actual in the West consisted in that

5. His original name was Bazhbeuk-Melikov and he was born in Tiflis (now Tbilisi) in 1900.

“they eliminated the last remnants of historicism and, restoring the most reactionary scholastics, tear logics off from its living historical roots in their search for the eternal truths of ‘pure consciousness’ as an ideological antidote against the revolutionary ideas of the epoch” (Bammel in Chubarov 2000, 417). As to Husserlianism proper, which was a part of the said movement, so it was, according to Bammel, nothing but “a reaction against Neo-Kantianism.” Despite this, Husserl’s philosophy “remains in the boundaries of Neo-Kantian ideas” (ibid.). Even so, the rest of the article—which I have not the possibility to deal with in details here—did not continue in the same reductionistic vein. Instead, Bammel delivered a sharp and detailed critique of Husserl’s ideas. His analysis tried to show that Husserl did not manage to develop an alternative to Neo-Kantianism and boiled down to the conclusion that Husserl’s phenomenological method leads to a “complete elimination of consciousness [...] in its real, generally acknowledged existence.” For Husserl, the consciousness becomes a thing, an object among other things, and as a consequence, it is no more possible to speak of a dualism between the object and the consciousness, or between material and ideal (ibid., 429).

Bammel, Iurinetz and Shpet became all victims of Stalinism. Grigori Bammel perished in Sevvostlag camp in 1939, Shpet in Siberia 1937. Iurinetz was likewise repressed in 1936 or 1937 (the sources do not agree about the year). He had got in troubles already in 1931 during the so-called philosophical campaign initiated by Stalin,⁶ when he became accused of “Menshevizing idealism” and expelled from the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in 1933. All three philosophers have left unpublished works and other materials, which may have become destroyed or (though the chances are not high) preserved in the archives of the NKVD, from which they some day may be retrieved. Especially in the case of Iurinetz we have to deal with a fragmentary *Nachlass* only. Besides his comments to Husserl, he published a critique of Freudo-Marxism and several articles in Ukrainian on philosophical subjects.⁷

Iurinetz was born in Galizia, which today is Western Ukraine but then a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He studied in the universities of Lvov and Vienna. During the First World War, he was sent to the Eastern front but soon became a Russian prisoner of war. This

6. The hitherto best description of this campaign is still Yakhot (2013).

7. See *Filosoofskaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 5, Moskva: Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia 1970, *sub verbo* ‘Iurinetz’ of Ukrainian articles by Iurinetz we can mention e.g. a presentation of Marx’ and Engels’ *German Ideology* (1927), the critiques of Max Scheler and German sociology (1928a), and of Kautsky (1928b).

changed entirely the course of his life, since he moved after the October Revolution to the Red Army. In the years 1921–24 he studied at the Institute of Red Professorship (IKP) in Moscow, a school for the education of cadres for the service of the new Soviet state. Soon Iurinetz moved to Kharkov in Ukraine, where he taught at the local Institute of Philosophy in 1925–1933. He managed to rise to important positions in the early Soviet Ukraine and participated in the edition of Ukrainian Bolshevik journals; in 1929 he finished a book manuscript with the title *Leninism and National Question*, which seems to be lost.⁸

Husserl as an Anti-Dialectician and Platonist

Iurinetz' two-piece article on Husserl in *Pod znamenem marksizma* was only some 45 pages. The present-day historian of Russian phenomenology Igor Chubarov claims that Iurinetz' article in this most important theoretical journal of the Bolshevik party “should be seen as programmatic, especially when one takes into account that this journal was a site of intellectual discussion with practical consequences, and a Red critique of Husserl expressed there was for many Russian phenomenologists an imminent political verdict” (Chubarov 2000, 432). It should be noted, however, that *Pod znamenem marksizma* was in the 1920s not so “orthodox” Marxist journal, if one means with orthodoxy the submission to the Party line. Its editor-in-chief Abram Deborin was an ex-Menshevik who displeased the Stalinists so much that they forced him out from the leadership of the journal in 1930—just with the motivation that *Pod znamenem marksizma* did not help to draw “practical consequences” from its theoretical discussions.

Iurinetz begins his article on Husserl by quoting the acknowledging words of his compatriot Gustav Shpet which he gave in *Javlenie i smysl'* 1916 on Husserl's philosophy as an attempt to encounter in a creative manner a phenomenological theory. At first sight it may indeed seem that Husserl's theory is a harmonious whole based on one fundamental idea. But a closer look, continues Iurinetz, shows that this system consists of different strata and contains several contradictions, so that it is more appropriate to call Husserl an eclectic. He compares Husserl with Plotinos, whose system had, in spite of its ostensibly formal structure, in the last instance a character of compilation (Iurinetz 1922, 62). This assessment may sound for many too harsh, although Iurinetz soon

8. See the Russian Wikipedia, *sub verbo* 'Iurinetz.'

substantiates his claims by detecting contradictions in Husserl's thought.

The first part of Iurinet's article deals mostly with Husserl's philosophical influences. The text is in places hastily written and not very consequent. Nevertheless, Iurinet manages to enumerate the most important sources for Husserl's thought. As to Bernard Bolzano, who conducted Husserl in his anti-psychologist turn, Iurinet claims that he exerted notable influence on Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*, refuting Gustav Shpet's contrary view, according to which the role of Bolzano in the development of Husserl's thought remains yet open. But what Iurinet especially points out in Bolzano is his hostility towards Hegel. The indirect goal of Bolzano's *Wissenschaftslehre* was "to serve as an antidote to the dialectical method of Hegel, which Bolzano attempted to overcome in a 'scientific' manner [...] This fact is for us of immense significance, because a complete lack of understanding, a complete lack of even a theoretical interest in dialectics is characteristic for Husserl, the 'founder' of the 'new' logics" (ibid., 63).

To back his claim of Husserl as an anti-dialectician, Iurinet quotes from his depreciating assessments of Hegel in the article "Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft" (first published in the journal *Logos*, 1911). According to Husserl, the fault of the 'maestro of Berlin' was, among other things, that "although Hegel insisted the absolute validity (*absolute Gültigkeit*) of his method and doctrine, his system lacks the critique of reason which in the first instance would make a scientific philosophy possible."⁹ In other words, Husserl accuses Hegel of deviating from the path of a critical inquiry of reason which Kant had initiated. Iurinet makes an ironic comment to Husserl: "The main fault of Hegel thus was that he did not remain a mere commentator of Kant and did not already in his time propose the slogan 'Back to Kant!'" (Iurinet 1922, 68).

Since the claim of Husserl's "anti-dialecticism" does not seem unfounded, it is pity that Iurinet does not dwell more upon the question of dialectics, or rather, of its lack in Husserl. After all, this is one of the most significant traits which distinguish phenomenology from Marxist philosophy. It is of course true that Hegel wrote a *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, but this is a work of quite another character than Husserl's phenomenological analysis of human consciousness. Hegel's work is "phenomenology" in the sense that it offers a revue in which concrete different historic characters of human consciousness pass the view of

9. Quoted here according to Husserl (2006, 7).

the reader, whilst in Husserl the consciousness is viewed as static and ahistoric.

Actually, this ahistoricity and lack of dialectics was noted even by Paul Natorp, one of the main representants of the Marburg school of neo-Kantianism, in a review of Husserl's *Ideen*. Natorp did not mention the term 'dialectics,' but from his comments follow that Husserl's thinking was 'metaphysic' (i.e. anti-dialectic) just in the sense Engels used the word. According to Natorp, there are Platonic traits in Husserl's doctrine, but Husserl has, nevertheless, not been able to adopt the genial core of Platon's philosophy:

. . . scheint es, dass er [Husserl] zwar bis zum Eidos *Platos* vorgedrungen, aber auf der *ersten Stufe* des Platonismus, der der starren, unbeweglich "im Sein dastehenden" Eide stehen geblieben ist, den letzten Schritt *Platos*, der erst der grösste und eigenste war: die Eide in *Bewegung* zu bringen, sie in die letzte *Kontinuität* des Denkprozesses zu verflüssigen, nicht mitgemacht hat. (Natorp 1917/18, 231)

Iurinetz quotes from the same article of Natorp, but, strangely enough, reproaches him for that he "did not find elements of Platonism in Husserl" (Iurinetz 1922, 64). The real state of matters is according to Iurinetz the contrary: "I am convinced that the Husserl school will finally merge with present-day Platonism." In a further passage he writes:

The parallel with Platon is here especially instructive: both in Husserl and in Platon the 'essences,' the 'senses' exist in the metaphysical meaning of the word (that is, they do not exist in extension and time, but 'in the eternity,' as Platon would say). But Husserl goes further than Platon. The more Platon dicusses the ideas, the more he is bound to see them only as ideas of functions, not of things, they mutate in Husserl into the 'eidoses' of the things in a particular world of essences." (Iurinetz 1923, 75)

A possible explanation for Iurinetz's strange claim that Natorp does not recognize Husserl's 'Platonism' is that Iurinetz thinks that the Neo-Kantian Natorp, whose rationalism culminates in a form of panlogism, is yet more Platonist than Husserl.¹⁰ Be that as it may, if Iurinetz's intention was to critique Husserl for the lack of dialectics, he would have

10. So might a somewhat unclear comment in a further passus be interpreted (Iurinetz 1923, 61). A further reason for Iurinetz's position may be that in his article he drew parallels with the 'bourgeois' philosophy of his days and the situation in Late Antiquity, where Neo-Platonism was a prevailing current of thought: when capitalism comes of age, it develops similar tendencies towards a Platonizing irrationalism as the Antiquity did.

had a valuable ally in Natorp. That he did not seize this opportunity is clearly a consequence of the general bias Marxist philosophers have had towards Kant and especially Neo-Kantianism, a bias which in no way is restricted only to Soviet philosophers.

The Antinomies of Husserl

The final part of Iurinet's article (section IV) is the most yielding part of his Husserl critique, since here he formulates the inherent contradictions (i.e. antinomies) of the phenomenological project.

The first antinomy concerns the problem of the ideation (*Wesensschau*, or the eidetic grasp of essences) which according to Husserl on the one side has the individual, contingent and empirical as their basis, but on the other side expresses the essence, a pure eidos (*Ideen*, § 2).¹¹ These eidoi are given by us via an "originally giving intuition" (*originär gebende Erschauung*; *Ideen*, § 3). Here we already encounter a problem, writes Iurinet. One is entitled to ask, which cognitive methods should be used in order to attain the goal of phenomenological analysis, the "vision of the essences":

Because phenomenology deals with the essences, not with facts, we should expect that in order to reach its goal it should utilise the tools of abstract thought: concepts, judgements, conclusions. But this is not how the matters stand. True, Husserl underlines that the results of a phenomenological analysis may be given further to discursive forms of thought, but the tool of the immediate analysis must remain the intuition, the vision of essences [...] Here we encounter the main contradiction of phenomenology. Its phenomena should, on the one side, be purely descriptive, but on the other side, they are not empirical. Husserl never solves this contradiction. (Iurinet 1923, 70)

Already the initial idea of 'original givenness' is for Iurinet suspicious and contains a further contradiction:

The givenness of the object presupposes an active state of the consciousness, for which the object is given. But Husserl's 'givenness' presupposes a phenomenological position, a complicated apparatus of reduction. The essence of the object, which according to Husserl is given, is the result of some kind of activity carried out by the consciousness. Phenomenological objects are thus submitted to a certain process of working up. We see them eidetically from a certain point of view, in a certain light. Consequently, they are not at all given. (Iurinet 1923, 79)

11. So Husserl (1992, 12): "...dass es zum Sinn jedes Zufälligen gehört, eben ein Wesen, und somit ein rein zu fassendes Eidos zu haben."

Hence, there is a contradiction in Husserl's theory of eidetic intuition. The postulate of the givenness of the object to the consciousness, which should relate to it in a passive, receptive way, is not in accord with the real activity of consciousness and the "constructive" character of the object we have in our mind. "This is the second fundamental contradiction of phenomenology" (Iurinec 1923, 79).

Again, one might readily agree with Iurinec's critique of Husserl in this respect. The 'gnoseological antinomy' (if we may use this term) of Husserl is a consequence of his vagueness in the fundamental question concerning the activity vs. passivity of human consciousness. This inaccuracy is the more astonishing, as Husserl in other respects examines in his oeuvre the problems of consciousness in a most rigorous manner. To put it shortly, Husserl does not make a clear distinction between the intellectual and the sense-derived content of our ideas, despite the fact that already Kant's well-known separation between *Anschauung* and *Begriff* must have been known to him.¹²

Already Natorp had in his *Logos* review of 1917/18 noted the same problem in Husserl's "original givenness," but he did not formulate it in distinct words as a contradiction. He notes that Husserl does not speak of a mere "givenness" (*Gegebensein*) of the objects, but of an "original act of giving" (*originär gebender Akt*), in which the objects come to our consciousness. Already this expression of an "act of giving" is antinomic, since it should, on the one side, indicate the passivity of the way the objects are given to us, but on the other side, it stipulates this givenness as something active (Natorp 1917/18, 228). Natorp is, however, very cautious in his comments. He rests contented with wondering, whether Husserl's expressions of a "giving act" or "giving intuition" (*gebender Akt*, *gebende Anschauung*) will say that there is nothing "given" in the sense of a mere receptivity. In that case, however, the expressions "action" and "passion" "are very much in the need of explanation" (Natorp 1917/18, 228–229).

The reason for the cautious way Natorp presents his critique is, of course, the fact that he does not note Husserl's idealist presuppositions. For Husserl, not even the "given" is something independent from the

12. And not only Kant's distinction. Already in the previous century Spinoza formulated the same principle: see *Eth.* II prop. 49 schol. where Spinoza stresses that it is essential "to distinguish between ideas, or the concepts of mind, and the images of the things." According to him, it is easy to understand this if one keeps in mind that the thinking in no ways involves the extension, which is a propriety of the matter. "*Atque adeo clare intelliget, ideam (quandoquidem modus cogitandi est) neque in rei alicujus imagine, neque in verbis consistere.*"

cognising subject. It is, in other words, not to be identified with Kant's things-in-themselves, which had the function of grounding the objectivity of the appearances. The Neo-Kantians generally dismissed this materialist element in Kant's theory of cognition, and it is consequently not a wonder that Natorp did not manage to proceed into a clear-cut formulation of the antinomies of Husserl's doctrine of *eidoi*. Iurinets, for his part, manages to do this. However, the problem with him is the anti-Kantian bias so characteristic for the Marxist philosophers of the epoch (it suffices to remember Paul Lafargue's quip of Kant as a "bourgeois sophist"), and so he does not revert to the distinctions of Kant between sensual and intellectual, which would have given his Husserl critique a more clear-cut profile.

Iurinets will see behind "Husserl's philosophical dreams" the Kantian doctrine of an *intellectus archetypus*, which catches up the reality in a twinkling of an eye without any mediating steps. Although Kant himself used this concept only sporadically,¹³ it would indeed suit well as an equipment of Husserlian phenomenology. The *intellectus archetypus* creates the objects by intuiting them; correspondingly, in Husserl the consciousness creates the (intentional) objects thanks to the reductions, although it is not expressly characterised as an archetypic intellect (Iurinets 1923, 83).

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As already mentioned, the analysis of Husserl's phenomenology is only a part of Vladimir Iurinets' philosophical work. Why his career was destroyed in the beginning of the 1930s is not yet quite clear. Certainly the philosophical campaign against "Menshevizing Idealism" initiated by Stalin in 1929/1930 played a role, but it seems that he was, in addition, accused of "Ukrainian nationalism." He in fact published several texts in Ukrainian and contributed to a university textbook on Dialectical Materialism in 1932 intended for Ukrainian-speaking students. The last years of his life seem to have been very disheartened and humiliating, which led to his personal demoralisation. Deprived of all his previous positions, he finally agreed to become an informant for the NKVD/GPU. After a couple of years he was, however, again arrested,

13. Kant had probably borrowed the idea of *intellectus archetypus* not directly from Platon, but from the discourse of the so-called Cambridge Platonists. It designates the manner how the divine intellect operates, but Kant discusses it merely as an hypothetical antipode to the *intellectus ectypus* of the humans.

this time with the accusation of leading the security organs astray with fictitious information. He was shot in 4 October 1937.¹⁴

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Biography

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14. So the Russian Wikipedia article on Iurinetz. Some sources give other dates.