

# Language and Society in the Thought of Konstantin Megrelidze

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**Abstract:** The classification of the history of philosophy is founded on an historical principle, which is not external to philosophy. Accordingly, the history of philosophy can be divided into three sections: the first seeks to study the object, the second is concentrated on the subject and the third on intersubjectivity. From the objectivity of Descartes, through the subjectivity of Wittgenstein, to the intersubjectivity of Hegel, only the latter was ultimately taken up by twentieth century philosophy, and was given its explicit form in the philosophy of the 1960s. This classification reveals something important about contemporary thought. This is the particular interest towards the social, an interest that takes different forms, but can be traced in almost every contemporary movement or school of thought. The 'linguistic turn', which characterized analytic philosophy, structuralism, and hermeneutics can be considered as part of the 'social turn'. Clearly, when we focus on language, we leave the sphere of subjectivity and enter the sphere of intersubjectivity. Western Marxism, late phenomenology, and later versions of psychoanalysis, represent the expression of the same tendency.

**Keywords:** 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy; hermeneutics; history of philosophy; intersubjectivity; language; objectivity; phenomenology; structuralism; subjectivity; Western thought

**Résumé :** La classification de l'histoire de la philosophie est fondée sur un principe historique, qui n'est pas extérieur à la philosophie. Par conséquent, l'histoire de la philosophie peut être divisée en trois parties : la première cherche à étudier l'objet, la seconde se concentre sur le sujet et la troisième sur l'intersubjectivité. De l'objectivité de Descartes à l'intersubjectivité de Hegel, en passant par la subjectivité de Wittgenstein, seule l'intersubjectivité a finalement été reprise au 20<sup>e</sup> siècle et a pris sa forme explicite dans la philosophie des années 1960. Cette classification révèle quelque chose d'important au sujet de la pensée contemporaine. C'est l'intérêt particulier pour le social, un intérêt qui prend différentes formes, mais qui peut être retrouvé dans presque tous les mouvements ou écoles de pensée contemporains. Le « virage linguistique », qui caractérisait la philosophie analytique, le structuralisme et l'herméneutique, peut être considéré comme faisant partie du « virage social ». Il est clair que lorsque nous nous concentrons sur le langage, nous quittons la sphère de la subjectivité pour entrer dans la sphère de l'intersubjectivité. Le marxisme occidental, la phénoménologie tardive et les versions ultérieures de la psychanalyse représentent l'expression de la même tendance.

**Mots-clés :** herméneutique ; histoire de la philosophie ; intersubjectivité ; langue ; objectivité ; subjectivité ; pensée occidentale ; phénoménologie ; philosophie du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle ; structuralisme

## Object, Subject, Intersubjectivity

Starting in the 1960s, the classification of the history of philosophy takes root on a historical principle, which is not external to philosophy<sup>1</sup>. According to this classification, the history of philosophy can be divided into three sections. The first seeks to study the object (the world, the principles animating the world, God), the second is concentrated on the subject and the third, and newest, on intersubjectivity. According to this classification, philosophy, from Thales to Descartes, was taking objectivity as its primary focus of interest, whereas from Descartes to Wittgenstein the attention shifted towards subjectivity. Only with Hegel do we see the thematization of the principle of intersubjectivity, which was ultimately taken up by 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy, and which was given its explicit form in the philosophy of the 1960s.

Of course, as all classifications, this one also contains multiple contradictions. First of all, it is difficult to designate a period in philosophy as object oriented if it did not deploy the term 'object.' It is clear that the concept of the object comes in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries as a correlate to the concept of the subject. Furthermore, we can find many figures that do not fit into the periods proposed by this classification. For example, Spinoza, despite the fact that he follows Descartes, cannot be considered a philosopher of subjectivity. There are many such examples that can be brought to bear against the classification.

And yet, the above mentioned classification does tell us something important about contemporary thought. This is the particular interest towards the social, an interest which takes different forms, but can be traced in almost every contemporary movement or school of thought. The famous 'linguistic turn', which characterized analytic philosophy, structuralism, and hermeneutics – in other ways juxtaposed paradigms of thought – can be considered as a part of this 'turn towards the social' or the 'social turn'. Clearly, when we focus on language, we leave the sphere of subjectivity and enter the sphere of intersubjectivity. Western Marxism, late phenomenology, and later versions of psychoanalysis, (Lacan and his school) represent the expression of the same tendency.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Karl-Otto Apel, *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, London, Routledge, 1979. The present article was prepared within the framework of the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation grant (contract n° 31/85).

Despite the fact that Soviet Marxism of the 1920-1930s should have focused precisely on the social factor, it was, in fact, entirely consumed with the study of relations between subjects and objects. Soviet Marxism was naturalistic and it left no space for intersubjectivity. In this context, it is of special interest to study the work of Konstantin Megrelidze who, in his social theory developed in the 1930s, attempted to avoid this naturalistic fallacy and take into account the intersubjective phenomena as a foundation for understanding human subjectivity.

## Konstantin Megrelidze

The fate of Konstantin Megrelidze's thought is as tragic as it is paradoxical – the thinker's *opus magnum* was published decades after it was written, because of political censorship. The author himself died in exile, and the second book, written in a Soviet lager, has been irrevocably lost. The thought itself is present in modern social sciences, but this is a presence of something forgotten. This presence of the forgotten gets Megrelidze's name mentioned in the Handbook of Contemporary European Social Theory once<sup>1</sup>; the third edition of his major work was republished in the Russian language in 2007<sup>2</sup>; and there are some works published in Georgian, Russian and Western European languages about his thought<sup>3</sup>. But his work has not yet been translated into any other language, which would make it available to an international audience (it exists only in Russian and Georgian); the number of persons in Western academia familiar with his work is limited to the

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<sup>1</sup> See Gerard Delanty, «A little-known work on the sociology of thinking by the Georgian philosopher Constantine Megrelidze, who died at an early age», in Gerard Delanty (ed.), *Handbook of Contemporary European Social Theory*, London, Routledge International Handbooks, 2006, p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> Константин Романович Мегрелидзе [Konstantin Romanovich Megrelidze], Основные проблемы социологии мышления [Major Problems of the Sociology of Thought], Москва [Moscow], Изд-во ЛКИ [LKI Publishing House], 2007. All future references to Megrelidze's work are either to this edition or to the 1937 publication of the book which is yet not accessible to the reader (when discussing parts deleted by censorship).

<sup>3</sup> See А. Бочоришвили [A. Bochorishvili], «От редактора» [From the editor], in: К. Мегрелидзе, Основные проблемы социологии мышления [K. Megrelidze, Major Problems of the Sociology of Thought], Москва [Moscow], 2007, p. 3-7; О. Джигоев, [O. Dzhioev], «Опережая время» [Ahead of time], *Заря Востока*, 17 декабря [Zarya Vostoka, 17 Dec.], Тбилиси [Tbilisi], 1980; J. Friedrich, *Der Gehalt der Sprachform: Paradigmen von Bachtin bis Vygotskij*, Berlin, Akademie 85 Konstantin Megrelidze's Theory of Consciousness Verlag, 1993; J. Friedrich, «Les traces de N. Marr dans le livre de K. Megrelidze », *Cahiers de l'ILSL*, n° 20, 2005, p. 109-125; Н. Мотрошилова [H. Motroshilova], Отечественная философия 50-80-х годов XX века и западная мысль [Russian Philosophy in the 50–80s years of 20th Century and Western Thought], Москва [Moscow], 2012, p. 131-136.

specialists of the history of Soviet epistemology and the place he deserves in the development of social and philosophical thought has not yet been determined. But the paradox extends further. Not only was Megrelidze's work published only in 1965, although it was written in 1936, it also underwent a process of self-censorship, which changed the initial title of the book from *Social Phenomenology of Thought*, no longer acceptable in the 1930s, to *Major Problems of the Sociology of Thought*. Furthermore, the first edition of the book, published after the "thaw" initiated by Khrushchev's 1956 anti-Stalin speech, was itself heavily censored and adapted to the changed realities of the post-Stalinist Soviet Union. References to Stalin were taken out, but, what is of more importance for the argument of the work, long discussions of, quotations from, and reference to the work of Nicholas Marr and his theories, were also deleted. Thus, the readers of Megrelidze's work of the last half a century have been familiar with it only in a truncated and abridged form, since the full edition of the book still awaits publication, lingering in the archives.

Megrelidze placed intersubjectivity at the center of his theoretical construct by introducing the ideational content as the element, which clarifies the relationship between individuals.

The objective content of consciousness is nothing if not its social content.... Human consciousness perceives objects to the extent to which in these 'things', and by their means, it constructs presumed relationships with other individuals. From the sum of such thoughts, which occur to humans, subtract thoughts of other subjects, and see what remains as the content of consciousness. Nothing will remain, since there has never been any other content.<sup>1</sup>

Consciousness becomes the foundation for relationships between individuals, since it presupposes a common ground for understanding between different individuals. This means that the relation of the subject-object and the relation of the subject-subject come into alignment. But, how does it happen that a single object can be imagined in the same way by different individuals? How do we arrive at a common understanding between individuals?

To clear up these questions Megrelidze turns to cultural studies. In discussing ethnology, folklore, and cultural history, he articulates several common theses. Megrelidze needs cultural studies so that he may analyze the parallelisms between different cultures and study their origins. He presents the reader with several theories in an attempt to explain the similarities between cultural phenomena separated in time and space. First, is the theory of common

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<sup>1</sup> Megrelidze, *op. cit.*, p. 352-353.

human nature; second is a theory which explains similarities with the idea of diffusion; and the third theory offers similarities in geographic conditions as an explanation of cultural similarities<sup>1</sup>. Megrelidze rejects each of these theories and turns to Niko Marr's conception of language.

The interest in language is not surprising in itself. Language is the main instrument of mutual understanding and the primary means of cooperation. What has to be explained is why Megrelidze specifically needs a Marrian and Marrist conception of language.

## **Marr and Marrism**

In 1950, Joseph Stalin's critical article, entitled 'Marxism and Questions of Linguistics', was published in the newspaper *Pravda*. The article was directed against Niko Marr and Marrism. It was Stalin who ended its almost thirty year reign over Soviet linguistics and the significant influence of Soviet humanitarian sciences. One of the chief problems of Niko Marr, who was born and raised in Georgia, turned out to be that it was in Georgia that his linguistic theory encountered most resistance. Stalin's final blow to Marrism (Marr himself was long dead) was inspired by the relationship of the dictator with Georgian linguistics – it looks like most of the arguments against Marr were provided to Stalin by Arnold Chikobava.

Genius, madman, charlatan, are three of the most frequent epithets used about Niko Marr (1864-1934). In reality, all three of these designations could be true. What we have in the case of Marr, is, to use a popular phrase, a person who is larger than life<sup>2</sup>. The extraordinary figure, who was a most talented and charismatic scientist, who wrote and published in several disciplines, a linguist who operated with forty (by some accounts sixty) languages, who appeared in the scientific field of the Russian empire at the turn of the century, is still much contested today. At the first stage of his scientific activity, he contributed greatly to the study of the history and culture of the Caucasus. He led archeological excavations in Armenia, near lake Vani, studied the monuments of Assyrian and Urartu cultures; he discovered many previously unknown Georgian manuscripts, he explored

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352-380.

<sup>2</sup> On Marr, see: Lawrence Thomas, *The Linguistic Theories of N. Ja. Marr*, Berkeley, California University Press, 1957; René L'Hermitte, *Marr, Marrisme, Marristes. Une page de l'histoire de la linguistique soviétique*, Paris, Institut d'Études slaves, 1987; Владимир Михайлович Алпатов [Vladimir Mikhaylovich Aplatov], *История одного мифа: Марр и марризм* [The History of One Myth: Marr and Marrism], Москва [Moscow], 2004; Ekaterina Velmésova, *Les lois du sens : la sémantique marriste*, Bern / Berlin, Peter Lang, 2007.

the work of the medieval Armenian historian Movses Khorenatsi. In general, it could be said that the history of Christian Caucasus (or the Christian History of the Caucasus) became known to western academy by Marr's accomplishments. He was a professor at Petersburg University and, in 1912, became an academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He was highly regarded at the leading research institutions of Europe.

Marr made a name for himself with, at times, excessively, brave theses: for example, he proposed that the Georgian language belongs to the family of Semitic languages, or that the Armenian language developed from the language of Urartu, etc. Even before the 1917 revolution, Marr created a theory of 'Japhetic' languages, the chief aim of which was to find a place for Georgian language within the pantheon of world languages.

However, the conception, which entered the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century science under the title 'Marrism' was developed by Marr after the revolution. Marr unequivocally supported the new order, which increased his worth to the latter – the relatively young Soviet state did not receive much support from Academicians. Accordingly, the political elite held Marr in high esteem, from the early days of the revolution. Lunacharsky referred to Marr as "the greatest of the living philologists, in the world", while others claimed that the importance of Marr to Marxism could rival that of Friedrich Engels. Clearly, this was also made possible by the fact that, after the revolution, Marr switched to singularly Marxist positions, despite the fact that before the revolution, he had not demonstrated any sympathies to this school of thought.

Marr's contention was that he created a "new linguistic doctrine", which, as a scientific breakthrough in the humanities, bore a certain equivalency to the political revolution. This new doctrine, which Marr begins to develop in 1923, (1920 according to some scholars) considers language as a class-based phenomenon and a superstructure, in Marxist terms. Marr continues the theory of Japhetic languages and gives it more than the status of a concept about a singular family of languages, but a fundamental theory for the explanation of any linguistic phenomenon. According to Marr, languages develop in transformative stages. Indo-European languages are nothing more than the transformative stage of the Japhetic languages.

Marr managed to gain a dominant position for his new doctrine within the Soviet scientific system not because of his energy and charisma, but also because he used the 'administrative resources' which were accessible to him as a result of his close relationship with Soviet power. The dominant position of his theory persisted after his death in 1934. For Megrelidze, who

wrote his book in the years in which he worked at Marr's institute, the theoretical constructs of Marr and Marrism were the natural environment from which his own theories were derived – a natural environment of Marxist and Phenomenological traditions.

## **Functional Semantics**

On the example of early societies, Marr showed that humans conceived the objects of the external world according to their function in daily life and in social production. He concluded that members of early societies viewed objects of completely different forms and contents as being identical, since these objects served the same function. To strengthen this position of Marr, Megrelidze turned to ethnographic literature. He cites K. von den Steinen, who described what the members of a particular tribe called different objects. They called a mirror – water, a clock – moon, and a compass – sun. This meant that foreign objects were designated with the names of the objects which served the same function. Marr also cites such examples from the history of language. For example, in certain languages, a horse was termed with the same word used for a deer, since the functions they served coincided; or the word for stone was transferred to the first instruments, since, prior to their appearance, stones served the same function. The “tongue” is an example of an overlapping between different semantic fields that are nevertheless functionally connected – both as an organ and a tool of communication. The conception and the naming of objects happened not based on their external similarities or their similar characteristics, but rather on the similarity or difference of their functions in socio-historical practice. It was precisely this rule of the transformation of the meaning of words that Niko Marr termed as ‘functional semantics.’

Can we say that Megrelidze's use of Marrian conception was solely motivated by ideological reasons and that it has no theoretical basis? In my view, we have no basis for such an assertion. The dependence of Megrelidze's theory on Marr is essential, but it must be clearly stated what we mean by Marr's theory. If we mean the theory of the Japhetic languages, which precede Indo-European languages, than this was not and could not have been of interest to Megrelidze, since his sphere of interest was of another realm. If by Marr's theory we mean the concept of a stage based development of language, here too Megrelidze cannot be classified as a Marrist, since he never mentions this concept. However, we encounter other elements in Marr's theory, which become of key importance to Megrelidze's sociology of consciousness or of social phenomenology.

Let us begin with what Megrelidze finds lacking in other theories of language. On the one hand, he separates the psychologistic understanding of language, and names the Russian thinkers Alexander Potebnya and Gustav Shpet as the representatives of such an approach. According to this view, words express the “psychic content of consciousness” of an individual<sup>1</sup>. This position is unacceptable for Megrelidze, since it neglects the connection of the word to the function, which is performed by the object, designated by the word, in social practice.

Megrelidze also touches on structuralism, as represented by its founder, Ferdinand de Saussure. Megrelidze deftly identifies the foundation of the Swiss linguist’s thesis: language is a system possessing autonomy from reality. It is precisely this, which is the differentiating characteristic of the linguistic sign – a sign points to other signs and creates a system; it does not point to reality. Signs are incidental and arbitrary. This is problematic for Megrelidze, for whom language and the distribution of work create a whole, a social complex, one might say, a social totality.

Unlike these two approaches, Marr’s approach accentuates the semantics of words and thus, poses the question of social practice.

A word, from its origin, expresses an object, its role, its sense, its function, from the point of view of its practical meaning. A word, from its origin, denotes to what degree humans have knowledge of this or that object, what is of interest in the object. Accordingly, a word expresses, first of all, human relationship to an object, a thing, the sense of an object for humans, most often it is that sense, which has been assigned to the object through social practice. A word is a formation which carries sense and not a mechanical sign, by means of which the subject conventionally and purely superficially connects a compilation of certain sounds to an object<sup>2</sup>.

Functional semantics seem compatible with Marxism, since both stressed the importance of work in the formation of human consciousness and language. For the sake of fairness, however, it must be noted that Marr did not borrow it from Marx. We find the origin of this idea with the 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Ludwig Noire, (and through his influence with another German author, Lazarus Geiger). According to Noire, it is impossible to understand the origin of language and consciousness without understanding their connection to work. Moreover, this work is not the work of an individual but that of society. Noire is the first to conclude that in this process of early social work, the process of the formation of the individual was in its infancy. We also encounter the idea of the functional semantic

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<sup>1</sup> Megrelidze, *op. cit.*, p. 339-340.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 347.

development of the meaning of words already with Noire, as well as the significant role of tools, which Marr also borrows<sup>1</sup>. For Megrelidze, this filiation between Noire and Marr was known – he sites both the works of Noire and Geiger in his book. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that the influence of German linguistics was not entirely mediated for Megrelidze by Marr.

## **Ideas and Sociogenesis: Marx and Lukacs**

Megrelidze is not satisfied with the study of the content of consciousness solely from the perspective of individual consciousness. One of his main objectives is to demonstrate that a singular individual thinks with the impressions and concepts formed within a society, and therefore the content of consciousness cannot be separated from the social dimension.

Here, we cannot bypass the social theory, as it is articulated in Megrelidze's book. If, in order to understand Megrelidze's theory of consciousness, we had to consider phenomenology, and in order to understand his theory of language we had to consider the ideas of Niko Marr, in order to outline Megrelidze's social theory we have to turn to Marx and Marxism. It is, however, possible to doubt Megrelidze's sincerity when he cites Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. Moreover, many arguments exist in support of the idea that not all of the panegyrics of the edition, prepared for publication in 1937, are to be trusted. And yet, there is nothing that seems to indicate that Megrelidze was not a sincere Marxist. Megrelidze's social theory is Marxist theory, suffused with Marxist themes and their resolutions. Marx is the most frequently cited author in the text – direct quotes from Marx are so long, that at times it feels like a summary.

Still, it would be incorrect to study Megrelidze's approach to Marx without any mediation and consideration of additional contexts. In my view, Megrelidze's 'encounter' with Marx was determined by the concrete epoch and the debates specific to it. In order to mark this historical-intellectual moment in time we must note the process of differentiation between Soviet and Western Marxisms.

It is well known that the beginning of this differentiation is marked by the publication of Georg Lukacs' 1923 classic book, *History and Class Consciousness*<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Lawrence Thomas, *The Linguistic Theories of N. Ja. Marr*, op. cit., p. 111-113.

<sup>2</sup> Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein. Studien über marxistische Dialektik*. Neuwied, 1968. On the book and its importance see Furio Cerutti, Detlev Claussen, & Hans-Jürgen Krahel (Hrsg.), *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein heute. Diskussion und Dokumentation*, Amsterdam, Verlag de Munter, 1971; Hanno Plass (Hrsg.), *Klasse. Geschichte. Bewusstsein. Was bleibt von Georg Lukacs' Theorie?* Berlin, Verbrecher Verlag, 2015.

Lukacs was a Hungarian philosopher, who arrived at Marxism after the study of idealist philosophy. His hermeneutic gestures in the interpretation of Marx were determined by the grand philosophical culture, which Lukacs – like Marx himself – possessed and which was not available for all the followers of Marx, despite their interest in philosophical problematics. Lukacs' radical interpretation began with his rejection of equating the theories of Marx and Engels. According to Lukacs, Engels did not understand the fundamental idea that dialectics pertain purely to the sciences of human activity, and not nature. Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* was published in full after Lukacs' work, but fragments from Engels' were known from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which gave Lukacs sufficient grounds for believing that the rejection of Engelsian 'naturalistic' interpretation of Marxism would give this school of thought its revolutionary content and the possibility of full development.

This novel attempt at rethinking Marxism met with a negative reaction in the Soviet Union. Already in 1924, Abram Deborin, an influential philosopher of his time, wrote a review of Lukacs' book, where he argues for the unity of the classics of Marxism-Leninism, as well as the unity of history and nature, based on the laws of dialectics. In 1930, Lukacs goes to the Soviet Union, which he is not allowed to leave until the end of WWII<sup>1</sup>. In the Soviet Union of the early 1930s he has to personally repent from the theoretical 'mistakes' which he made in *History and Class Consciousness*. The 1923 book will continue to be greatly influential in Western philosophy and social thought without its author. After this, Lukacs will attempt to avoid confrontation with Soviet Marxism by any means.

Did Megrelidze know about this book and the debates surrounding it? The answer is a definite yes. Abram Deborin was a member of the committee, which in 1936 awarded candidacy to Megrelidze. With close reading, we can also find traces of Lukacs' theory in Megrelidze's book. For example, in the very first paragraph of the first chapter of the book, Megrelidze quotes Giambattista Vico. The quote is oddly cited, via Marx, in German, and is then translated into Russian in a footnote. "*Die Menschengeschichte unterscheidet sich dadurch von der Naturgeschichte, dass wir eine gemacht und die andere nicht gemacht haben*" ("Human history differs from the history of nature in that the first is made by us, and the second is not"). It is interesting that this quote by Vico, cited via Marx, is the only appearance of the great Italian

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<sup>1</sup> А. Деборин [A. Deborin], «Г. Лукач и его критика марксизма» [G. Lukács and his critique of Marxism], Под знаменем марксизма [Under the banner of Marxism], n° 6-7, 1924, p. 49-69.

thinker in Lukacs' work<sup>1</sup>. Lukacs also notes that Vico's influence transcends the years of his life and stretches into a much later period. It is precisely this fact that Megrelidze will choose to highlight, by saying that Vico's "new science was not noticed by his contemporaries and his epoch passed him by, while ideas identical to his gained common acknowledgement a century later<sup>2</sup>".

What appears to be an accidental intersection with Lukacs, in fact, marks one of the most important elements of Megrelidze's theory. Vico is not an average author; he is an encyclopedic author. Let us consider another example. When Megrelidze considers the question of self-consciousness and argues for its secondary nature to a consciousness of objects, he states that humans better understood their own organisms after they had invented tools, whose functions duplicate the functions of a human body. Megrelidze offers the example of the *camera obscura* and the photo camera, which led to the study of the makeup of the human eye. Megrelidze concludes: "we understand the mechanism of nature only when we begin to freely reproduce it<sup>3</sup>".

Hans-Georg Gadamer used to say that the rule of good reading was that if you read a single paragraph of a difficult philosophical text well, whatever you discover must be given in the following paragraph. Any reader who reads Megrelidze's above-cited passage, and considers Vico's famous principle *verum est ipsum factum* – truth is that which is already done<sup>4</sup> – will be rewarded in the following paragraph, where Megrelidze quotes Vico regarding the notion that humans exist, above all, in a manner as to not notice their existence.<sup>5</sup> (Clearly, this is an argument for the secondary nature of self-consciousness, but also an anti-Cartesian gesture, which Vico introduced and, according to which, observation is no longer the criterion for truth.)

Vico is an important figure for Megrelidze precisely in the foundation of human sciences. Vico is the first thinker of the new age, who opposed the reduction of science to the knowledge of natural sciences, (which was in vogue after Descartes and Hobbes) and who tried to base knowledge about humans, culture, and society in principles, which differed from natural sciences.

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<sup>1</sup> Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, *op. cit.*, p. 210-211.

<sup>2</sup> Megrelidze, *op. cit.*, p. 399.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257-258.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*, Princeton (New Jersey), Princeton University Press, 2013, p. 157.

<sup>5</sup> Megrelidze, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

The contrast between knowledge about nature and society can be read as a certain anticipation of the debates, which took place two centuries later, in the context of Marxism, as to the possibility of applying dialectics to nature. As we have already said, Megrelidze's first gesture was the separation of social and natural worlds, which required a founding of two different types of knowledge. In a period where Deborin's vulgar materialism reigned, Megrelidze could not do this openly, but gestures like citing Vico served this mission.

In 1934, during his stay in the Soviet Union, Lukacs repented from the 'mistakes' of his first Marxist book, in the same journal in which, ten years earlier, he was criticized by Deborin<sup>1</sup>. Two of the main mistakes, copied to by Lukacs, are the opposition to the theory of representation (directed against Lenin), and the opposition to the dialectics of nature (directed against Engels). It is highly probable that Megrelidze knew not only Lukacs' book, but also the article where he recanted his earlier views. In any case, we shall see that he latently rejects both the theory of representation and the dialectic nature. However, while understanding the critical importance of ideological frames constraining him, he is not explicit.

This is not to say that Megrelidze agrees with Lukacs on everything. There is a fundamental difference between their approaches. Lukacs is interested in the phenomenon of modernity, which, in his view, is thematized through the concept of a capitalist society. His main theoretical intention is to establish the difference between modern and pre-modern societies. This intention appeared for Lukacs before he was a Marxist, when he was writing a book about the theory of the novel<sup>2</sup>. For Megrelidze, by contrast, capitalist society and the question of the modern society were secondary. While he touches on these issues, they are of no special interest to him.

## **The Striving of Reality toward Thought**

There is nothing inherently unusual in the attempt to synthesize phenomenology and Marxism, although here Megrelidze deserves the title of a pioneer, alongside Tran Duc Thao, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jean-Toussaint Desanti, Enzo Paci, and others. The primary direction of this attempt to synthesize

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<sup>1</sup> Г. Лукач, «Значение "Материализма и эмпириокритицизма" для большевизации коммунистических партий», *Под знаменем марксизма* 4 [Georg Lukács, «The meaning of "materialism and empirio-criticism" for the Bolshevization of the communist parties», *Under the banner of Marxism* 4], 1934, p.143-148.

<sup>2</sup> Georg Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans: ein geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch über die Formen der großen Epik*, Bielefeld, Aisthesis-Verlag, 2009.

takes from phenomenology to Marxism, or from consciousness to praxis<sup>1</sup>. Typically, such attempts become problematic in the second half of the equation – the standard of precision and rigor required by phenomenology is no longer adhered to when the synthesizers move to the discussion of the social sphere.

Here also, Megrelidze manages to be original, although in his originality he follows Marx. One of the main mottoes of his book is: “it is not enough for thought to strive toward realization in reality, reality itself must strive toward thought”. The quote belongs to Marx, and we encounter it in his text *Towards a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (1843-1844). Megrelidze will repeat the quote several times in his book.

What does this seemingly counterintuitive phrase mean? Written by Marx in his youth, it shows that he was rather cautious when it came to certain utopian philosophical tendencies. This idea was to be the explanation of why it was that a revolution did not take place in Germany in the 1840s – ‘the passive element of the Revolution’, meaning the material basis, was not as ready as German philosophy. From this observation of Marx, Megrelidze derives a fundamental characteristic of the sociology of knowledge. According to Megrelidze, the socio-genesis of ideas means that objects achieve generalization in and by themselves, not as products of consciousness, but as objects circulating in the process of work and social practice. The content of human experience is organized in such a way that humans ‘happen upon’ certain ideas, and do not ‘invent’ them. Ideas are ‘in the air’ and like Samuel Beckett’s saying, “what difference does it make who’s speaking?” What matters is that what is said is that which already has been formulated and articulated in the social field.

In the language of sociology, what we have here is a straightforward dominance of social structures over agency. The social sphere is the objective reality, which prods and forces the individual to think and materialize ideas that are already ‘ready,’ including original thoughts which are expressed by an individual not because they have not occurred to others but because he or she thought of them first. Behind the notion of chance appears the notion of necessity, which permeates the social sphere and sees Communism as the ultimate aim of historical development, a condition where social consciousness determines social life and not the other way around.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Jean-Toussaint Desanti, *Introduction à la phénoménologie*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p. 19.

## Collective and Individual Self-Consciousness

As we have already noted, the greatest brunt of censorship to the 1965 edition was done to chapter 5 of the book. In this edition, which has been familiar to interested readers for the second half of the last century, chapter 5 contains only four pages. In the 1937 version, which remains unknown to the general public to this day, chapter 5 consists of fourteen pages. Ten pages were removed because the chapter is a compendium of Niko Marr's quotations and paraphrases<sup>1</sup>. No other author, aside from Marx, earns the respect of having a whole *florilegium* dedicated to him or her, in Megrelidze's book.

First of all, Megrelidze cites Marr's rather insightful argument about the fact that the terms for culture and nature (*cultura* and *natura*) are derived from the same root. This is a noteworthy deconstruction of one of the fundamental philosophical oppositions, which is based on linguistic and etymological study. It is difficult to assess the solidity of the etymologies, which Marr cites in defense of his thesis, since he was known for his extravagant and often unsubstantiated hypotheses precisely in this sphere.

Based on Marr, Megrelidze seeks to show that at an early stage of the human development 'I' did not possess consciousness. First, there was the consciousness of objects, towards which human work was directed. Only as a result of mediating these material objects could humans arrive at the consciousness of the 'I.' This is clearly directed against the tradition of German idealist philosophy, which took as its starting point the fact of self-consciousness, and sought to derive the rest of the content of consciousness from it. For Megrelidze, self-consciousness, which constructs itself (Johann Gottlieb Fichte's famous *Setzung*), is almost a theosophical or mythological figure of thought. At the very beginning, humans are outside of themselves, with the objects.

However, Megrelidze does not stop there. He argues that the subsequent stage of human development consisted not of the formation of the individual 'I', but of the collective 'I.' Leaning on the 'paleontology of speech' of Marr and his students, he claims that the formation of the grammatical plural in language preceded the formation of the singular. Moreover, pronouns for the singular appear still later. Initially, conceptions of the individual were connected to the collective, the totem, which was designated with the pronoun for the third person. According to Marr, we must seek to understand why the appearance of third person pronouns precedes the rest. It appears that first person pronouns appeared after this stage, and only in the plural form.

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<sup>1</sup> Мегрелидзе [Megrelidze], 1937, p.195-210.

When the category of an active person appeared, the subject was the collective and not the individual. The separation of the individual from the collective was a result of a later stage of consciousness. According to Megrelidze, this process is connected to the appearance of property. First, personal property appeared, (clothing, jewelry, basic tools) followed by private property. The consciousness of an owner, the consciousness of an owner of private property, represents the historical foundation of human self-consciousness, while collective consciousness, the totemic 'I', was therefore possible on the basis of collective property.<sup>1</sup>

### **Anti-Individualism**

All of the above is nothing if not a paraphrase of Marr's article 'The Right to Property Based on the Signalization of Language in Relation to the Origin of Pronouns'.<sup>2</sup> The idea, which connects self-consciousness to private property, is clearly derived from Hegelian philosophy.<sup>3</sup> (My hypothesis would be that the distinction between personal and private property is a result of the influence of Soviet jurisprudence, although such a distinction also existed in other traditions of law, with different valences.) In this context, it would be interesting to determine, how Megrelidze imagined an individual could live and be self-conscious during Communism, toward which he strives, which would abolish private property. But, as in other parts of Megrelidze's work, we encounter a theme, which becomes nearly obsessive for the author. This is the theme of the individual's relative insignificance compared to the collective. One could say that this passionate position is as important to Megrelidze as arguing that consciousness is determined not biologically but socially. We could even say that the first four chapters of the book are permeated with the argument for the social nature of consciousness while chapters 6 to 10 sustain the argument for the determination of the individual by the collective.

Megrelidze's anti-individualism, in many cases, is theoretically justified and it fits perfectly within the paradigm of inter-subjectivity discussed above. It is difficult to argue with the notion that "consciousness exists not in the form of isolated individual consciousness, but in the setting of other conscious beings".<sup>4</sup> However, Megrelidze goes considerably further than the mere designation of consciousness as a social phenomenon. "A singular individual

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>2</sup> Н. Марр, *Избранные работы* [Selected Works], т. 3 [vol. 3], p. 180-198.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Wolfram Hogrebe, *Metaphysik und Mantik*, Menschen & Frankfurt/M., Suhrkamp, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Megrelidze, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

thinks in socially determined concepts and notions. The thought of an individual is not a result of individual creativity, but rather a product of history – these are social thoughts... each individual mind is an organ of social thought, a social mind<sup>1</sup>.” “The role of a singular individual in the formation of social thoughts is always more or less incidental<sup>2</sup>.” “Essentially we are all collective beings: so little, from what we have and from what we are, can be termed as personal, in the true sense of the word<sup>3</sup>.”

Megrelidze speaks in detail about the ways in which the activities of great scientists, artists, and leaders can be reduced to the dynamics of historical processes and the distribution of social forces. We could confidently say that Megrelidze represents the wave of the fourth blow to human ambition. According to Sigmund Freud’s famous formulation, human narcissism has suffered three blows at the hands of science. Firstly, from Copernicus, who discovered that the earth is not at the center of the universe; secondly, from Darwin, who discovered that humans are a result of natural – and accidental – selection; thirdly, from Freud’s own psychoanalysis, which showed that humans were not masters of their own minds, and subconscious motivations determined behavior. To this, we can add a fourth blow, broadly that of sociology or social sciences, according to which a human person is not original, he or she is not the master of his or her fate, and is the same as others. (We could consider this fourth blow as part of the third, since Freud’s subconscious could not possibly be individual, as it is often claimed. It necessarily must have a social and linguistic dimension. Only, the perception of this dimension became possible after the ‘social turn’.) Megrelidze turns out to be a part of this fourth wave as he smashes the illusions of singularity, isolation, autonomy, and sovereignty.

However, this double attack on individualism, – on the one hand based in linguistics founded in Marr’s studies, and on the other, based in Marx’s, and presumably Max Scheler’s sociology of knowledge – becomes problematic if we consider when Megrelidze wrote his book. The Leningrad of 1937 is precisely the height of a collective. When he argues that at the early stage of human development individual self-consciousness did not exist and in its place there existed a collective ‘I,’ a collective self-consciousness, he must be thinking of what the introduction of individual self-consciousness changed. However, it appears as if he is not interested in this issue. On the contrary,

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 389.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 390.

he maximally tries to show that today's humans are also permeated with collective consciousness. When Megrelidze speaks of the insignificance of individual thoughts, if they do not express social tendencies, he must be extending this idea, self-reflexively, to his own argument and thinking about what gives it significance. When he speaks of the connection between the appearance of self-consciousness and private property, he must be asking himself what will happen to self-consciousness when private property disappears. And yet, Megrelidze has no doubt that it should disappear in Communism, towards which history is striving.

In conclusion, we can say that Megrelidze does not acknowledge the value of an individual. This might not, in fact, be his ethical position – despite Fichte's conclusion that a human being chooses philosophy according to the type of human being he or she is – drawing a direct connection from the individual to theory would be the opposite of Megrelidze's intention. However, discounting the worth of an individual naturally follows from the fundamental suppositions of Megrelidze's theory. One such supposition is that a human being is totally involved in society:

No one creates the history of society, but it is created by everyone, every day and every minute. Every human being, despite their personal wishes, inescapably participates in this common process, each human being – be it a toddler, a cripple or a fully-fledged worker – already by the fact of his or her existence, and the needs and worries it produces, necessarily participates in the common process of the creation of history, and that at every point of his or her life, while sleeping, working, resting, or making merry<sup>1</sup>.

Here, we should also note that the danger of totalizing the social was noticed fairly late in contemporary theory. We can cite three of the most interesting positions: it is this danger that forms part of Niklas Luhmann's position, according to whom human beings are not part of social systems theories. They remain outside, and thus maintain an 'inviolability' from the totalization of the theory. The same danger is connected to the interest of the late Michel Foucault towards forms of subjectivity, when he moved from the study of historical quasi-totalities to the study of practices with which human beings determine themselves. And finally, Jacques Lacan's conception, beyond the symbolic or cultural order, acknowledges reality as that which cannot be symbolized, and can also be understood as an awareness of the abovementioned danger.

Megrelidze's view of society and history is total. Nothing remains from the actions of human beings outside the dynamics of historical processes and

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 459.

social forces. Any desire, fantasy, thought, action, be it oriented towards work, knowledge or entertainment, automatically becomes part of this total social unity. This is the view of totality, which is not far from totalitarianism. Megrelidze spoke of animal consciousness, which is enslaved to the field of perception. If we follow his logic, we could conclude that the dependence of human consciousness on the social sphere is equally as total, as in the case of animals.

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